

CHAPTER 13

Choosing The Way Of Wisdom

The book of Proverbs presents two ways to us. I must choose (or I have already chosen) one of these ways. It is a very important decision, because the road that I travel on will determine my direction in life and my destination in the next life.

The book of Proverbs presents two roads (see again the discussion in **Chapter 2** of these notes). There is the way of wisdom and there is also the way of folly. There is the road that a wise man travels on, and there is the road that a fool travels on.

In making our choice and decision, we learned that there are two WOMEN who cry out to us along life's way: the WISDOM WOMAN (Proverbs 1:20 and 9:1-4) and the WORLDLY, WICKED WOMAN (Proverbs 9:13-18). Both women call and give forth the invitation to me (compare Proverbs 9:4 with Proverbs 9:16 where the identical words are spoken, but by different women). Which one will I listen to? Which woman will I love and embrace? Which woman will I hate and reject? The WISDOM WOMAN says, "Whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. But he that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul: **all they that hate Me love death**" (Proverbs 8:35-36). Yes, there are those who *find life* and there are those who *love death*. What will my choice be?

I must choose the way of wisdom or the way of folly. I must choose the way of life or the way of death. The decision is mine to make, but God has already clearly revealed what my decision should be. God has told me which way to choose! In Deuteronomy chapter 30 God set before the children of Israel two choices: LIFE AND BLESSING or DEATH AND CURSING (verse 19). What choice should they make? God says, "therefore CHOOSE LIFE!" (verse 19). And if they were to ask, "What is LIFE that we may choose it?" what would the answer be? (See Deuteronomy 30:20--"that thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for _____ is thy _____!") So for them to choose LIFE meant that they were to choose the LORD their God. Those who have HIM, have LIFE (compare 1 John 5:12 and John 14:6 and Col. 3:4--"Christ who is _____"). God desires that men choose life. It is not God's desire that men should have death and cursing. Rather it is God's desire that men should have a relationship with Himself, WHO IS LIFE: "and this is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

In Ezekiel chapter 18 we again see God's desire for men and His yearning that men might choose the way of life: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways and live? . . . for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and LIVE ye" (Ezekiel 18:23,31-32). See also the same cry of God in Ezekiel 33:11: "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" God is not pleased at all when men choose the path of folly which ends in death. Instead of being pleased, He is grieved!

In the Gospel record we find the tragic example of those who refused the LIFE OF GOD and who refused the GOD OF LIFE. These are people who refused to come to Christ and refused to believe on Him. Jesus said to them, "And ye **will not** come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). The meaning of these words is this: "You do not desire to come to Me" or "You are not willing to come to Me." Because of their sin-blinded and sin-stubborn hearts, they refused to come. Jesus said, "COME UNTO ME" (Matthew 11:28), but they were not interested. They could have had LIFE! It was theirs for the coming! But they did not want it. They refused it! God did not refuse them. It was they who refused Him. God did not reject them, but they rejected God. God graciously provided and offered the gift of eternal life which is found in the Person of His Son (Romans 6:23), but they refused to receive this gift (compare John 1:11-12). How foolish is man's unbelief!

The graciousness of God's offer to man and the ungrateful response to that offer is clearly seen in another passage: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often **would I** have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and **ye would not**" (Matthew 23:37). Notice the contrast here between the Lord's gracious offer and the people's ungrateful response: "I WOULD . . . and YE WOULD NOT!" "I WAS WILLING . . . and YE WERE UNWILLING!" "I OFFERED . . . and YE REFUSED."

This passage in Matthew chapter 23 makes us think about another tragic passage found in Psalm 81 (in both passages the symbolism of a mother bird is used). In verse 8 the children of Israel were told to HEAR and HEARKEN. When WISDOM cries out, we need to be listening. We need to HEAR and HEED and BELIEVE. In verse 9 the Lord reminded His people that there must be NO SUBSTITUTES for God. Nothing and no one can replace the only true God. HE IS OUR LIFE, and we will not find life in anyone or in anything else. The idols and substitutes which we put in the place of the TRUE GOD can never satisfy our hearts or provide that which we really need.

