The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

Proverbs | Wisdom

2026 Week 9

Proverbs ~ Eugene Peterson Introduction

Many people think that what's written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting people into heaven—getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not *mostly*. It is equally concerned with living on this earth—living well, living in robust sanity. In our Scriptures, heaven is not the primary concern, to which earth is a tagalong afterthought. "On earth as it is in heaven" is Jesus' prayer.

“Wisdom” is the biblical term for this on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living. Wisdom is the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. It has virtually nothing to do with information as such, with knowledge as such. A college degree is no certification of wisdom. Nor is wisdom primarily concerned with keeping us out of moral mud puddles, although it does have a profound moral effect upon us.

Wisdom has to do with becoming skillful in honoring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions within ourselves and attitudes toward others that make for peace. Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing—absolutely nothing—takes precedence over God.

Proverbs concentrates on these concerns more than any other book in the Bible. Attention to the here and now is everywhere present in the stories, legislation, pages of prayers, and sermons that are spread over the hundreds of the Bible. Proverbs distills it all into riveting images and aphorisms that keep us connected, in holy obedience, to the ordinary.

Proverbs ~ Wesley Study Bible Introduction

This book is a collection of brief wisdom sayings by teachers of Israel. Along with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes and several of the Psalms, Proverbs is part of what is called the wisdom literature of the OT. Wisdom literature is so called because it focuses on wisdom, practical decision-making involved in everyday living. Wisdom in the OT refers to observing patterns in daily life. It also refers to the body of writings derived from this habit of keen observation. The wisdom literature, with its frequent use of proverbs, brief nuggets of advice, seeks to equip readers to evaluate specific situations in their daily lives in light of the character and purposes of God and to think and act in accordance with divine wisdom. In the NT, we see the influence of wisdom themes in the short sayings and parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, in the prologue to the Gospel of John, in Jesus' "I am" sayings, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and the book of James.

Proverbs' theological premises have much in common with Wesley's understanding of divine grace and the process by which one comes to accept God's love and grow in holiness. (1) Wisdom is a gift from God. (2) Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, and awe and respect for God. (3) Living by God's wisdom leads to a certain kind of life, a life in keeping with God's will. Wesley's approach to religion was practical, and he valued the book of Proverbs for the practicality of its moral guidance. In his journals he frequently mentions Proverbs 22:6, the importance of training children in the way of wisdom; Proverbs 18:12, humility versus pride; and, most frequently, Proverbs 3:17, the peace that comes from following God's wisdom.

Personification of Wisdom

Proverbs 1–9 depicts wisdom as a woman calling in the streets, offering life to all who heed. Wisdom stands in contrast to Folly, who lures the naïve to death (Proverbs 9:13-18). This literary device heightens the moral urgency of choosing God's way. https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2451.htm

Wisdom in Hebrew is **Chokmah** (,(חָכְמָה a concept representing far more than intellectual knowledge, encompassing practical skill, moral discernment, and godly insight. It implies the ability to live successfully, act with skill (like a craftsman), and apply moral understanding in daily life, often rooted in the "fear of the LORD". Google AI

Strongs 2451 the divine wisdom is personified: Wisdom was begotten before all things to be the architect and counsellor of God in the creation (Proverbs 8:22-31); Wisdom builds a palace and spreads a feast for those who will receive her instruction Proverbs 9:1 (compare Proverbs 9:2-5); Wisdom teaches in public Proverbs 1:20; Proverbs 8:1,5,11,12 (see context); gives her pupils the divine spirit Proverbs 1:23; by her discipline simple become wise, rulers rule wisely, and those seeking her are richly rewarded Proverbs 8:14 (compare Proverbs 8:1-21).

https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2451.htm

The primary Greek word for wisdom is Sophia, representing deep knowledge, skill, and insight. It refers to both practical skill in living and higher intellectual or divine wisdom. In Greek thought, wisdom was revered, often personified by goddesses like Metis (cunning wisdom) or Athena ~ Google AI

STRONGS NT 4678: σοφία
σοφία, σοφίας, ἡ (σοφός), Hebrew חָכְמָה, **wisdom, broad and full intelligence** (from Homer down); used of the knowledge of very diverse matters, so that the shade of meaning in which the word is taken must be discovered from the context in every particular case.
https://biblehub.com/greek/4678.htm

Proverbs 3 NRSVUE

13 Happy are those who find wisdom and those who get understanding,
14 for her income is better than silver and her revenue better than gold.
15 Wisdom is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.
17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
18 Wisdom is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he establiWisdomd the heavens;
20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

Proverbs 1-10 offers a vivid personification of wisdom as an attractive woman.

Wisdom acts *and* speaks, threatening *or* promising her audience, exulting in her intimacy *and* privileged place with Yahweh.

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Wisdom invites her disciple into relationship based on love that expands the relationship giving other gifts as well.

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Wisdom is a symbol of divine presence as well as of revelation;
Wisdom is closely related to the instruction of the human teacher and to wisdom…

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…it is difficult to read Proverbs' paeans to the power of both wisdom personified as woman (Chapters 1–9) and of woman as the ideal representative of wisdom (Chapter 31) without imagining some related social reality at their base.

One likely context for such open recognition of women's contributions—as well as perceived danger from "loose women"—is the period after the Babylonian exile, as the Judeans struggled for a new definition of "Israel" as a people identified by family households rather than a monarchic polity. Especially notable is the editor's choice to open and close the Book of Proverbs with female imagery. Whatever one might make of it—whether ultimate co-optation or ultimate subversion—this quintessentially male book is framed with a woman's voice.

~ The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women| Woman Wisdom: Bible by Claudia V. Camp
https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/woman-wisdom-bible#:~:text=In%20some%20of%20the%20books,woman's%20voice%20in%20male%20books.

Proverbs 31:10-31 NRSVUE

10 A woman of strength who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
12 She does him good and not harm
all the days of her life.
13 She seeks wool and flax
and works with willing hands.
14 She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from far away.
15 She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her female servants.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
17 She girds herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.
18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
19 She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
20 She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
21 She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
22 She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
27 She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
28 Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband, too, and he praises her:
29 "Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."
30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
31 Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Proverbs 31 NRSVUE

10 The Wisdom of strength who can find?
Wisdom is far more precious than jewels.
11 The heart of Wisbom's husband trusts in Wisdom,
and he will have no lack of gain.
12 Wisdom does him good and not harm
all the days of life.
13 Wisdom seeks wool and flax
and works with willing hands.
14 Wisdom is like the ships of the merchant;
Wisdom brings food from far away.
15 Wisdom rises while it is still night
and provides food for Wisdom's household
and tasks for Wisdom's female servants.
16 Wisdom considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of Wisdom's hands Wisdom plants a vineyard.
17 Wisdom girds Wisdom's self with strength
and makes her arms strong.
18 Wisdom perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
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