



**Sunday School Lesson**  
**Prov. 3:13-18**  
 by Lorin L. Cranford  
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**Wisdom and Things**



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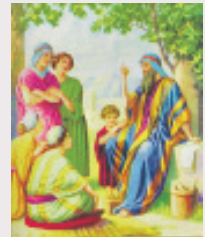
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Wisdom's value and contribution to daily life is the focus of this OT passage from Proverbs. In a materialistic society based on a capitalist economic philosophy, the words of wisdom from the ancient Jewish sage have particular importance and relevance. These words become disturbing to folks living in such a society as ours, because they challenge the very foundations of our world. Here is one of those places where believers find special challenge with the uninevitable tension of being "in the world but not of the world." Even within U.S. society among non-Christians, especially the Gen-X crowd, the emptiness of a life built mainly, or solely, around things is taking a heavy toll and growing numbers are rejecting a materialistic life in favor of alternative life-styles. All too often, however, the choice of one of the alternative life-styles moves in the direction of some sort of foggy spirituality based on a distorted form of eastern mysticism. Lots of it gets labeled "New Age" but that label has pretty much become meaningless and mostly serves as a "catch all" label for anything that doesn't fit into a neat pigeonhole. Much of the rejection of materialism in our society is energized by alternatives that make little or no demands upon individuals. By adopting a non-materialistic philosophy I don't have to "keep up with the Joneses" in house, car, salary etc. I can simply do "what feels good." Something as destructive as crass materialism.



On one side stands this side of American society, to whom "things" mean very little. But, on the other side, stands another segment deeply caught up in a passionate pursuit of things. Bigger houses, fancier cars, higher salaries etc. -- all these and more define one's life both philosophically and in day-to-day living. To see how prevalent this is just travel to more affluent neighborhoods in any reasonably large city in our country. Or, watch TV ads, especially the one where the fellow talks about "being in debt up to his neck" and has trouble paying his bills month to month. A dangerously large segment of American society falls into this category.

To both segments of our society, this passage in Proverbs has much to say. The challenge is to clearly hear these words of sacred scripture and then incorporate them into our living.

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**I Context**

The literary nature of the content of Proverbs poses special challenges to the Bible student. The short pithy nature of most of the "sayings" in the book reflect timeless truths that came out of the ancient world and reflect that world's perception of reality and how life "was supposed to work." The wisdom viewpoint of the Jewish people was deeply connected to similar approaches found in other Semitic cultures of that time, along with profound impact from Egyptian wisdom perspectives. Thus, in deep serious study of these biblical texts consideration of parallel concepts in extant texts from these materials is critical to correct understanding. Also helpful is the tracing of parallel texts from the OT wisdom material, found

mostly in Proverbs and Psalms but including Job, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes, through the large body of intertestamental Jewish wisdom literature that surfaced during the four centuries between the writing of the Old and New Testaments, principal among these are Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. To see how concepts often changed on the same subject during that period is very informative.

Within the limits our or study space, attention will be given to these matters as they surface in the words of [Prov. 3:13-18](#).

### a. Historical

**External History.** As is so often the case with ancient literature, identifying the external history of an Old Testament document is particularly difficult. Such is the case with the book of Proverbs.

The starting point for an examination of the origin of these proverbs is [Prov. 1:1-7](#):

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: 2 For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, 3 for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young— 5 let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill, 6 to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. 7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Although the proverbs are attributed to Solomon, uncertainty exists over whether this was intended for the entire document, or for the first section (chaps. 1-9) of long poems. Careful examination of the contents of the entire document will argue overwhelmingly for a variety of sources including borrowing from the wisdom of the surrounding cultures, especially the Egyptian wisdom tradition. Given the long time connection of the Jews with the Egyptians beginning with the four hundred years in Egypt from Joseph onward, one should not be surprised of this influence. Additionally, the subheadings of the sections found in chapters 10-31 (see [Literary Setting](#) below) indicate sources beyond Solomon. Most OT scholars agree with the assessment of Harold C. Washington in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (3rd ed.; HB 904):

The book is typical of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and also of the ancient Near East, especially Egypt. In face of this, most scholars agree that 22.17-23.11 is in some way depended upon the 'Instruction' of the Egyptian sage, Amen-em-ope (ca. 1100 BCE). Royal scribes are responsible for much of the material in Proverbs hence the sayings sometimes reflect an elite point of view. But the learned editors of the book also preserve the folk wisdom of ancient Israelite village and extended families.

