

WISDOM PROVERBS & ECCLESIASTES

IN THE RICHEST TRANSLATIONS



Editor STEVE
GALLAGHER

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INTRODUCTION

It began with a humble cry. Solomon was probably little more than twenty years of age when he was anointed King of Israel. Overwhelmed with the responsibility of following in his great father's footsteps as king of Israel, the young monarch asked God for one thing: wisdom. This humble petition pleased God. "Behold," the Lord said to him, "I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have!" (1 Kings 3:12 NLI)

It was from that supernatural gift that the "Wisdom Books" of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes emerged. In fact, of the 300 or so occurrences of the word wisdom (and its derivatives) in the Old Testament, half of them are found in these two books. Perhaps even more telling is that 70% of the 176 usages of the term "fool" (the antonym of "wise") in the Old Testament are used in these two books. The Lord puts such a premium on the contrasting subjects of wisdom and foolishness that He devoted two books of the Bible to them.

Exactly what is wisdom? It is a term I find difficult to define with any precision, yet I know it when I see it. Consider the following examples:

- Brad has gained a lot of wisdom in dealing with men during his 16 years at Pure Life Ministries.
- Mike had the wisdom to stop himself before he said something he would regret later.

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- Jeremy shared a valuable piece of wisdom with one of his students.
- Ken had the wisdom to understand what was motivating his counselee's request.

As you can see from these examples, the word may not be easy to define, and yet most people probably recognize it when they see it. Part of the difficulty of defining this slippery term is that there are different aspects of wisdom that come forth in different settings.

For instance, one form of wisdom is having the discernment to understand the inner workings of people. What a gift it is in ministry to be able to detect the spirit a person is in or to possess a comprehension of how the human will, emotions and mental faculties interrelate to each other. Unquestionably, understanding what makes people tick is of enormous value in God's work. As one old time writer said, "Wisdom is the knowledge which sees into the heart of things, which knows them as they really are."¹

Another type of wisdom is shown in the ability to make sound decisions. Noah Webster defined it as "the right use or exercise of knowledge; the choice of laudable ends, and of the best means to accomplish them. This is *wisdom* in act, effect, or practice."² That ability to draw proper conclusions regarding various situations in life typically comes from much experience.

Yet another kind of wisdom is foresight—the ability to anticipate the long-term consequences of one's behavior or choices. This aptitude differentiates the wise man from the fool. Elsewhere I wrote: "The biblical term 'fool' perfectly describes a person who routinely chooses the temporal over the eternal. I suppose the most telling characteristic of a foolish person is that he lacks the ability (and/or desire) to think through the consequences of his actions. Peter spoke of the man who '... is blind, [*spiritually*] shortsighted, seeing only what is near to

him...’ (2 Peter 1:9 Amp) Solomon wrote, ‘The wise are cautious and avoid danger; fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence.’ (Proverbs 14:16 NLT) When it comes right down to it, foolish people just don’t consider the long-term results of their actions. They impulsively respond to their emotions or desires with little regard to biblical instruction.”³

A final aspect of wisdom to consider is what might be called insight: the ability to see into the inner workings of the spiritual realm. This understanding comes through a two-part process. It begins by studying God’s Word—especially books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. If it ends there, it is no more than “head knowledge,” however. It must be worked into a person’s inner being through the process of the Lord’s discipline (Proverbs 3:12). Over time, the believer stores up a treasure house of wisdom regarding the kingdom of God and how it operates.

These last two forms of wisdom are the most important because they have such eternal implications. In other words, a godless psychologist might possess pretty good insight into the workings of the human mind, but that knowledge in itself will not help him or anyone else spiritually. And many unbelievers have learned through experience not to become involved in foolhardy behavior, but this will not acquit them on the Day of Judgment.

The truth is that the unbelieving world has a form of its own wisdom. The apostle Paul dedicated the opening chapters of his first epistle to the church at Corinth to the subject. Worldly wisdom leaves God out of the equation and determines wisdom or folly in temporal terms. Its concerns relate to how one’s behavior will affect his quality of life; how it lines up with social norms; how it fits into human logic and rationale. With this in view, it isn’t difficult to see why the world sees true Christianity as the epitome of folly.

