

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b, The Will of God in the Old Testament, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b, The Will of God in the Old Testament, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture, "Knowing God's Will in the Old Testament Part 2," explores the biblical concept of wisdom (*hokmah*). He argues that wisdom is fundamentally about **skill**, encompassing technical abilities, understanding, and skillful living. **Meadors emphasizes that true wisdom originates from knowing and applying God's Word, shaping one's worldview and values for sound decision-making.** He distinguishes his view from Gary Friesen's concept of "spiritual expediency," advocating for a higher standard rooted in biblical discipline and reasoned application of scripture. **The lecture concludes that understanding God's will in the Old Testament was tied to living according to the law and testimony, informed by a biblical worldview.**

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b – Double
click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Knowing the Will of God).**



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3. Briefing Document: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b, The Will of God in the Old Testament

Briefing Document: Knowing God's Will in the Old Testament - Part 2 (Session 4b)

Overview: This session (4b) continues Dr. Meadors' exploration of the will of God in the Old Testament, specifically focusing on the biblical understanding of **wisdom (hokmah)**. Meadors argues that wisdom in the Old Testament is fundamentally tied to **skill**, encompassing technical abilities, understanding, experience, and ultimately, skillful living in obedience to God. He contrasts this understanding with subjective interpretations and briefly addresses Gary Friesen's perspective on decision-making.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Defining Wisdom as Skill (Hokmah):

- The Hebrew word for wisdom, *hokmah*, and its Septuagint translation, *sophia*, both carry a broad range of meaning, but at their core lies the concept of **skill**.
- This skill can be technical (craftsmanship, running a boat, building), intellectual (understanding, discernment), or experiential (wisdom of the aged).
- Meadors emphasizes that even when translated as "wisdom," the underlying concept often relates to a practical ability or proficiency.
- **Quote:** "But there's one thing about the word wisdom in its translation and in its contextual meaning, that it's usually got something to do with skill, either the skill to do something like run a boat or the skill to understand something, the skill to understand your experience. The skill is always at the core of this..."

1. Biblical Examples of Wisdom as Skill:

- **Technical Skill:** Exodus 28:3 ("all the skillful"), Exodus 31:3 ("filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship"), 1 Chronicles 22:15 ("skilled in working"). These passages illustrate *hokmah* applied to craftsmanship in the tabernacle and temple construction.
- **Understanding and Experience:** Genesis 41:33 (Joseph as "discerning and wise" in managing resources – a skill in business and management), Job 12:2 ("wisdom will die with you, but I have understanding as well as you" - highlighting the parallelism between wisdom and understanding), Job 12:12 ("Wisdom is with the

aged and understanding in the length of day" - equating wisdom with the experience of age), Isaiah 5:21 ("woe to those who are wise in their own eyes" - parallel to "shrewd," suggesting skillful manipulation).

- **Skillful Living:** Meadors concludes that "wisdom is skillful living." This involves understanding life, God's Word, and skillfully living according to it.

1. **Wisdom and Discernment:**

- In the context of discernment, wisdom is defined as "the skill to study the scriptures, engage your worldview and values, and make decisions."

1. **The Fear of the Lord as the Beginning of Wisdom (Proverbs 9:10):**

- Meadors emphasizes the complete verse: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."
- He highlights the parallelism, stating that "fear is equivalent to knowledge and vice versa, and wisdom is equivalent to understanding."
- The fear of the Lord is not just being afraid, but a deep respect and understanding of God that leads to an awareness of the consequences of disobedience.
- **Quote:** "So to fear God is to know God and to have knowledge of God. It's not just to be afraid of God, but it is to have respect. It is to have a deep level of understanding where you respect God in such a way that you know that disobedience will cause real fear to enter the equation."

1. **Wisdom Requires Reason and a Biblical Worldview:**

- Wisdom is not merely doing what "makes sense" or relying on subjective feelings.
- Wise decisions are those where "you can show lines of reason that move from a biblical worldview system to the decision."
- It requires the ability to answer "why" based on biblical principles and values.
- Meadors cautions against uncritical evaluation of one's own worldview and values, even for Christians and leaders.
- **Quote:** "A wise decision is one in which you can show lines of reason that move from a biblical worldview system to the decision. In other words, you never do anything by accident."