In Psalm 81, verse 10 God reminded His people concerning WHO HE IS and WHAT HE HAS DONE. He is the mighty God who redeemed His people from Egyptian bondage! No idol or false god did that; the LORD GOD did that! Today we don't look back to Egypt, but we can look back to the cross of Calvary where this mighty God shed His blood to provide redemption for sinful man. At the end of verse 10 we have God's gracious invitation: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it!" (The imagery is that of a mother bird feeding her young with their mouths fully opened!) God wanted to fill their mouths with His good things! God wanted them to have life and blessing, not death and cursing. God had good things for them, but IT WAS THEIR CHOICE. They had to decide whether they would open their mouths or not. God will not fill a closed mouth. Each one must decide whether it will be open or shut. And for those who decide to open their mouths, HOW WIDE WILL THEY OPEN THEM? Just a little bit open or wide open? (Some people claim to want what God has for them, but their mouths are not open very wide!)

The sad and tragic response of the children of Israel is recorded in Psalm 81:11. "My people would not hearken to my voice: and Israel would none of me." They refused! They shut their mouths tight! They said. "Not interested!" to the good things which God had for them! They made their choice. They hated life and they chose cursing and death. It's not what God wanted, but it is what they chose, and God gave them what they wanted. God let them live with the consequences of their foolish choice. God gave them over to their stubborn hearts (see v.12), and let them go their own way, not in God's way of wisdom. But the heart of God was grieved and pained: "Oh that my people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in **my ways!**" (v. 13)

Imagine what God would have done for His people if they had been believing and obedient (verses 14-16)! Think of the tragedy of all that they could have had! God had so much for them, but they missed out on it all.

These people are not unlike those who are described in Proverbs chapter 1. Again we have a contrast between the wise man and the foolish man. The wise man will hear (verse 5) but the fool will despise wisdom and instruction (verse 7). In verses 20-23, WISDOM calls out and cries out, inviting men to respond to her voice. But in verse 24 we learn that man refuses. In Psalm 81 we learn all that God would have done if man had made the right choice. Here in Proverbs 1:24-28 we learn all that God will do because man made the wrong choice. Psalm 81 describes what the Israelites missed out on; Proverbs 1:24-28 describes what they got: fear, destruction, distress, anguish and worst of all, A CLOSED DOOR TO GOD (v.28) In Psalm 81 God would have been very gracious to His people and they could have had what they did not even deserve. In Proverbs 1 God cannot be gracious to His people because they refused His grace, and therefore God must give them just what they deserve (instead of grace, they get justice). In Psalm 81 we see a God who is very grieved and filled with sorrow over the folly of His people (81:13); in Proverbs 1 we see a God who mocks and laughs at the calamity which will befall those who have rejected Him (Proverbs 1:26). The same God speaks, but two different aspects of His character are seen. On the one hand God is grieved at the stubborn refusal of His people to claim the good things of God (this is God expressing HIS LOVE). On the other hand, God's holiness is satisfied when wicked men get exactly what they deserve, and are rewarded according to their works (this is God expressing HIS JUSTICE). Both are true of God. There is a sense in which He weeps over them (see Ezekiel 18:23,32), and there is a sense in which He laughs over them (see Prov.1:26).

The people described in Proverbs chapter 1 made a choice but they did not make the right choice. They did not choose life and blessing. "For that they **hated** _____ and **did not** _____ **the fear of the LORD**" (Proverbs 1:29). God said, "Will you FEAR ME, and respect ME and honor ME because of WHO I AM?" Their answer: "NO! We will not!" They made their choice. It was a wrong choice. It was a bad choice. It put them in the wrong direction and on the wrong road. It will bring them to the wrong destination. They must live with the terrible consequences of their choice: "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1:31). Here again we have a contrast with Psalm 81. In Psalm 81 God told them what He could have and would have fed them with and filled them with (v.16). But in Proverbs 1 God tells them what they will eat and what they will be filled with (v.31). Psalm 81 describes what they missed out on; Proverbs 1 describes what they got in on. Psalm 81 tells of the good things of God which they lost; Proverbs 1 tells of the terrible things of "self" which they found!

What about me? What will my choice be? Who will I listen to? Will I be like them? Will I also miss out on the good things of God? Will I also make a choice that will result in calamity and fear and destruction and distress and anguish? I may, but I don't have to. The choice is mine to make, and God has already told me how He wants me to choose! "CHOOSE LIFE!"-- Deuteronomy 30:19.

