

## THE BOOK OF WISDOM – PART VIII

### WISDOM AS ESSENTIAL TO LEADERSHIP

I. Chapter 6, verses 1-21, concludes the first part of the book by again exhorting all peoples in leadership (and by extension all of the faithful) to pursue wisdom as the guiding star of their lives.

A. The idea is that wisdom is not simply an optional talent, but one that is essential to any leadership, lest one both govern poorly and draw condemnation upon oneself.

B. Directly, the address is to those in command, that they may govern wisely.

1. However, all peoples are meant to have a certain authority over their own households and projects, and thus are recipients of this message. See, Cf. Ps. 127:3-5, 128:3-4. This message is perhaps especially present in the Book of Tobit, in which the faithful family is the center of attention as the Assyrian Empire rises and falls in the background.

2. In addition, even in the Old Testament, there is a vision of all the peoples joining with God in judgment. See Ps. 149:7; Prov. 31:23; Dan. 7:27. This vision was emphasized in chapter 3, verse 8. The New Testament makes even clearer that all of the faithful will be judges. See Matt. 19:28, 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-17; 1 Cor. 5:2; Rev. 5:20.

3. Furthermore, if one is in the position of choosing or voting for leaders, in this context as well, a knowledge of the need for wisdom is important. See, e.g., Act 6:3.

C. This conclusion of the first part is apparently constructed in four sections, although there are different ways of ordering it.

1. The first section, which most likely consists of verses 1-9, warns then rulers, especially kings and magistrates, that they need wisdom to govern rightly and to avoid harsh judgment on themselves.

a. It begins, in verses 1 and 2, with an exhortation that those in power must listen carefully to the words of God, and then ends in verse 8 and 9 by saying that these words are addressed especially to them.

b. Verse 3 emphasizes that the authority comes from God, but verse 7 and 8 remind the rulers that God also shows no partiality, and that all are equal in His eyes.

c. In the middle, verses 4-6 warn about the judgments that will come to rulers who govern poorly.

2. The second section, which seems to consist of verses 10-12, then tries to stir up a personal desire for wisdom on the grounds that one will be holy and ready for judgment.

3. The third section, which consists of verses, 12-16 describes Wisdom as a woman who is easily accessible to those who make the effort to be with her.

4. The fourth section, which consists of verses 17-21, describes the growth in wisdom, from the desire for her, through discipline to the keeping of her laws, and finally to incorruptibility and closeness to God in a new and eternal kingdom.

II. The first section emphasizes both the glory of those in authority insofar as they have received nothing less than a calling by God, but also the warning that they are under His judgment.

A. The first two verses set up the theme that those in power must listen carefully to these words.

1. When Jesus or the prophets are emphasizing a controlling point or dealing with the sluggish in thought, as those in power may well be, the discourse to shake them out of it often begins with words such as "Hear" or "Listen." See, e.g., Duet 6:3-4, 9:1; Is. 1:2, 1:10, 33:13, Jer. 2:4, 6:18-19; Ez. 18:25, 25:3, 37:4; Hos. 4:1, 5:1; Amos 3:1, 4:1, Mic. 1:2; Matt. 13:8.

2. This particular passage is perhaps most similar to Jeremiah 22:1-9. However, in the Book of Wisdom the passage is addressed to all rulers of the earth, not simply the king of Judah. The implication is that all rulers in the end are guided, or at least meant to be guided by God. See John 19:11; Rom. 13:1-7; cf. 2 Chron. 36:23; Is. 44:24-45:25; Dan. 2:37.

3. In the Gospels, there will be a contrast between those who lord it over the peoples (or boast of many nations, in some translations) and the followers of Christ who delight in serving others. See Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-30. While not

going as far as Jesus in describing the paradox of service rather than power leading to glory, this passage sets up the idea by describing all authority as belonging in the end to God and owed back to Him.

B. Verse 3 very plainly emphasizes that all rightful authority comes from God.

1. In ancient Israel, it was understood that the governance of that nation came from God and thus the ruler was guided by Him and meant to be responsible to Him. See, e.g., 1 Sam. 9:1-16, 16:1-13, 2 Sam. 7:9-16, 23:2-7; Ps. 45. In addition, they expected a future king who would give glory to Israel and come to govern all nations. See, e.g., Ps. 2, 110; Is. 7:14-17, 9:2-7, 16:4-5, Jer. 23:1-6, Ez. 37:23-24.

2, Here, this principle that authority is from God is extended to all nations, as the Book of Proverbs had said and as St. Paul will later make clear. See Prov. 8:15-16; Rom. 13:1-2.

