

Chapter 1. Wisdom and Biblical Proverbs



And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. 1 Kings 3:24-27 LVB.

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment. 1 Kings 3:28 LVB.

INTRODUCTION

I was very young when I first learned the Bible lesson of King Solomon and the baby. The account, recorded for us in 1 Kings 3:16-28, is of two mothers. One mother's baby died, and she tried to steal the child of the other. Obscure to me in my early years was the fact that the women were prostitutes. Perhaps neither was very honest. When King Solomon suggested cut-

ting the child in two to satisfy both mothers, only the true, loving mother protested the impending harm to the child. I was quite overcome with this show of wisdom, but even more impressed that, as told earlier in the same biblical chapter, that Solomon chose wisdom when God offered him his choice of any gift. This choice pleased God. Solomon had gone to a holy place in Gibeon to make a sacrifice unto God:

In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. (1 Kings 3:5 LVB).

Solomon's choice:

And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. (1 Kings 3:8-14).

Solomon later himself wrote, Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do! And with your wisdom, develop common sense and good judgment. (Proverbs 4:7 LVB).

GOD'S WISDOM

God's wisdom mystifies me at times because I have a fallible human mind that absolutely cannot fathom perfect wisdom.

Note that the choice of words in the previous sentence, "fallible human mind" is a redundancy, as are the words "perfect wisdom." I didn't choose those words merely because I am a bad writer, but to demonstrate the problem with my thought pattern and lack of logic in understanding God.

Man's wisdom is quite fallible. We learn when we are quite young, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Well that's great, but the first thing you learn when you are about to publish a book is, "If you want to sell it, don't skimp on the cover- make sure it's in full color."

Back to God's wisdom: Why didn't God fashion a perfect creation? One that would not ultimately end in sin and sickness. Answer: He did make a perfect creation. Then why sin and death? Man was created perfect, but with free will. Following are passages Solomon wrote about God's wisdom, even calling God "Wisdom."

¹⁴I, Wisdom, give good advice and common sense. Because of my strength, kings reign in power, and rulers make just laws. ¹⁷I love all who love me. Those who search for me shall surely find me. ¹⁸Unending riches, honor, justice and righteousness are mine to distribute. ¹⁹My gifts are

better than the purest gold or sterling silver! ²⁰My paths are those of justice and right. ²¹Those who love and follow me are indeed wealthy. I fill their treasuries. ²²The Lord formed me in the beginning, before he created anything else. ²³From ages past, I am. I existed before the earth began. ²⁴I lived before the oceans were created, before the springs bubbled forth their waters onto the earth; ²⁵before the mountains and the hills were made. ²⁶Yes, I was born before God made the earth and fields, and the first handfuls of soil. ²⁷I was there when he established the heavens and formed the great springs in the depths of the oceans. I was there when he set the limits of the seas and gave them his instructions not to spread beyond their boundaries. I was there when he made the blueprint for the earth and oceans. ³⁰I was the craftsman at his side. I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence. ³¹And how happy I was with what he created--his wide world and all his family of mankind! (Proverbs 8:14, 17-27, 30-31 LVB).

The Lord's wisdom founded the earth; his understanding established all the universe and space. (Proverbs 3:19 LVB).

WISDOM: THE GIFT OF CHOICE

Solomon could have chosen riches. I have always remembered his choice over what many of us might have taken instead, money. Yogi Berra may well say that when Solomon asked for wisdom, he showed he had it before he got it. Why is wisdom important to us and to God? Further, why did God show surprise when Solomon chose wisdom? We are told that God has foreknowledge. Wouldn't He know that Solomon was going to choose wisdom?

Consider this. You teach your child all of the ways of polite society. At a function with the entire family, your child gets into the age-old situation of having to select from the last two pieces of dessert offered to him and a friend. Aha, you've covered this one. Your child selects the small piece, just as you knew he would. You are so very proud of him and tell him so. Same thing.

Following are some of the reasons why God grants us wisdom:

⁴"I want to make the simple-minded wise!" he said. I want to warn young men about some problems they will face. ⁵I want those already wise to become the wiser and become leaders by exploring the depths of meaning in these nuggets of truth. ⁷How does a man become wise? The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord! Only fools refuse to be taught. Listen to your father and mother. What you learn from them will stand you in good stead; it will gain you many honors. (Proverbs 1:4-5, 7 LVB).

⁶For the Lord grants wisdom! His every word is a treasure of knowledge and understanding. ⁷He grants good sense to the godly--his saints. He is their shield, protecting them and guarding their pathway. ⁹He shows how to distinguish right from wrong, how to find the right decision every time. ¹⁰For wisdom and truth will enter the very center of your being, filling your life with joy. (Proverbs 2: 6-7, 9-10 LVB).