In contrast, Solomon tells us “The reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord is the beginning and the principal and choice

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part of knowledge [its starting point and its essence]; but fools despise skillful and godly Wisdom, instruction, and discipline...” (Proverbs 1:7 Amp) Another translation puts it this way: “To obey the Lord is the fundamental principle for wise living; all who carry out his precepts acquire good moral insight.” (NET)

As the Pulpit Commentary sums it up: “There is a spiritual world apprehensible by those spiritual faculties which are only quickened by the revelation of God to the soul. The scientific man who ignores the spiritual cannot attain true wisdom. Belief in God is the absolute foundation on which alone can rest a complete knowledge of the world, of facts that are both sensible and spiritual... A man of himself can only shape his life under the impulse of what he finds pleasing to himself. And no life can be ordered wisely under that rule. Man cannot act wisely if he be his own king, because he is created as a dependent being...”²⁴

The Books of Wisdom

With all of that in mind, let’s return to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Anyone who has spent any time in these books knows there is a huge difference in the mindset between them. Yes, Solomon wrote both, but he wrote Proverbs while he was still young and he wrote Ecclesiastes toward the end of his life.

Solomon wrote Proverbs before pleasure and sin corrupted his soul. He was still able to discern God’s mind regarding the way life should be lived. By the time he wrote Ecclesiastes, he no longer had a “reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord” to guard against self-indulgence. Combined with a lack of self-control, especially amidst such lavish material wealth, he had become hardened and cynical. He had lost sight of the beauty of the Lord. His worldview had become dark and hopeless.

And yet, even in this condition, he could still view life with a degree of God’s wisdom. When he looked back over his life,

he concluded, “Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I gave in to every impulse, held back nothing...” (Ecclesiastes 2:10 MSG) “But when I turned to look at all I had achieved and at my toil and trouble, then it was all vain and futile. Nothing in this world is worthwhile.” (Ecclesiastes 2:11 Mof) Solomon came to see the futility and emptiness of chasing the pleasures of this world. “In my opinion, nothing is worthwhile; everything is futile.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2 TLB) Eventually, he even came to the place where he “hated life.” (Ecclesiastes 2:17)

No, Solomon! Not *all* is futile! Living a life of humble obedience to God and love for other people is richly fulfilling! It is wise because it is a life that has been lived with eternity clearly in view. And it is wise because the rewards of such a lifestyle will be enjoyed forever.

Solomon, you were granted a marvelous gift which the Lord has used to help millions of His people over the past 3,000 years. You wrote those proverbs “to teach his people how to live—how to act in every circumstance.” (Proverbs 1:2 TLB) You said, “Here men may learn the lesson of insight, the dictates of duty and right and honor.” (Proverbs 1:3 Knox) According to you, you did this, “to make the simple-minded sharp, and to give the young man knowledge, and serious purpose.” (Proverbs 1:4 BBE)

But why didn’t you heed your own counsel? Why couldn’t you control your passions? Why couldn’t you have the foresight to see where your path of indulgence was taking you?

One can only guess the answers to these questions. It is my hope and belief that Solomon repented before he died and that his final days were lived in peace. But what great loss he suffered!

And so, in spite of the fact that Proverbs was written while he was still an unsullied young man and Ecclesiastes was colored by his later folly, I commend these two books into your study. They are of enormous value to the Christian life.

I believe you will find that the translations I have painstakingly chosen for each of the 1,137 verses of these

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two books will not only give you a much richer understanding of what was actually intended to be communicated when he wrote, but will also breath fresh life into your study of these marvelous books of Wisdom.

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PROVERBS 1

1:1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.

(NASB)

* *THESE proverbs were written by David's son Solomon, that was king of Israel.* (Knox)

1:2 He wrote them to teach his people how to live—how to act in every circumstance. (TLB)

* *For learning what wisdom and discipline are, for understanding words of deep meaning.* (JB)

* *...for a grasp of wise teaching.* (Mof)

1:3 Here men may learn the lesson of insight, the dictates of duty and right and honor. (Knox)

* *For acquiring an enlightened attitude of mind—virtue, justice and fair-dealing.* (JB)

* *To receive the discipline of wisdom, justice, and right, and equity.* (JPS)

1:4 To make the simple-minded sharp, and to give the young man knowledge, and serious purpose. (BBE)

* *"I want to make the simpleminded wise!" he said. "I want to warn young men about some problems they will face."* (TLB)

* *To impart shrewdness to the morally naïve...* (NET)

1:5 There's something here also for seasoned men and women.

