

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 26, Introduction to the Wisdom Psalms – Psalm 19 20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everybody. Today, we're going to be taking a deep dive into some fascinating material you sent over about wisdom and the Psalms, particularly Psalm 19. We've got excerpts from a lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke, a renowned Old Testament scholar who really digs into these wisdom Psalms.

So our mission today is to kind of understand what they are, how Psalm 19 fits in, and what surprising connection Dr. Waltke makes between creation and the law. Yeah. It's a fascinating exploration of how these ancient texts can speak to us even today.

For sure. So to set the stage, can you give us a little background on this Hebrew idea of wisdom? Sure. The Hebrew word for wisdom is hokmah, and it's much more than just book smarts.

Think of it as the art of skillful living, mastering all aspects of life from practical skills to navigating relationships and ultimately living in a way that leads to a fulfilling life aligned with God's will. So it's not just about being clever, but about using that cleverness for good. Exactly.

True. Chokmah is always paired with righteousness, ensuring it's used for good. Right.

Interestingly, even the serpent in the Garden of Eden is described as having a form of hokmah. Okay. It was cunning and deceptive, but lacked the crucial element of righteousness.

That's a great point. It highlights how wisdom, in the biblical sense, is inseparable from ethical living. Right.

But how does this concept of hokmah play out in the Psalms? What makes a wisdom psalm different from other types of psalms? Think of wisdom psalms as guides for navigating life's complexities. Okay. They offer advice, warnings, and encouragement on how to live well.

Okay. Especially when faced with difficult situations. Could you give us some examples? Certainly, Psalm 49 cautions against envying the prosperity of the wicked.

Right. A struggle many of us can relate to even today. Mm-hmm.

Then there's Psalm 73. Okay. Where the psalmist grapples with that same issue.

Seeing bad people succeed while good people suffer. Yeah. He ultimately learns to find peace by aligning his perspective with God's.

Right. Rather than trying to fit God into his limited understanding of fairness. That's a powerful reminder that our human perspective is often limited.

Yeah. We don't always see the full picture. Right.

Which brings us to Psalm 19. Dr. Waltke describes it as a Torah psalm praising God's law.

Right. It seems to be strategically placed within the book of Psalms, wouldn't you say? Absolutely. It comes right after a section highlighting the flaws of humanity.

Right. Almost like a turning point. Okay.

Offering a path to righteousness through the law. Okay, but here's where I get a little puzzled. The psalm starts by praising God's creation.

Specifically, the heavens. Right.

And then abruptly shifts to praising God's law of the Torah. Yeah. What's the connection between these two seemingly disparate things? Why this sudden jump? That's the central question Dr. Waltke tackles.

Okay. And he doesn't shy away from the complexities. He dives into various interpretations offered in commentaries.

Uh-huh. Some focus on the different speakers in the psalm. Okay.

Others highlight the different types of words being used. There's even the idea of a contracting movement from the vastness of the heavens to the individual worshiper. But do any of these interpretations fully explain the logic of why creation and the law are paired together in this way? That's where Dr. Waltke's unique perspective comes in.

Okay. He draws on his expertise in wisdom literature to suggest a connection between God's comprehensive knowledge. Okay.

As seen in creation. Yeah. And the absolute truth of his law.

Comprehensive knowledge. Can you unpack that a bit for us? Think of it this way. Okay.

Imagine a doctor trying to diagnose a patient without a complete medical history. Okay. They might make incorrect assumptions based on limited information.

Okay. So are you saying that our human understanding is often limited? Precisely. Like a doctor missing crucial information.

We often operate with incomplete knowledge. And Dr. Waltke illustrates this point with a fascinating story about Westminster Seminary's library. Oh, I've heard about this.

Something about radon gas, right? Yes. The builders unknowingly constructed the library in a location with dangerously high levels of radon gas. Oh, wow.

Because they lacked complete knowledge of the underground geology. They thought they had chosen the perfect spot. Right.

But their limited perspective led to a hazardous situation. So how does this radon story relate to Psalm 19 and the idea of comprehensive knowledge? Well, it goes back to this idea that God created the universe with this perfect knowledge, you know? And he's also given us his law as a reflection of that wisdom to guide us toward right living. Okay.

That makes sense. But some might say, hold on, the Torah. That's an ancient text.

Right. With all sorts of rules and regulations. Yeah.

How can that possibly be relevant to my life today? That's a valid question. But remember, the Torah isn't just a static list of do's and don'ts. It reflects God's character and his heart for humanity.

It's about justice, compassion, and living in right relationship with both God and others. So it's more about understanding the underlying principles. Right.

And applying them to our modern context. Precisely. Think of it like a blueprint for a well-built house.

Okay. The blueprint provides the foundational structure, but the builder adapts it to the site's specific needs and conditions. Similarly, the Torah provides the foundational principles for a just and flourishing society.

And it's up to us to apply those principles to the specific challenges of our time. I'm starting to see how this all ties together. Yeah.