¹³The man who knows right from wrong and has good judgment and common sense is happier than the man who is immensely rich! For such wisdom is far more valuable than precious jewels. Nothing else compares with it. ¹⁶Wisdom gives a long, good life, and riches, honor, pleasure, and peace. ¹⁸Wisdom is a tree of life to those who eat her fruit; happy is the man who keeps on eating

it. ²¹Have two goals: wisdom--that is, knowing and doing right--and common sense. Don't let them slip away, ²²for they fill you with living energy, and bring you honor and respect. ²³They keep you safe from defeat and disaster and from stumbling off the trail. ²⁴With them on guard you can sleep without fear; you need not be afraid of disaster or the plots of wicked men, for the Lord is with you; he protects you. (Proverbs 3:13, 16, 18, 21-24 LVB).

For the value of wisdom is far above rubies; nothing can be compared with it. Wisdom and good judgment live together, for wisdom knows where to discover knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 8:11-12 LVB).

⁹Teach a wise man, and he will be the wiser; teach a good man, and he will learn more.

¹²Wisdom is its own reward (Proverbs 9:9, 12 LVB).

Everyone admires a man with good sense, but a man with a warped mind is despised. (Proverbs 12:8 LVB).

The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won't face facts. (Proverbs 14:8 LVB).

¹⁵Only a simpleton believes everything he's told! A prudent man understands the need for proof.

¹⁶A wise man is cautious and avoids danger; a fool plunges ahead with great confidence.

¹⁸The simpleton is crowned with folly; the wise man is crowned with knowledge.

²⁹A wise man controls his temper. He knows that anger causes mistakes. ³⁰A relaxed attitude lengthens a man's life; jealousy rots it away.

³³Wisdom is enshrined in the hearts of men of common sense, but it must shout loudly before fools will hear it. (Proverbs 14: 15-16, 18, 29-30, 33 LVB).

⁹We should make plans--counting on God to direct us. (Knowing by faith that God will lead us.)

¹⁶How much better is wisdom than gold, and understanding than silver! (Proverbs 16:9, 16 LVB).

Good sense is far more valuable than gold or precious jewels. (Proverbs 20:15 LVB).

The wise man conquers the strong man and levels his defenses. (Proverbs 21:22 LVB).

A wise man is mightier than a strong man. Wisdom is mightier than strength. (Proverbs 24:5 LVB).

WISDOM & FRIENDS

It takes a lot of effort to be a good friend. In fact any relationship needs lots of work, be it husband-wife, parent-child, boss-employee, or teacher-student. To be a friend, you have to be a friend first. To be a good friend, you have to be a better friend.

At my father's funeral service, the pastor stated one simple sentence very clearly and with emphasis, "Ralph Lerch was kind." In my father's case, "kind" was a big and important word because those four letters summarized how he lived his life for God. Everyone liked my

father. He was a friend to others first, and was rich in friendship in return.

A friendly discussion is as stimulating as the sparks that fly when iron strikes iron. (Proverbs 27:17 LVB).

A mirror reflects a man's face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses. (Proverbs 27:19 LVB).

MATURITY AND WISDOM



The beauty of old men is the gray head. Proverbs 20:29b.

An episode of the Waltons presented a situation in which Grandpa went to an immigrant family to give the middle-aged father some needed advice. The father was being a bit stubborn until his wife convinced him to heed Grandpa, “Listen to him, he is older.” Everyone gets wiser with age, a blessing that accompanies white hair.

At age 52, sometimes I surprise myself with “wise” thoughts I think. Since I am getting to the age when most people are younger than me, many do come to me for advice. I spew forth the words that come from my experience, and the young person thanks me and departs. I reflect on what I just said for a moment and think, “Cool.”

¹Young men, listen to me as you would to your father. Listen, and grow wise, for I speak the truth--don't turn away. ³For I, too, was once a son, tenderly loved by my mother as an only child, and the companion of my father. ⁴He told me never to forget his words. If you follow them, he said, you will have a long and happy life. ⁵Learn to be wise, he said, and develop good judgment and common sense! I cannot overemphasize this point. (Proverbs 4:1, 3-5 LVB).

White hair is a crown of glory and is seen most among the godly. (Proverbs 16:31 LVB).

The glory of young men is their strength; of old men, their experience. (Proverbs 20:29 LVB).

In the past, haven't I been right? Then believe what I am telling you now, and share it with others. (Proverbs 22:20 LVB).

