

TRIBAL WISDOM: HELP IN UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL WISDOM

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INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is a fundamental factor for stability and solidarity of a community or a clan. For this reason, the people of Kawelka, in the Dei district of Western Highlands Province, regard it as the most basic and providential aspect for their good living. They keep the process of imparting wisdom to their children through proverbs and sayings.¹

Wisdom plays a central role in the Bible. In Old Testament times, wisdom was conveyed by the appointed leaders, to teach the Israelites, as God's chosen people. The words of wisdom came directly from the mouth of the Lord, in the form of laws, as a means of valued wisdom.

In the New Testament, the Word is the source of wisdom. The Word is identified in the person of Jesus Christ, as the Lord of the universe. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the revealed Word of God, which was God's hidden wisdom since the beginning. Jesus Christ became the revealed wisdom of God; what was promised before has now been fulfilled in Him. In fact, this wisdom offers hope and salvation, through the way of the cross, and those who believe in him will receive eternal salvation.

¹ This article often uses the "present tense" when discussing the customs and sayings of the Kawelka people. However, not all customs and sayings may be as prevalent today as they were in the past.

Historically, words of wisdom were considered a true part of life for the Melpa people, who lived with their animistic beliefs. But now, by the grace of God, in and through Jesus Christ, who is the true incarnate Word, the hidden wisdom of God has now become the revealed wisdom of God for all mankind. Christ has brought a whole new reality of life among the Kawelka people of Melpa society (Col 2:17).

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE KAWELKA CLAN

It is common knowledge that speeches by Melanesians are too long, and cannot be easily understood, because Melanesians use proverbs, symbols, and figurative speech as their usual way of communication. As Philip Gibbs writes:

Symbolic language is common in the languages of Papua New Guinea, particularly in emotionally-charged fields as religion and politics. The more abstract the concept, or more deeply felt the experience, the greater the likelihood that it will be expressed in symbols.²

Melpa culture and language, in the Kawelka tribe of the Dei in Western Highlands Province, can be studied as the basis of Melanesian wisdom. The people of Kawelka, who are part of the Melpa-speaking tribal people of the northern region of Mt Hagen city, regard proverbs and sayings as fundamental ways of transmitting wisdom.

PROVERBS AND WISE SAYINGS, A MEANS OF TRANSMITTING WISDOM

The Kawelka people hold to the wisdom learnt from traditional stories, passed on through generations. The story of “The Wisdom of a Cassowary” is an example. In this story, the mother cassowary says to her chick: “Child, you are to take a long journey, and, in this long journey, there are trials, threats, and enemies to be faced, therefore, pay good attention to my instruction, and keep in mind what I, as your loving mother, want to tell you.

² Philip Gibbs, “Evangelisation with Proverbs and Sayings”, in *Catalyst* 30-2 (2000), p. 186.

Child, if you see and hear something coming down from above, you shall go ahead and take it as food and drink, but if you see and hear something coming up from the ground, leave, and escape it; for from the ground come your enemies, who await to take your life.”

The meaning behind such a story is the value and importance of wisdom. Wisdom points to the right way of life. The wisdom, the mother cassowary gives to the chick, helps us to see life. The basic needs of life are spoken of in the fresh rainwater and the good fresh air. And, also from heaven above, come the fresh juicy fruits, which are given to eat. Therefore, the good comes down from the sky to the earth. However, what come up from the ground are the enemies – dogs, men with bows and arrows, and traps. These observations are regarded as the fundamental aspects for the well-being of the young cassowary.

Likewise, in our case, the mothers train their young ones with wisdom and that is passed on from one generation to another. Customs in the community are taught in two major ways. Firstly, customs are taught orally. Secondly, customs are learned by applying the proverbs practically, in real life situations. The mother becomes the role model of life.

There is a general belief that a couple came from the west and settled in the valley of Bagla Imp-manga, and they began to cultivate the land, and look after their pigs. Their descendants now live along the edge of the Waghi Valley, and occupy the Dei District of Western Highlands Province. When the population grew in numbers, and inhabited the Dei district, a chief, Onga Kaipa, in the early 1930s, rose to leadership of the Kawelka clan. The Kawelka clan regarded him as a wise man in everything he did, and honoured him for this quality. When the gospel of Jesus Christ came to the Dei area, he became a Christian, eventually becoming the spiritual leader of the Kawelka clan, until his death in December, 2003.

In the oral tradition of the clan, we find many sayings and proverbs attributed to this chief. For example, the following statement is supposed to impart wisdom to his clan:

As men of Kawelka, you are to put your hands into the ground, and, from there, you will have more than enough. From the ground come pigs, shell money, wives, and children, for all are there. All of these things are at your door, unless you put your hands down into the ground. When doing this, the next day, you will find yourself up in the treetops.