In Psalm 119:30 we learn about a man who made the right choice and the right decision. With much conviction he cries out, "I HAVE CHOSEN THE WAY OF TRUTH." He chose God's way, the way of wisdom, the way of truth. He chose the truth of God and he chose the God of truth. Consider also what this same man said in Psalm 119:173--"Let Thine hand help me; for I HAVE CHOSEN THY PRECEPTS. I have longed for Thy salvation, O LORD; and Thy law is my delight" (verses 173-174). He chose GOD'S WAY (verse 30) and He chose GOD'S WORD (verse 173). He chose to go God's way and to heed God's Word. He made God's way his way

and He made God's Word his Book. Have I done this? This was a man who opened his mouth wide for God to fill it! This was a man who chose the fear of the Lord! This was a man who said, "I want what God has for me! Indeed, I want all that God has for me! I don't want to miss out on any of it!" Proverbs speaks about the person who LOVES and who EMBRACES wisdom (see for example, Proverbs 4:6 "LOVE HER", and Proverbs 4:8 "EMBRACE HER"). Here in Psalm 119 we find such a person. We find a man who has chosen the way of truth and the word of truth. What choice have you made? Is the decision that you have made a *firm one*? Is it a *final one*?

Joshua made a firm and final decision as seen in Joshua 24:15. He said to the Israelites of his day, "C_____ YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE!" They had to choose which idols and false gods they would serve (read verse 15 carefully). Any choice to serve false gods, no matter which false gods they are, is a bad choice! Joshua had already made his choice, and it had nothing to do with false gods who were no gods at all: "BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL _____ THE LORD!" In other words, "I have chosen (firmly and finally) to serve the LORD!"

In John chapter 6 many of the Lord's disciples were turning back and following Him no more (see John 6:66). The twelve disciples had to make a decision. Would they continue to follow the Lord or not? Jesus said to them, "Will ye also go away?" Peter gave forth this sane and sensible answer: "Lord, to whom shall we go? THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE!"

It is helpful for each one of us to think about this. Where else can I go to find wisdom and to find truth? If I go into a bookstore, what book am I going to find that will make me truly wise? What books will give me THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE? Will Shakespeare? Will the encyclopedia? What PERSON can I go to in order to find wisdom? What person shall I choose? Shall I go to a friend? Shall I go to my English teacher or some other teacher?

Do I myself have the answers? Am I the source of wisdom? How wise am I? How much do I know? How do I intend to get wise? By books? By television? By college and education? By talking with friends? What happens if I don't "WISE-UP"? What happens if I don't get wise? What are the consequences of not having wisdom? Where shall I find wisdom? SHALL I FIND IT ON THE STREET? Or, SHALL I FIND IT IN THE SCRIPTURES?

There is only ONE PERSON who is the source of wisdom, and no one else. Peter said, "to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68- implying that there was no one else!). It is only in the Lord Jesus Christ that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (see Colossians 2:3). If I reject Jesus Christ, then I am rejecting the Source of wisdom, and the TREASURE can never be mine!

There is only ONE BOOK that contains the wisdom I need, and no other book. Peter said, "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). No one else has these words; only God does! God's Word is the only place where we will find the words of God. Don't look anywhere else. The man of true wisdom is the man of the Bible. No man is wise who rejects the message of the Bible. Even the book of Proverbs says, "Every word of God is pure (purified): He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30:5). Whose word am I trusting? The Lord Jesus is "the way" and "the truth" (John 14:6). Have I chosen the way of truth? Have I chosen the fear of the Lord? Proverbs begins with this message: "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE" (Proverbs 1:7). This message is repeated in the middle of the book: "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM: and the knowledge of the Holy (One) is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). The book of Proverbs ends by giving us the

example of a woman who fears the Lord (see Proverbs 31:30). The book of Proverbs also begins by showing us the tragedy of those who do not choose the fear of the Lord (see Proverbs 1:29). Have I chosen to give God the respect and reverence that He deserves BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS?

Finally in closing our study, consider three final questions:

1) WHAT KIND OF HUNGER DO I HAVE?

"Oh taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psalm 34:8).

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

"As the hart panteth (longs for, craves) after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1-2).

2) WHAT KIND OF A SEEKER AM I?

"And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of (by) you, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

"That they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

"He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

3) WHAT KIND OF DESIRE DO I HAVE?

"Desire the sincere (pure) milk of the Word that ye might grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it!" (Isaiah 1:19-20).

"If any man will do His will (if any man desires to do His will, if any one is willing to do His will), HE SHALL KNOW..." (John 7:17).

BLESSED IS THE PERSON WHO HEARS WISDOM (Proverbs 8:34) AND WHO FINDS WISDOM (Proverbs 8:35). CURSED IS THE PERSON WHO SINS AGAINST WISDOM (Proverbs 8:36) BY IGNORING AND REJECTING THE GOD OF ALL WISDOM. What kind of person am I? Have I chosen the way of wisdom? Have I found the God of wisdom? "WHOSO FINDETH ME FINDETH LIFE" (Proverbs 8:35). "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12)!