In earlier personal studies of ancient Jewish wisdom

literature in comparison to ancient Semitic and Egyptian materials while at the university of Bonn Germany in the earlier 1980s I found enormous confirmation of these viewpoints. As we worked our way through this huge pile of extant literature in the Forlesung class of Prof. Otto Plöger, I discovered amazing parallels of the material in Proverbs to this larger wisdom tradition of the ancient Middle East. One would want to note that both similarities and distinctives exist in such a comparison. The Hebrew sages certainly had a distinct view which was shaped by their religious heritage.

More helpful is the assessment of the intended objective of this material. As [Prov. 1:8](#) suggests, this material was primarily targeting young Jewish men to help them learn to make good decisions and avoid bad decisions as they charted their way through life. The writing strategy was to present wisdom as a "vibrant feminine personification of divine Wisdom" (Washington, *NOAB*). She thus stood opposed to both foolish woman (chap. 9) and to the dangerous figure of a "strange woman" (chaps. 2, 5, 7).

In ancient Hebrew culture where a young boy wasn't considered of marriageable age (=an adult) until his 30th birthday, the later teen years and the twenties of his youth were fraught with mine fields morally. Sexual relations were technically forbidden by the Law until marriage, but youthful passions reached a feverous pitch during this period of his life. Temptations to force himself on young women would be substantial, but most young girls were married by their early teen years.

The dangers of doing this were enormous both to him personally and to the reputation of his family. The OT Code prescribed execution in most situations of this nature. The other temptation was to purchase the services of a prostitute. The widespread practice of this serves as a background for the portrayal of the "strange woman" who posed enormous dangers for him as the admonitions within the book of Proverbs make clear. In ancient Israelite so-



ciety this sexual activity sometimes found “legitimation” through the services of “sacred” prostitutes who were a part of the worship of various Canaanite gods and goddesses, most especially in the worship of Baal.

## b. Literary

**Genre.** Different levels of literary form exist in these verses. Generally speaking, they are a part of what is universally labeled [Wisdom literature](#). The Introduction to Proverbs, [1:1-7](#), helps define this distinct literary pattern. The article on “Wisdom” in the Harpers Bible Dictionary provides a helpful summary:

This literature has characteristic traits: (1) There is an absence of reference to the typical salvation beliefs, such as the patriarchal promises, the Exodus, the Sinai covenant, etc. (2) The object of the Hebrew sage is to transmit the lessons of experience, so that one may learn to cope with life. The teaching inculcates certain goals, such as self-control (especially in speech), honesty, diligence, etc. If one follows the counsels of the sage, wisdom will bring life; its opposite, folly—a practical, not merely intellectual folly—brings destruction. (3) A characteristic problem is retribution, the way in which the wise/foolish (i.e., virtuous/wrongdoers) are treated. Proverbs upholds the optimistic view shared by such books as Deuteronomy but disputed by Job and Ecclesiastes. (4) Certain literary forms are cultivated: the discrete, separate saying, which is usually a pithy expression in two parallel lines; the admonition, whether positive or negative, which is often accompanied by a motivation; wisdom poems (typical of Prov. 1-9); and reflections (characteristic of Ecclesiastes). Job is dominated by disputation speeches between the protagonist and the three friends (chaps. 3-31).

The major vehicle through which these ideas are expressed is ancient Hebrew poetry. This is the reason virtually all modern English translations of Proverbs will format their translation in modern English poetic form. In our passage, two types of parallel expressions are especially prominent: synonymous and step parallelism. In synonymous parallelism the second line (strophe) merely restates the point of the first line, but uses different words or mental pictures in order to place higher emphasis upon the core idea in both lines. For example:

Happy are those who find wisdom,  
and those who get understanding,

In step parallelism the second line advances the idea of the first line to a new level:

She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
those who hold her fast are called happy.

**Internal History.** Inside 3:13-18 only the “virtuous woman” surfaces who personifies divine Wisdom. The foolish woman and the strange woman are not present, but in the larger context stand in the shadows providing a reference point to highlight the value of the virtuous woman.

In this passage, note the word “happy” as the first word in 3:13 and as the last word in 3:18, from the two examples above. This beautiful structure serves to tie the material together in verses 13-18 as a literary unit, that is, a pericope in a hymnic poem.