The godly pray for those who long to kill them. After the counter-attacks to terror began in Fall 2001, I was humbled by mature wisdom. As I was on fire wishing swift justice on the terrorists and feeling no remorse for their souls, my mother told me she was praying that they (Bin Laden, et al) would receive Jesus as Savior. Mom had a wiser solution than did I. (Proverbs 29:10 LVB).

Every word of God proves true. He defends all who come to him for protection. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar. O God, I beg two favors from you before I die: First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs! For if I grow rich, I may become content without God. And if I am too poor, I may steal, and thus insult God's holy name. (Proverbs 30:5-9 LVB, the messages of Agur, son of Jakeh addressed to Ithiel and Ucal).

There is a right time for everything:

A time to be born; A time to die; A time to plant; A time to harvest;
A time to kill; A time to heal; A time to destroy; A time to rebuild;
A time to cry; A time to laugh; A time to grieve; A time to dance;
A time for scattering stones; A time for gathering stones; A time to hug; A time not to hug;
A time to find; A time to lose; A time for keeping; A time for throwing away;
A time to tear; A time to repair; A time to be quiet; A time to speak up;
A time for loving; A time for hating; A time for war; A time for peace.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 LVB)

To be wise is as good as being rich; in fact, it is better. You can get anything by either wisdom or money, but being wise has many advantages. (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12).

This, too, I carefully explored--that godly and wise men are in God's will; no one knows whether he will favor them or not. All is chance! The same providence confronts everyone, whether good or bad, religious or irreligious, profane or godly. It seems so unfair, that one fate comes to all. That is why men are not more careful to be good, but instead choose their own mad course, for they have no hope--there is nothing but death ahead anyway. There is hope only for the living. "It is better to be a live dog than a dead lion!" For the living at least know that they will die! But the dead know nothing ; they don't even have their memories. Whatever they did in their lifetimes--loving, hating, envying--is long gone, and they have no part in anything here on earth any more.

So go ahead, eat, drink, and be merry, for it makes no difference to God! Wear fine clothes--with a dash of cologne! Live happily with the woman you love through the fleeting days of life, for the wife God gives you is your best reward down here for all your earthly toil. Whatever you do, do well, for in death, where you are going, there is no working or planning, or knowing, or understanding. Again I looked throughout the earth and saw that the swiftest person does not always win the race, nor the strongest man the battle, and that wise men are often poor, and skillful men are not necessarily famous; but it is all by chance, by happening to be at the right place at the right time. (Ecclesiastes 9:1-11 LVB).

¹⁰A dull axe requires great strength; be wise and sharpen the blade.

¹⁸Laziness lets the roof leak, and soon the rafters begin to rot. (Ecclesiastes 10:10, 18 LVB).

It's not the knowledge you have, it's knowing where or from whom to get the knowledge you need. (David Pearce)

TEACHING OTHERS

It seems that most people enjoy teaching others. It is a privilege to do so when one has attained knowledge that another has not yet found. That doesn't mean, of course, that the teacher knows everything, or more about everything than the student; but, most people do have at least one thing that they know how to do better than most others. The old man next door might appear feeble, but he also might know everything there is to know about fly-tying great lures for native trout.

I recall my first meeting with a certain consultant. He was rather down to earth like me, and as he spoke about drawing on my experiences and others, as well as his, to work toward the answer to our situation, he said something along the simplistic that I would use, "You know what you know, and I know what I know." That comment was directed toward two people with the same education and work backgrounds. Even so, these two would have different experiences. They would have solved different problems throughout their careers, and therefore would have different knowledge and expertise.

Here is what King Solomon wrote:

If you rebuke a mocker, you will only get a smart retort; yes, he will snarl at you. So don't bother with him; he will only hate you for trying to help him. But a wise man, when rebuked, will love you all the more. (Proverbs 9:7 LVB).

¹³Men with common sense are admired as counselors; those without it are beaten as servants.

¹⁴A wise man holds his tongue. Only a fool blurts out everything he knows; that only leads to sorrow and trouble.

²⁰When a good man speaks, he is worth listening to, but the words of fools are a dime a dozen.

²¹A godly man gives good advice, but a rebel is destroyed by lack of common sense. (Proverbs 10:13-14, 20-21 LVB).

¹⁴The advice of a wise man refreshes like water from a mountain spring. Those accepting it become aware of the pitfalls on ahead.

¹⁵A man with good sense is appreciated. A treacherous man must walk a rocky road.

¹⁶A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't, and even brags about it!

