

# God's gift of wisdom in words, actions, and practical skills



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This article examined wisdom, a godly attribute, as a gift God gives. The gift takes at least three forms: skill in wise words, skill in subsequent actions, and skill with one's hands. Bystanders and readers easily spot wisdom. This article found that wisdom grew and was refined through use. Employing a canonical approach and a literary methodology, this article presented selected Hebrew Bible characters who broadly illustrated God's gift of wisdom in words and actions; it then considered two men and a group of women who were skilled – wise – with their hands. Four biblical characters noted for wise speech and actions include Joseph, the dream-interpreter and second to Pharaoh as Egypt's ruler (Gn 41:37–41); the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah, a city's arbitrator during a siege (2 Sm 20:14–22); Solomon, David's successor, who asked God for an understanding mind and received wisdom (1 Ki 3:9–12); and Daniel, a Judean exile in Babylon who sought God's wisdom in a life-and-death situation (Dn 2:19–23). A fifth character, Lady Wisdom (a most interesting persona), teaches that wisdom is not only a gift but also a learned skill. In an 'Elevator Pitch' proclaimed loudly in a city's streets, she invites passers-by to come to her banquet, learn from her, and become wise (Pr 8–9). God's wisdom also abounded in practical, tactile ways. God gave Bezalel and Oholiab wisdom in crafting furnishings for the Tabernacle in the Wilderness (Ex 31:1–11); wise-hearted women participated as spinners (Ex 35:25–26). This article concluded that whether given as word, action, or skill or learned via study or practiced manually, all wisdom's forms come from the bountiful Giver, and require a recipient's maintenance, namely the lifelong pattern of seeking God and walking in his ways (Pr 2). Wise choices in friends, words, and actions result in blessing the learner and subsequently promoting a society's well-being. Wisdom ripples.

**Contribution:** Through the lens of Old Testament character studies, this article illustrated aspects of God's gift of wisdom. Stories showed how individuals sought, practiced, and developed wisdom. While wisdom initially met a need, saved a life, or led a nation, it overflowed from the one singularly known as wise to others. However, a condition applied. Wisdom is not inherited; all seekers must learn that wisdom's objective, like all God's gifts, is God's glory.

**Keywords:** Wisdom; Joseph; Solomon; Daniel; Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah; Lady Wisdom Bezalel; Oholiab.

## Introduction

This article looks at wisdom through several Old Testament characters who exhibit wisdom. The article finds that wisdom is a gift from God, represented in words, actions, and skills. Wisdom can be both caught (in the sense of example) and taught (in the sense of instruction) and employed (in the sense of a visible result). While wisdom often promotes its recipient to higher positions, the glory goes to God.

## Methodology: A canonical approach and literary tools

This article combines a canonical approach and literary tools. A canonical approach recognises the influence and contribution of history, tradition, and editing in the text's final form; both synagogue and church determined the final form recognised as canon today (see Gignilliat 2012:148–168).

A canonical approach and literary tools allow for the text to be approached with creativity and balance (see Gignilliat 2012:166–167). For example, Psalms 105 and 72 mention Joseph and Solomon, and they provide insights in this article.

**Note:** Special Collection: Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of Gods wisdom.

A canonical methodology includes the following:

- Recognising Scripture's authority
- Considering the entire canon
- Seeking a consistent witness that can be understood as normative theological or ethical teaching (see Branch 2021:160–161; Johnson-Leese & Scholer 2002:xxxv).

Literary terms include conflict, plot, time, characterisation, point of view, setting, language, and tone (Lostracco & Wilkerson 2008:iii–vi). A character can be static (one who does not grow or change), dynamic (one who grows and changes), round (a fully developed persona), or flat (one showing a single characteristic like anger or joy and does not change or grow). Language includes diction, imagery, symbolism, irony, dialogue, and syntax (Lostracco & Wilkerson 2008:35).

Alter (1981:3) examines the role literary art plays in shaping the biblical text, especially biblical narrative. This article follows his lead by pointing out examples of bluntness, silence, deft characterisation, editorial summaries, and vibrant verbs. The biblical text is comfortable with unanswered questions and terse conclusions. Biblical stories prove multi-faceted and applicable to both a nation and an individual. The Bible's final form balances multiple genres including law, poetry, wisdom literature, gospels, historical narrative, epistles, and apocalyptic literature.

## Wisdom

Hebrew wisdom shares parallels with Egyptian wisdom, tradition, and literature (Packer & Tenney 1980:359). But Hebrew wisdom differs, however, because it emphasises the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom (Pr 1:7). Wisdom literature for the Israelites provided instruction for day-to-day living while acknowledging God's sovereignty. The Israelites understood wisdom as both a common-sense approach (Packer & Tenney 1980:359), yet overshadowed and overseen by a God who is involved in every aspect of life. In contrast, Egyptian wisdom centered on the individual; it opened doors for careers and privileges that were otherwise unattainable (Packer & Tenney 1980:359).

The concept of wisdom figures prominently in the Old Testament with the Hebrew word *hkm*; it occurs some 318 times, including 183 uses in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Murphy 1992:VI:920). The character Wisdom (or as I call her Lady Wisdom) figures prominently in Proverbs, especially in chapters 1–9.

The book of Proverbs offers models of wisdom from Solomon, the wise men of Hezekiah, Augur, and the mother of Lemuel. It provides pithy sayings that prove true over the long term (Vang & Carter 2006:167). Individual sayings helping define wisdom include the following:

Wise words: Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding (10:13):

- Wise actions: The path of life leads upward for the wise (15:24)
- Wise skills: A wise woman builds her house (14:1)
- More wise skills: A man skilled with his hands will serve kings (22:29).

This article builds on these Scriptures and adds further insights on Israelite wisdom. Each character in this study was chosen because he or she is associated with wisdom in some way – by asking for it, using it, or being known for it. Italicised literary aspects begin each character's story. The article ends with suggestions for further study; observations about wisdom that join, mesh, and weave together the characters; and wisdom's ongoing byproducts and offshoots.

## Joseph (Gn 37–41)

<i>Heroes or Characters:</i>	<i>Joseph and Pharaoh.</i>
<i>Conflict:</i>	<i>Dreams trouble Pharaoh. Joseph, a jailed slave, interprets them.</i>
<i>Setting/Time:</i>	<i>Canaan and Egypt during the Patriarchs.</i>

I recently began a lesson on Joseph in an adult class at church by throwing out a question: 'Define a 17-year-old boy.' A retired chief of police shouted, 'Stupid and dumb!' A commodities trader added, 'Stubborn!' The class chuckled, for the members knew the two described themselves in earlier decades.