**Literary Setting.** The understanding of how the book of Proverbs is structured both grows out of and impacts one's view of the [External History](#) of the document. This focuses especially on 1:1-7, which serves as an Introduction and begins with a designation of Solomon as the sources of the proverbs. General agreement among OT scholars is that the basic structure of the document revolves around two foundational sections: chaps 1-9 and 10-31, with subsections in the second section. This is helpfully summarized in the *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (“Proverbs, Book of”):

**Proverbs, the**, an OT book bearing a traditional title, ‘Proverbs of Solomon,’ which disguises the fact that this work is made up of several collections of sayings and poems, as indicated by the presence of other sub-titles.

### OUTLINE OF CONTENTS

#### *The Proverbs*

The book is best outlined as a series of collections:

- I. Wisdom poems (1:1-9:18)
- II. Wisdom sayings (10:1-22:16)
- III. Admonitions (22:17-24:22)
- IV. ‘Sayings of the wise’ (24:23-34)
- V. ‘Proverbs of Solomon’: wisdom sayings (25:1-29:27)
- VI. ‘The words of Agur’ (30:1-33)
- VII. ‘The words of Lemuel’ (31:1-9)
- VIII. Poem on the ideal wife (31:10-31)

Prov. 3:13-18 thus falls in this first section of chaps. 1-9, the longer “Wisdom poems.” This section of Proverbs, 1:8-9:18, consists “of extended poems in second-person address, with commands and admonitions usually completed by motive clauses. Personified Wisdom and her opposites, the ‘strange woman’ and the foolish woman, are prominent” (Washington, *NOAB*).

Typically verses 19-20 are included with vv. 13-18 but as a sub-section. This is largely due to the continuation of the focus on wisdom, while verse 21 shifts focus to “my son” and the second person admonition structure. The emphasis upon God's use of wisdom to create and sustain the world in these

verses builds off the introductory depiction of wisdom in 1:7a: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Wisdom is inseparably linked to God and His wisdom as reflected in creation. Later on this same principle will surface in the New Testament in [James 3:17](#):

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.” True wisdom is connected to God and provides understanding about how life works with the impact of shaping our living based on those insights from God, the Creator of that life.

## II. Message

**Literary Structure.** The flow of ideas inside verses 13-18 moves along through a series of parallel expression largely around the foundational theme of the value of lady wisdom. Thus setting up an outline of the passage artificially imposes a division of thought structure. The spiral figure on the right more closely represents the thought flow in the passage. We will therefore treat the passage as a whole in this pattern of thought structure.

### a. The value of Lady Wisdom, vv. 13-18

#### LXX

<sup>13</sup>μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὃς εὕρει σοφίαν καὶ θνητὸς ὃς εἶδεν φρόνησιν <sup>14</sup>κρεῖττον γὰρ αὐτὴν ἔμπορεύεσθαι ἢ χρυσίου καὶ ἀργυρίου θησαυρούς <sup>15</sup>τιμιωτέρα δὲ ἐστὶν λίθων πολυτελῶν οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται αὐτῇ οὐδὲν ποιηρόν εὐγνωστός ἐστιν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐγγίζουσιν αὐτῇ πᾶν δὲ τίμιον οὐκ ἄξιον αὐτῆς ἐστὶν <sup>16</sup>μηκος γὰρ βίου καὶ ἔτη ζωῆς ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτῆς ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀριστερᾷ αὐτῆς πλοῦτος καὶ δόξα ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῆς ἐκπορεύεται δικαιοσύνη νόμον δὲ καὶ ἔλεον ἐπὶ γλώσσης φορεῖ <sup>17</sup>αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτῆς ὁδοὶ καλαί καὶ πάντες οἱ τρίβοι αὐτῆς ἐν εἰρήνῃ <sup>18</sup>ξύλον ζωῆς ἐστὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀντεχομένοις αὐτῆς καὶ τοῖς ἐπεριδομένοις ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς ἐπὶ κύριον ἀσφαλῆς



#### NASB

13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. 14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

#### NRSV

13 Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, 14 for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

#### NLT

13 Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. 14 For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. 15 Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. 17 She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. 18 Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.



## Notes:

The set of six couplets begins in verse thirteen with a beatitude couched in synonymous parallelism:

Happy are  
those who find wisdom,  
and those who get understanding,

אֲשֶׁר  
אִדָּם מִצְאָה חִכְמָה  
וְאִדָּם יִפְיֵק תְּבוּנָה

A blessing is pronounced on the individuals who find wisdom, which is the same thing as getting understanding. It is just expressed in different words for emphasis sake.

