

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
JANUARY132024

wise beyond his years

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 3; 4; 10.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 1.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

United we stand—but divided we fall.

Around 800 years passed from when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to when Nebuchadnezzar dragged them off to Babylon. We usually think of them as a united people all those years, but the century of monarchy ruled by Saul, David, and Solomon was about as good as it got. Before Saul the Benjamite was anointed and crowned, civil war nearly wiped out his tribe. Even the legendary rule of David was marked by restless dissenters challenging his grip on the throne, first from members of other tribes and Saul loyalists, then within his own family.

Solomon's reign is remarkable not only for Israel's peace with its neighbors, but for its peace within. Before losing his mule and life in battle, big brother Absalom "stole the hearts of the people of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6, NIV) with his good looks and charisma, but for young Solomon it would take more than looks or luck. Having to get by on wits alone no doubt contributed to his asking for wisdom above everything else.

When Solomon solved a custody dispute by suggesting a baby boy be sliced in two (prompting the true parent to give up the child while the faker spitefully agreed to the split), "all Israel . . . held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice" (1 Kings 3:28, NIV). Perhaps today we should be awed that he held a country together for so long, for at his death it was torn, and no king's horses or men ever put it together again.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- *Know* that God desires to bless their talents if they will give Him their lives.
- *Feel* the call to live for God.
- *Respond* by dedicating themselves to God's work.

III. EXPLORE

The Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 1

"The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Everybody lives by one philosophy or another. "He who dies with the most toys wins." "Eat, drink, and be merry." "Greed is good." "All we need is love." "Just trust God." But whether one's personal philosophy is pessimistic or optimistic, rooted in guilt or in gratitude, the question still lingers: What is wisdom? What does it mean to be *wise*?

Have your students read the following texts in as many versions as possible: Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:1–7; Proverbs 8:32–36; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 15:31–33; Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 11:1–3; Isaiah 33:5, 6; Micah 6:8, 9.

What light do these verses shed on the origin of wisdom? How can these words help you make wise decisions in regards to your dating relationships, your choice of friends, and whether or not you will use drugs or alcohol? Discuss and write your students' distinct ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard where everyone can read them.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Seek God's kingdom first, and you'll get everything else." Nice words to live by, but is God faithful when we ask Him for wisdom for everyday life?

Nineteenth-century London preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "Men do not seek God first; God seeks them first; and if any of you are seeking Him today it is because He has first sought you." The great Christians of history weren't all prosperous by worldly standards, but they were all rich in wisdom. They put God first, and people respected them because they respected God. Wisdom brings humility. Ellen White wrote: "I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do" (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 46).

Paul Rusesabagina, who saved the lives of more than 1,200 people during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, grew up watching his wise father quietly command the respect of villagers. "He was usually the elder who spoke last," Rusesabagina remembers. A particularly petty dispute his father resolved, "a small misunderstanding that had blossomed into a full-scale war of pride," stands out in his memory. One farmer's crop had jumped the line onto another man's property, but most was where it should be, so there "was no clear villain or victim. 'Listen, you two,' [my father] said, motioning with the blade of his hand. '*This* is where the line is. Respect it from now on, and respect each other as well. I don't want to hear about this again' " (*An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*, by Paul Rusesabagina. Penguin Books, 2006).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

What's your biggest priority in life? To find true love? To be the greatest at your art, sport, or business? To find yourself?

Solomon's story may seem far removed from us (most people don't find themselves ruler of God's own theocracy, offered anything we desire), but the book of Proverbs makes clear that wisdom is for everybody. Proverbs 30 brings us the wisdom of one Agur, son of Jakeh, with a prayer that any longtime Christian will find familiar:

"Two things I ask of you, LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:7–9, NIV).

How do those verses sum up a Christian perspective on life?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- How did Solomon win his people's approval despite so much intertribal conflict?
- What mistakes do you see Solomon making that will later come back to haunt him?
- The people were happy and prosperous under Solomon. What spiritual dangers does

prosperity bring that can result in poverty?
- How would you describe God's offer to Solomon?
- *Underline* what's new to you in the story.
- *Circle* the words or phrases that best capture the story's various emotions.
- What questions does this story prompt in your thinking?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: James 1:5; Proverbs 2:1–5; 3:13–18; Philippians 1:9.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

In Proverbs, wisdom is next to godliness. Proverbs's themes have been summarized in five major points:

1. Actions have consequences. In God's world good deeds lead to blessing and bad deeds result in negative consequences or punishment. God is passionate about justice.
2. How we treat others and relate to God is as important as the technical things we know.
3. God gives everyone freedom of choice. In contrast to much of Greek philosophy and fear, we are not ruled by fate. The ideal of wisdom is that when people know the good, they will do it.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

More Improvisation

Laugh and learn with some Bible improv. Proverbs's contrasts and vivid imagery provide endless possibilities for improvisational fun. Have one student narrate while others act out some of the "wise vs. fool" descriptions from Proverbs. The lighthearted humor, visual reinforcement, and whole-body learning will cement the principles in their minds like nothing else. For example:

- "The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin" (10:8, NIV).
- "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down" (14:1, NIV).
- "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues" (17:28, NIV).
- "The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down" (21:20, NIV).
- "Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end" (29:11, NIV).

See also Proverbs 6:6–11; 12:27; and other verses throughout the book.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

4. In everything we do we either follow the road of righteousness or the highway of folly, with sure results.
5. Proverbs contrasts the opposite types—the wise and the foolish, the slothful and the studious, the rich and the poor.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10, NIV). It's a familiar text to most Christians, but while archaeologists find parallels between many of the Bible's proverbs and other "wise sayings" in ancient Middle Eastern manuscripts, only the Bible describes wisdom as beginning with worship. Gerald Wheeler writes: "A major difference between nonbiblical wisdom and that of Scripture is that the other wisdom documents taught that one could have success by what one did. The Bible teaches that true success comes from whom one worships. . . . 'The fear of the Lord/God' is a fundamental and widespread image. It combines awe, reverence, faith, and obedience—the whole life of the believers as they relate to God. As His followers live out a concrete expression of their loyalty and faithfulness, they respond to the leading of God, who alone can provide atonement. A truly godly life can only come through God Himself" (*Wisdom: Timeless Treasures from Proverbs*, Review and Herald, 2000, p. 42).

Proverbs focuses primarily on external behavior, for Bible writers believed that what we do reflects who we are. We see this in Proverbs 6:16–19, NIV: "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."

Violence of words and deeds is equally condemned in Proverbs, "For as churning cream produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife" (30:33, NIV).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have your students rewrite specific proverbs, in groups, to apply to their own situations—at school, with parents and siblings, with friends—and in their own words. For example, Proverbs 30:32, 33; Proverbs 28:1, 6–8; Proverbs 13:20–22; Proverbs 11:4–6; Proverbs 11:22–27.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Proverbs are timeless. "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion" (11:22, NIV). You don't have to live in 900 B.C. to come up with an instant association for those words—just look at the nearest tabloid newspaper. "Whoever brings ruin on their family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise" (11:29, NIV). Remind you of anyone you know?

"Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin" (10:10, NIV). "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips" (24:26, NIV). "The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion" (28:1, NIV). Each one is still as true as it's ever been.

Proverbs is one of the most underrated books of the Bible, but it's packed with power for anyone who wants to glorify God and live an outstanding life. James 1:5 says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (NIV). In Proverbs, God gives us some words to live by.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 1.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 3; 4; 10.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 1.

wise beyond his years



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keytext

"I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings."

(1 Kings 3:12, 13, NIV)

flashlight

"The language used by Solomon while praying to God before the ancient altar at Gibeon reveals his humility and his strong desire to honor God. He realized that without divine aid he was as helpless as a little child to fulfill the responsibilities resting on him. He knew that he lacked discernment, and it was a sense of his great need that led him to seek God for wisdom. In his heart there was no selfish aspirations for a knowledge that would exalt him above others. . . . Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed, 'I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in' " (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 30).

what do you think?

Which of the following proverbs do you think people struggle with more? Which ones might you struggle with?

1. "Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways" (Proverbs 3:31, NIV).
2. "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Proverbs 3:11, 12, NIV).
3. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1, NIV).
4. "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues" (Proverbs 17:28, NIV).

did you know?

Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the existence of such later kings as Ahab and Hezekiah. Yet little archaeological evidence of Solomon's reign has been discovered (though areas such as the likely site of Solomon's temple have not been thoroughly excavated). Solomon's story includes about the only biblical reference to any seafaring on the part of Israel.

The book of Kings credits Solomon with some 3,000 proverbs, though only a few are preserved in the Bible, and many of the Bible's proverbs are credited to others, such as the mother of King Lemuel, an otherwise unknown ruler. The proverbs are grouped into sayings such as "Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:6, NIV) and advice such as "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness" (Proverbs 23:4, NIV).

