

# Next Steps with the Bible

*Going Deeper and Growing Stronger*

## **Week 9: Understanding the Wisdom Books Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes**



For my thoughts,  
are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,  
declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are  
higher than the earth,

*so are my ways higher*

than your ways and  
my thoughts than your thoughts.

*Isaiah 55:8-9*



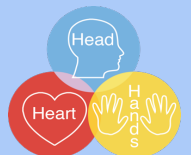




# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 1. Review of Week 8: Parables

- Parables as **extended similes**: “the kingdom of God is like . . . ”
- Parables as **mini-narratives** within a larger narrative . . .
- Flexible understanding of the significance of the **details** in light of context . . .
  - Some parables contain detailed correspondence between the story and the kingdom
  - Some parables have one main point
- Assignment: Luke 15 revisited



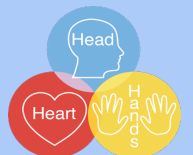




# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 2. What is wisdom and wisdom literature?

- Wisdom amounts to **skillfully applying biblical knowledge** and truth to life's complexities.
- ***Information is not insight***; many "smart" people are **not wise people**.
- Wisdom is not law to be obeyed or doctrine to be believed but **guidelines** and insights to be applied as needed.

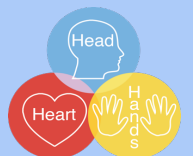




# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 2. What is wisdom and wisdom literature?

- Wisdom books do not share the same **form** or genre like letters, poems, or narratives do.
- Wisdom books share the **purpose** of teaching their audience how to live a godly and therefore a successful life in a broken world.
- Wisdom books don't give us simplistic **rules** or **guarantees** for life but general **principles** and **guidelines** that we apply prayerfully and skillfully.





# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 3. Where do we find wisdom literature in the Bible?

- Job
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Some Psalms (e.g. 1, 37, 119)
- Embedded in other books, especially James
- Apocryphal books like Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) and Wisdom of Solomon



# Proverbs 8 and Sirach 1: Which is which?

**4 Wisdom was created before all other things**, and prudent understanding from eternity.

**6** The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed? Her subtleties—who knows them?

**8** There is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne—the Lord.

**9 It is he who created her**; he saw her and took her measure; he poured her out upon all his works,  
**10** upon all the living according to his gift; **he lavished her upon those who love him.**

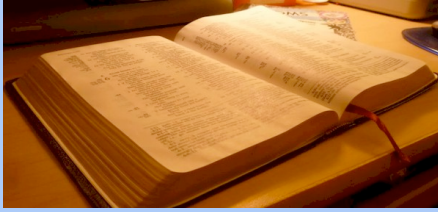
**22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.**

**23** Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth . . . [24-29]

**30** . . . then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

**31** rejoicing in his inhabited world and **delighting in the human race.**

(Texts from NRSV)



# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. How do we interpret wisdom literature?

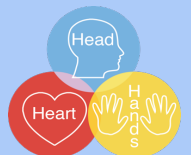
- **Historical and literary context** remain important
  - We need to understand the **ancient situation external** to these books and
  - We need to understand **the internal flow of thought** in these books.



# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. How do we interpret Job?

- Job conveys wisdom through a **narrative dialogue** meant for our reflection.
- The dialogue in Job 3-41 is framed by a prologue (1-2) and epilogue (42).
- Job is a ***theodicy***. it vindicates God from blame when the righteous suffer.
- The gritty, ***realistic*** story of Job balances a simplistic and ***triumphalistic*** misinterpretation of Proverbs.
  - E.g. Prov 10:3; 22:6; Ps 37:25 and the discussion of Proverbs below.







# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. How does Job fit together?

Prologue: Job *tested* (1-2)

Dialogue with three friends (3-31)

Dialogue with Elihu (32-37)

God speaks from the whirlwind: (38:1-41:34)

Job replies (42:1-6)

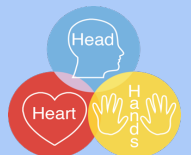
Epilogue: Job 42:7-17 (Job *vindicated*)



# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. How do we interpret Job?