3. But, precisely because authority is from God, the passage warns, judgments are subject to His law. As the Catechism makes clear, the political and religious realms are separate. However, all politics must be based upon an accurate or inaccurate view of the human person and of human rights. And a lack of faith can lead to an inaccurate view, which in turn can lead to great injustice. See Catechism 2244-46, 2257; cf. Vatican II Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 74, 76 (1965.)

C. The passage then turns toward the rulers and condemns them for failing to exercise judgment in accord with God's law.

1. The prophets had often condemned the kings and other rulers for failing to judge rightly. See, e.g., 1 Sam. 13:1-15; 2 Sam. 12:1-24, 24:1. Here, this judgment is applied to rulers across the board.

2. Rulers are even warned that their judgment will be stricter because the lowly are more easily pardoned. There are several possible reasons why the lowly may be more easily pardoned.

a. The damage done by them would presumably be the less. Cf. Sir. 10:1-5.

b. They would not necessarily be responsible for knowing as much. See Luke 12:47-48.

c. The lowly state may make them more humble and, therefore, more open to repentance. See Duet. 8:6-20.

d. The sufferings of this life may have made them more repentant and brought them more to God. See Duet. 4:30-31; Luke 15:1-32.

3. In any case, as with Moses and Aaron, who were denied entrance to the Promised Land because of single faults (and in Moses' case a seemingly minor one), the rulers have to be particularly attentive to wisdom. See Num. 20:12.

D. The passage goes on to remind the powerful that the Lord will not prefer them to anyone else, for their greatness is as nothing before Him.

- And, in fact the scrutiny is the greater for the wealthy, for their position demands more attention. By contrast, the struggles of the lowly often make them favored by God, a theme Hannah and Mary sing about in their canticles. See 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55.

- The king and other rulers were called upon to show no partiality in judgment. See Duet. 1:17, 16:18-20; 2 Chron. 19:6-7. The Lord, the perfect king, is completely impartial, as Moses had told the people in the context of calling for them to seek the Lord and recognize His favors. See Duet. 10:12-22.

- Here, this principle is applied to each and every ruler, telling them that seeking and living in the wisdom of God, not their position, is what will bring favor to God.

E. This section then concludes by emphasizing again the need for the princes of the world to pay attention both positively that they may be wise and negatively that they may avoid sin in their missions. This passage then connects this section to the next two verses, which give the more practical goal for seeking wisdom.

III. Verses 10 and 11 summarize the preceding passage and summarize three practical reasons for pursuing wisdom, i.e. achieving holiness, having a defense when judged, and being able truly to learn.

A. First, the passage says that it is the seeking of wisdom that rulers may be holy and thus, by implication, make their people so. Moses had of old told the people that they should be holy as God is holy. See Lev. 11:45, 19:2; Duet. 4:2, 21.

- In order to be holy they were to carry out the various precepts of the holiness code, including the laws of cleanliness and against idolatry. See also 1 Peter 1:16.
- This passage indicates that the controlling principle of these instructions is wisdom, which leads to that holiness, for all wisdom is with God, the Holy One.
- Jesus will later, in the Sermon on the Mount, tell the people to see goodness in others and thus to be holy as God is holy. See Matt. 5:48; see also 1 John 3:3. Jesus describes love as the controlling principle of the law. See, e.g., Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28. Wisdom, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the vision or judgment that is affiliated with love. Summa Theologica II-II q. 45 art. 2.

B. Second, the passage says that, with wisdom, the leaders will have a ready response, or will have a defense.

- The idea seems to be that, when it comes time to appear before the judge the wise will be able to give an account of their lives and their use of authority. Jesus refers to this principle especially in the parable of the talents. See Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27.

C. The final advantage is, if one really longs for wisdom, as opposed to ignoring her or learning precepts for a lesser reason, one can really receive instruction. As Isaiah and Jesus point out, one can hear but not understand, see but not comprehend. See Is. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12. In particular, the blindness that comes from arrogance and a lack of repentance prevents true learning in the ways of God. See, e.g., John 3:19-21, 9:41. By contrast, one who really wants wisdom will be learned in the ways of God.

IV. The passage then describes wisdom as available to all who really seek her.

A. The author is responding to a possible objection that the ordinary man or ordinary ruler does not have the talent or time to be wise.

1. The Book of Sirach, which was probably written around 200 B.C., but translated into Greek about 70 years later, had distinguished between two types of good wisdom. He had said that all people who are steadily at work can come to

participate in God's handiwork and enter into His order. See Sir. 38:25-34. But it is the scribe who is free from other labors and can devote himself to the study of the law who can be a wise teacher and counselor. See Sir. 38:24, 39:1-11.

2. With this passage alone, one may conclude that it is only the learned man who can ascend to the highest levels of wisdom. This passage in the Book of Wisdom indicates, however, that the office of teacher or counselor is not the highest, but rather that Wisdom in herself is available to all.