From his deathbed, Chief Onga spoke these words, “Love your fellow men, and keep in touch with others in various ways, which will bring peace and wealth. As men of Kawelka, you are to hold the ground.” Then he invited the men to come, one by one, and eat from his hand the head of a roasted pig, eventually just leaving the bones. This invitation was a mark of love and unity. Then he gave his walking stick and his spade to place in the Kawelka clan men’s house for remembrance of his wise teachings.

This is why people of other clans began to regard Kawelka as wealthy. They would say, “if you want to eat pig meat, well, go to Bugl. If you are hungry, then go to Bugl, where you will be satisfied to the fullest with *po palga kaimb* (valued sugar cane) and *rua kenenga membogl* (valued bananas).” According to the other clans, Bugl was the place where wisdom had originated, because they regarded the wisdom of Kawelka as the source of wealth, prosperity, and peace.

THE TRANSFER OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

Legends and tales are told at bedtime, when children, who listen with great interest, are about to sleep. These stories are recited repeatedly, so that the children understand the stories very well, and then they, in turn, interpret them to other children.

People keep transferring wisdom from generation to generation, and here is one reason: simply, men wanted to uphold the identity of the community. In addition, it is meant to build the reputation of the community, and to strengthen the recognition of the community, in terms of wealth, solidarity, and prosperity.

During teaching, the young ones pay close attention to what is being spoken, because the leaders share their experiences that they have seen and heard. As a saying goes: “Tell others what you yourself have seen and experienced; show your brother the hole in the tree, in which you have killed the possum; show your brother the hole in the stone by the pool, in which you drew the largest eel that he, too, will one day have the things you have taken.”

The other way to transfer wisdom is by practical application, which men put into practice by teaching, from generation to generation. In these practical experiences, men and women handle certain tools to use in their respective areas of work. They learn how to take good care of themselves, by handling tools, and do excellent work. By doing this, they are regarded as hard-working people, who supply food for the family, and their livestock. During times of famine, these families would have a supply of food, because they had the ability to supply enough food for their needs. Chief Kingal Pana said:

Kaukau are regarded as pig growers, for out of *kaukau* comes heads of pigs, and the household rubbish becomes the compost of the banana *kenenga* and *membogl* (valued bananas). Study the environment, and it shall tell you when to cut the bush, when to plant, and when to harvest.

Fathers to Their Sons

In Melpa society of Western Highlands Province, as in all Melanesian communities, sons are often valued with greater respect than are daughters, because they are the ones who will govern the clans and the families. To raise productive and influential sons, the fathers have the responsibility to teach them, which means that they must equip their children with enough skills and knowledge to make them become their successors.

Subsequently, a Melpa father is very much concerned for his son. He does not want his son to be poor, to be an outcast, a beggar, or even a stranger in his own land. However, he wants to see his son become a man of character and wealth, in order to be respected in the community. The father says to

his son: “With you will be the ropes of pigs, a supply of garden foods, and you will be seen as if you were being rubbed with oil everyday”, and so on. The young sons value these words, as spoken wisdom from their fathers.

A father teaches his son to be a good tribesman, and gain respect from others by good behaviour. For a spirit of humility makes other men praise him, and fix their eyes upon him, to make him a good leader in the next generation. Winning others’ hearts is important, and that means a boy shall do his best to win the full interest and attention of others, by helping them, being obedient, and being gentle, with intelligent actions. The father teaches all these leadership qualities in the house, and the boy grows up with these instructions.

In the Pidgin language, *haus man* means “men’s house”, the central place where the young men and the boys learn all the ways of becoming a man of wealth and prosperity. Every evening until midnight, the old men teach the ways of living productive lives. Some of these grandfathers were good warriors before, so they teach the young men to become good warriors, others were good gardeners, who educate the young ones to become good gardeners, and others were good spokesmen for the clan, who teach the boys how to become good public speakers.

Therefore, the wise fathers admonish the young men: “Eat whatever is given to you by your mothers and your sisters, but do not take anything which is given by others. Simply, say ‘no, thank you’, and you will save yourself in the long run, and you will see the many good things, which are to come in the years ahead.” This admonition is given to avoid death by poisoned food, which is usually given by enemies.

The fathers also teach the young men about marriage, that is, when it is suitable to sleep with their wives, and when it is not safe. This teaching is related to the menstrual periods, when it is not safe for them to sleep with their wives. This taboo must be strictly followed, because the men say that women have many ways to kill men, and this is one of them. The wise fathers also put more emphasis on the young men to put their hands into the

ground, because, from the ground, comes everything, which is essential for a stable and a productive life. When they are good gardeners, they will have enough food. As a father says, “plant a lot of sugar cane, and put a lot of sugar cane for your wives and your daughters, so that, when they come from their gardens with string bilums of sweet potatoes or *kaukau*, they will be satisfied”.