- Notice how Job is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible:
  - Ezekiel 14:14, 20
  - James 5:11
- Notice how Paul uses Job:
  - Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19
  - Job 41:11 in Romans 11:35.





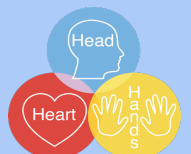
# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. How do we interpret Proverbs?

- A Proverb is a pithy saying, an **adage** or **maxim** derived from extensive observation of human experience:
  - "A stitch in time saves nine,"
  - "You don't miss your water 'til your well runs dry."
  - "God helps those who help themselves." (?!)
- Biblical proverbs are often expressed through parallelism/pairs/couplets.

*Food gained by fraud tastes sweet,*

*But one ends up with a mouth full of gravel. (Prov 20:17 NIV)*



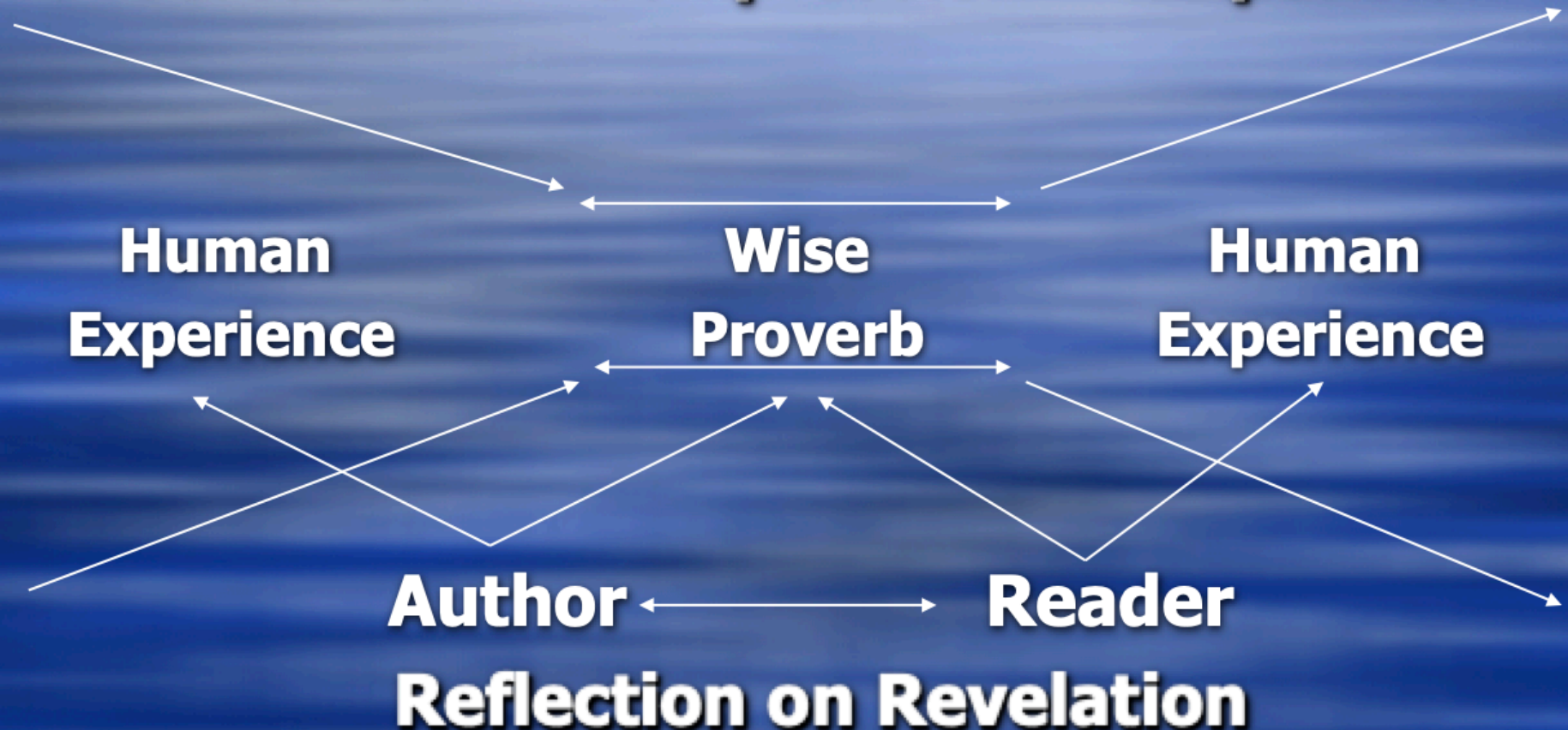


# The Proverb Process

**Observation**

**Compression**

**Expansion**





# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. Proverbs

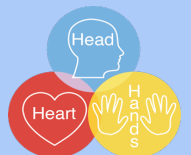
- Occasionally a short story occurs:

*I went past the field of a sluggard,  
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;  
thorns had come up everywhere,  
the ground was covered with weeds,  
and the stone wall was in ruins.*

***I applied my heart to what I observed  
and learned a lesson from what I saw:***

*A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest—  
and poverty will come on you like a thief  
and scarcity like an armed man. (Prov 24:30-34 NIV)*

- Proverbs are not promises or guarantees; they are reasonable principles or guidelines.





# Understanding the Wisdom Books

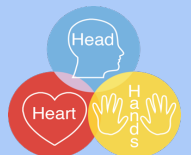