The **wisdom beatitude** form here stresses individual experience of wisdom. Beatitudes in the Old Testament have a range of emphasis, as C.H. Toy (ICC) notes:

The beatitudes of Prov. all (with the exception of 16:20) relate to the individual moral life, standing thus in contrast with those of the legal and historical books (and  $\psi$  32:12, 146:5, Eccl. 10:17) which refer to national life, and to those of the Psalter, which, with a few exceptions, have a personal-religious tone.

Here the emphasis initially is upon the young man gaining wisdom. Ultimately, application extends to every person seeking to serve God. The two verbal subjects “those who” reflect the same Hebrew word אָדָם (adam). The LXX mistranslates the Hebrew text by using ἀνθρώπος in the first instance and θνητός in the second instance, leaving room for understanding these as two separate individuals. Thus the two lines of the Hebrew poetic expression refer to the same individual(s), not two different persons.

The beatitude pronounces God’s blessing upon everyone who seeks wisdom and understanding. The blessing is indeed a happy life. But this happiness is much more than a good feeling about life. The sense of deep satisfaction that comes from being in harmony with God and His creation is the point. Life only becomes “blessed” when it is lived out within God’s will. [Prov. 2:1-11](#) makes this clear:

1 My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; 3 if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; 4 if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures— 5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 he stores

up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, 8 guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones. 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; 10 for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 prudence will watch over you; and understanding will guard you.

Whether this wisdom is obtained by individual effort or as a gift from God is not specified here. Since the line of demarcation between these two sources was not clearly drawn in Proverbs, one should not make a lot of distinction here. What we seek is what God grants. The two verbal expressions, “find” (LXX: εὕρεν; MT: מִצְאָה), and “get” (LXX: εἶδεν; MT: יִפְיֵק) denote an active seeking and receiving. The first Hebrew verb, מִצְאָה, means to reach and to possess, while the second verb, יִפְיֵק, means to obtain.

What is it that we are to seek? “Wisdom” and “understanding” are stressed here. חִכְמָה (wisdom) in Proverbs stresses moral and religious behavior, while תְּבוּנָה (understanding) places emphasis on comprehension of life. Thus our grasp of how God intends for life to work is linked to making correct ethical and religious decisions in the living out of life. We are smart enough to know what to do, and also are wise enough to do it. These two elements combined together are what we are to seek and what God desires to grant us.

Ms. Wisdom then offers something of tremendous value. Don’t forget the feminine imagery behind these words for wisdom and understanding.



What follows in verses 14-15 is **two sets of comparisons** highlighting the superiority of what Dame Wisdom offers in comparison to that offered by the foolish or “strange” woman. To the young Jewish male in his twenties this comparison hit home with points of relevance to him at that stage of life especially. To twentieth first century Americans in a highly materialistic culture most of the same points continue to serve as points of temptation and allurements.

The first couplet in verse fourteen compares her “income” (מִסְחָר) to silver and her “revenue” (תְּבוּאוֹתֶיהָ) to gold. The Hebrew text is capable of a

variety of possible meanings, as Toy (ICC) notes:

Literally: for her acquisition is better than the acquisition of silver, and her revenue than gold. The expression rendered *her acquisition* may mean the acquiring her, or what she acquires (her gain, profit), or what she produces (= the gain that one gets from her), or her trade, or trading in her (= RV. the merchandise of it, the word merchandise being used in the now obsolete sense of commerce). The meaning seems to be fixed by the second clause, in which her revenue must signify either what comes to her (her income), or what she yields to her possessor (the income from her); the second of these senses is supported by the connection, in which the topic is the advantage that man derives from wisdom, and by the similar passage 8:19 *my fruit is better than gold and my revenue than silver*, that is, as v. 17 suggests, what she has to offer to her followers.

The commercial tone here seems to favor the idea of wisdom's benefits, that is, what she provides to the one who acquires her. Note the similar passage in [Prov. 8:19](#): "My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver." Also see [Mt. 13:44-46](#) in the New Testament: "44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Thus she can provide something far more valuable than money. In an ancient world where money -- silver and gold -- stood as one of the three symbols of wealth and power, wisdom stood above even this in value and importance. In modern culture where seeking money as the vehicle to wealth so dominates our capitalist society, most have great trouble accepting the premise that anything is more important than money.