1. Critique of Gary Friesen's View on Wisdom:

- Meadors acknowledges Friesen's valuable critique of subjective approaches to knowing God's will.
- However, he disagrees with Friesen's principle that the objective of the Christian in non-moral decisions is to make wise decisions "on the basis of spiritual expediency."
- Meadors finds Friesen's understanding of wisdom too "generic" and not sufficiently grounded in the biblical concept of skill and rigorous reasoning.
- He argues that "spiritual expediency" is a subjective phrase that doesn't align with biblical statements about wisdom.
- **Quote:** "Friesen's principle about wisdom is this... 'In non-moral decisions... The objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions. I agree. And then he says, on the basis of spiritual expediency.' Wow. Now that gets your attention."

1. Knowing God's Will in the Old Testament:

- Based on Isaiah 8:16 and 8:19-20, knowing God's will in the Old Testament was primarily a matter of understanding and applying the **law and the testimony** (God's Word) to life, leading to a biblical worldview and values.
- It was not about seeking guidance through divination or subjective feelings.
- **Quote:** "Isaiah would say, no, to the law and to the testimony, not the desert and your devotional life, because that's your own, that's yourself talking to yourself. You need to get deeply engrossed with the Word of God and with the values and the worldview and values that it provides and how that operates in the world."

Conclusion:

Dr. Meadors concludes that wisdom in the Old Testament is fundamentally about skill – the ability to live life proficiently, grounded in the understanding and application of God's Word. This involves technical abilities, intellectual understanding, experiential learning, and ultimately, skillful obedience to God, informed by a biblical worldview and a reasoned approach to decision-making. He distinguishes this view from more subjective approaches and offers a critique of Gary Friesen's concept of "spiritual expediency." The Old Testament model for knowing God's will emphasizes immersion in Scripture as the foundation for wise living. The subsequent lecture will explore the will of God in the New Testament.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b, The Will of God in the Old Testament

Understanding Wisdom and God's Will in the Old Testament

Study Guide

I. Defining Wisdom (Hokmah/Sophia)

- **Etymology and Translation:** Understand the Hebrew term *hokmah* and its Greek translation in the Septuagint, *sophia*. Note the connection of *sophia* to the feminine name Sophie.
- **Core Meaning: Skill:** Recognize that the fundamental meaning of wisdom in the Old Testament revolves around skill. This skill can manifest in various ways.
- **Types of Skill: Technical Skill:** Provide examples from Exodus (craftsmanship in building the tabernacle) and 1 Chronicles (artisans).
- **Practical Understanding/Experience:** Explain how wisdom relates to understanding and experience, citing the example of Joseph's management skills in Genesis and the parallelism between wisdom and understanding in Job.
- **Shrewdness (including negative connotations):** Discuss how wisdom can also be associated with shrewdness or skillfulness, even in negative contexts like manipulation (Isaiah).
- **Wisdom as Skillful Living:** Summarize the idea that being wise means being skillful in navigating life, obeying God, and interpreting Scripture.

II. Examples of Skill as Wisdom in Scripture

- List and briefly explain the examples provided in the lecture where *hokmah* (wisdom) is translated or understood as skill:
- Exodus 35:26 (skill to weave)
- Exodus 35:31 (ability/skill to teach)
- Exodus 36 (skill to build the sanctuary)
- 2 Chronicles (skill with raw materials)
- Ecclesiastes 2 (skill to work/career)
- Ecclesiastes 10 (skill with an axe)

- Ezekiel 28 (skill in business)
- Solomon's wisdom as a ruler (skill in judgment)

III. The Source and Nature of Wisdom

- **Wisdom is Learned:** Understand that wisdom is not self-originated (*sui generis*) but comes from learning, experience, and often age.
- **Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord:** Analyze Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Explain the parallelism and the interconnectedness of fear (respect/knowledge of God), knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
- **Wisdom is Understanding, Not a Shot in the Dark:** Contrast the idea of faith as "jumping into the dark" with biblical wisdom, which is based on understanding and knowledge ("the light is on").
- **Wisdom is Describable:** Unlike the "indescribably delicious" candy bar, wisdom and faith are knowable and can be described through Scripture.
- **Wisdom as Skill to Obey God:** Emphasize that a key aspect of wisdom is the practical skill to live in obedience to God.