²⁰Be with wise men and become wise. Be with evil men and become evil. (Proverbs 13:14-16, 20 LVB).

¹A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words cause quarrels.

²A wise teacher makes learning a joy; a rebellious teacher spouts foolishness.

⁴Gentle words cause life and health; griping brings discouragement.

⁷Only the good can give good advice. Rebels can't.

²³Everyone enjoys giving good advice, and how wonderful it is to be able to say the right thing at the right time! (Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 7, 23 LVB).

The wise man is known by his common sense, and a pleasant teacher is the best. (Proverbs 16:21 LVB).

A rebuke to a man of common sense is more effective than a hundred lashes on the back of a rebel. (Proverbs 17:10 LVB).

Ability to give wise advice satisfies like a good meal! (Proverbs 18:20 LVB).

Timely advice is as lovely as gold apples in a silver basket. (Proverbs 25:11 LVB).

Yanking a dog's ears is no more foolish than interfering in an argument that isn't any of your business. (Proverbs 26:17 LVB).

Friendly suggestions are as pleasant as perfume. (Proverbs 27:9 LVB).

LEARNING, DISCUSSING

It is enjoyable to learn new ideas, facts, interesting history, or anything one doesn't already know (otherwise it wouldn't be learning). The Discovery Channel, History Channel, and The Learning Channel are my favorite places on the cable dial when I have time to watch television. I am even learning to keep my mouth closed for longer periods, thus allowing words, unimpeded, to reach my auditory system for processing and storing.

Even when learning, we must remember that teachers are fallible, and just because you heard it on TV, it isn't necessarily true. One needs to learn when to question the "facts." (A good test for me is- if it is without God or anti-God, it probably "ain't so.")

The wise man is glad to be instructed, but a self-sufficient fool falls flat on his face. (Proverbs 10:8 LVB).

¹To learn, you must want to be taught. To refuse reproof is stupid.

¹⁵A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others. (Proverbs 12:1, 15 LVB).

The intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them. (Proverbs 18:15 LVB).

²⁰Get all the advice you can and be wise the rest of your life

²⁷Stop listening to teaching that contradicts what you know is right. (Proverbs 19:20, 27 LVB).

Don't go ahead with your plans without the advice of others; don't go to war until they agree. (Proverbs 20:18 LVB).

Don't refuse to accept criticism; get all the help you can. (Proverbs 23:12 LVB).

My son, honey whets the appetite, and so does wisdom! When you enjoy becoming wise, there is hope for you! A bright future lies ahead! (Proverbs 24:13 LVB).

It is a badge of honor to accept valid criticism. (Proverbs 25:12 LVB).

SENSIBLE PERSONS

I know many sensible persons: all of them think like me. (Imagine that!) We have had sensible presidents administrating the greatest country in the world, and all of them have been the same political party as me. I don't know if that is coincidence or not, but the poorest presidents have all been from that other party. Beyond my comprehension, half of Americans think the other guys are sensible.

Sensibility goes beyond politics. Sometimes we call it "common sense." The preceding paragraph is really about prejudice, not sense. It depends upon one's bias. At any rate, sensible persons are those with the same bias as you, and are to whom you turn for wisdom. These persons tend to be the source from which you select your friends.

Never abandon a friend--either yours or your father's. Then you won't need to go to a distant relative for help in your time of need. (Proverbs 20:10 LVB).

¹¹My son, how happy I will be if you turn out to be sensible! It will be a public honor to me. (Proverbs LVB).

¹²A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks, and suffers the consequences. (Proverbs 27:11, 12 LVB).

The good man knows the poor man's rights; the godless don't care. (Proverbs 29:7 LVB).

A wise, sensible man prepares for the future. How are you doing with planning for your children's education expenses, or perhaps your retirement plans? There is life beyond retirement, and eternal life for those who plan for it. Have you made plans for an eternal home?

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16. Be a wise man and build your house upon this rock.

Sometimes eternity comes earlier than we expect. At my age, I have lived about 70% of my normal life expectancy, yet there are obituaries of men younger than me nearly every day. It's why we buy life insurance to protect our families. How about protecting yourself and preparing for your eternity.

Here is the way to eternal life:

- *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Romans 6:23.
- *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9.
- *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* John 14:1-3.

Pray these words, “Dear Father in Heaven, I know I am a sinner and have sinned against you. I am sorry for my sins and sinful nature, and ask that you will forgive me. I accept Jesus now as my Savior who shed His blood for me. I give my life to you and will strive to live for you. Thank you, LORD, for saving my soul. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.”

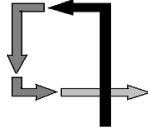


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