Add arrogance and their descriptions match Joseph as a teenager. In Genesis 37, Joseph at age 17 is his father Jacob's favourite – and he flaunts it! The text emphasises his half-brothers' intense dislike of him through a play on words: Joseph (*yosef*, derived from increase/add to) and hatred (*yosifu*) (see Hendel 2006:58; Gn 37:5–11n).

Joseph shared dreams that caused Jacob to wonder if someday he and those other sons would bow to Joseph. Jacob gave Joseph a multi-coloured coat with sleeves, leading the brothers to hate him even more. They first decided to kill him but settled on selling him for twenty shekels to Ishmaelite traders bound for Egypt (vv. 12–36). They told Jacob a wild animal killed Joseph.

Yet, by Genesis 41, Joseph had changed. Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, recognised him as wise and discerning (v. 39) and told the court so! What had happened?

Those intervening 13 years included indentured servitude, a false accusation, imprisonment, interpreting dreams, and two opportunities to showcase a remarkable new gift: administration. Joseph ran his master Potiphar's house and then the king's jail. Throughout these adventures, Joseph acknowledged God's sovereignty. When summoned from prison to the court to interpret Pharaoh's two troubling dreams, Joseph firstly replied: 'God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer' (Gn 41:16).

Thinking on his feet before an elite audience, Joseph gave perhaps the best Elevator Pitch of all time. He offered a solution. Joseph interpreted the future for Pharaoh (see Fretheim 1994:621). There will be 7 bountiful years for crops, followed by 7 lean years and famine. The doubling indicates the reality of what will come. He suggested that Pharaoh appoint a man who is 'discerning and wise' over Egypt, to supervise the gathering and the storing of one-fifth of the produce for 7 years, 'so that the land may not perish through the famine' (Gn 41:25–36).

Pharaoh, firstly recognising that the spirit of God resided in Joseph, then summarised what he and everyone else saw: namely that Joseph was both discerning and wise (Gn 41:38–39; Speiser 1964:309). Joseph would be the 14-year project's overseer!

Promoted on the spot, Joseph went from prison to palace, from weakness to strength in a day (cf. Fretheim 1994:620). Pharaoh's action proved to Joseph the truth of God's Word (cf. Dahood 1970:57; Ps 105:19n).

Psalms 105 adds insights to the Genesis novella on Joseph. Verses 16–25 describe God's plan to meet the famine through Joseph. Imprisoned because of the false accusation of assault, by Potiphar's wife, Joseph endured the pain of fetters on his feet and an iron collar (v. 17). Perhaps thus cramped, he had time to think. Evidently, he accepted his new life in the prison and rose (as he had in Potiphar's house) to a high administrative position. Joseph showed he could get things done and make, firstly Potiphar and later the head jailer, look good. Slavery and jail taught Joseph efficiency and faithfulness; he did a good job – when there was no one but God to notice.

Writing on Psalm 105, Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller note that Joseph saved his family as a slave and through much suffering. Keller and Keller (2016) say:

If Joseph hadn't been betrayed, sold, and imprisoned for years, he never would have escaped his own deadly character flaws, never would have been able to redeem his own family from its generations-deep sins, nor would he have been able to save thousands of people from famine (Genesis 37–50). (p. 267)

Additionally, Joseph's story fits the pattern of God's deliverers: 'rejection, weakness, and sacrifice' (Keller & Keller 2016:267).

Jewish tradition addresses a problem the brothers faced: How to tell their father that Joseph was alive and wanted the family to come to Egypt. Furthermore, how could they admit to their father that they had lied about Joseph's death? They faced their father via a song sung by his favourite granddaughter, Serah, daughter of his son Asher.

Evidently, Serah was a delightful child, beautiful, wise, and skilled in singing and lute playing (Ginzberg 1910:II:115). The 10 brothers taught her to sing this song to her grandfather (Ginzberg 1910:II:115–116; Rappoport 1995:2:140):

My Uncle Joseph is not dead,  
For he liveth all the while;  
A crown he weareth on his head,  
As King of Egypt by the Nile.

Rappoport (1995:2:140) and Ginzberg (1910:II:116) elaborate further:

The old Patriarch placed his hands on Serah's head and blessed her thusly: 'My dear, may death in all eternity never have power over thee, because thou hast brought joy to my afflicted heart. Repeat this song often to me, for it is balm to my wounds and brings joy to me.'

Jewish tradition has more to say about this Serah.

Jewish tradition also speaks broadly to a silence in Scripture, namely what did Joseph look like? When I teach this section of Genesis, I mention that Joseph is a *hunk*. The class laughs. Scripture, however, backs up my vernacular.

Joseph is described as handsome (Gn 39:6). The same Hebrew word describes his mother, Rachel, as beautiful (Gn 29:17); there must have been a strong resemblance between son and mother. Scripture allows us, I tell the class, to use our imaginations to see Joseph and Rachel and to give them our own definitions of handsome and beautiful.

When Pharaoh promoted Joseph, he also gave him Asenath, daughter of Potiphara, the priest of On, to be his wife (Gn 41:45). Extra-biblical material regarding the story of Joseph and Asenath brings in both an initial difficulty and Joseph's comely appearance.

According to Jewish tradition, Asenath refused to marry him and earlier had spurned all suitors! Joseph also rejected her because of her idolatry and because she had eaten food sacrificed for idols (cf. Yee 1992:1:476).

This dilemma is resolved, however. According to Jewish tradition, Asenath was visited by the chief of the heavenly host who provided her with the bread of life, the cup of immortality, and the ointment of incorruptibility, all of which made her eligible to be Joseph's bride (Neusner, *Dictionary* 1996:2:340). She renounced her idols and their worship. Asenath agreed to the marriage when she saw Joseph's 'gorgeous appearance' and was convinced he was 'a son of God' (Neusner, *Dictionary* 1996:2:340). She converted to Joseph's God, and Joseph, the most pious and chaste of the patriarchs (Yee 1992:1:476), married her.

## Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sm 20)

*Setting:* Abel Beth Maacah, an important crossroads in northern Israel.

*Time:* An ongoing rebellion in Israel against David.