The other thing the boys learn about is their family tree lines, like who are their in-laws and uncles. These blood relatives are considered very close and they are to be called upon in trade, in times of need and in times of shortage of food.

Another way of teaching wisdom is done in a practical form. For instance, men call the boys together, and take them away to work for a man, who would need help. During this work period, boys are taught how to sharpen the posts of the house and the fences. They are shown trees that are suitable for the posts, and how to use their tools like axes. In stone-age times, stone axes were valuable, and it took a long time to make one. They are taught how to dig drains, build houses, sharpen bows and arrows, and even make flutes.

Mothers to Their Daughters

In Western Highlands Province, girls are brought up in a different environment from that of boys. In the Pidgin language, we say *haus meri*, for the place where mothers give their daughters wisdom teaching.

Raising wise children is like building the reputation and the identity of the family. Once a girl has grown up and is married, she takes along with her what she was taught, and the people, to whom she is married, certainly talk about her for her good deeds. Hermann Strauss states, “She has with her the

words of her mother, or she had not listened to her mother, and forsaken her words.”³ A wise mother, Yangui Romrui said,

Women of Melpa, we are to win the heart of our husbands, before they can marry other wives besides us. To be in the centre of the husband’s heart, we shall become as his mother, and be loyal to him; and all we do is for the good of our husband and the family. By doing these, even though he marries other wives besides us, we still remain in the centre of our husband’s heart, with the help of the wisdom, which was taught by our mothers.

Another informal educational and training, which daughters receive, is to visit and manage the gardens.

The Man-Ik Instructions

The word *Man-Ik* in the Melpa language is translated as “instructions”, given by someone, who is regarded as a wise person, especially an elder, who is a leader. *Man-Ik* is a preparation for the good of the child, in the years ahead.

The basic idea of *Man-Ik* is love. Love is the wisdom, in which *Man-Ik* is valued, for a productive life. Because, when *Man-Ik* is given, it is given to someone whom you love so much, and that you do not want to become a person, who is regarded as poor and unstable. Therefore, the father gives his son these words of wisdom to prepare him, before entering the battlefield. According to Strauss, *Man-Ik* means powerful “instructions a wise father gives to his son, or a wise mother gives to her daughter”.⁴

To confirm the idea of *Man-Ik*, as a wisdom-tool to avoid enemies, Kingal Pana, a chief of Kawelka, said,

³ Hermann Strauss, *The Mi Culture of the Mt Hagen People*, Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

We fathers are like tins of oil, which are dried up, but you young ones are tins freshly being filled, and so you are the most wanted to be killed; therefore, avoid strangers, who give you food and drink.

On the battlefield, the enemies approach the young ones, and they are the groups most wanted to be killed, so *Man-Ik* is given to them, so that it will become a way of escape from enemies. Strauss states,

Contents of *Man-Ik* include taboo rules, instructions of sacrifice, and advice on how to avoid people, places and things, which are evil. Yet it is also ethical in import, for it warns people to behave well, to be diligent, reliable, and constant, to avoid quarrels and arguments, to be peaceful and hard working; it reminds people that, at all costs, they should not do anything that provokes contempt.⁵

Konts Gints, a village court magistrate and chief leader, said,

For the word that comes out from your mouth is like a spear, so please observe where the end would be, and where you are aiming. The words you speak are like fences that are built to guide your clan, and your words bring wealth into your clan as well. Your words are essential for negotiation with other clans for trade and terms of exchange.

People are encouraged to follow spoken words during their childhood, and into their adult lives, as a means of learning and memorising things. Yap Rolgoppa, a chief leader, said:

When you are young, your ears are soft and ready to hear and record things, therefore, we are telling you, but, when you are grown up, your ears would be hard, and would not be capable to record things. And now, your backbone and your ribs are soft, and you can bend and work, before they become hard to bend, when you grow up.

⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

On other occasions, parents and leaders give teaching and instruction from their hearts to the young people. This is done, in love, for the children by their parents. As Kots Gints said,

Child, I am like a frog, who is about to climb down the cliff, but you are starting. I am near the sunset, but you are with the sunrise, and so, keep my saying, so that you will find yourself implanted with these words. Give your daughter to those who raped your wife, give a pig to him who had stolen the other, give a banana sucker to him who stole your bananas.

This kind of a saying from leaders and parents means that they have now come to the end, and are concerned with the welfare of the young people, the community, and the clan, and the next generation.

