

## ***“Your Wisdom and Understanding”***

God’s people Israel, have been through a lot. They’ve been held captive and endured extremely harsh conditions as slaves in Egypt for generations. They’ve been set free – only to face the desolate wilderness. Yet every step of the way, the Lord was with them. Even so, they were not faithful. They grumbled. They rebelled. They forgot the Lord their God, and His steadfast love towards them.

Now they find themselves on the doorstep of the Promised Land – this land flowing with milk and honey that the Lord had promised to give them. All they needed to do was cross the Jordon River, and the land was theirs .....

..... except for the fact that this was not an empty land, a paradise just waiting for inhabitants. The Canaanites lived there. There were battles to be fought. They must be driven out completely – so that Israel may be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.

But before they proceeded, the Lord once again instructs His people. What they faced would not be easy. The Canaanites would resist – and their pagan idolatry would be more dangerous than their spears and arrows. And so, the lesson begins.

“Now, O Israel, listen ....” Listen to the Word that I, the Lord your God – the Lord who redeemed you from bondage, who provided for all your needs of body and soul, who led you through the wilderness, and drove out your enemies from before you – listen to me. “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it ...”

“Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples ...” The Canaanites, and all who see how you live according to my Word, who hear what I have spoken to you – they will see that my Word is “your wisdom and your understanding.”

Dearly beloved, you are the people of God – His Israel in these days. Let me ask you – does the world see your wisdom and your understanding? Do they see you living according to God’s Word? Do they see His Word – His Word made flesh – as “your wisdom and your understanding”?

Moses tells God's people of his day that when the people see how the Israelites live and hear the Word of the Lord, they will say – "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

And why are they "great"? Why are they "wise and understanding"? Moses says, "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and just decrees so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?"

Really? Is that what the people today say about you, about Christians, about our God and His Word?

A "great nation"? More like a bunch of weak people who need the crutch of religion. Christianity may have a history – but it's become irrelevant – easily side-lined by the ideologies of the day. Great? No ... weak.

A "wise and understanding" people? Hardly. More like naïve, brainwashed, backwards thinkers who are nothing more than fools.

A "god who is near to them"? You can't be serious! You Christians worship a nothing – a fake, false god that has been conjured up by your ancestors. Take a look around – you think your god is near you – it looks like he's abandoned you, forsaken you.

A god who hears you and answers you when you "call upon Him"? You think that god talks to you. You are crazy, and you certainly can't be trusted. Do you really think that if there actually is a god, that he'd have time for you, that he'd care about you – and that he'd actually listen when you call upon him?

"And what great nation is there, that has statutes and just decrees so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" God's Word, God's law – the Ten Commandments and everything else that the Lord had spoken to His people through Moses – you think the world sees them as "just" and "righteous"?

YOU know what God says about false objects of worship – about cursing that drags His name through the slime – despising church – rebellion against authority – abusing one's body – promiscuity – sharp and nasty words – desiring to have what is not yours.

The WORLD hears the Word of the Lord and declares it to be unjust and unrighteous – horrible, unloving, not fair. But it is not just “the world” – those people – the unbelievers – we too, as Christians, are guilty of such sinful living, and thinking, despising our Lord and His Word.

That is why the Lord must continue to guide and lead us in our days – as Jesus is doing in the Gospel reading. He shows that even when people put on an outward show of righteousness – that evil comes from within. Like whitewashed tombs – there is sin and death that lurks within – and that is what defiles a man.

What mankind once tried to hide and whitewash is now done out in the open and celebrated. The list of evils mentioned by Jesus are flaunted, promoted – and anyone who would try to correct such things – is persecuted.

Dearly beloved, this is the world in which we live. The truth is that we are surrounded by sin – and we are sinful to our core. What is also true is that God’s Word is our wisdom and our understanding.

What is wise is that you do not look to yourself, to your deeds, to your heart for your righteousness and redemption – that you understand that it is only the blood of Jesus Christ that atones for your sin.

You are a great people because the Lord Jesus Christ is near to you. He hears you when you call upon Him, confessing your sins – and He is merciful, His steadfast love never ends. He gives you His holy, precious, risen-from-the-dead-and-never-to-die-again Body and Blood – cleansing you from all sin, making you to be righteous before your Father who is in heaven.

Dearly beloved – don’t forget the Word of the Lord and His grace showered upon you. Teach it to your children, and your children’s children – for indeed, there is no other God – than our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.