

Part One: What is meant by "wise counsel" in the Old Testament?

Written by Bob Stone

I can vividly remember the first time I heard about Solomon and his wisdom in Sunday School. It made quite an impression on me because of the way our teacher introduced the subject, asking the class, "If you had three wishes and could have anything you wanted, what would you choose?" My potential list was filled with things that would gladden any boy's heart, but I believe I finally narrowed it down to three. I wanted a bicycle, money and fame. After the members of the class offered their wish lists, our teacher told us about how Solomon had a similar opportunity to choose, and chose wisdom above everything else. I was deeply affected by that class. I went home that day and prayed: "God, that makes sense to me. If I'm wise, I'll get wisdom and anything else I want as well—including a bike." So I asked for wisdom, and it has since been my consistent prayer.

I've discovered something else about God's wisdom that has renewed my interest in and hunger for it. While going through an emotional upheaval in my life, I discovered that just reading Psalms and Proverbs was extremely helpful to me. I understand why the book of Psalms can be helpful to us when we are in turmoil, because in it we can always find someplace to identify with David's emotions. I'm not quite sure, however, why reading the Proverbs is so restorative and healing to my spirit. Maybe it is because reading Proverbs is like having your own counselor. It may also be that true wisdom, no matter when we hear it, has a soothing effect on us (see Prov. 12:25). Whatever the case, I now know that reading Proverbs can bring life and health to our soul and emotions, as well as provide good direction for our steps.

Therefore, it is good to continually pray: "Lord I search for wisdom as if it was silver or gold. By so doing, Lord, I want your wisdom to speak health to my soul, give me insight for my steps, and enable me to share your wisdom with others."

With that prayer in mind, we begin a series that can be introduced with the question: **"Are we wise or otherwise?"**

Picture a world without trained counselors, psychologists, or pastoral counselors. There would be no one to consult for your counseling and insight except the Lord, your family, and friends. How would you do? The truth is, you and I would do about the same as we are doing now, because very few of us draw upon the counseling resources available to us outside the circle I mentioned. The Lord is always a faithful friend and counselor, but very few of our Christian friends are equipped to be of assistance in the encouragement we need. That is why we have put together

"A Word Fitly Spoken"

. It is an attempt to prepare us all to be more insightful and wise in the words we say to a friend or a family member. It is to help us all be partners with our Lord in the counseling

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process that comes from His Word and prayer.

Several verses from Proverbs 24 introduce the need for fitly spoken words of wise counsel.

"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (v 11). Do you get the picture? An apt word spoken at just the right time is a beautiful thing. In verse 13 we read:

"Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters."

Notice also verse 25:

"Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land."

Do you see the power of a good word and a trustworthy messenger bringing that word? Apt words can have a significantly positive and life—giving impact upon our lives and souls, no matter in what format they come. For me, these apt words are often contained in notes of encouragement sent to me. Time after time, a word fitly spoken in a note from someone has soothed my troubled soul and helped me to be renewed. Likewise, if we are prepared, we can minister wise words of counsel and encouragement, bringing healing to people all around us.

Therefore, with the power of apt and healing words in mind, we want to look at a number of questions about the whole area of encouragement and counsel, and then attempt to answer them. The first question is:

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The Old Testament has five special words for counsel.

DAR-BAAR—Deuteronomy 11:18—19: *"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19] Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

The term is used for talking—for normal and everyday household, office, etc. speaking or conversing. On rare occasions it is translated "counseling." We should note that not all counseling is formal. We don't counsel only when we say, "Sit down and I will counsel you on this matter." We counsel our children in the home; teachers counsel pupils; employers counsel employees in needed areas. Friends counsel friends in conversation. Someone who points out a blind spot in your life is "dar—baaring you," counseling you in the sense of genuinely talking about it.

YAH-SAAD—Proverbs 15:22: *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."*

This means to converse in a friendly but confidential manner marked by privacy. This is different from dar—baar in that no one else is around when you "yah—saad." Sometimes it is translated "secret assembly." If a person comes to talk to you privately about something, he asks for your "yah—saad"—confidential time where he can share openly his needs with you.

RAH-GASH—Psalms 64:2: *"Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers."*

This term means to be in tumult, to have commotion. It's a stormy word. David was asking God to deliver him from those times when evil councils would be held against him. This is a

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time in counseling when the situation becomes stormy because the heart resists change. Though the term is used here in a negative sense, it can reflect both negative and positive results.

The longer you deal with people, the more you will realize how deeply entrenched sin may be in their lives. When you reach in to excise that sin, as a surgeon with a scalpel, understand that many times it is not released without the pain of "inward bleeding." It doesn't mean that you have necessarily made a mistake; in fact, it might mean you're on the right track.

CHA-BAAL—Proverbs 1:5: *"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance"* (see also 12:5).

This means to bind—to pledge. It is never used in verb form in the Old Testament when it is translated counsel. It is always in noun form, and has to do with the idea of a rope or cord being attached to an animal, and that animal being pulled in the way you are going so as to give it direction. At times it may be a pledge, or a vow, or a binding agreement. On occasion counseling is giving direction—giving projects. It is giving specific direction and steering to a person so they can correct an area of wrong or error. A wise person sometimes says, "Lead me." "Put the rope on me and give me direction." "I really want to know which way to go."

YAH-AATZ—Proverbs 12:20: *"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy"* (NASB— See also 15:22).

This is the most familiar of all Old Testament terms for counsel, meaning to give advice. On occasion it includes exhortation, admonition, a rebuke, or reproof. Many times we hear that we are not to give advice, but only to listen, empathize and be objective and neutral. We are told to simply reflect what the person talking is really saying. The Bible, however, doesn't support that position. There are occasions when reflection is necessary, but there are others when we must speak the truth in love. We are not to remain neutral when we know what the Bible says about the wrong way.

A Working Definition of "Wise Counsel": In a formal or casual way, communicating with someone for the purpose of reflecting, revealing, instructing, or giving direction in a specific area of his/her life.