*Conflict: Israel's army besieges Abel Beth Maacah for an unknown reason. A lone woman mounts its wall and asks Joab, the army's commander, a question.*

The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah makes a cameo appearance on the biblical stage (Branch 2018:65). She shows she merits the narrator's designation of wise by listening, asking relevant questions, quickly thinking through a problem, and immediately promising a solution. She illustrates that wisdom in action is facing a situation, thinking through it, and finding a workable and effective resolution (see Hamilton 2001:358–359). She exits when her wise actions and wise words stop a rebellion against David. It quietly loses steam, ceases. In perhaps the Bible's most understated climax, the besiegers simply go home (2 Sm 20:22a); the narrator then understates the outcome: David remains king (2 Sm 20:22b).

Here is the backstory. David faced rebellions. Absalom lost his life and his quest for his father's throne (2 Sm 18), but Sheba, son of Bichri, a Benjamite and secessionist, likewise voiced dissent and mounted another rebellion (Hamilton 2001:357). David feared Sheba would do more harm than Absalom (2 Sm 20:6).

Joab, now again the commander of Israel's army, tracked Sheba to Abel Beth Maacah, a northern Israel city famous for its counsel (Volkner 1992:I:10). A prominent mound commanding a good view of the Hula Valley and set on the Iyyun Rive (one of the headwaters of the Jordan), is thought to be the ancient city's site (Panitz-Cohen & Yahalom-Mack 2019:26).

Joab tracked Sheba to Abel Beth Maacah and ordered its siege. In this, he erred as a covenant person, for Deuteronomy 20:10 states that a peace offer must firstly be made. Instead, Israel's troops followed orders and started battering the wall.

A lone woman shouted from the wall's top. She summoned Joab by name. The battering momentarily stopped. All eyes focused on her. She acted as a fulcrum between the army and the townspeople.

Here the biblical text seems coy. It gives nothing about her age, patrimony, husband, training, tribe, or children. The narrator introduces her as a Wise Woman, gives her a dramatic entrance, and then verifies his editorial adjective via her words and actions.

Obviously, the woman represented the city's choice of negotiator. She neither introduced herself nor pointed out Joab's neglect of Israel's law. Instead, she referenced the law indirectly, by giving a command from a beloved verse and broadly framing their public encounter with Israel's history and Israel's God.

She shouted: 'Listen! Listen!' (2 Sm 20:16). The word *shema* is the same word in Israel's beloved faith statement, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Dt 6:4).

Wisely and graciously nodding to his national fame, the woman called herself Joab's servant. She identified herself with the city as a mother in Israel. This put her on par with Deborah, the judge (Jdg 5:7).

She asked Joab why he sought to destroy a city regarded as a national treasure and known for its counsel. She implied it did not make sense. After all, all Israel knew Joab's skill! The woman pressed her advantage. The narrator gives no indication that Joab knows the woman.

But is that necessarily the way it really is?

According to Jewish tradition, the woman is Serah, daughter of Asher, granddaughter of Jacob (Ginzberg 1928:VI:304), the lovely youngster who sang to Jacob that her uncle Joseph was alive and ruled Egypt. Jacob was so thrilled that he prophesied she would not see death. Tradition names her as among those entering Paradise without dying (Ginzberg 1925:V:96, 165). By this time with Joab, Serah was an adult and advanced in age (see Kadari 1999).

This ancient story shows a woman in leadership (according to legend, Serah) at a decisive moment of Israel's history. This woman's story reflects ongoing viewpoints about women in leadership today. Alvera Mickelson (1989:177) notes that God works 'through women whom He has gifted to leadership positions around the world'. Others, citing 1 Corinthians 14:34–37, believe that women should keep silent in public situations and in the church. Since Robert Culver (1989:33) favours the prohibition of women speaking in church, he probably would not endorse a woman negotiating for a city during a life-and-death situation (like the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah); neither would he seem to favour a woman in a civic leadership position (like the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah).

And yet, there she was (be she Serah, or an anonymous woman of wisdom in her own right)! Thinking quickly, she saved Abel Beth Maacah from destruction, its occupants from the sword, and Israel from an extended civil war. Indeed, she showed that wisdom triumphed over weapons (cf. Kadari 1999).

## Solomon (1 Ki 3, 10)

*Time:* Solomon's early reign.

*Characters:* Two kings: earthly and heavenly.

*Diction:* Fascinating dialogue between God and Solomon.

Solomon's life began with the Lord's unique blessing, a special name. God named the baby *Jedidiah*, beloved of the Lord (2 Sm 12:25). Although named Jedidiah, the child was called Solomon because peace prevailed throughout his reign. However, the nicknaming tradition continued; his other nicknames include the following (Ginzberg 1954:IV:125):

Ben: Builder of the Temple.

Jakeh: Ruler of the whole world.

Ithiel: Because God was with him.

Upon his father David's death and his ascension to the throne, Solomon soon became known as the wisest man the world has ever seen (cf. 1 Ki 10:23) – and I would agree that he was – for a season.

His reign's latter years, however, showed the folly of resting on one's laurels and the wickedness of abandoning an ever-deepening relationship with God throughout one's life.

Here are his story's highlights:

Quite early in Solomon's reign, God met him at Gibeon. The Lord asked what he wanted. Solomon requested 'an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this, your great people?' (1 Ki 3:9).

Significantly, Solomon did not ask for wisdom in the account of 1 Kings; he asked for *shama*, a word meaning *understanding, careful attention, regard, and giving ear* (*The New Strong's*, 1984:#8085). He seemed to realise that wisdom, once possessed, meant that 'all else would come of itself' (cf. Ginzberg 1954:IV:130). However, perhaps this interaction between Solomon and God presents this possibility: We pray the best we can, and God graciously gives us something better than our request. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 1 differs slightly. Solomon does ask for wisdom, *chokmah* (v. 10); the word means *skillful wisdom, wisely, and even wit* (*The New Strong's*, 1984:#2451).

The Lord replied:

Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life. (1 Ki 3:12–14)

The new king's gift soon received public display. Solomon gave a wise ruling regarding the dispute of two prostitutes over a living child, a judgement revealing the child's true mother (1 Ki 3:16–28).

Wisdom enhanced Solomon's fitness as an international statesman and just ruler (Tomoo 1992:VI:111). Two Gentiles affirmed Solomon's wisdom: Hiram of Tyre and the queen of Sheba. Hiram and Solomon engaged in shipbuilding and trade, especially trade in lumber and gold (1 Ki 5:10; 9:26–28). Hiram rejoiced that the Lord had given his friend David a wise son to rule 'over this great nation' (1 Ki 5:7). This is significant, for one of equal regal rank (and a Gentile!) observed wisdom in Solomon.