INTO THE STORY

"Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

"The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'

"Solomon answered, 'You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

" 'Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?'

"The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.' Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

"He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court."

"The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy."

(1 Kings 3:3–15; 4:20, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Solomon asked God for wisdom, and what he hadn't asked for—riches and glory—were added as well. What do you think might have happened if he'd asked God for material things instead of wisdom?

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God blessed Solomon's reign with wealth, yet many of his proverbs warn against the dangers of riches. Are financial blessings necessarily a sign of God's favor for His followers today? How should we relate to money as Christians?

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Solomon was fascinated by all kinds of science and natural things. What can the natural world tell us about God? (See Psalm 33:5 for one idea.)

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After Solomon returned to Jerusalem, he threw a party for his people! What does this say to you about the role of celebration in the Christian life?

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How would you define "wisdom"? How is it a "tree of life" as Proverbs describes?

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punch lines

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" **(Proverbs 1:7, NIV).**

"For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" **(Proverbs 2:6, NIV).**

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" **(Proverbs 4:6, 7, NIV).**

"Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD, and humility comes before honor" **(Proverbs 15:33, NIV).**

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" **(Matthew 6:33, NIV).**

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" **(James 1:5, NIV).**

further insight

"Those who today occupy positions of trust should seek to learn the lesson taught by Solomon's prayer. The higher the position a man occupies, the greater the responsibility that he has to bear, the wider will be the influence that he exerts and the greater his need of dependence on God."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 30

Sabbath

Read Proverbs 15:33.

This week's *What Do You Think?* looks at some words of wisdom from Proverbs. Today's reading from Proverbs states: "Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD, and humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 15:33, NIV). How does devotion to God develop wisdom? What's the relationship between humility and wisdom?

Sunday

Read 1 Kings 4:29–30.

The book of 1 Kings describes Solomon as both wise and intelligent, curious about everything around him. Though God doesn't guarantee us material wealth if we follow Him, life usually works better, and we can spare ourselves much pain when we follow God's principles.

Read this week's *Out of the Story*. What are some ways we can become more wise? How do we tell the difference between wisdom and foolishness? In what situations is wisdom particularly necessary?

Monday

Read Proverbs 9:10.

This week's *Key Text* is God's promise to Solomon after he asked for wisdom above anything else God could offer. If someone looked at your priorities, what would they think is most important to you? Do your actions live up to what you believe in? If "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10, NIV), how can you make following God more central in your life?

Tuesday

Read Matthew 23:11, 12.

This week's *Flashlight* quotation addresses the idea of true greatness. Today, as throughout history, people think greatness means possessions, power, or personality. We imagine greatness to mean the clothes we wear, the car we drive, the home we live in, the money we make, the influence we wield, or the attention we command. Solomon's story reminds us, however, that true greatness is rooted in selflessness.

Solomon's number one goal was to serve his people. Looking back at how Israel's two previous kings had tripped over their own importance, forgetting their obligations to God and citizens, Solomon knew that ruling a troubled nation was too great to handle on his own. With such a humble heart, Solomon became the greatest of earthly kings. It was only as he forgot his commitment to God that things began to fall apart.

Jesus came to show us how to serve others, telling us that whatever kindness we do for someone in need, we're doing for Him. Everything we do should be for God's glory—but that requires humility. How can we keep the perspective in today's Bible verses in our everyday lives?

Wednesday

Read Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 2:6–8; 4:6, 7.

Have you ever faced a situation through which you knew you couldn't make it without God's help? If so, how did God make the difference for you?

How does the picture of God in today's Bible verses make you feel? When you look at the tragedies in the world around you, affecting even faithful Christians, do you feel as if God is as trustworthy as these verses describe? How can you reconcile such a Bible promise with the reality that God allows bad things to happen to some of the best people?

The book of Proverbs sometimes personifies wisdom as someone with whom the reader can have a protective relationship. What does this tell you about how ancient cultures valued wisdom?

Thursday

Read Luke 14:7–14.

Solomon described himself as like "a small child" as he faced the enormous challenge of becoming king. Is it possible to be too humble? What role does self-confidence play in a successful life? How does someone balance self-confidence and humility? In what ways is it important for us to be self-confident? In what ways is it important for us to be humble?

How might true humility affect our career and social standing?

Friday

Read James 1:5.

Think of someone you know whom you would describe as wise. Why do you think they are? What situations have they handled particularly wisely? What can you learn from their life that can help you to make wise decisions? How does asking God for wisdom help us in line with today's Bible passage?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 1.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.