THE *KELAMEMP-IK*

Kelamemp-Ik is one of the ways in which wisdom is delivered to the young people with blessings, and, thus, something extraordinary abides within the words spoken. *Kelamemp-Ik* is a word of wisdom, which is given by a father or a mother at a certain time, when they are pleased with something their son/daughter did for them. When the child satisfies the feelings of their parents, by a job well done, or something that is given which pleases them, then they give these words of wisdom. Out of their hearts come the words of *Kelamemp-Ik*. Strauss refers to it as, “The final farewell speech of the old parents, they have the effects of blessings.”⁶

In the event of giving these words, the father or the mother also calls to remembrance memorable moments of their lifetime, puts them into words, and transfers them to the young. They might say: “Child, may you become the chief of the clan, and be their leader; may you have plenty of pigs, and a tunnel, in which shell money shall flow through.” Or a wise father might say to his son: “Son, may you become rich in wealth, and may you marry many wives, and multiply in numbers, and be in possession of my land, and remain

⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

as I was.” A mother says, “Child, may you become the mother, who will be in the heart of your husband, and look after your husband’s property.” Or she may say, “Child, your gardens shall be plentiful, and your garden will produce quality food, and your bilum will be greasy (meaning that, at all times, there will be pig meat in it).”

These words of wisdom are given as visible signs of love, joy, acknowledgment, concern, and responsibility.

THE *KENTIK-IK*

Kentik-Ik is a way in which wisdom is transferred from the parents, especially a wise father to his son, or a wise mother to her daughter, whom they love. This form of wisdom is given to their children, especially from the deathbed of a father or a mother. *Kentik-Ik* could be translated as the testament of a dying person, from their deathbed.

When *Kentik-Ik* is spoken, it has to remain with the children. The last wisdom words and the items the parents give away become useful for young men and women, because wisdom, power, and might reigns within them. As Strauss says, “*Kentik-Ik* is the testament of a dying person dividing his effects among his children. Power and might reign in the words. This is revealed in the life of the recipient.”⁷

When *Kentik-Ik* is spoken, with actions, something more significant takes place, because the words accompany the items, in which strength and power abide. A wise father distributes his possessions among his sons, with certain words abiding in them. Suppose, he had only one son, he might say,

Son, I am about to go there. I leave with you the ropes of the pigs, with the mother pig. I also leave with you the axes that are to cut down trees for chopping posts for fencing and building houses, and the bush knife for gardening, and the spade for digging drainage.

⁷ Ibid., p. 81.

If he were a chief leader, and a good spokesman, he would say: “Son, I give my bundle of words to you”, and he gives his walking stick, and says, “you grow old until the walking stick would kill you”. The same pattern applies to mothers, speaking to their daughters. When an old mother is sleeping on a deathbed, and instructing her daughter with her last testament, this wisdom becomes a gift from the mother to her daughter. As she draws closer to her mother, the mother would say,

Child, as I am going, I am leaving with you what I have, take this bilum, and may it always be greasy, and here is the digging stick, may *kaukau* (sweet potato) be fastened on to it always, and your bilum shall be full of all kinds of garden crops.

From the writer’s own experience of *Kentik-Ik*, when he was a little boy, sitting beside his father, he still remembers his grandfather, who had given his farewell speech (*Kentik-Ik*) to his father. From that day, up until now, his personal view is that these words, often spoken by people from deathbed, as wisdom, become reality.

Pana Nurum, a chief leader, provides an example of the wisdom given by his grandfather to his father,

My son, take with you the pigs’ ropes, which may be with you, and my bundle of words shall be with you, that you may look after the ceremonial ground, and may that ceremonial ground, at all times, be clean. You and your brothers may live in peace, and be friendly to one another, that you may multiply in numbers, and inhabit the land of the Kawelka clan.

When a person gives someone a word of wisdom with blessing, it abides within him/her forever.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament says a great deal about wisdom and knowledge. Where does wisdom come from? Wisdom is a living principle, and derives from a

source that is outside of man. It is to be held carefully, because it leads a person to success of life. It is likened to a hidden treasure (Prov 3:13-18).

To obtain wisdom, Israel had to be loyal, faithful, committed, and obedient to God, because faith became the tunnel, through which it came. It was Israel's duty, also, to make sure that the tunnel to the dam hadn't been disconnected, to maintain and strengthen wisdom. There are certain conditions and instructions, which were to be followed, as a way of wisdom-keeping, and fulfilment of it. One of them was to love and fear the Lord. Israel acknowledged God as their Lord and King, because He was true wisdom, the life-giving tree.

Wisdom literature in the Old Testament stresses that the act of believing in God was fundamental, because through the faith relationship, God worked with wise men. In Hebrew, wisdom means:

intellectual virtues (generally הַכְּמָה = *hok^emāh*, though other words are used: e.g., בִּינָה = *bînāh* = understanding, בְּנֵי-בִינָה = *t^ebînāh* = insight, or שֵׂכֶל = *sēkel* = prudence, which is intensely practical, not theoretical.). Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful, of forming a correct plan to gain the desired results. Its seat is the heart, the centre of moral and intellectual decision. Those who possess technical skill are called wise; kings and leaders were in special need of wisdom. On them, hung the responsibility for correct decisions in political and social affairs.⁸

GOD THE SOURCE OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

God is the source of wisdom and knowledge. And creation confirms who God is, and what His knowledge is like. As Carson says,

He required no magic to do this; His word was sufficient by itself. According to the Genesis account, there is one God, the sovereign

⁸ *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 3 vols, vol 3: parable-Zuzim, Douglas, J. D., ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1980, p. 3:1650.