The queen of Sheba praised Solomon; she saw his people and friends were happy and could enjoy his presence and hear his wisdom continually (Josephus 2007: *Antiquities of the Jews* 8:6:5:224). She gave Solomon an 'Exceeds Expectations' rating by saying: 'Not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told to me' (2 Chr 9:6; Branch 2022).

Solomon is the major author of Proverbs, Song of Songs, some 3000 proverbs and 1006 songs, and the probable author or focus of two psalms (72 and 127), and Ecclesiastes (cf. 1 Ki 4:32; Branch 2022).

Psalm 72 describes an ideal ruler, one who promotes justice, brings prosperity, enjoys long life, has a universal dominion, shows power over his enemies, and receives the homage or tribute of other kings (Mays 1994:236). Psalm 72 describes (via exaggeration and hyperbole) the office of king (cf. Dt 17:20) – but not one specific king (Mays 1994:236). However, Psalm 72 may fit Solomon better than any other king of Israel or Judah, because Solomon prayed for an understanding mind to judge God's people (see Mays 1994:238). Psalm 127 acknowledges the Lord as the builder of a house (probably of both an individual house and a national house) and as the One who graciously gives his beloved sleep.

The queen of Sheba's visit capped Solomon's reign and Israel's golden age of power in both the 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles accounts. However, amid her praise for Solomon, the narrator introduces two concerns: excessive wealth (Solomon's drinking vessels were gold) and horses (Solomon kept 12000) (cf. 1 Ki 10:14–39, especially verses 21, 26). Deuteronomy 17:16–17 forbids both.

Then 1 Kings 11:1 abruptly mentions Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines. The numbers defy imagination and belief. Deuteronomy 17:17 states a king must not acquire many wives. The structural arrangement of 1 Kings 10–11 indicates that perhaps Solomon's phenomenal number of women showed not only lust, but also loneliness; Solomon seemed to have an affinity with the queen of Sheba in terms of talking. Perhaps wisdom had isolated him. She asked questions; they talked. Their meetings showed an egalitarian nature in rank, statesmanship, education, worldview, and bearing (see Branch 2022)

Solomon's reign, however, did not end in praise and vigour. Yes, his early reign had exceeded in wisdom and riches above the reigns of rulers before him, yet he did not 'persevere in this happy state till he died', but fell 'headlong into unreasonable pleasures' (Josephus 2007: *Antiquities of the Jews* 8:7:5:226). Solomon's story, ultimately one of sadness, illustrates that God's gifts need to be used for God's glory. Here is the biblical evaluation: Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord (1 Ki 11:6).

## Lady Wisdom (Pr 1–9)

Setting: *An ancient town's street corner.*

*Conflict: Young people need to learn wisdom.*

*Plot: Devising a curriculum illustrating best practices for a long, prosperous life and showing the consequences of its opposite, a lifestyle of sloth, lies, and perverse companions.* (Branch 2016:13–25)

Lady Wisdom is classy, opinionated, independently wealthy, and claims the impossible – to have been with the Lord as his darling and delight during creation (Pr 8:22). None in town refutes her. She knows her neighbours and calls them by name—Drunkard, Slothful, Adulteress, Gossip, and a newcomer: Simple Youth (Branch 2016:8–12). Her nemesis, Lady Folly, brags that she too lives in the elite part of the city (Branch 2016:16).

Lady Wisdom defies convention. She shouts to passers-by, inviting them to come to her banquet. She addresses townsfolk the way men do: loudly and from one of the city's busiest parts (Pr 1:20–33; Fontaine 1992:147). Lady Wisdom joins the cacophony of hawkers selling fruit, prostitutes seeking customers, and judges rendering verdicts (cf. Branch 2016:13; Fontaine 1992:147).

As a character, Lady Wisdom is both complex and consistent. She teaches the skill of wisdom. She consistently exemplifies excellence and consistently expects it from all others, including her students. Her high standards reflect her knowledge of the Lord. She requires her students to pursue the goals she specifies and to come back to her, their lifelong teacher, for refresher courses (Branch 2016:25).

Via regular banquets, she advertises her ongoing classes. She will both feed you and teach you wisdom. Disdaining her invitation invites death (Branch 2021:171). Her instructions lead to life. Her qualification? She knows wisdom's Source, the Lord. Wisdom comes only from a right relationship with the Holy One (cf. Fontaine 1992:147).

Since she reprimands publicly, it is not wise to anger her. Her teaching outlines two paths for life: righteousness or wickedness. The former is nuanced by wisdom, instruction, understanding, knowledge, and honour; the latter by perversity, folly, generations of trouble, and sudden death (cf. Pr 1). As an obvious wisdom advocate, she tells students her path requires establishing a pattern of wise choices, daily study, and living all life under the umbrella of 'the fear of the Lord' (Pr 1:7a'; cf. Branch 2016:13).

Her message smacks of urgency. Like a 911 alert announcing a tornado, Lady Wisdom knows the consequences of ignoring her banquet invitation. Choosing foolishness over wisdom leads to patterns like sloth, drunkenness, gossip, and adultery. These lead to death. Proverbs is a book showing how long-term patterns lead to joy, prosperity, community standing and long life—or to destruction, isolation, exclusion, poverty, and a shortened life. She boldly proclaims her way is the ONLY way to life.

Indeed, to ignore Lady Wisdom is to court death (Fontaine 1992:147).

Typical of biblical portraits, her character attributes are mentioned but not her appearance. Individual imagination prevails. Someone so vocal in the public arena would not be slovenly. When I teach Proverbs, I invite my students (as I do when I teach Genesis and Joseph) to imagine Lady Wisdom and the other characters in Proverbs.

I picture her in understated but undisputed elegance. Her fabrics are fine linen, soft wool, smooth silk; she accents with real pearls, true gold, big rubies and bright sapphires. As one who is quality, she knows quality.

In contrast, Lady Folly—her flouncy, cheap nemesis—is a copy-cat and a poor one at that! Whereas Lady Wisdom loudly and publicly cries out her banquet invitation, Lady Folly is not only loud—but also obnoxious. The refined elegance, excellent diction, and the well-modulated tone of Lady Wisdom contrasts easily with Lady Folly's brazenness, sexual innuendos, and grating nasal twang (see Branch 2016:3–25).

Lady Wisdom is actually quite fun. She enjoys a game of hide and seek, announcing at the beginning that she can be found by those who seek her (Pr 3:15). Yes, finding her is more profitable than silver and her investment return rate is better than gold.