## 4. How do we interpret Ecclesiastes?

- Ecclesiastes conveys wisdom through observing the **ambiguities** and **inconsistencies** of life
  - “under the sun” occurs in every chapter except 7, 11.
- How does Ecclesiastes fit together?

Third person **prologue** (1:1-11): the **problem is emptiness**

▶ First person **monologue** (1:12-12:7): the teacher’s **observations**

Third person **epilogue** (12:8-14): the **solution is to obey God anyway!**



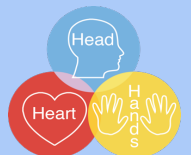




# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. **Ecclesiastes:** Emphasis on life's ambiguities

- “Meaningless” (NIV, NLT) or “vanity” (KJV, NIV) occurs in every chapter except 9-10.
- Many take the book as **cynicism** or bad advice.
- It is better to take the book as **realism** about life in a broken world.
- In spite of all the ambiguity, we must still acknowledge and obey God who is the judge of all humanity.
  - 1:13; 2:24-26; 3:10-22; 5:1-7; 5:18-6:2; 7:13-14, 18, 26, 29; 8:12-13, 15; 9:1, 7, 9; 11:5, 9; 12:1, 6-7, 13-14
- Along with Job, Ecclesiastes cautions us from reading Proverbs naively and simplistically.



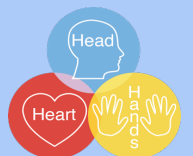


# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 4. Ecclesiastes

### ▪ Fun Fact:

- The **oldest lyric** of any number one song ever recorded is found in Ecclesiastes.
- Do you know what it is?
- If not, it's ***time*** you knew.





# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T51nmyCODHQ>



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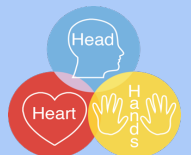
# Understanding the Wisdom Books

## 5. Conclusion: Two Kinds of Wisdom in James 3:13-17

**Who is wise and understanding among you?** Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the **humility** that comes from wisdom.

