

“Who Are the Discerning and the Wise?”

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By internal evidence, we may ascertain Joseph's “attitude towards God and his own family.” It is disclosed in the names which he gave to his children. In giving names which had a *meaning* at all, and not merely a talking sound, he showed that *he understood*, as well he might, that *every human life has a significance and expresses some principle or fact.*” (Alistair Begg, “Joseph in Charge,” May 1996))

This is a valuable insight which helps us cut through the fog induced by such movements as BLM, the Pro-life Movement etc. The value of human life is tied to the significance borne by each individual in non-racist, gender-free and non-ethnic terms. This is the human side of my recent theme of how much God values the human soul!

“And in giving names, which recorded his acknowledgment of God's goodness, he showed that *prosperity* had as little influence as *adversity* to move him from his allegiance to the God of his fathers. His first son he called Manasseh, Making to forget, " for God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house"-not as if he were now so abundantly satisfied in Egypt that the thought of his father's house was blotted from his mind, but only that in this child the keen longings he had felt for kindred and home were somewhat alleviated. He again found an object for his strong family affection. The void in his heart he had so long felt was filled by the little babe. A new home was begun around him. *But this new affection would not weaken, though it would alter the character of, his love for his father and brethren. The birth of this child would really be a new tie to the land from which he had been stolen.* For, however ready men are to spend their own life in foreign service, you see them wishing that their children should spend their days among the scenes with which their own childhood was familiar.

In the naming of his second son Ephraim he recognizes that God had made him fruitful in the “most unlikely” way. He does not leave it to us to interpret his life, but records what he himself saw in it. It has been said: "To get at the truth of any history is good; but **a man's own history**-when he reads that truly, and **knows what he is about and has been about, it is a Bible to him.**" And now that Joseph, from the height he had reached, could look back on the way by which he had been led to it, he cordially approved of all that God had done. There was no resentment, no murmuring. He would often find himself looking back and thinking,

- Had I found my brothers where I thought they were,
- Had the pit not been on the caravan-road,
- Had the merchants not come up so opportunely,
- Had I not been sold at all or to some other master,
- Had I not been imprisoned, or
- Had I been put in another ward-
- Had any one of the many slender links in the chain of my career been absent, **how different might my present state have been.**

How plainly I now see that all those sad mishaps that crushed my hopes and tortured my spirit were steps in the only conceivable path to my present position.”

I gained tremendously from reading Alistair's two-part sermon (and I will share more from that in what follows). But I also came across an astonishing claim, by one commentator that "the interpretation of Pharaoh's "Seven Cows and Seven Ears of Wheat" dreams would be a cinch for any competent Egyptologist." Really? Here's what Gen. 41:8 says: **So in the morning, his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men.** (Could one presume that a competent Egyptologist was numbered in these two professional classes?) **Pharaoh told them his dreams but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.** Now that is a complication increasing the disturbing dream business. The Egyptologists were consulted, **all of them**, and not one of them could interpret the "familiar symbology" of the dreams! In contemporary terms, the matter was not a cinch, and not obvious—at least not to "knowledgeable men!" What was needed was someone "wise" and not merely the learned, or the experts. That was the curtain call for Joseph—out of his *close relationship* with God (**God was with him—the Spirit of God was in him**) and through his **fear of the Lord** and his **growing trust in the Lord**, Joseph had been made wise. Something wonderfully similar was observed about the Galilean disciples of Jesus (**ignorant and unstudied men/or uneducated, common men—Acts 4:13**) but it was noted **they saw that they had been with Jesus!** (same verse). Paul describes this "Jesus effect" (seen, not reported or conjectured!) elsewhere, in Colossians 2:3 **In him is found (hidden?) all our wisdom and knowledge** (and holiness, righteousness, redemption and salvation)! By being with Jesus, they had been in touch with the living God! And so may we also be found wise. God knows the wiser we are these days, the better.

Alistair makes the point that wisdom was at premium in Pharaoh's court at that time (1700 BC) and, in the midst of a presidential election, the same is true of America in 2020 AD! **Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God? . . . there is none so discerning and wise as you (Joseph) are.** (vv.38-39) And if I might be allowed the observation, this was a very astute, wise and discerning thing of Pharaoh to say! These verses had a strong impact on me(!), they set off a yearning for the wise in my own heart. Alistair Begg sermonized on the nature *and necessity* of wisdom in Part One of his two-part sermon already cited. Let's take a listen in to Alistair's weighty commentary on Joseph:

"In his generation, **wisdom was at a premium**—so much so that anyone who was clearly endowed with "this faculty" would be put in a position of usefulness. And the same thing remains today. ***One of the most striking characteristics of our culture—and we've (Alistair and Parkside Church) mentioned this before—is a lack of true wisdom.*** At a point in history where we have more opportunities for education, more people that take undergraduate degrees with success, more people who have postgraduate qualifications and they're continuing to expand their level of knowledge, *we still live in a realm of educated foolishness. We are creating a generation of intellectual fools*<sup>1</sup>. Because the psalmist says in 14:1, "The fool [has said]