IV. Wisdom and Decision Making

- **Beyond Personal Sense:** Explain why wisdom is not simply doing what makes sense to an individual (pragmatism).
- **Lines of Reason:** Understand that wise decisions are characterized by lines of reasoning that connect a biblical worldview and value system to the decision. Be prepared to explain the "why" behind decisions.
- **Importance of Worldview and Values:** Recognize that a transformed mind, shaped by Scripture, provides the necessary worldview and values for wise decision-making.
- **Self-Critical Evaluation:** Understand the importance of self-critically evaluating one's own worldview and value system, even if it seems Biblically based (example of Paul before his conversion).
- **Wisdom Beyond Proof Texts:** Explain how wisdom is applied in situations where there is no direct biblical command, requiring the use of implication and constructive reasoning based on scriptural principles.

V. Critique of Gary Friesen's View

- **Spiritual Expediency:** Understand Friesen's concept of making wise non-moral decisions based on "spiritual expediency."
- **Meadors' Critique:** Summarize Meadors' criticisms of Friesen's view, including:
 - Friesen's unpacking of wisdom is too generic.
 - "Spiritual expediency" is a subjective term not well-defined Biblically (use of "spiritual" primarily in the New Testament).
 - *Chokmah* (wisdom) sets a higher standard than expediency.
 - Friesen's view is ultimately as subjective as the views he critiques.
 - Meadors believes his view of wisdom is more directly rooted in Scripture.

VI. Old Testament Conclusions on Knowing God's Will

- **Focus on Law and Testimony:** Understand Isaiah's emphasis on the Law and the Testimony (God's Word) as the primary means of knowing God's will, rather than seeking personal revelations or divination.
- **Rejection of Divination:** Recognize the rejection of seeking guidance from familiar spirits and wizards.
- **Origin of Guidance:** Reiterate that true guidance originates from Scripture, leading to a transformed mind, worldview, and values applied to life.
- **Knowing God's Will as Worldview and Values:** Conclude that in the Old Testament, knowing God's will was fundamentally about understanding and living according to the worldview and values derived from the Law and the Testimony.

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the primary meaning of the Hebrew word *hokmah* and its Greek equivalent *sophia* as discussed in the lecture? Explain how this core meaning is evident in the various translations and contexts of the word.
2. Provide two examples from the Old Testament where the word typically translated as "wisdom" is used in a context that clearly refers to technical or practical skill. What does this tell us about the nature of wisdom in the Old Testament?

3. According to the lecture, how does Proverbs 9:10 ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...") define and expand upon the concept of wisdom? Explain the parallel relationship between the two halves of the verse.
4. Explain the illustration of the father and daughter on the staircase. How does this analogy differentiate between true biblical wisdom/faith and a less informed approach to trust and decision-making?
5. Why does the lecturer argue that wisdom is more than just "doing what makes sense to you"? What alternative framework for wise decision-making is proposed?
6. What is meant by "lines of reason" in the context of wise decision-making? How do these lines connect to a biblical worldview and value system?
7. Briefly explain Gary Friesen's concept of "spiritual expediency" in non-moral decision-making.
8. What are two key criticisms that Dr. Meadors raises against Gary Friesen's view of wisdom and decision-making?
9. According to the lecture, where should believers primarily look to understand God's will in the Old Testament, according to the prophet Isaiah? What should they avoid seeking?
10. In summary, how was "knowing the will of God" primarily understood in the Old Testament, based on the principles discussed in the lecture?

Answer Key

1. The primary meaning of *hokmah* (Hebrew) and *sophia* (Greek) is skill. This core meaning is evident as the terms are often translated as "skill," "ability," or "craftsmanship" in various contexts, indicating proficiency in different areas of life. Even when translated as "wisdom," the underlying idea of practical competence or understanding remains.
2. In Exodus 28:3, *hokmah* is translated as "skillful" in the context of artisans creating garments for the priesthood, highlighting technical expertise. Similarly, 1 Chronicles 22:15 describes workmen as "skilled" (*hokmah*) in various construction trades. This demonstrates that wisdom in the Old Testament encompasses practical abilities and proficiencies.