Creator, to whom all the universe owes its being, and whom it is expected to obey.⁹

About Gen 1, Martin Luther said,

God had reserved His exalted wisdom, and the correct understanding of the chapter, for Himself alone, although He had left us with the general knowledge that the world had a beginning, and that it was created by God out of nothing.¹⁰

The book of Proverbs affirms that, in the beginning was wisdom, and wisdom was with God. Since wisdom was God Himself, through Him, and by Him, the world originated (see also John 1:1-4).

For a man and woman to receive wisdom and knowledge, he/she had to put their faith and hope in the Lord. The only way was to fear the Lord first, from whom comes wisdom and knowledge (Job 28:20-23). In the words of Tozer,

God is self-existent, while all created things necessarily originated somewhere at sometime. Aside from God, nothing is self-created. By our effort to discover the original things, we confess our belief that everything was made by Someone who was made of none.¹¹

God Himself is the source of everything. Through Him came the world, and what is good and best for the well-being of men. God has given men wisdom and understanding, because God Himself is Wisdom, and is the author of all things.

⁹ *New Bible Commentary*, 21st-century edn, Carson, D. A., ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds, *Luther's Works*, 54 vols, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1958, p. 1:3.

¹¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1961, p. 32.

The Pentateuch emphasises wisdom as one of God's attributes, and, where God is, wisdom also reigns. Tozer states, "Without the creation, the wisdom of God would have remained forever locked in the boundless abyss of the divine nature. God brought His creatures into being that He might enjoy them, and they rejoice in Him".¹²

Mankind is searching for wisdom, but it shall never be found in the world (Job 28:20-23). Job 28:28 provides a condition that people must follow to know where wisdom dwells: "And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.' "

WISDOM INITIATED BY GOD

God was in the beginning, and He will be in the end, and this is why He describes Himself with these words, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev 22:13).

During the time of slavery, Israel was totally a new nation, because they were living as captives/foreigners in a foreign land. The Israelites were living among the Egyptians, and directly under the leadership of ungodly kings, who did not know Yahweh. So, God called Israel out of the slavery in Egypt, as His own beloved children, and He cared for them, and nursed them. Vern Poythress states, "At every point, its contrast between good and evil recapitulates the fundamental contrast between serving an idolatrous ruler in Egypt and serving God with freedom in a new, redeemed situation."¹³

During the 40 years in their desert wanderings, almost all the elders, leaders, and older people (men and women) perished in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. The good news is that, while the old were gone, a new generation grew with a new social lifestyle. This was a new time for them, physically and spiritually.

¹² Ibid., p. 67.

¹³ Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1991, p. 97.

Firstly, God spoke directly to them about His requirement for their obedience (Ex 20:1).¹⁴ He began to educate them with His commandments, in terms of didactic wisdom to Israel, as His covenant community. God gave them the law as a tool, and wisdom was given as knowledge on how to use the tool (Deut 4:6). God's emphasis was that He was the Lord God, who brought them out of slavery in Egypt; the people should listen to Him. The people were instructed in the Law, which was the wisdom teaching, directly initiated from the Lord's mouth. Hence, in the Ten Commandments, people were given revelation of the mind, heart, and the love of God for Israel.

The second way in which God showed the love He had for Israel, was that God, with His powerful and holy hands, wrote these laws, which should be followed. If we were to take a closer look at the law, and thoughtfully and even prayerfully examine it, we would see the loving heart of God for humanity. It was the love of God being transformed onto the stone tablets, upon which Israel had to see and live.¹⁵ Carson says, "It alone was inscribed on stone tablets by the fingers of God".¹⁶ This sign of God's fingerprints confirmed that there was nothing hidden from the sight of Israel. In addition, it meant that God never hid anything from His people. Thus, God as the Sovereign Lord, gave everything that was needed for the Israelites to follow in the years ahead.

Most importantly, the Lord had written His laws in the hearts of each one of the Israelites that, wherever they were; it was with them, for the law is life (Jer 31:33; 2 Cor 3:3). Then they had the duty to transfer this law to the

¹⁴ See also Ex 20:19-20; Deut 3:10, 12-13; 5:4-5, 22-27.

¹⁵ *New Bible Commentary*, p. 107.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

next generation.¹⁷ For, in these words, was the love of God, and it was given in wisdom from God to Israel for implementation to live in prosperity.¹⁸

The land of Canaan, which the Lord was to give them (a land of milk and honey), was a confirmation of the blessing in the law. Moses stressed the importance of obedience to the law, because God's sayings were God's wisdom. If they obeyed it, then they would live longer in the land, which they were about to receive as a gift from the Lord (Deut 5:22-33).