Lady Wisdom is one of the Bible's most fascinating characters. But who is she? Is she real or a myth? Fontaine (1992:148) does a fine job of showing the struggles of various translators. For example, in Proverbs 8:30 Lady Wisdom can be a master work or a darling child, depending on the translation. Translations for Proverbs 8:22 include the following: he created me; begot me, brought forth me, conceived me; Fontaine (1992:148) notes they are ambiguous, but in their ambiguity, they seek to avoid a sexually conceived child of God, as well as a pre-existent entity, whom Yahweh acquires to begin creation.

Yet Lady wisdom repeatedly emphasizes her existence before creation. She was at God's side; she played before God. 'She is something of God, born of God, in God' (Murphy 1992:VI:927).

Lady Wisdom is also known as Woman Wisdom and Sophia. Elizabeth Johnson (1994:86–87) calls Sophia the most fully developed personification of God's presence and activity in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Sophia speaks on her own authority, declares that one who refuses to listen to her will be struck with calamity, and that the one who listens to her can dwell without fear of evil (Johnson 1994:87).

Not only is Sophia an 'architect of creation', but she is also a construction worker, vintner, butcher, sender of prophets, and a compelling hostess (Pr 9:1–6; Johnson 1994:88).

Words fail when trying to define the mystery and wonder of Sophia. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1994:161) puts it this way: divine reality 'cannot be comprehended in human language'.

Adding more insight, Fontaine (1992:148) rightly observes that Lady Wisdom's speeches are full of self-praise. However, they are accurate and not pompous. Lady Wisdom is the Bible's only character, besides God, I believe who calls herself wise and is not refuted. She gives and receives honour (Pr 3:16).

As a fully developed character, Lady Wisdom proves to be a reliable heroine. Proverbs provides a model of her authoritarian side as teacher and mentor (Ch. 1–9) and ends with a practical example of a Wise Woman who, over a lifetime, excels in the tasks at hand: establishing a home, raising fine children, encouraging her husband by resolving to do him good all the days of her life, successfully weaving, working hard in running a farm, investing in diverse economic activities, and giving glory to the Lord (Pr 31:10–31).

## Daniel (Dn 2)

<i>Setting:</i>	<i>King Nebuchadnezzar's court in Babylon.</i>
<i>Time:</i>	<i>The second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, probably around 603 BCE (Milne 2006:1171; Dn 2:1–49n).</i>
<i>Characters:</i>	<i>Daniel, a young exile from Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar.</i>
<i>Plot:</i>	<i>A dream troubles Nebuchadnezzar. The king demands an immediate re-telling and an interpretation thereof.</i>

Nebuchadnezzar creates a national conflict. He demands that Babylon's wise men not only tell him his dream, but also interpret it; otherwise, they will die. The plot addresses the impossibility of Nebuchadnezzar's impossible demands. The wise men certainly want to interpret the king's dream. They request the normal order: firstly, he recount the dream and then receive the wise men's interpretation. Their counteroffer enrages the despot. His conduct shows he distrusts his own counsellors. The sages are buying time (Alter 2019:3:755n). Synonyms for wise men are magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, and Chaldeans (Dn 2:2; Hartman & Di Lella 1978:137).

The king's tell-me-or-die edict covers Daniel and his three friends: all exiles from Judah and all being trained in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Daniel does not argue with the king, but courteously asks for an extension, an execution delay. The request is granted; the four young men pray.

Dreams were 'the wokeness', if you will, of ancient times. People in Egypt and Babylon saw them as foretellers of the future. Both the Pharaoh during Joseph's time and Nebuchadnezzar centuries later in Daniel's time had dreams—dreams interpreted correctly by two covenant members of Israel's God. Dreams and fantastic occurrences shed insights on the future (cf. Longman 1999:77).

It is not unusual to forget a dream (cf. Knight 1973:316). What the king remembered when awakening was this: a feeling of being profoundly troubled.

The Bible lacks a record of Daniel's prayer. Instead, it highlights the prayer's addressee: the God to whom belong 'wisdom and power', as well as Daniel's praise to God for giving him 'wisdom and power' (vv. 20, 23). The interesting doubling reveals this biblical truth: God gives qualities that are his (cf. Hartman & Di Lella 1978:140).

Daniel's urgent prayer, whatever it was, was simple, direct. It stated a need and respectfully, directly addressed God. Daniel urgently prayed in God's name, for God's sake, and did not have long to wait (cf. Foster 1992:14–15). God responded to this ancient equivalent of a 911 call.

Daniel's prayer highlighted two aspects of God's character – wisdom and power. It also recognised that God raises up and brings down kings (Longman 1999:79–80). God is sovereign.

The use of *us* (v. 23) indicates that God's answer may have been in quadruplicate. Undoubtedly the four young men received it with great joy. God's response indicated they would live.

Daniel's prayer and praise response also displayed his covenant heritage; he sought his ancestors' God. His confidence showed he knew the mind of God (cf. Knight 1973:318). Daniel's prayer rejected the prevailing Babylonian view, the pagan view, that man can control nature via magic and manipulate the gods (Knight 1973:317–388).

Daniel's praise acknowledged the prophetic nature of God's answer. Daniel was to serve Nebuchadnezzar and successive monarchs 'until the first year of King Cyrus', approximately 539 BCE (Milne 2006:1171).

I imagine that Daniel joyfully awaited the upcoming morning when he would not only recount to the king the king's dream, but also give its interpretation. Daniel immediately credited the God of Heaven – and not himself! – with being able to meet the king's commands (Dn 2:37). What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to Daniel's recounting and interpretation? The king 'fell on his face and worshipped Daniel' (Dn 2:46). The king recognised an unseen power greater than his own. The king and court saw wisdom in action.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel illustrates that wisdom is an encounter that is captured by words (Murphy 1992:VI:925). Furthermore, because Daniel's ability to interpret the dream saved many lives, his prayer foreshadows a prevailing New Testament concept: love your enemies (Longman 1999:79–80). The wise men of Babylon, although undoubtedly relieved that their lives were spared, probably resented that the four exiles were promoted to authority over them.

The book of Daniel starts by affirming life in the present and ends with a new insight: a 'theological leap' of the 'reality of another life beyond the grave' (Van Deventer 2021:214). Perhaps this new revelation gradually became accepted,

because of the gifts of wisdom and power given to the book's hero, Daniel.

## Bezalel and Oholiab and the wise-hearted women (Ex 31:3; 35:35)

*Setting and time:* Somewhere in the wilderness, after the giving of the Ten Commandments and during Israel's forty-year sojourn before entering the Promised Land.