(MSG)

* *Let the sage too listen and learn sense, let the intelligent know how to handle life.* (Mof)

* *The wise, too, may be the wiser for hearing them...* (Knox)

* *If the wise man listens, he will increase his learning...* (NEB)

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1:6 He will read both parables and the interpretation of parables, both wise words and the hidden thoughts they signify. (Knox)

** To understand proverbs and figures of speech; the words of the wise and their dark sayings. (Lam)*

** For perceiving the meaning of proverbs and obscure sayings... (JB)*

1:7 True wisdom is founded on the fear of the Lord; who but a fool would despise such wisdom, and the lessons she teaches? (Knox)

** The reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord is the beginning and the principal and choice part of knowledge [its starting point and its essence]; but fools despise skillful and godly Wisdom, instruction, and discipline. (Amp)*

1:8 My child, pay attention to what your father and mother tell you. (GNB)

** Heed well, my son, your father's warnings, nor make light of your mother's teaching. (Knox)*

1:9 What you learn from them will stand you in good stead; it will gain you many honors. (TLB)

** What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck. (NLT)*

** Their teaching will improve your character... (GNB)*

1:10 If young toughs tell you, "Come and join us"—turn your back on them! (TLB)

** My son, if scoundrels would lead you astray, never agree to it. (Mof)*

** My son, if sinners try to seduce you, do not give way. (JB)*

1:11 Suppose they say, "Come on; let's find someone to kill! Let's attack some innocent people for the fun of it! (GNB)

** If they say, "Come with us: there is blood to be had if we lie in wait for it, if we plan an ambush for the innocent." (JB)*

1:12 They may be alive and well when we find them, but they'll be dead when we're through with them! (GNB)

** Let us swallow them up alive as does Sheol (the place of*

the dead), and whole, as those who go down into the pit [of the dead]. (Amp)

** There are fortunes to be swallowed up whole...* (Knox)

1:13 We'll find all kinds of riches and fill our houses with loot!

(GNB)

** Think of the great things we'll get! We'll fill our houses with all the stuff we take.* (NLT)

1:14 Come and join us, and we'll all share what we steal. (GNB)

** You have but to throw in your lot with us; every man shares alike.* (Knox)

1:15 My son, do not walk in the way with them; restrain your foot from their path. (Amp)

** My child, don't go with people like that. Stay away from them.* (GNB)

1:16 For their feet run to evil, And they hasten to shed blood.

(NASB)

** For crime is their way of life, and murder is their specialty.*

(TLB)

1:17 It does no good to spread a net when the bird you want to catch is watching. (GNB)

** The net is always spread in vain if the bird is watching.*

(JB)

1:18 What do they, but compass their own ruin, plot against their own lives? (Knox)

** These men lie in wait for their own blood and waylay no one but themselves.* (NEB)

** But people like that are setting a trap for themselves...* (GNB)

1:19 Such is the fate of all who live by violence and murder. They will die a violent death. (TLB)

** Such is ever the end of greed; he who cherishes it must fall by it at last.* (Knox)

1:20 And all the while Wisdom is publishing her message, crying it aloud in the open streets. (Knox)

** Wisdom cries aloud in the open air, she raises her voice in public places.* (NEB)

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1:21 She calls out to the crowds along Main Street, and to the judges in their courts, and to everyone in all the land. (TLB)

** Never a meeting of roads, never a gateway, but her voice is raised, echoing above the din of it. (Knox)*

1:22 “You simpletons!” she cries. “How long will you go on being fools? How long will you scoff at wisdom and fight the facts? (TLB)

** What, says she, are you still gaping there, simpletons? Do the reckless still court their own ruin? Rash fools, will you never learn? (Knox)*

** You ignorant people, how much longer will you cling to your ignorance? How much longer will mockers revel in their mocking and folds hold knowledge contemptible? (JB)*

1:23 Come here and listen to me! I’ll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you and make you wise. (TLB)

** If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. (NIV)*

1:24 I have called you so often, but still you won’t come. I have pleaded, but all in vain. (TLB)

** Since my call is unheard, since my hand beckons in vain. (Knox)*

1:25 Because you have shunned my counsel, and would not take my warning. (Mof)

** Since my counsel is despised and all my reproof goes for nothing. (Knox)*

** Because you spurned all my advice and would have nothing to do with my reproof. (NEB)*

1:26 I, for my part, will laugh at your distress, I will jeer at you when calamity comes. (JB)