The law was not designed for a certain period of time, nor was it meant only for a certain group of people, but it was given for the whole well-being of the people of Israel. Accordingly, it was, firstly, the family's responsibility to teach their children regularly at home so that these instructions were followed at all times (Deut 6:6-8).

"Keep the law and live" was a prophetic call to God's chosen people, to remain faithful to their election. Israel had to abide in the law in all of her life situations, as an act of covenant between God and His people. Therefore, recitation of the law became an important means of education in the house. From these in-house lessons, the leaders later repeated the same in community gatherings, to enable, strengthen the people, and to make them grow in wisdom and knowledge. It was the basic role of each individual in the community to educate each other to keep the law, because the law was life.¹⁹

Moreover, the propagation of wisdom and knowledge was a parental responsibility, so Moses advised the parents to educate their children. God's message was always clear that they should "Keep the Lord's commandments

¹⁷ See S. G. Graff, *Promise and Deliverance*, vol 1, Nutley NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977, p. 300.

¹⁸ See Herbert C. Allenman, *The Old Testament Commentary*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1948, p. 75.

¹⁹ See Johannes Feiner, *The Common Catechism*, New York NY: The Seabury Press, 1973, p. 115.

and live, for long life reigns in the laws.”²⁰ Before Moses left the Israelites for a new world, he reinforced this wisdom to dwell within their life (Deut 11:8-9; 30:1-20; 32:46-47).

When thinking of this ideal, and referring to how Israel grew in stability, wealth, and prosperity we will look at an example from Solomon’s wisdom. Amazingly, Solomon has realised that fearing the Lord, and being loyal to Him, was a fundamental concept for all mankind (1 Kings 3:7-14). Solomon had also realised that the Lord was the source of all wisdom and knowledge, because he had learnt that, through wisdom, all other things came into existence. God made him understand what was most important and useful in ruling the nation of Israel, as a model nation among other nations. Furthermore, this wisdom of God, alone, made the other nations realise how wise the king was.

During the reign of Solomon, Israel was recognised as a nation of wealth and prosperity, because she was well organised and protected by the wisdom around her. Alleman says: “And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt.”²¹

The most important thing, which this wisdom of God had done for the Israelite community, was that it had become a means for God’s deliverance of the nation from all forms of poverty and slavery (2 Chron 1:11-12). King Solomon’s wisdom attracted the Queen of Sheba, to give praise to him on his understanding and wisdom. She also praised the Lord, as the giver and source of all wisdom, because God was the source of wisdom.

Where the Lord reigns, there is always going to be wealth, peace, solidarity, prosperity, and happiness. However, true happiness of life is not a matter of wealth and prosperity, but the discovery of the hidden treasure in wisdom and knowledge of God, as a gift of God to this world.

²⁰ See Allenman, *The Old Testament Commentary*, p. 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the main theme, which stands out as the message to be conveyed, is that the Word of God is the wisdom and the knowledge of God. This Word became flesh, took human form, and dwelt among men. This was Jesus Christ, the true wisdom and knowledge of God.

The four gospels spell out the fact that Jesus Christ is the Wisdom of God. Jesus Christ is the Word, and this Word was the fulfilment of the prophecy given centuries before.²² The writers of the gospels had real personal experiences, and they had personally seen the events (John 20:30-31). They taught the divine teachings, with power and authority from Christ Himself.²³

The Acts of the Apostles explain the work of the Holy Spirit, who came to empower the apostles and other Christian believers to become witnesses of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the great truth that Christ became man, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the grave on the third day. The gospel of Jesus Christ confirms the preexistent Word of God, who is the true wisdom of God.²⁴

Subsequently, the Revelation of John and the letters of Paul all proclaim that the wisdom of God is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul plainly clarifies who Christ is (1 Cor 1:18, 23-25, 30). Initially, Christ came from God, and He is the true, revealed wisdom (1 Cor 2:7). Therefore, it was the hidden supernatural power, knowledge, and wisdom that is now revealed in Christ Himself.²⁵

²² See Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?: The Dispute over Christ's Origin*, London UK: SCM Press, 1992, p. 242.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁵ See *New Bible Commentary*, pp. 1165-1166.