But if you harbor bitter **envy and selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have **envy and selfish ambition**, there you find **disorder** and **every evil practice**.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all **pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere**. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. (NIV)







# Understanding Biblical Wisdom

## 6. So What? How does all this impact us?

***Information***

***Transformation***

***Action***

**Accurate knowledge**

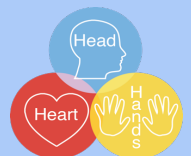


**Wise values**



**Missional Lifestyle**

- We are richly blessed to have the Bible in our language, along with the freedom and opportunity to study and teach it.
  - **Are we faithful stewards of this blessing?**
- Jude saw his church's situation in continuity with Israel's history as the ongoing one people of God.
  - **Do we read the OT like Jude did?**
- Jude speaks frankly and clearly about dangerous teaching and its judgment.
  - **Are we following Jude's example?**





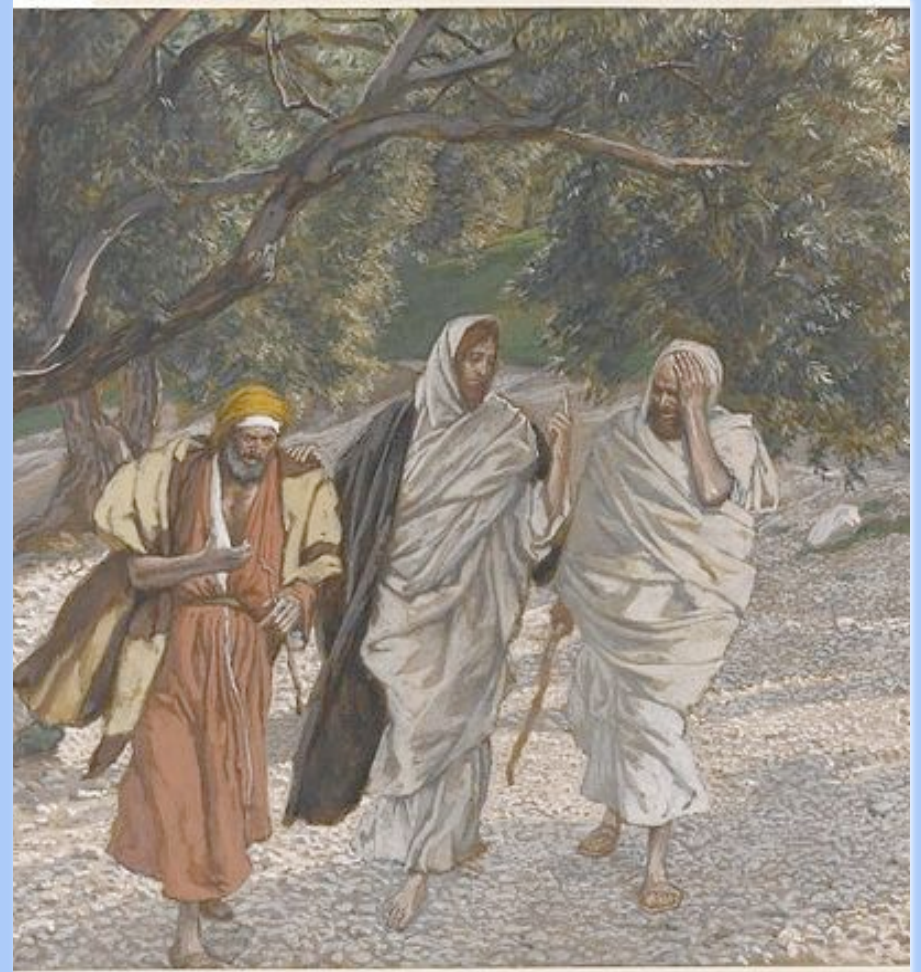
# Understanding Biblical Wisdom

## Luke 24

<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, **he explained to them** what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. . . . <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “**Were not our hearts burning within us while he . . . opened the Scriptures to us?**” . . .

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, “. . . **Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me** in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

<sup>45</sup> **Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.** <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> **You are witnesses of these things.**



James Tissot (1836-1902)

November 13, 2019