** It will be mine to laugh, to mock at your discomfiture, when perils close about you. (Knox)*

** I in my turn will laugh at your doom and deride you when terror comes upon you. (NEB)*

- 1:27 When a storm of terror surrounds you, and when you are engulfed by anguish and distress. (TLB)
 * *When your terror comes like a storm, and your doom descends like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish befall you.* (AAT)
- 1:28 Then I will not answer your cry for help. It will be too late though you search for me ever so anxiously. (TLB)
 * *It will be their turn, then, to call aloud; my turn, then, to refuse an answer...* (Knox)
 * *Then I will give no answer to their cries...* (BBE)
- 1:29 For they were haters of knowledge, and did not give their hearts to the fear of the Lord: (BBE)
 * *For you closed your eyes to the facts and did not choose to reverence and trust the Lord.* (TLB)
 * *Because they hated moral knowledge...* (NET)
- 1:30 They had no desire for my teaching, and my words of protest were as nothing to them. (BBE)
 * *They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them.* (NLT)
 * *They would have none of my counsel, but despised every warning of mine.* (Mof)
- 1:31 “So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. (NASB)
 * *That is why you must eat the bitter fruit of having your own way and experience the full terrors of the pathway you have chosen.* (TLB)
 * *So now they must eat the fruit of their own doings, and have their fill of all that they devised.* (Mof)
- 1:32 Inexperienced people die because they reject wisdom. Stupid people are destroyed by their own lack of concern. (GNB)
 * *For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the careless ease of [self-confident] fools shall destroy them.* (Amp)
 * *For heedless folk fall by their own self-will, the senseless are destroyed by their indifference.* (Mof)

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** For the defection of fools shall slay them, and the security of the stupid shall destroy them. (Spr1)*

1:33 “But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.” (NASB)

** But whoever listens to me shall live without a care, undisturbed by fear of misfortune. (NEB)*

PROVERBS 2

2:1 My son, if you will take my words to your heart, storing up my laws in your mind. (BBE)

** Here, then, my son, is counsel for you; take this bidding of mine to heart. (Knox)*

2:2 So that your ear gives attention to wisdom, and your heart is turned to knowledge. (BBE)

** Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom; set your heart on a life of Understanding. (MSG)*

** Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. (NLI)*

** Tuning your ear to wisdom, and applying your heart to truth. (JB)*

2:3 If you summon discernment to your aid and invoke understanding. (NEB)

** Yes, if your plea is for clear perception, if you cry out for discernment. (JB)*

2:4 Look for it as hard as you would for silver or some hidden treasure. (GNB)

** If you seek her out like silver and dig for her like buried treasure. (NEB)*

2:5 Then you shall see what reverence for the Eternal is, and find out what the knowledge of God means. (Mof)

** Then you will understand the reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of [our omniscient] God. (Amp)*

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ECCLESIASTES 1

- 1:1 These are the words of the Philosopher, David's son, who was king in Jerusalem. (GNB)
- 1:2 In my opinion, nothing is worthwhile; everything is futile. (TLB)
- 1:3 You spend your life working, laboring, and what do you have to show for it? (GNB)
- 1:4 A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains the same through the ages. (NET)
** Age succeeds age, and the world goes on unaltered. (Knox)*
- 1:5 The sun still rises, and it still goes down, going wearily back to where it must start all over again. (GNB)
- 1:6 The wind blows south and north, here and there, twisting back and forth, getting nowhere. (TLB)
- 1:7 Every river flows into the sea, but the sea is not yet full. The water returns to where the rivers began, and starts all over again. (GNB)
- 1:8 Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. (NLT)
** All this monotony is tiresome; no one can bear to describe it: The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever content with hearing. (NET)*
- 1:9 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. (NLT)
- 1:10 Does someone call out, "Hey, this is new"? Don't get excited—it's the same old story. (MSG)

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- 1:11 No one remembers what has happened in the past, and no one in days to come will remember what happens between now and then. (GNB)
- 1:12 I, the Philosopher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. (GNB)
- 1:13 I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. (NLT)
- 1:14 I have seen all that goes on in this world; it is a vain, futile business. (Mof)
** All that men do beneath the sun I marked, and found it was but frustration and lost labour, all of it. (Knox)*
- 1:15 You can't straighten out what is crooked; you can't count things that aren't there. (GNB)
- 1:16 I told myself, "I have become a great man, far wiser than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me. I know what wisdom and knowledge really are." (GNB)
- 1:17 I was determined to learn the difference between knowledge and foolishness, wisdom and madness. But I found out that I might as well be chasing the wind. (GNB)
- 1:18 The wiser you are, the more worries you have; the more you know, the more it hurts. (GNB)

ECCLESIASTES 2

- 2:1 I thought to myself, "Very well, I will try pleasure and see what enjoyment has to offer." And there it was: vanity again! (JB)
** I said to myself, "Come, I will plunge into pleasures and enjoy myself;" but this too was emptiness. (NEB)*
- 2:2 I said of partying, "It is folly," and of self-indulgent pleasure, "It accomplishes nothing!" (NET)