Lesson 22

Doctrine and Covenants 89

This is the first revelation given after the School of the Prophets was organized. Is there a connection between that organization and this revelation?

As you study section 89, ask yourself what aspects of the Word of Wisdom you personally have difficulty with. Why? What is the ultimate purpose of the Word of Wisdom?

Doctrine and Covenants 89

Verse 1: The phrase “word of wisdom” appears in three other places in the scriptures—1 Corinthians 12:8, Moroni 10:9, and D&C 46:17—in sections that are clearly parallel. What might the use of that phrase here have to do with its use in those places? How is this a “word of wisdom”?

Why is this given “for the benefit of the council of high priests, . . . and that church, and also the saints”? Why list all three rather than just the church, since it includes the other two?

What do you make of the fact that for some time after this revelation was received it wasn’t considered binding on members of the Church? It was counsel rather than commandment. How has it become a commandment to us today?

Verse 2: As this verse makes clear, the Word of Wisdom was not originally binding as a commandment. How did it become one? When?
What does it mean to say that the Word of Wisdom is given, not only by revelation, but by the word of wisdom? Is it important that this is for the temporal salvation of the Saints?

Brigham Young said:

I told them [the Brethren] they could not draw the line between the spiritual and the temporal. All things were created first spiritual, and then temporal. Everything in the spirit world was presented as we see it now, and this temporal earth was presented there. We were in the spirit world, and we came here into this time, which is in eternity, nothing in the world only a change of time and seasons allotted to a change of being that makes it time to us. It is in eternity, and we are just as much in eternity now, as we shall be millions of years hence. But it is time measured to finite beings, and it is changeable, and we call it temporal, while the fact is it is all spiritual in the first place, then temporal, the spiritual, and made immortal, consequently you cannot divide them. (Journal of Discourses, 18:243.)

What perspective does Brigham Young’s view give us on the Word of Wisdom?

Verse 3: What is “a principle with promise”? Are there principles that do not have promises associated with them? If not, why describe this one in particular in that way?

What is the implication of saying that the Word of Wisdom has been adapted?

What does it mean to say that it is for the weakest of those who can be called saints?
Verse 4: What do you make of the fact that this revelation was given “in consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of men”? What evils and designs might the Lord have had in mind? How is that related to these commandments about food and drink?

Verse 5: It is not good to drink wine, the Lord says. But current medical science says that, in moderation, wine is good for our health. If the Word of Wisdom is a health law, how do we explain that difference? What if the Word of Wisdom is not a health law? If not, what kind of law is it?

Verse 9: How do we know that “hot drinks” refers to tea and coffee? (See Hyrum Smith, *Times and Seasons* 3:799.)

Verses 10–11: What did the word *herb* mean at the time of Joseph Smith? The 1828 edition of Webster’s says an herb is “A plant or vegetable with a soft or succulent stalk or stem, which dies to the root every year, and is thus distinguished from a tree and a shrub, which have ligneous or hard woody stems.” Does that meaning change your understanding of the verse?

In 1833, when this revelation was given, it was important to use fruits and vegetables in season because they were considerably less nutritious at other times, due to storage difficulties. Is it still important for us to use them in season? If so, why? What does it mean to use fruits and herbs with prudence?

Verses 12–13: To whom should we be thankful for the meat we eat? Though we sometimes twist verse 13 in a variety of ways, the plain meaning seems clear: do not eat meat except in the winter or in famine. Why does the Lord make an exception for winter time? How do you deal with this part of the revelation?
Is it relevant to your understanding of these verses that for much of human history only the wealthy could afford to eat meat?

**Verses 14–17:** What does it mean to say that grain is the staff of life? What is the significance of the image of the staff? What mild drinks are made from barley? From other grains? At the time of the revelation, beer and the like were considered to be mild drinks. But when the Brethren decided to make the Word of Wisdom a requirement, they decided to include those drinks among what was prohibited. Does that say anything about the way in which revelation applies to us? What does it tell us, specifically, about how we should go about understanding the Word of Wisdom?

**Verses 18–20:** What do these promises mean to us? What does it mean to receive health in our navels and marrow in our bones? Compare Proverbs 3:7–8. Are that verse and this about the same thing?

What does it mean to find wisdom? Why do you think this is what the revelation promises instead of something like long life?

Does “not faint” have anything to do with the same phrase in D&C 88:126? Compare Isaiah 40:31, which uses the same phrase, “run and not be weary, walk and not faint.” Does the passage from Isaiah shed any understanding on this promise? On the revelation as a whole?

**Verse 21:** Implicitly this verse compares keeping the Word of Wisdom to the children of Israel placing blood on the lintels of their doors. (See Exodus 12:21–23.) What is the point of that comparison?