3. Proverbs 9:10 equates the "fear of the Lord" with the "beginning of wisdom" and the "knowledge of the Holy One" with "understanding." This parallelism suggests that true wisdom originates from a deep respect and knowledge of God, leading to genuine understanding of the world and how to live in it.
4. The staircase illustration highlights that true faith and wisdom are not blind leaps into the unknown ("the dark"). Instead, they are based on a clear understanding and knowledge of the one to be trusted ("the light is on"). Biblical faith and wisdom involve knowing God and His character, not hoping for a positive outcome in ignorance.
5. The lecturer argues that wisdom is not merely doing what makes sense personally because that can be subjective and lack a grounding in God's truth. Instead, wise decision-making involves a deliberate process of reasoning from a biblical worldview and established values to determine what is right and appropriate.
6. "Lines of reason" refer to the logical connections a person makes between their understanding of biblical principles, their core values derived from that understanding, and the specific decision they are facing. These lines of reasoning provide a justification for the decision rooted in a biblical framework, answering the question "why."
7. Gary Friesen's concept of "spiritual expediency" suggests that in non-moral decisions (where there is no direct biblical command), Christians should aim to make wise choices based on what is spiritually advantageous or beneficial.
8. Two key criticisms Dr. Meadors raises against Friesen are that Friesen's definition of wisdom is too general and lacks sufficient biblical and philosophical depth. Additionally, Meadors argues that the term "spiritual expediency" is subjective and not well-supported by biblical usage, particularly since the term "spiritual" is primarily a New Testament concept.
9. According to Isaiah, believers in the Old Testament should primarily look to the "law and the testimony" (God's written Word) to understand God's will. They should avoid seeking guidance from methods of divination such as consulting those with familiar spirits or wizards.

10. In the Old Testament, knowing the will of God was primarily a matter of understanding and internalizing the worldview and values presented in the Law and the Testimony. By deeply engaging with Scripture, individuals could develop the "skillful living" that characterized wisdom and align their lives with God's desires and purposes.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the multifaceted nature of wisdom (*hokmah*) in the Old Testament, illustrating your points with specific examples from the lecture. How does understanding wisdom as "skill" provide a unifying framework for its various expressions?
2. Analyze the relationship between the "fear of the Lord" and wisdom as presented in Proverbs 9:10 and elaborated upon in the lecture. What are the key components of this "fear," and how does it serve as the foundation for true understanding and skillful living?
3. Compare and contrast the lecturer's view of wise decision-making with the idea of simply "doing what makes sense." What are the potential pitfalls of relying solely on personal pragmatism, and how does a biblical worldview and value system offer a more robust framework for navigating life's choices?
4. Evaluate Dr. Meadors' critique of Gary Friesen's concept of "spiritual expediency." What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective in understanding how Christians should make non-moral decisions?
5. Based on the principles discussed in the lecture, how did individuals in the Old Testament discern and live according to God's will? What role did Scripture (the Law and the Testimony) play in this process, and what does this imply for believers today?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hokmah (חִכְמָה):** The primary Hebrew word for wisdom in the Old Testament. It encompasses the idea of skill, ability, understanding, and practical intelligence.
- **Sophia (σοφία):** The Greek word for wisdom, commonly used in the Septuagint to translate *hokmah*. It also carries a broad meaning related to skill and understanding.
- **Septuagint:** The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament).
- **Skill:** A central aspect of biblical wisdom, referring to proficiency or expertise in a particular area, whether technical, practical, or intellectual.
- **Understanding:** Closely linked to wisdom, referring to the capacity to comprehend and discern, often gained through knowledge and experience.
- **Shrewdness:** A form of wisdom that implies astuteness or sharp-wittedness, which can be used for both positive and negative purposes.
- **Fear of the Lord:** Not simply being afraid of God, but a profound reverence, respect, and awe that acknowledges His sovereignty and leads to obedience. It is presented as the foundation of wisdom.
- **Knowledge of the Holy One:** In Proverbs 9:10, this is presented as being equivalent to understanding and is linked to the fear of the Lord as the basis for wisdom.
- **Synonymous Parallelism:** A common feature in Hebrew poetry where the second line of a verse repeats or reinforces the idea of the first line using different but similar words.
- **Sui Generis:** A Latin phrase meaning "of its own kind" or "unique." In the context of the lecture, it is used to emphasize that wisdom does not originate independently but is acquired through learning and experience.
- **Pragmatism:** A philosophical approach that emphasizes practical consequences and usefulness. In the lecture, it is contrasted with wisdom based on biblical principles.
- **Biblical Worldview:** A comprehensive framework for understanding reality and making judgments based on the teachings and principles of the Bible.