*Characters:* Two skilled craftsmen and wise-hearted women spinners.

*Plot:* The community-wide project of constructing a mobile worship centre that was beautiful, expensive, smelled good, and featured fine workmanship.

God's gift of wisdom not only expresses itself in words and actions, but also in tactile ways. Israel recognised Bezalel and Oholiab as skilled artisans in all forms of metallurgy, woodwork, weaving, and perfumery. God not only agreed, but also honoured the two with wisdom, a gift that increased their skills.

Bezalel's name means *shadow of God* (Ginzberg 1911:III:154). Oholiab's name may mean *father is a shelter or a tent* (Hostetter 1992:V:10).

Bezalel came from an elite family of heroes: Hur, Caleb, and Miriam were part of his close lineage. According to Jewish tradition, Hur gave his life to restrain Israel from worship of the golden calf (Ginzberg 1911:III:154). Oholiab, however, came from what was considered a lesser tribe, Dan. Their teaming shows that before God, 'the great and the lowly are equal' (Ginzberg 1911:III:156).

Jewish tradition notes that Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the Holy Ghost, as were all the construction workers; even the beasts that engaged in heavy labour possessed wisdom, insight, and understanding (Ginzberg 1911:III:156)!

Bezalel and Oholiab's story, which is not excessively cerebral (Brueggemann 1994:921), shows wisdom's practicality. The chain of command for the building of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was the following: God directed Moses, and Moses directed Bezalel and Oholiab and their workers. All used their skills 'in ways befitting the holy' (Brueggemann 1994:921).

The building of the Tabernacle was one of Israel's most significant events in its 40 years in the wilderness. Generosity dominated and abounded. On a theological level, it showed God's great generosity in forgiving the sin of the golden calf. God's forgiven people reciprocated generously by giving funds and labour for this, the faith's first house of worship. The community gave their gold, silver, and other treasures.

Brueggemann (1994:961) writes that men as well as women gave their strengths – whether in goods or personal skills; the whole community was alive and energised, bestirred to act well outside itself.

The Tabernacle project caught on. The people backed it wholeheartedly. Approximately 7600 pounds of silver (1775 shekels) was received from 603 550 people who gave at least two-tenths of an ounce (Bruckner 2008:323–324). The silver became the stands for the poles for the wood frames for the entrances to the Tabernacle and its holiest place. This time the donated gold created a beautiful space for God, instead of an idol, a golden calf (Bruckner 2008:316).

Located in the camp's centre, the Tabernacle showed not only God's presence, but also God's character trait of graciousness. Israel came to recognise it as a chance to redress the disobedience of Aaron (Ex 32:2–3); it heralded the upcoming end of wandering and God's desire to dwell with his people (Brueggemann 1994:961).

The wise-hearted women spinners do not receive the textual space of Bezalel and Oholiab. They are not named, and their work is not detailed. Their attitude toward their work must have been joyful and positive because they are described as wise-hearted. The women probably were spinners and not weavers. Why? Because an ancient spinning process is visible on a wall of a Middle Kingdom tomb at Beni Hasan (Miller & Miller 1996:379). Spinning is forming threads by drawing out and twisting fibers (Miller & Miller 1996:379).

During Israel's season of wandering, the Tabernacle became a kind of portable Sinai (Fretheim 1991:274). This Tabernacle was essential, for it gave assurance of the divine presence (Fretheim 1991:273–274). Its workers received an opportunity, one larger than they could imagine. The Tabernacle displayed 'God's microcosmic plan' – a plan eventually involving his presence in the whole world (Fretheim 1991:271).

The Tabernacle's beauty of sight, texture, materials, craftsmanship, and smell created a model for generations. This place of reverence and welcome, became a place set apart, a fitting place for God, a place where God would meet his people with the blessings of goodness (cf. Ps 21:3). Truly, it takes wisdom to create a place for God's holiness.

Perhaps Jan Struther (2001:#469) thought of Bezalel and Oholiab when she penned the hymn, *Lord of all hopefulness* and described Jesus' strong hands as 'skilled at the plane and the lathe'.

## Suggestions for further study

This article concentrated on selected Old Testament characters as an appropriate basis for a study of God's gift of wisdom. It is a survey.

Additional articles can further develop this theme by looking at wisdom in the New Testament –both in terms of specific



characters who exhibit wisdom (or do not!), and how the concept of wisdom broadens in the New Testament.

The following are additional topics for study:

- The relationship between suffering and wisdom.
- The relationship between wealth and wisdom (cf. Crenshaw 1998:43).
- Comparing the Hebrew and Greek contributions on Lady Wisdom and Sophia.
- An investigation of how Scripture links wisdom with the prophetic word in terms of judging it and implementing it.
- Specific Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 1:30–31.
- The mystery of how Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.
- A discussion of how Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).
- An examination of Colossians 2:23 reveals that in Him (Jesus) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Indeed, further study of these verses and concepts will prove most rewarding; they touch not only on the mystery of the Godhead, but also on the depth and variety of the gift of wisdom.

Those wishing to combine biblical studies with contemporary avenues of Sociology, Psychology, and Politics can look at the relationship between wisdom and discipline and how that connection produces character. An excellent place to start is *The road to character* by David Brooks (2015).

## Observations about Wisdom from the above character studies

The following observations about the material presented from the characters studied seek to show ways that wisdom is expressed, used, applied in daily life, and recognised by others.

While the observations may seem similar, they are highly nuanced. Like red when mixed with blue becomes purple, and when added to yellow becomes orange, the nuanced observations investigate wisdom's diversity. This section presents material regarding the finding of common ground between the characters studied.

## Wisdom is multi-faceted

As shown by the characters in this article, God's wisdom manifests itself in wise words, wise actions, and specific skills. Wisdom also is a faith experience; it entails gradually coming to know God (cf. Murphy 1992:VI:925). While each character's experience with God was different, God was the focal point for each. In this way, wisdom serves as a model for individual faith. Experiences may differ, but the Giver is the same.

## Wisdom can be requested

Solomon requested what translators call an understanding, or a discerning heart (1 Ki 3:9), and Daniel requested wisdom

and power from God. God gave both men wisdom and other gifts. God answered affirmatively. However, requesting wisdom gradually becomes the mode as biblical stories progress. James, writing with a pastor's heart and authority, encourages 'any of you who is lacking wisdom' to ask for it specifically (Ja 1:5–8). Such a request humbly acknowledges that a wise life is to be lived under God's sovereignty (cf. Firth 2021:76).

