

**James 3:13-18.**

Pericles ushered Greece into her Golden Age as did Hammurabi for ancient Babylon, Augustus for Rome, and Solomon for Israel. These men were at the helm when their people enjoyed a time of unusual peace and prosperity.

King Solomon transformed Israel into an economic powerhouse trading vast amounts of goods. Gold poured into the treasury by the tons. Silver was said to be as plentiful as the stones of the street (1 Kings 10:14-29). Israel's armed forces were expanded, alliances were strengthened, and the first temple was built during this time. One might have wondered if days such as these would ever end, but they did. In fact, Israel's Golden Age ended almost overnight.

Solomon followed in his father's footsteps. He started out well with a humble heart before the Lord, and the people were exceedingly blessed. Yet, by the end of his 40-year reign, Solomon had failed as a father, a husband, and as a man of God.

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**"MEN FALL IN PRIVATE LONG BEFORE THEY FALL IN PUBLIC"**

— J.C. RYLE.

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What on earth happened here? The king shifted from godly wisdom to worldly wisdom, from humility to pride. The most egregious example of this is Solomon's accrual of wives. Kings commonly gave their daughters in marriage to ensure peace with other monarchs. Rather than reject this practice, Solomon seemed to think it wise. He had hundreds of wives as a result.

Being wise in his own eyes, he drifted away from the Lord. Solomon's inquisitive mind began to experiment with various sins, and the further he wandered, the more empty his life became. He had such a promising start with the world at his fingertips! Yet, towards the end, Solomon says he "congratulated the dead" (Ecc 4:2). Worldly wisdom led him deeper and deeper into misery.

What is worldly wisdom? James gives us a few characteristics: Worldly wisdom reasons without god, focuses upon oneself, sets aside God's moral standard, and leads to disorder (Jas 3:14-16).

Turning from God's wisdom, Solomon ruined much of his personal life. Sadly, worldly wisdom is what he passed onto his son who became the next king and provoked the people to civil war (1 Kings 12).

James contrasts godly and worldly wisdom in this section. The most striking difference is that godly wisdom has a profound humility before God (Jas 3:13). Had Solomon devoted himself to this wisdom, he would have avoided numerous pitfalls both personally and politically. His life and legacy could have been so much more than it became.

**WISDOM FROM BELOW**

**(JAMES 3:13-16)**

*James 3:13—"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom"*

James asks all who think they're wise and understanding to step forward. The word he uses for "understanding" refers to a specialist, an expert, or a professional. He's confronting those who so eagerly stepped up to be teachers (Jas 3:1). They wanted the position, but what sort of wisdom would they promote?

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" It's a bit sarcastic. James is basically saying: *If you think you're the expert in the church, let's look at your life and see.* What kind of wisdom does the pattern of your life suggest you have?

Worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom might make the same decision at times. For instance, it's wise to build a savings—God's Word affirms this (Prov 6:4-6), and so do countless other sources. The difference between worldly and heavenly wisdom isn't always on the surface. We have to dig down to the foundational level. How do you make decisions? What principles govern your thinking? Why did you choose this or that?

The wisdom of the world is "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (Jas 3:15). It's a self-centered, not God-centered, kind of wisdom. It asks, "How will this deal, that person, this meeting, or that organization help *me*?" "Me" is the end-all of worldly wisdom. James says it's driven by "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" (Jas 3:14). As surely as the Lord looks at the heart, He abhors it.

# Two Kinds of Wisdom

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Godly wisdom will always produce good or moral conduct (Jas 3:13); worldly wisdom might. Where bad or immoral conduct is seen, worldly wisdom was always the source (Jas 3:16). The wisdom from above never chooses an immoral end or means. It is pure through and through from beginning to end.

*But can't the end justify the means?* According to Scripture, moral standards aren't conditional. Lying and stealing are always wrong. No matter how noble our plans may be, they will always be less of an end than the pursuit of God and His glory. If the highest end is to please Him, the means matter.

In the case of Solomon, peace was a noble goal. Yet, he pursued it by marrying hundreds of women. The result in his life and those around him was disorder—just as James says (Jas 3:16). The wisdom from below never ends well, and ultimately, all it does crashes as a house built upon sand (Matt 7:24-27).

## WISDOM FROM ABOVE

(JAMES 3:17-18)

In the final years of Solomon's life he penned Ecclesiastes, a book that displays the fruit of worldly wisdom. Looking back, Solomon concluded that "all is vanity" (Ecc 12:8). He felt his life wasn't worth living, because he finally realized that fulfillment comes only by fearing and following the Lord.

*Ecclesiastes 12:13—"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."*

Heavenly wisdom begins with fearing God (Prov 1:7). Thus, wisdom from above is, first of all, pure (Jas 1:17). It is holy or set-apart from the thought patterns of this world. It loves what God loves and hates what God hates. To the degree that a believer's life reflects this, he or she is walking with the Lord in wisdom.

Worldly wisdom is godless, selfish, immoral, and results in disorder. By contrast, the wisdom from above is God-centered, moral, and orderly.

James gives a list that characterizes heavenly wisdom. Here they are with a brief description of each...

**Peaceable.** Rather than causing fights or inciting conflict, heavenly wisdom strives to make peace where possible.

**Gentle.** Retaliation and revenge are worldly responses. A person with God's wisdom seeks to show kindness. He loves his enemies.

**Reasonable.** As opposed to being stubborn or obstinate, one who's wise is teachable. He's humble enough to change his position and admit error.

**Merciful.** Instead of self-centeredness, God's wisdom desires to meet the needs of others. It looks on suffering with compassion.

**Fruitful.** Godly wisdom yields fruit or results that's pleasing to God and last. Worldly wisdom does not.

**Impartial.** Godly wisdom doesn't vacillate in its dealings with others.

**Sincere.** The wisdom from above is without hypocrisy or disguise.

## A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Roman orator Cicero said, "Wisdom is the best gift of the gods. It is the mother of all good things, the best and that which generates all of the best." True wisdom is a gift from God that generates good things through His people in this world. Worldly wisdom does the opposite.

Some of James' original audience wanted to teach (Jas 3:1), but their selfish, godless, immoral, disorderly conduct proved they shouldn't. The way they lived revealed they hadn't God's wisdom for life. A principle from this is that one's personal life matters very much for any kind of public service.

James has written very practically of the differences between heavenly and worldly wisdom. He challenges us to look at our lives. The one who has God's wisdom, has a humble reverence before the Lord. The fruit of his life is good and pleasing—he is blessed (Psalm 1:1). Seeds of true wisdom scattered about will affect countless lives for good both in this generation and the next. They will produce a "harvest of righteousness" (Jas 3:18).