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<sup>1</sup> By "fools" I think Alistair means the gullible, the manipulatable, un-read and so easily led—those with no roots or background of intellectual rigor/virtue. They are intellectually superficial, like those who live of "tips" and "insider info" on the stock market (knowing when to see, when to buy and when to hold 'em. The commercially-minded act as if everything is for sale, or is merchandise! Such "lightweights" are prone to believe, without vetting, or fact checking, any so-called "authority." Given the prevalence

in his heart, “There is no God.” so that no matter how much I have by way of gray matter; no matter how well I am able to understand, retrieve, and regurgitate information; no matter how many advances I may make in the realm of my own particular discipline, ***without the dimension of biblical wisdom I live in the realm of foolishness.*** For when the Bible thinks of wisdom in these terms, it is speaking of that endowment of heart and mind which is necessary for right living. So that it is in our living that we declare our wisdom.

Job, in chapter 28 and verse 12, asks the question, “Where shall wisdom be found?” He says, “Man does not know the way to it.” And isn’t that the truth?

. . . if our universities were full of wise people, people would be taking their vacations there. They would be going up there, you know, taking trailers and simply having picnics in(sic-I think “on” would be more apt) the ground: “Let’s go up and hang around with wise people! Let’s go up and see how the wise people live! ***Maybe we will become wise like them, too.***” But, of course, that doesn’t happen.

Because the youngster—no matter how well they graduate, into what environment, matriculate into whatever school—they’re not there five minutes till they realize, “I am surrounded by intellectual idiots! And unless I have an answer that is deep in the soul of my being, all of my gains here will be held in check by this great lack.”

Until a man or a woman comes to fear God, to recognize that our times are in his hand, that we were created purposefully by him, that we are ruined by sin, that we *are glorious* in our originality in terms of being made in the image of God and yet marred by this sin, that God’s desire is to recreate in us the image of his Son and to set us to rights—until a man is brought to ***fear God in that way***, then no matter how great his advance, he will always be less than that which God might make him.

So Job asks, “Where is this wisdom?” He replies later in the way that the psalmist does in Psalm 111:10; he says, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”*** (Alistair Begg)

If fear of the Lord is the beginning, then Christ is the end, or glorious completion of all wisdom! Eve’s mistake was thinking that what she ingested, the “apple,” would make her wise (a drug, or brain food?)—many folks are inclined that way today!—BUT it is *companionship with God* that makes one wise. His presence within us is critical to wisdom. ***Fear God in that way***, says Alistair, the way just laid out for us! “Realizing, in the midst of intellectual idiots (the knowledgeable and informed, in worldly, media savvy terms, articulate, opinionated but not wise), that our times are in his hands” (Joseph’s life lesson!),” “that we were created *purposefully* (with significance, “expressing some principle, or fact”),” “that we were ruined by sin, (marred and disfigured) *but God has come to recreate us, restore the image of Christ within* and ‘set us to rights.’” God sets about recreating us through spiritual rebirth, with regeneration and sanctification. These truths are the components (or elements) of the **fear of God**. Hardly a visceral, emotional reaction of terror! More of **power and love and a sound mind**. (2 Tim. 1:7) There is much to unpack in Alistair’s commentary on Joseph.

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of the shrewd, we do need to be wise indeed. We need to be soundly sourced and able to obtain reliable data. We must get beyond appearances.

But first this, I said earlier that vv.38-39 had a strong impact on me(!), they set off a yearning for the wise in my own heart. And, as an exercise, I began a list of the “wise” people in my life: over twenty deceased persons and ten living ones, more than ten Puritans, a dozen classical writers, over two dozen contemporary writers, thinkers and theologians. Something upwards of a hundred names were scribbled down in the margin (many by initials only). I was amazed to reconsider these wise friends, colleagues and influencers (and yes, I included great authors and expositors known solely through their books). Just naming them was a form of tribute—my honor role of those who led me and taught me, heart and mind and soul. I am so blessed and so very grateful! And I wonder, who would be on your “bibliography of the wise?” Who is on your list? Who do you note? Listen to? Alistair delineates between knowledge through education and learning from the acquisition of wisdom. *Do you?* If it’s wisdom we are wanting then more academics and schooling is the wrong route there. Wisdom is the biblical aspiration we should promote and pursue! For us and for our children!—the bible does so. An enduement of heart and mind necessarily for right living—knowing what to do with your knowledge!—comes by way of being in God’s presence, developing your fear of the Lord as explained above, and living by faith which means growing in trust and reliance upon God, *these things bring wisdom*. Who are the discerning and the wise? They are those who have spiritually mastered, whose submission to God has yielded wisdom. If we choose to live with, to meditate upon and ponder the life of Joseph, we may catch wisdom from our practice!

Remember, when the tempting apple appears, choose God instead! Making you wise is part of your renewal program. It is, in part, what being glorified entails. Feed on the Bread of Life, friends, not the bread which perishes. **Amen.**