3. There is an indication here of the universal calling of the Spirit that would occur at Pentecost and is the basis for the universal call to holiness that the Church teaches to this day. See Acts 3:14-21; Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium 40; Catechism 2013.

B. First, the passage says that Wisdom is radiant, as opposed to hidden or dark. The implication is that she is easy to see, not hidden away as a secret.

1. Moses had said long ago that the commandments of God are not remote, but are in fact in our mouths and hearts. See Duet. 30:11-14. Likewise, he prayed for the day when the prophetic spirit of God would be poured out upon all the people of God. See Num. 11:29. And Joel had prophesied that, in the age to come, this wish would be fulfilled. See Joel 3:1-2.

2. The Book of Proverbs had already indicated that Wisdom is available to all people who diligently seek her. See Prov. 8:17. The Book of Wisdom here elaborates on this theme. As with that book, which was probably composed from about the eighth the sixth or fifth centuries B.C., wisdom is here presented as a woman eager to be known.

3. The contrast is with the Gnostic tendency to present the deepest knowledge as secret and available only for the few elect. God does sometimes keep things secret until the proper time for revelation. See, e.g., Dan. 12:4; Rom. 16:25. But all that is needed for wisdom and holiness is available to all.

C. Verses 13-16 indicate the paradox, however, of how wisdom is both available to all, yet only achieved by those who desire her.

1. On the one hand, as with Proverbs chapters 1, verses 20-33 and chapters 8-9, the lady Wisdom seeks out those who wish for her and is right at hand with them. She travels around the streets seeking those who wish for her, as in a sense an evangelist. And to those who are with her, she frees them from care and is pleasant to them.

2. But there are conditions on finding her:

a. One must watch at the dawn, which implies the sort of discipline involved in awaking early, i.e. not being slothful.

b. One must also take thought of her, i.e. use the intellect.

c. One must also keep vigil for her, i.e. be patient in awaiting her, and be willing to put the effort into being with her.

d. And one must be worthy of her. For, as chapter 1 had stated, Wisdom will not enter a sullied heart. Wis. 1:4-6.

V. Finally, this section, and the first part of the book, concludes with a series of connections that wisdom guides one along to arrive at a glorious kingdom of which earthly glory is but an image.

A. The overall type of literature here is called a "sortie," i.e. a series of statements in which each one leads to the next and finally to a climatic conclusion. Other examples of this device include Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4.

B. First, there is the desire for wisdom in the first place. This desire may seem obvious, but the question is whether one really wants true wisdom, rather than worldly wisdom, see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, 2:6-16, and really care about her enough to have her regardless of the cost. See Sir. 2:1-5. People will frequently desire more knowledge until it means that their life will have to change. See Mark 6:17-29; Acts 17:22-32.

C. The desire for wisdom, and her instruction, leads, through discipline, to a real love for her. There is a difference between a desire and a deep love that will overcome all resistance, a love willing and indeed eager to sacrifice for his beloved.

D. The love for her must lead one to heed her laws. There is a reminder here, as Jesus will make later, that love for the divine must involve keeping the divine commandments. See John 15:10, 14. As time goes on the laws become more internalized and one does them as a matter of second nature. But there can never be a conflict between the love of God and the laws of God.

- And the law is not just moral law, but the entire eternal law through which Wisdom governs everything. To keep the moral law is to enter into this Wisdom. Cf. Catechism 1951.

E. Thus, the keeping of the laws of Wisdom leads one to this eternal realm, which is immortal. The promise here is that one not only has access to knowledge and contemplation of this eternal, immortal realm, but also through Wisdom enters into it and become immortal.

- The human soul is immortal in the sense that it can never be destroyed. But it can condemn itself to a living death, a second death described in the Book of Revelation, but permanently keeping itself from ever arriving at its rightful goal of holiness. Rev. 20:14-15. It thus becomes an unrecognizable wreck forever. See Matt. 7:21-23.

- Wisdom by contrast allows one into that eternal realm beyond any more loss or separation, in which all glory and joy is permanent.

F. It is in this eternal realm that one finally comes to be with God, an astonishing privilege, for even the angels veil their faces before God. See Is. 6:2. And yet He calls us to be His sons and daughters and friends. See John 1:12, 15:15; 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-6; Rev. 3:21.

G. Thus, the passage concludes, if one takes delight in an earthly kingdom, how much more should one seek the eternal kingdom in the presence of God.

- There is, as with the promise of a kingdom in chapter 3, verse 8, and the promises of Jesus that His faithful would reign with Him, both a democratic notion that wisdom is available to all, but also the notion of an exclusiveness insofar as there is a need for struggle. The crowning glory of this struggle is, however, the pageantry and glory of a kingdom.