## Suffering and wisdom

The gift of wisdom may be preceded by suffering. An iron collar and fetters restrained Joseph (Ps 105:18).

The book of Daniel begins with a broad sketch of Nebuchadnezzar's victories, his sack of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the bringing of Israel's elite to Babylon, all probably around 605 BCE (cf. Archer & Youngblood 1985:1300; Dn 1:1n).

Daniel and his three friends were among the exiles from Judah (Dn 1:6). Chapter 1's silences include the journey itself from Jerusalem to Babylon – some 900 miles – and its details. The chapter omits describing the fall of Jerusalem and the exiles' treatment in captivity. Were they beaten, humiliated, raped? Did some die of exposure, hunger, exhaustion?

Arguably, the book's initial audience knew many accounts of that journey and the sufferings its survivors experienced. The narrator, however, refuses to linger on loss. Instead, the narrator not only uses the literary tool of silence, but also that of surprise.

Chapter 1 highlights the courage of the four Judeans regarding food choices and the courtesy of Daniel toward a Babylonian guard (vv. 6–14). As aliens in a strange land, but foremost as covenant believers, the four learn lessons of God's sovereignty. God's faithfulness in chapter 1 prepares them for a despot's mercurial demands in chapter 2 and propels Daniel to pray specifically for wisdom and power.

The life of the four, so far, seems to be a roller coaster of adventures, suffering, human fear, extreme needs, and miraculous deliverances. Chapters 1–2 showcase two aspects of wisdom: a particular way of looking at reality and an awe, a fear of the Lord (cf. Crenshaw 1998:10, 12).

## Wisdom can be given without a specific request

God gave Joseph, Bezalel, and Oholiab wisdom. God's gift manifests his generous character by meeting an immediate need, but also unfolds later as part of a larger plan.

Scripture introduces the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah, Lady Wisdom, and the wise-hearted women spinners as wise. Their presence challenges the text's apparent male dominance of wisdom. It develops Miriam's pointed questions: 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has

He not spoken through us also?’ (Nm 12:3). The answers are that God certainly has spoken through Moses and through others, including Aaron and Miriam. God speaks to whom He chooses, for his purposes, and in his own time. And God also disciplines arrogance – as Miriam quickly discovered (Nm 12:6–16).

God freely gives wisdom to both men and women. Wisdom does not have a single gender perspective (cf. Newsom & Ringe 1992:xv). Crenshaw (1998:80) emphasises God’s sovereignty; and he notes that ‘Wisdom was the first of God’s created works; she was fashioned long before the earth and sea’.

## Wisdom can be a skill

Wisdom begins with home training from both parents (Pr 6:20). Aided by the pithy couplets in Proverbs, wisdom grows with study, application, practice, and constant correction.

Wisdom extends from skill with words and wise choices for actions, to skill with one’s hands. Proverbs 22:29 states: ‘Do you see those who are skillful in their work? They will serve kings; they will not serve common people.’

## Wisdom in action

Wisdom speaks to leaders. Biblical stories show that the one given godly wisdom addresses a leader who either needs it or seeks it. Three stories (Joseph with Pharaoh, the Wise Woman with Joab, and Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar) illustrate this need. Encounters with godly wisdom then ripple as teaching tools for generations.

Godly wisdom often surfaces unexpectedly. It faces an immediate crisis (cf. Fretheim 1994:662). Wisdom is terse, succinct, specific, directed, spot-on.

Wisdom shows God’s advance planning. Someone (pre-prepared for the moment) acts. The narrator of 2 Samuel 20 introduces a woman on a wall with a single adjective: wise. The narrator backs up the description by tersely telling how the siege on Abel Beth Maacah ceased because of her questions, listening, advice, and action. Significantly, the story of the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah counters one in Ecclesiastes about a wise, poor man who lived in a city, but was ignored and forgotten. A king surrounded the city, besieged it, and evidently conquered it. The city could have been saved by wisdom – if the poor man had been consulted, ‘but nobody remembered him’. The vignette concludes that ‘wisdom is better than strength’ (Ec 9:13–16).

Similarly, Joseph’s training in running Potiphar’s house and then the king’s jail equipped him for the administrative duties of 7 years of plentiful harvests, followed by 7 lean years and famine. Joseph’s story displays the ideal virtues of one in power: discernment and wisdom (cf. Coats 1992:III:918).

Wisdom listens. The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah listened to Joab without interruption. Joseph listened to Pharaoh’s troubling dreams. Daniel listened as God answered his prayer and gave him what Nebuchadnezzar demanded: re-telling and interpreting his dream. Both rulers showed wisdom, as they listened to Joseph and Daniel respectively. Listening lets the other parties involved know you have heard them (Blanchard, Hodges & Hendry 2016:117).

Wisdom often augments an existing skill. Bezalel and Oholiab had expertise in metal, wood, perfumery, and weaving crafts, but God enlarged their skillset with wisdom.

## Wisdom overflows to many areas of a person’s life and in a community

One known as wise often has other exemplary character traits or giftings. The wise-hearted women spinners arguably blossomed as they served; they likely made the spinning area a joyful enclave. Under Moses’ oversight and the leadership of the skilled artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, construction of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness became a joy-filled community effort marked by generosity, tribal unity, and shared purpose.

Joseph’s propensity to dream evidently opened him to other traits needed in an ideal ruler: administration and organisation. How did he learn to run a country? From years of running Potiphar’s house and the king’s jail. During those stints, he related well vertically (to authorities over him, Potiphar, and the jailer) and horizontally (to Potiphar’s other servants and the king’s other prisoners). He did his jobs so well that his immediate bosses not only looked good to outsiders, but also trusted him and left everything to him. Evan Howard (2018:221), a spiritual director and author, notes that people over time can develop a pattern of ‘intentionally growing in wisdom’. Arguably, the examples in this article show this trait.

## Wisdom’s wider implications

The gift of wisdom surely has great import for its recipient. But like all God’s gifts, it is to be used, shared, given away, replenished, and enjoyed. God gives wisdom to bless and help an individual immediately, but also to promote God’s plans for the future. God is sovereign. Wisdom given to one becomes an avenue to bless many. Joseph’s gifts of wisdom and discernment led to food for a nation and surrounding countries. It kept the covenant people alive. Joseph leads a list of deliverers: Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Esther, and finally the Messiah.

God’s revelation to Daniel and his three friends of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation surely saved their lives; it also led to their promotions to high positions in Babylon. Over the years, this placement, no doubt, led to opportunities to benefit the covenant people. Roughly 150 to

200 years later, in the 4th century BCE, Esther likewise, as the Persian queen, saved her people. Wisdom seems to begin with blessing one life, saving one life; it then overflows to blessing multitudes in numerous ways.