JESUS CHRIST: THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

During the course of our study, we have seen that wisdom has been with God since the beginning of the world. He created everything, visible and invisible, countable and uncountable. This is what wisdom says, "I was the craftsman at His side" (Prov 8:30a). The word "I" means someone, and it denotes a person, who is expressing Himself in this passage. If it is referring to somebody, the person must be a sovereign and superior being. He must be the creator and the founder of everything. Therefore, Gen 1:2 says, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Then we should ask, "Who is this Spirit?" The only answer is that it is the Spirit is God. The Word is the living, active, and the creating Word. For God's word creates all things, and gives power in His Word. This powerful and active Word is at work in Jesus Christ (Heb 4:12). Prov 3:19-20 states, "By wisdom, the Lord laid the earth's foundation, by understanding He set the heavens in place. By His knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew." Prov 8:22 states, "From the beginning, I was with the Lord." Christ is the living word of God, who is the wisdom of God, and He is the source of life for mankind (John 1:1-4, 14-15, 17-18). For the law was written on two stone tablets, but Christ has written the law of grace into the hearts of men and women, so that, through faith, we can now understand the meaning of the law, and the reality of life in Christ, who is the wisdom of God (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:10). Christ is the answer to the needs of humankind.

The old Israel, as a covenant community, heard God's voice through the law, as a way of life. In fact, the Torah was only a guide to Jesus, because He is the fulfilment of the law and the prophecy.²⁶ Jesus Christ is the contact point with God the Almighty for all moral beings. From now on, moral beings can come to God in and through Christ, without fear and doubt. In Jesus, there is something more than the law and instructions, for Christ is the giver, and the new Torah Himself.

²⁶ See Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?*, p. 264.

God's hidden nature in glory becomes a revealed nature through Christ. Jesus Christ had established communion with moral beings through His words. When people take hold of His words, or abide in His words, the words of wisdom remain in them, so that they then find Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God, as the meeting place of God and men.. A good example is the story of the Samaritan woman. Jesus said that the time will come when people will no longer worship, either in Jerusalem, or on their mountain, but will worship the Father, who is Spirit. Now, the time has come in Jesus Himself, as the redeemer of the world (John 4.21-26).²⁷

Pauline theology helps us to understand that Jesus is the Word of God, the way to the kingdom of God, the wisdom and knowledge of God, the love of God, and He is God's everything for man's necessity, now and for eternity. Therefore, when Jesus began His ministry, He often referred to Himself as men's salvation for everything. Whatever you are looking for, and what you could think of, are found in Him (Phil 3.8-10). That is why men must give up all they have, and find the reality of life in Him alone. Matthew, once a tax collector, realised that Christ was his everything, he gave up his human authority, job, title, and what he had, and followed Christ (Matt 13:44, 45-56).

Jesus Christ is this wisdom of God. All that was with God and all that will be are hidden in Him (Phil 4:12-13; 2 Cor 6:10).²⁸ He is God's wisdom and power. In light of this understanding, Jesus is the giver of life, the source, the superior wisdom, and is the manifested wisdom of God for this sinful world.

THE WISDOM TEACHING OF JESUS

The New Testament speaks very plainly about teachers being regarded on a higher plane in society. As followers, the students studied all the things that

²⁷ See Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ*, p. 93.

²⁸ See James Wood, *Wisdom Literature: An Introduction*, London UK: Gerald Duckworth, 1967, p. 13.

their teacher did, as they went around. These followers were called disciples.

There were many teachers in New Testament times.²⁹ Many young men became followers and disciples of these teachers. The teachings were basic to the life, upon which the students' lives were built, and the student could achieve respect, just as their teacher was respected.³⁰ The Apostle Paul was one of Gamaliel's students. As a result, Paul rightly claims that he was once a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). We understand that Gamaliel made a wise, ethical decision during a meeting of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:33-39).

However, when we are talking about Jesus Christ as a Teacher, He was much greater than the Rabbis were. Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing miracles affirmed the scripture that prefigured Him as the coming Messiah (Matt 5:21-31).³¹

Jesus Christ was the giver and the source of wisdom and knowledge. "You have heard . . . but now I say to you" (Matt 5:27-28). Before, the people of Israel heard the law and instructions interpreted by their spiritual fathers, but now, it is being heard from the very mouth of the Giver Himself, because Christ is the reality of the wisdom of God.

Thus, Jesus did not teach as one of the rabbis, but as one who had authority and power. Yet the people did not realise that He was the promised Messiah, who was to come (Matt 13:54; Mark 1:22).

In Matt 5-7, Jesus taught a sermon on a mountain in Galilee. Jesus delivered this long sermon to His disciples, and a great multitude. Perhaps, the scene may be likened to the people of Israel, who had gathered around the foot of Mt Sinai, when God gave Moses the law (Matt 5:43-45).

²⁹ Teachers were given the Hebrew name, *rabbi* and *rabboni*. *Rabbi* means "my teacher", *rabboni* means "my great one", *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 996.

³⁰ A classic example was "Rabban Gamaliel", in *New Bible Dictionary*, pp. 395-396.

³¹ *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 567.

When Jesus said, “Now I say to you”, these words should have been spoken by somebody with authority, and nobody else could be in a better position to say something like that, because He was revealing with what authority could He say such things. At the same time, Jesus was trying to reveal His authority through His preaching of the law. Since they were unsure, He had to make Himself known by saying, “but now I say to you”. The main idea was to help them realise that He Himself was the wisdom of God, and is the reality of the hidden treasure of heaven.