But going back to Dr. Waltke's interpretation of Psalm 19, are we basically saying that both creation and the law are revelations of God's wisdom? Yes. And by studying both, we can gain a deeper understanding of who God is and how we should live. You've hit the nail on the head.

Creation reveals God's power, creativity, and infinite knowledge. Right. The law reveals his heart for justice, righteousness, and human flourishing.

And by reflecting on both, we can cultivate true wisdom, the kind that leads to a life well-lived. I'm curious: what else did Dr. Waltke bring up to support this idea of comprehensive knowledge being key to true wisdom? He points to passages in Job and Proverbs that reinforce this concept. For example, Job 28 states that wisdom can only be found through God, who sees everything under the heavens.

It emphasizes that our human perspective is limited, and true wisdom comes from recognizing that and seeking guidance from the one who sees the whole picture. Right. Because only God possesses that complete and perfect knowledge.

Right. It reminds me of a line from Proverbs 30, where the wise man Agur confesses his own limitations, asking, who has gone up to heaven and come down? Yeah. And who has gathered up the wind in his fists? Yes.

Agur acknowledges that only God possesses that kind of all-encompassing knowledge because he's the creator of it all. We, on the other hand, see only a tiny fragment of the grand tapestry. So if we bring this back to Dr. Walt Meany's interpretation of Psalm 19, are we essentially saying that the shift from creation to law highlights the reliability of God's law precisely because it comes from a God who knows everything? You got it.

The Psalm moves from praising God's awe-inspiring creation, demonstrating his boundless knowledge, to praising his law, which is a direct reflection of that perfect understanding. It's like saying, if God created the universe with such wisdom and precision, surely his moral law is also trustworthy and wise. Okay, this is all making a lot of sense.

But how does this idea of comprehensive knowledge play out in our lives practically? We can't exactly ascend to heaven and gain God's perspective, right? We can't literally go up to heaven, but we can cultivate humility and acknowledge the limitations of our understanding. The Westminster Radon story serves as a stark reminder that even the brightest minds can make mistakes when they don't have the full picture.

So it's about being open to learning, admitting when we're wrong, and seeking guidance from a source of wisdom greater than ourselves. Absolutely. And that's where the Torah comes in.

It provides a framework for understanding right and wrong, navigating life's complexities in a way that aligns with God's will and ultimately leads to genuine flourishing. This has been such a fascinating exploration of wisdom, Psalm 19, and the concept of comprehensive knowledge. But before we wrap up, I'm curious what stood out to you the most from Dr. Walke's lecture.

You know, what really resonated with me was his emphasis on the link between knowledge and truth. He argued that we can't truly know anything with certainty unless we have a comprehensive understanding of it. It makes you wonder.

It makes you wonder if we're often too quick to jump to conclusions based on limited information. We live in a world of sound bites and instant opinions. But true wisdom seems to require a deeper, more thoughtful approach.

Absolutely. It's so easy to settle for surface-level understanding for quick fixes and easy answers. But as Dr. Walke highlights, genuine wisdom involves grappling with complexity, questioning assumptions, and being willing to change our minds when presented with new evidence.

I think that's a really crucial point, especially in today's world. We're bombarded with information from all sides, and it can be tempting to just grab onto whatever confirms our existing beliefs. But true wisdom, the kind we've been discussing, seems to require a more humble and open-minded approach.

What do you think? I completely agree. It's about acknowledging that we don't have all the answers and that there's always more to learn. It's about recognizing the limits of our own

understanding and being willing to engage with perspectives that challenge our preconceived notions.

You know, it reminds me of a time when I, well, let's just say I learned the hard way that assuming I had the full picture often led to misunderstandings and misjudgments. It's a constant process of learning and growing, isn't it? It certainly is. And I think that's a key takeaway from this deep dive into Dr. Waltke's lecture.

The pursuit of wisdom is a journey made a destination. It's a lifelong process of seeking truth, wrestling with complex issues, and refining our understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place in it. That's a beautiful way to put it.

It's not about arriving at some fixed point of perfect knowledge, but about embracing the ongoing process of learning and discovery. And I think that's where the real excitement lies. It's in that constant exploration, that willingness to question, to probe, to dig deeper.

It's about recognizing that even when we encounter challenging or seemingly contradictory ideas, those challenges can actually deepen our understanding and lead us to a richer, more nuanced appreciation of truth. So to bring this all home, what's one final thought you want to leave our listener with today? What's the one thing you hope they'll take away from this deep dive? If we truly believe, as Dr. Waltke suggests, that God's law is a reflection of His perfect and complete knowledge, how does that change the way we view our own attempts to live wisely in the world? Wow, that's a powerful question. It challenges us to examine our own values, our motivations, and our decision-making processes.

It invites us to consider whether our actions are aligned with the wisdom of a God who sees the whole picture, who understands the interconnectedness of all things, and whose love for humanity is boundless. It's something to ponder, to wrestle with, and perhaps to explore further through Dr. Waltke's lecture. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.