

# Let Not the Wise Boast of Their Wisdom

## 9: 23-26

**DIG:** What is the only boast that has any legitimacy with God? What do the wise, the strong and the rich stand to lose from the invasion? What does it mean to boast of their wisdom, strength or riches? In whom should they boast? Was circumcision the sole practice of the Israelites? What kind of circumcision matters to ADONAI and why (Genesis 17:10; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4 and 6:10)?

**REFLECT:** In what three things should we boast about? What kinds of things do people "boast" about today? Or take pride in? Even in circumcision, Judah had become like the surrounding Gentile countries. In what way is the universal Church today, made up of Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14), indistinguishable from the rest of society? In what ways should believers be distinct from any other social group?

### 609 BC during the three-month reign of Jehoahaz

Some people have extraordinary intelligence, some have exceptional looks, and others have a phenomenal memory, incredible wealth, unbelievable strength, or amazing musical talent. Those who have these fantastic abilities might be tempted to think more highly of themselves than they should. But we don't have to be wildly smart, strong or wealthy to want to take credit for our achievements. Anything we accomplish carries with it this question: Who gets the credit?

In this prose section there are two very different sayings that are placed back to back. They show two very different ways of life and are presented in contrasting triads. In the first triad the ways of self-sufficiency are condemned. **This is what the LORD says: Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches (9:23).** A person needs something to aim for in life, something to glory in. And it would be hard to update the biblical triad of the graven images mankind has erected. These things are not necessarily bad. In fact, they are good when they occupy the proper place in our lives. But when we glory in anything less than YHVH, that thing becomes a graven image, an evil. In the midst of concentrating on their own achievements and activities, Judean society had forgotten God.<sup>98</sup> In the last analysis, the trinity in which mankind glories; wisdom, strength, and riches, are shown to be unable to bring lasting joy and well-being.

The second triad, however, reflects a wholly different way of looking at things. They show a God who not only delights in these qualities but insists upon them. These are the only grounds for boasting. **But let the one who boasts boast about this, that they have the**

**understanding to know** (Hebrew: *yada*) **Me**. The Hebrew word to **know** means being intimate friends, but has no exact equivalent in English. In an attempt to give definition to this beautiful but elusive concept, translators have used such terms as **loyalty, covenant loyalty, loving-kindness, steadfast-love, unfailing devotion, merciful-love, mercy, etc.** The distinction lies between knowing *about* YHVH and being in an extremely close relationship *with* Him, between intellectual knowledge and a dedication of the heart. When teaching on the greatest commandment, **Yeshua** said it this way: **The most important is, "Sh'ma Yisra'el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad [Hear, O Isra'el, the LORD our God, the LORD is one], and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength" (Mark 12:29-30).**

**That I AM ADONAI: Who exercises chesed** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**): In this context it means a loyal love to the covenants between **God** and **Isra'el** (see **Af - Covenants of the TaNaKh**). The word order is always important. **Chesed** or **loving-kindness** comes first before the other noble virtues. Rabbi Sha'ul develops somewhat the same thought: **If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing (First Corinthians 13:2-3).** **Chesed** was a quality that YHVH might have expected to find to some degree in **His people**, but, unfortunately, was often lacking. The prophet **Hosea** in the previous century made the same point (**Hosea 4:1 and 6, 5:4, 6:6 and 8:2-4**).

**And justice** (Hebrew: *mishpat*): This establishes the rights of mankind, but at the same time establishes judgment and punishment for the wicked or the lawbreaker. It was important in society to establish a state of affairs where doing the right thing was encouraged and made possible. At times, this involved the protection of citizens from those who would harm them and in some cases deliverance from oppressions. YHVH as Judge sought out both the wrongdoer to restrain or punish, and the righteous to deliver and vindicate. **God** would perfectly establish the rights of everyone, that is, **He** would establish *mishpat*. This is exactly opposite of the worldly Egyptian concept of *ma'at*, where Pharaoh was supposed to be the chief judge and lawmaker (see the commentary on **Exodus Bc - Pharaoh as god and upholder of Ma'at**). Therefore, **justice** in this world can be fleeting, but justice during the thousand year reign of **Christ** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fl - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**), will be permanent because **Messiah Himself** will be reigning and ruling from the Temple in **Yerushalayim**.

**And righteousness** (Hebrew: *tsedaqah*) **on earth**: This means **righteous** living in accordance with the social, legal, ethical and religious standards of the Torah. The people of **Y'hudah** were involved in many relationships - family, clan, nation, economic, social, political,

and religious. Over and above all these lay the relationship offered by **the LORD . . .** that being a member of the covenant family. It was this that gave the deepest significance to life and thought. Where **righteousness** was obtained, **justice** was enjoyed and the claims of everyone in the covenant family were safeguarded. **ADONAI** looked for a similar quality from **His people**. A particular way of life was right and fitting for **them**. The norm was not merely social custom, but rather a reflection of the character and will of the **God** of the covenant. Nothing less was acceptable. **YHVH's** ultimate purpose is that **His righteousness** should prevail over the world as well (see the commentary on **Revelation Fh - The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom**).<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (First Corinthians 1:31). Without the knowledge of **God**, human wisdom is futile. **YHVH** is contrasted with other gods who seek worldly **wisdom, strength** and **riches**. If **ADONAI** is committed to **kindness, justice** and **righteousness**, so should we be. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between the delights of **God** and **His children**. **For in these I delight, declares the LORD (9:24)**.

**The warning of an uncircumcised heart:** **God** will eventually punish the circumcised Gentiles, but the emphasis here is the **uncircumcised hearts** of the **Israelites**. These nations that **Jeremiah** lists here did at different times in their various histories practice, to greater or lesser degree, physical **circumcision** (at least a class in their society would have practiced it). **Judah**, of course, generally practiced it. **The days are coming, declares ADONAI**. When **Jeremiah** (under the direction of the **Ruach HaKodesh**) uses the phrase **in the days to come; the days are coming; in those days; in that day, at that time; or for the time will surely come**, the context points either to the **near historical future** or the **far eschatological future** and which one should be used. This is the fourth of twenty-five times that **Yirmeyahu** uses one of **these phrases**.

The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh - Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places (apparently these nations practiced circumcision). **Though physically circumcised, they are spiritually uncircumcised, their hearts being closed to the understanding and love of God and His teachings**. For all the **Gentile nations** are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of **Isra'el** is uncircumcised in heart (9:25-26). While all those **Gentile nations** at some point practiced physical **circumcision**, nevertheless, **they** had remained **uncircumcised at heart**. Unfortunately, so did **Judah**. This emphasized again that **Judah** had deteriorated to the same level as the **Gentiles** and were no more circumcised spiritually than **they** were. Because of this, judgment would come. So this was a **near historical future** prophecy about the destruction of **Judah** in 586 BC.

Who gets the credit in your life? You were created to give **ADONAI** the glory. If we allow praise to inflate our self-image, we forget that **every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father (James 1:17a)**. It is better to give **God** the glory - not only because it protects our hearts from pride but also because **He** rightfully deserves it. **He is YHVH, the One who does great things . . . marvelous things without number (Job 5:9).**<sup>100</sup>