In the Matt 5-7, Jesus made it clear about the true life for which men and women had been longing for. Jesus referred to the spiritual requirement as the benefit factor for all human beings, because the word of God brings the true valued wisdom that humanity is searching for. The basics, Jesus taught, were to focus on everlasting life (Matt 6:33). Jesus knew that life does not necessarily mean food, drink, wealth, pride, title, and the honour you have. They come in the morning for a while, and then they are gone before the evening. As moral beings, we have our beginning in God, and our ending in Christ (Matt 6:21-22; 1 Pet 1:24). Jesus also taught that those who forsook His teaching would fall in doom. Jesus took this message, by applying it to the practical aspect of the people’s lives (Matt 7:24-26).

The only way to be wise and be effective in whatever has been taught is to love the teacher who taught you (John 14:23-24). To love a teacher is to follow his teachings. The words become the umbrella during the rainy season, the lamp in the dark, and the walking stick on the slippery path that will help one from falling.

In summary, we must take serious notice of what Jesus said about Himself, and God the Father. Jesus, who is the giver of all things, and the key to the heavenly treasure, affirms that He and His Father are one, and He has

everything with Him. What moral beings are longing for is Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God for salvation.³²

THE EFFECT OF WISDOM

In Melpa society, people normally live in a clan, and are united as a group, which means that they are joined to each other, in unity and cooperation. They share together what comes into their clan, and each person's problem is a communal thing. The community's aim is to raise productive and creative people to be leaders of tomorrow, who will build up the identity of the community; and, at the same time, the community strives to build unity, solidarity, and the reputation of the clan.

Therefore, it is the primary role of parents, leaders, and the older people within the clan, to bring up children, with wisdom in their instruction and teaching. For the teaching of the wise produce clansmen who will uphold the identity of the clan. However, if the recipient forsakes these words of wisdom, and rejects them, then the person will find himself or herself as a foreigner in his/her own homeland. The sad thing is that a person brings ruin and destruction upon himself/herself, and the community as a whole.

In 1 Tim 5:17, we read, "The worker deserves his wages", because a person must plant something inside to reap something from it. This applies to all forms of traditional wisdom teachings among the Kawelka people of Melpa society, in accordance with biblical terms. Traditionally, people can tell the difference by identifying a recipient, who had taken serious action with them on the words of wisdom, and the life they live.

In the Old Testament, God's words, words of wisdom, were a necessity for living. Israel had been richly blessed with livestock, fertile land, and growth as a nation. God's words were the basis for Israel's identity and solidarity as a nation (Deut 28:1-14).

³² See Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 3 vols, vol 3: prayers-zeal, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1959, p. 2:1455.

In the New Testament, the wisdom of God became a human form, who played the role of mediator, and thus Himself manifested the attributes of God. Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, is the hidden treasure of God. This means that we have found the treasure hidden in a field, and the fine pearl, for which we have been longing in life (Matt 13:44-46). That means that the followers of this true wisdom have life (John 5:24; 8:31-32).

When a clan person rejects wisdom from wise clan people, he or she is viewed as a foreigner among their own clan. The same thing happened when Israel rejected the words of wisdom. They faced terrible disasters (Ps 137:1-9). This happened because Israel refused the source of life. They made their own choice, and followed their own path to destruction.

Jesus Christ is the word of wisdom (Acts 4:12). However, the people rejected Him, not realising whom He was, and for what He came. The people did not realise that He was the word of wisdom, in which life reigns in its fullness. They chose their own way, which led them to destruction (Luke 20:17-18). They loved darkness more than light (John 3:19). The same is true today.

SUMMARY

In Melpa society, the men of Kawelka historically have upheld wisdom, in various forms, as fundamental aspects for the well-being of their clan. But, in today's world, in the daily newspaper and television media, one sees violence and crimes almost daily. When such things happen, we tend to ask, "Why is there evil in society?" "Who is responsible for it?" "Who is to blame?" This leads to the answer that we are lacking in the wisdom and knowledge, which are fundamental aspects of life and faith. Therefore, we encounter emptiness, and consequently search for life. However, we do not realise that life is in our own hands.

The Bible speaks plainly about the consequences of rejecting the words of the wisdom of God and His appointed spokesmen. The way to enter the new heavenly Canaan is by believing in Him, receiving His words, and obeying His words. Through Jesus, the truth is revealed. By way of the cross, Jesus

died to the demands of the law for our sins, and opened the door of the word of wisdom, as living water, for all people. Jesus Christ is now God's revealed wisdom, for salvation for all people, not only for the people of Melpa society, but for all mankind. Our tribal wisdom has envisaged the need for wisdom to live a life of harmony and peace, thus showing us the greater need to accept the wisdom of God (John 3:18-19).

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