

Wisdom Literature

BOT252



Wise people adapt themselves to the truth. Fools try to adapt the truth to match themselves. Be wise... listen and adjust yourself to reality

Dr. Henry Cloud

So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NLT)

There are two ways to live under the power of the Holy Spirit

- The first is the way most people seek – miracles, answered prayers, open doors, feelings of presence, manifestations of the gifts
- The second is by living wisely – this is the most neglected

Wisdom is a *learned* discipline

Borderline Christianity

There's something comfortable about reducing Christianity to a list of do's and don'ts, whether your list comes from mindless fundamentalism or mindless liberalism: you always know where you stand, and this helps reduce anxiety. Do's-and-don'ts-ism has the advantage that you don't need wisdom. You don't have to think subtly or make hard choices. You don't have to relate personally to a demanding and loving Lord.

Robert C. Roberts in *The Reformed Journal* (Feb. 1987). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, no. 9.

The Uniqueness of the genre... little to no mention of:

- a. Covenant
- b. Salvation history
- c. Redemption
- d. Exodus
- e. Conquest
- f. Temple and the sacrificial system

The Identity of the Wisdom Material

Job

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Songs

Psalms 1, 19b, 32, 34, 37, 49, 78, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133

Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books

The Wisdom of Jesus

Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

The Wisdom of Solomon

The central theological essence of biblical wisdom is
The Fear of the Lord

^{NIV} Job 28:28 And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord-- that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

^{NIV} Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

^{NIV} Proverbs 9:10-11 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹ For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.

See also, Ecc. 7:18; 8:12; 12:13-14; Psalms 19:7-14; 112:1; 119:33-38, 57-64.

Perhaps we can best capture the biblical way of thinking about all this by thinking in terms of worldview integration. In the ancient world, including Israel, order was an important value. Creation brought order to the cosmos; law brought order to society; etiquette brought order to human relationships; politics brought order to governance and authority. Ancient wisdom can then be understood as the pursuit of understanding and preserving order in the world.... In Israel, people saw the fear of the Lord as the key to this integration process.

Order in the cosmos could only be understood through acknowledgment of the one who brought order. Order could only be preserved in society and in life by understanding God's requirements and expectations.

The fear of the Lord acknowledges the following truths

- Wisdom begins with the *recognition* of *who God is*
- God is the *source* of all wisdom, and wisdom begins by *properly aligning ourselves* with who he is
- Proper *recognition* results in *reverence*
- The practical side of *reverence* is *submission*

The theological notion of biblical wisdom is also rooted in the concept of *humility*

^{NIV} Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

^{NIV} Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Practical Implications of Wisdom

- The rise of *narcissism* is a barrier to biblical wisdom
- Therefore, one of the great barriers to wisdom is *pride*
- The fear of the Lord in biblical literature becomes the antidote for *idolatry*
- Knowledge requires *stewardship*
- Wisdom is a *moral* issue, not just an *academic* one
- Since the 1990's, *IQ levels* in the West have been *declining*
- Only the *wrong* people love your *ignorance*

Ryken gives two basic criteria for categorizing a text as wisdom

1. The position of the *narrator as sage*
2. The use of *poetic language*

The goal of wisdom is two-fold:

1. The formation of *character*
2. To make sense of *life and its anomalies* through a *divine* grid.

Primary Wisdom Books	Job	Higher Wisdom	Deals with life's big questions. Theme is "God is free" and sovereign over His creation.
	Proverbs	Lower Wisdom	Deals with the daily rhythms of life and the practical considerations that lead to wise living.
	Ecclesiastes	Higher Wisdom	Deals with life's big questions. How to live free for the God who is "above the Sun."
Secondary Wisdom Books	Psalms		Not a book of wisdom yet has wisdom psalms within its collection.
	Song of Songs		Has proverbial lyrics in it. Intended to be a picture of intimate and beautiful sexual relations within marriage.

According to Bartlett, there are seven dominant characteristics of wisdom literature.

1. It is less concerned with what God reveals to *humankind* (either through the words of the prophets or through acts in history) than with what *humankind* can *discover* about the world through human *wisdom*.
2. It presupposes that there are various *orders to experience*, and that the *perceptive observer* can discover something of those *regularities* (e.g. Ecc. 3:1-8).

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3. It stresses "*common sense*." The wise are not wise because of scientific *discovery and hypothesizing*. Rather, they are *wise* because they effectively fit into and integrate the *experience* around them. Further, this common/ordinary sense is a *shared sense* (Prov. 26:20; 25:19; 26:11).
4. However, the wisdom writers and teachers are quite aware that "*common sense*" has *limitations*. The *inscrutable* is inevitable and is to be attributed to the *divine* (Prov. 16:1; 21:31; 25:2; Ecc. 8:16-17; Job 28:1-28).

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5. The literary style (parable, poem, essay, and the emphasis on parallelism) tends to *dull the sharpness* of the *didactic impact*, and rather moves in the realm of the *obvious and incontrovertible*. Imperatives are often *blunted* by a reference to the *obvious*. Hence, wisdom is not up for *debate*, rather it is something to which to respond, *emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually* (Prov. 17:17, 28; 22:26-27; Ecc. 7:13-14).

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6. It *emphasizes* the gifts of *human wisdom, knowledge, discernment, prudence*; rather than *mighty acts and revelations of God* (Job 28:1-28; Prov. 1:7; 16:4; Ecc. 7:13-14).
7. Wisdom is a *reality* that was *present* with God at the time of *creation*, and while distinct from the *specific orders* and *phenomena of creation*, is determinative in succeeding in the *phenomena and orders of creation* (Prov. 8:22-36).