Similarly, the wisdom of one era may be seen differently in another. Joseph's story probably encouraged the later exiles (McCann 1966:1105). Through Joseph, God showed that He kept his covenant promises to Abraham. Why? Because He kept the covenant people alive (cf. Gn 15:1; 28:15; Ps 105:17; Glodo 1995:373).

## Wisdom often precedes promotion

Among wisdom's first results is that bystanders – witnessing a profound encounter – name it as wisdom. It spellbinds; public reaction attributes it to God. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, two of the world's most powerful men in different eras, saw that Joseph and Daniel, respectively, had wisdom in a way that only God could give. Both rulers made immediate decisions to put Joseph and Daniel in positions in which they directly reported only to the monarchs themselves. Perhaps these rulers thought wisdom rubbed off and wanted a share of the public admiration that wisdom brings. Wisdom graces leadership like a laurel crown. Leaders and others listening to the one with wisdom often recognise gifts they do not have or gifts their countries may need.

## Conclusion: Wisdom's byproducts and offshoots

This conclusion provides an analysis of God's gift of wisdom as shown in the characters studied. It finds that wisdom is beautifully, overwhelmingly positive. It points directly to God. Joseph and Daniel show that those receiving the godly gift quickly give the credit to God. Wisdom in their stories and in others may serve as a tool for evangelism. Why is that? The reason is that wisdom serves as an introduction to the God of Israel.

On a personal note, I found that formulating this conclusion and the preceding observations kept me grinning. I repeatedly marvelled at how wisdom keeps giving. I wish David had added wisdom to his benediction in Psalm 23. I wish he had said the following: 'Surely goodness and mercy and wisdom will follow me all the days of my life ...' (italics added). I found that wisdom repeats itself (as do goodness and mercy); indeed, the gift becomes a recognised necessity of life!

What follows now are some of my findings. They are incomplete. Why? Because God keeps giving and giving and giving.

*Wisdom is attractive.* Lady Wisdom modelled quality in everything. She is a legend in her own lifetime; her townspeople respected her. Similarly, Joseph, Daniel, and Solomon (in his early years) illustrated the qualities of ideal rulers (cf. Ps 72).

*Wisdom often produces beauty.* The Tabernacle in the Wilderness is a fine example. Bezalel, Oholiab, their workers, and the wise-hearted women created a place of glory in the wilderness for the worship of God. They obeyed Moses in carrying out God's plan. The Tabernacle even smelled good!

*Wisdom often saves lives.* The wisdom of the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah showed the townspeople how to save their city – via the death of one man, Sheba, one described as a scoundrel (2 Sm 20:1). Daniel and his three friends had wisdom and power. Because they could answer the king's unreasonable demand, they lived and prevented the slaughter of the wise men of Babylon.

*Those who receive the gift of wisdom teach others.* Lady Wisdom herself was a student of God's wisdom during creation. She remembered her time as a darling child near the Creator (Pr 8:22–31); her studies as a student prepared her for her later teaching role in the community.

I also grinned when I realised that *wisdom is fun!* This feature should not be overlooked! Solomon and the queen of Sheba enjoyed solving riddles and making them up. According to Jewish tradition, the queen peppered Solomon with riddles, and he answered them easily. Here is one: 'A woman said to her son, thy father is my father, and thy grandfather is my husband; thou art my son and I am thy sister.' In this confusing chronicle of family history, who is this woman? The answer from Solomon came quickly: 'The daughter of Lot, who spoke thus to her son' (Ginzberg 1954:IV:146).

*Wisdom yields benefits like a long life, riches and honour, and a good name* (Pr 3:16; 8:18; 22:1).

*Wisdom and character entwine.* Joseph showed wisdom's refinement when he met Pharaoh with confidence and respect (cf. Glodo 1995:373). The Wise Woman evidenced no fear when she heard the battering ram against the city walls. In some wonderful way, spinning and wise-heartedness meshed. Gifts of teaching, administration and leadership often accompany the gift of wisdom.

*Wisdom directs hearers on how to meet a prophetic word.* This is very significant. Pharaoh's dream indicated inevitabilities: 7 years of plenty and 7 of leanness and famine. It gave the world a blueprint for preparing for famine and enduring it (cf. Gn 45:25–40). Preparation validates the principle that the biblical God is a God of life.

*Wisdom requires a life-long pattern of pursuit.* Wisdom requires constant maintenance. Wisdom's upkeep should be the primary focus of one's life. Upkeep means seeking the Lord daily and keeping a clean slate through obedience and confession of sin. Wisdom is not a one-time gift. Like silver, wisdom can tarnish.

Solomon faltered in terms of study and obedience in his later years. His sloth led to burning incense to other gods and

sacrificing to them (1 Ki 11:8). These actions led to God's wrath on his reign, his successor, and on Israel.

*Wise actions take time.* Bezalel and Oholiab and the wise-hearted women as well as the labouring community, produced a quality worship centre; it became the community's focal point and the model for subsequent Jewish and Christian worship centres throughout the world and over time.

*Wisdom in one area may blossom elsewhere.* Joseph's wisdom and discernment solved two problems, as illustrated in Genesis 37–50: family strife and family safety. Joseph addressed his brothers' hatred for him (Gn 37:4) with forgiveness (Gn 50:20); he said that what they had intended for evil, God had changed for good, namely the saving of many lives (Gn 50:20). What a benediction!

*Wisdom draws the world.* Wisdom is obviously a gift from God, or a word from God, or an action of God, or something else altogether fitting for the moment. Solomon's wisdom left the world in awe. The queen of Sheba said that the half had not been told to her (1 Ki 10:7).

*Wisdom evaluates with honesty and without partiality.* The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah advised her townsfolk to toss Sheba's head over the wall; Joab in turn, called off the siege. Wisdom both praises and rebukes. Lady Wisdom praises those who come to her banquet and publicly reprimands the drunkard, adulteress, gossip, and sluggard for their choices in life (Branch 2016:14, 18, 19, 22). It is never wise to run crosswise with Lady Wisdom!

However, no matter how much the gift of wisdom benefits its recipient, its ultimate purpose is the glory of the Giver. Perhaps the verse best illustrating God's open plan for wisdom, is Proverbs 11:30 (KJV): 'He that winneth souls is wise.' God in his wisdom always reaches out, always gives.

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