

**Text: various**

Adapted from a study in October 2003.

What is wisdom? Here is the OED definition:

“Capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opposed to *folly*.”<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to Biblical wisdom, the definition adds a God-ward outlook, while often appearing as this capacity of sound judgement the OED describes.

**Read Prov 1.2-6**

## I. Nature of Biblical wisdom

A. In contrast with **English** wisdom

“Wisdom in Scripture has a fundamentally different orientation from the English concept. It is intensely practical whereas the English idea is mostly mental. The English word means things like ‘the power of discernment,’ ‘a high degree of knowledge,’ ‘prudence,’ ‘sagacity,’ ‘understanding,’ ‘discretion,’ and ‘insight.’ These qualities are essentially intellectual. The biblical concept often includes these things, but is fundamentally pragmatic or utilitarian.”<sup>2</sup>

“Like all Hebrew intellectual virtues, wisdom is intensely practical, not theoretical. Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results. Its seat is the heart, the centre of moral and intellectual decision.”<sup>3</sup>

B. Wisdom as **technical skill**

1. Bezaleel and Aholiab – **artisans** (Ex 31.3ff.)

<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “wisdom (n.), sense 1.a,” September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6452400914>.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Rude, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” *Biblical Viewpoint: Focus on Proverbs* 23, no. 2 (November 1999): 6.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Hubbard, “Wisdom,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 1333.

2. Jeremiah 10.9 – **artisans in gold, weaving, tapestries, etc.**, “skilled” NAU; “cunning” KJV
3. Jeremiah 9.17 – **professional mourners** — “wailing” NAU; “cunning” KJV
4. Ezek 27.8-9 – **pilots of ships; craftsmen for repairing damage to ships**

“These examples illustrate the immediate applicability of Biblical wisdom to real life. They suggest the definition ‘skill in applied knowledge.’ That is, Scriptural wisdom is the ability to apply what we know to the problems and issues of life.”<sup>4</sup>

### C. The main Hebrew word: “*ḥokmâ*”

1. Root *ḥākam* [verb: “to be wise”]

“The essential idea of *ḥākam* represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life’s experiences; including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

2. Distinctives of OT wisdom (in comparison to other ancient views)
  - a. Greek wisdom: **intellectually based**, speculative insight into the way the world works
  - b. OT wisdom is “**the teaching of a personal God** who is holy and just and who expects those who know him to exhibit his character in the many practical affairs of life.”<sup>6</sup>
  - c. OT wisdom: skill in living **comes from the human will in subjection to God**
  - d. OT wisdom: because in submission to God, **has an ethical basis (right and wrong)**

<sup>4</sup> Rude, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” 7.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Goldberg, “647 חָכַם,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 282.

<sup>6</sup> Goldberg, 283.

### 3. Range of OT wisdom

“The usages of *ḥokmâ* cover the whole gamut of human experience.”<sup>7</sup>

- a. **Technical skill** (as seen above)
- b. Necessary for **leadership** (government officials)
- c. **Shrewdness** (but a caution, Isa 47.10)
- d. **Prudence**
- e. Sourced in **God** (Job 12.13, 28.20, 23)

### 4. Personification of wisdom: “the wise woman of Proverbs”

- a. NOT a **deification** of wisdom
- b. Personified as a woman because the term “wisdom” is **feminine** in Heb.
- c. Contrasted with the evil woman, “**Folly**,” [personified **sin**]

Famously called “Dame Wisdom” and “Madam Folly” in Robert Deffinbaugh’s study available at [The Way of the Wise: Studies in the Book of Proverbs | Bible.org](https://bible.org/series/way-wise-studies-book-proverbs) (<https://bible.org/series/way-wise-studies-book-proverbs>)

### 5. Wisdom for man

“Wisdom for man is not only to make one humanly wise, but also to lead him to fear the Lord, for this is the beginning of all wisdom (Job 28:28). True wisdom for man involves knowing the Holy One.”<sup>8</sup>

- a. Listen with **attentive ears** (Pr 2.2)
- b. Gain wisdom through **strenuous** searching (Pr 2.4)
- c. Discover your search for wisdom is a search for **God** (Pr 2.5)
- d. Impossible for the **scoffer** (Pr 14.6-7)

<sup>7</sup> Goldberg, 283.

<sup>8</sup> Goldberg, 283–84.

e. The place of real happiness and satisfaction (Pr 3.13)

## II. Value of Biblical wisdom (Pr 3.13-18)

- A. Profit better than gold and silver (14)
- B. More desirable and precious than jewels (15)
- C. Gives long life (16a)
- D. Gives riches and honor (16b)
- E. Leads along pleasant and peaceful paths (17)
- F. The tree of life to those who take hold of her (18)

The man or woman who is generally unhappy in life has spurned Biblical wisdom.