
*Interpreting Biblical
Wisdom Literature*

Hermeneutics

The science of interpretation,
especially the study of how the
Bible is to be interpreted.

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Philippians 4:5

Near in *time* or near in *place*?

One meaning or *two* meanings?

Genre

STYLE & CONTENT

3 Genres in English Literature:

POETRY

DRAMA

PROSE

Proper Bible interpretation depends upon an understanding of the *literary genre* one is reading.

Literary Genres in the Bible

Narrative

Gospel

Prophecy

Epistle

Poetry

Wisdom

The Nature of Biblical Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature in the Bible

JOB

PROVERBS

ECCLESIASTES

(Psalms)

(Prophets)

The Purpose of Wisdom Literature

To give instruction concerning the way life works in God's world, created and ordered by Him.

the way
life works

The path of the just
is like the shining sun....
Proverbs 4:18

The path of the wicked
is like darkness....
Proverbs 4:19

Two kinds of people in Wisdom Literature

The Wise

The Blessed

The Just

The Perfect

The Righteous

The Fool

simple

scorner / scoffer

The Unjust

The Wicked

“Blessed is the man...”

Hebraic blessing formula

Two Kinds of Wisdom Literature

1. Proverbial Wisdom

PROVERBS

What is a *biblical proverb*?

A short saying that summarizes the rule of life for those who would follow God's blessed path.

When there are many words,
transgression is unavoidable;

But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 10:19

The righteous should choose his
friends carefully,

For the way of the wicked leads them
astray.

Proverbs 11:26

Hear, my children, the instruction of a
father,

And give attention to know
understanding.

Proverbs 4:1

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And find out knowledge and discretion.
The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.
Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, I have strength.

Proverbs 8:12-14

An excellent wife is the crown of her
husband,

But she who shames him is as
rottenness in his bones.

Proverbs 12:4

A wise son heeds his father's
instruction,

But a scoffer does not listen to
rebuke.

Proverbs 13:1

Proverbs are not promises.

The fear of the LORD prolongs days,
But the years of the wicked will be
shortened.

Proverbs 10:27

The soul of the sluggard craves and
gets nothing,

But the soul of the diligent is made fat.

Proverbs 13:4

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But harsh words stir up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

Train up a child in the way he should
go,

Even when he is old he will not depart
from it.

Proverbs 22:6

Proverbs are intended to be understood after *meditation*.

Do not answer a fool according to his
folly,

Or you will be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,

Or he will be wise in his own eyes.

Proverbs 26:4-5

A word fitly spoken is like apples of
gold

In settings of silver.

Proverbs 25:11

Two Kinds of Wisdom Literature

1. Proverbial Wisdom
2. Reflective Wisdom

JOB

ECCLESIASTES

Wisdom in Job

Wisdom in Ecclesiastes

Wisdom in Ecclesiastes

Qoheleth

“Cynical Wisdom”

“Vanity of vanities,” says Qoheleth,

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what advantage to him who toils for the wind?

Ecclesiastes 5:16

Money is the answer to everything.

Ecclesiastes 10:19

Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is come will be futility.

Ecclesiastes 11:8

There are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

Ecclesiastes 8:14

The Message of Ecclesiastes

For God has so worked that *men should fear Him.* (3:14)

Rather, *fear God.* (5:7)

...for the *one who fears God* comes forth.... (7:18)

The Message of Ecclesiastes

I know that it is well with those
who *fear God*, who fear Him
openly. (8:12)

The Message of Ecclesiastes

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: *fear God and keep His commandments*, because this applies to every person. (12:13)

*Keys to Understanding
Biblical Wisdom Literature*

1. Consider the literature as a whole,
not in parts.

*Keys to Understanding
Biblical Wisdom Literature*

2. Read the literature for the “sense” of what the author is saying, recognizing symbolic language.

*Keys to Understanding
Biblical Wisdom Literature*

3. Follow the line of argument. Allow yourself to be led along to the conclusion.

*Keys to Understanding
Biblical Wisdom Literature*

4. Read with adequate time for reflection, realizing that the full meaning is not always readily apparent.

*Keys to Understanding
Biblical Wisdom Literature*

5. As in all Bible reading, read prayerfully and submissively, allowing the Holy Spirit to minister to you.

Proverbs 2:2-5

Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding.

For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;

Proverbs 2:2-5

If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden
treasures;

Proverbs 2:2-5

Then you will discern the fear of the
LORD

And discover the knowledge of God.