- **Values Complex:** The system of core beliefs and principles that guide a person's behavior and decision-making, shaped in the context of the lecture by a biblical worldview.
- **Lines of Reason:** The logical connections and justifications that link a person's biblical worldview and values to a specific decision.
- **Spiritual Expediency:** Gary Friesen's concept that in non-moral decisions, Christians should choose the option that is most spiritually beneficial or advantageous.
- **Law and the Testimony:** Refers to the core teachings and principles found in the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly the Mosaic Law and the prophetic messages, which are presented as the primary source for understanding God's will in that era.

5. FAQs on Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 4b, The Will of God in the Old Testament, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Understanding God's Will in the Old Testament

1. How is "wisdom" (hokmah) defined in the Old Testament? In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "hokmah," typically translated as wisdom, fundamentally relates to skill. This skill can manifest in various ways, including technical abilities like craftsmanship (Exodus 28:3, Exodus 31:3, 1 Chronicles 22:15), practical understanding and experience in managing affairs (Genesis 41:33), and the intellectual capacity for discernment (Job 12:1-2, Isaiah 5:21). Ultimately, wisdom is presented as skillful living, which involves understanding and skillfully applying God's word and principles to navigate life.

2. Beyond technical skill, what other aspects does biblical wisdom encompass? While technical skill is a key aspect, biblical wisdom also involves understanding and the ability to learn from experience. It's parallel to understanding (Job 12:12), shrewdness (Isaiah 5:21), and is associated with the knowledge gained through age and time. This broader understanding allows individuals to make sound judgments and decisions based on a skillful interpretation of their experiences and circumstances in light of God's teachings.

3. What is the significance of the phrase "the fear of the Lord" in relation to wisdom? Proverbs 9:10 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." This verse highlights that a deep respect, reverence, and understanding of God's character and sovereignty are foundational to acquiring wisdom. The "fear of the Lord" is not merely being afraid, but rather a profound recognition of God's authority that leads to obedience and a proper understanding of the world. It is equated with knowing God, and wisdom is equated with understanding that knowledge.

4. How does one develop wisdom according to the Old Testament perspective?

Wisdom is not self-generated but is acquired through learning, experience, and, crucially, through consistent engagement with God's Word (the law and the testimony). It involves developing a transformed mind, which then shapes one's worldview and values. By diligently studying and internalizing scripture, individuals gain the skill to make wise decisions and live in a way that aligns with God's desires and purposes.

5. What is the role of community and accountability in developing wisdom? While individual study and reflection are important, the text implies the need for community. We need help and may be wrong in our own judgment. Observing others, especially those who demonstrate skillful living based on biblical principles, can contribute to our understanding and application of wisdom. However, it is crucial to discern true wisdom based on its correlation with a transformed mind and biblical values, not just on personal agreement or outward appearances.

6. How should Christians approach decision-making when there isn't a direct command in Scripture? In situations where the Bible does not provide a direct command, wise decision-making involves applying a biblical worldview and values system. This means reasoning from the principles and teachings of scripture to the specific situation. Instead of seeking a specific "proof text" that might be misapplied, individuals should utilize direct teaching, implied principles, and constructive reasoning based on their understanding of God's character and purposes as revealed in the Bible.

7. What is Dr. Meadors' perspective on Gary Friesen's view of decision-making based on "spiritual expediency"? Dr. Meadors acknowledges Gary Friesen's valuable critique of subjective approaches to knowing God's will. However, he disagrees with Friesen's principle of making wise non-moral decisions based on "spiritual expediency." Meadors argues that this concept is too subjective and doesn't align with the Bible's emphasis on wisdom as skillful living rooted in a thorough understanding and application of scripture. He believes true wisdom requires more rigorous biblical discipline and clear lines of reasoning from a biblical worldview.

8. In the Old Testament, what was the primary way to know and fulfill God's will? According to the Old Testament, knowing and fulfilling God's will was primarily a matter of understanding and living according to the "law and the testimony" – the revealed Word of God. It was not about seeking personal revelations in isolation but about being deeply engrossed in scripture, allowing it to shape one's worldview and values, and then applying those principles to daily life. The Book of Proverbs serves as a key illustration of this skillful application of God's wisdom.