The second comparison in verse fifteen asserts that wisdom is more precious than jewels:

She is more precious than **jewels**,  
and **nothing you desire** can compare with her.

יְקָרָהּ הִיא (מִפְּנִיִּים) [מִפְּנִינִים]  
וְכֹל־חֲפִצֵּיךָ לֹא יִשׁוּבֶנָּה

The Hebrew word translated by the NRSV as "jewels" normally means "corals" and thus sometimes is rendered in English as "rubies" rather than the more generalized "jewels." As R.E. Murphy (*Word Biblical Commentary*) notes: "The precise nature of פְּנִינִים, "rubies" (also translated as "corals"), is unclear, but they are associated with gold also in 20:15. Wisdom

is clearly superior to any material gain that precious objects could achieve." This comparison of wisdom to precious metals is rather common in Proverbs, reflecting an anti-materialistic stance. Especially see [Prov. 2:9](#): "if you seek it [wisdom] like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures."

The haunting question coming out of these comparisons is whether we value this kind of wisdom even as much as our valuable things? Much less more than? Knowing how God has structured life and being able to live by that structure -- just how important is that to us? To be sure, in Proverbs material prosperity is not condemned as inherently evil. Right the opposite, on occasion Proverbs will assume that wisdom will lead to wealth, as in [10:4-5](#):

- 4 A slack hand causes poverty,  
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
- 5 A child who gathers in summer is prudent,  
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.

But the material wealth that grows out of true wisdom is a wealth that is kept in proper perspective. It is the blessing of God, and not the product of one's own cleverness apart from God. It therefore never becomes the object of worship and devotion that belongs exclusively to God. Wisdom keeps us from making an idol out of material wealth.

In verses 16-17, the **benefits of wisdom** are set forth.

- Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honor.
- Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.

אֶרֶךְ יָמִים בְּיְמִינָהּ  
בְּשִׁמְאוּלָהּ עֵשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד  
דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי־נְעָם  
וְכֹל־נִתְיֹבֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם

Literally "length of days" are promised to those seeking wisdom. Lady Wisdom holds them in her right hand. In her left hand she holds "riches and honor." The background of



this personification of Lady Wisdom is most likely the Egyptian tradition of the [goddess Ma'at](#) who was the symbol of truth in Egyptian religious tradition. Sometimes in ancient inscriptions she is depicted with the sign of life, an *ankh*, in one hand and a royal scepter in the other, a sign of riches and honor. For the Egyptians Ma'at kept balance in life and in eternity. For the Hebrew sage, not Ma'at but Lady Wisdom was the one who kept balance in life.

Wisdom lengthens one's life since she provides insight into how to make the right choices in life. Riches and honor she provides to the wise since they in her wisdom know how to properly use them, and not destroy themselves with these potent possessions. Length of days is sometimes associated with riches and honor in the Old Testament; note this in regard to David at his death in [1 Chron. 29:26-28](#): "26 Thus David son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27 The period that he reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 28 *He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor; and his son Solomon succeeded him.*" The potential destructiveness of riches and honor may very well be signaled by Lady Wisdom holding them in her left hand -- the hand of darkness in the ancient world. Length of days is in her right hand, the hand of power and strength. But she possesses both and in her comes the ability to control and wisely use them for a full, complete life.

The second couplet (v. 17) moves the image of what her hands possess to where her feet walk. Two roads ("[ways](#)" & "[paths](#)") are the ones that she travels: pleasantness and peace. Thus, those seeking wisdom will walk in her paths as they seek her.

The first path is "pleasantness" ([נעים](#)). The Hebrew noun is translated, in its limited OT use, as "beauty," "delightfulness," "favor," et als. The attractiveness and the derived satisfaction of this path is what is being emphasized. This path is also "peace" ([שלום](#)). The Hebrew Shalom, which is used here, connoted peace in outward circumstance of one's life. The combining of these images -- pleasantness and peace -- in synonymous parallelism underscores a foundational principle. Peace in life is one of the most attractive qualities to be experienced. In a violence filled world, the paths of peace become all the more desirable. This was certainly true in a violent ancient world, and unfortunately remains true in our contemporary world. Any religion that advocates violence instead of peace has no claim of connection to the God of the Bible.

In the spiraling thought flow of vv. 13-18, the climax is reached in verse 18, especially with the return to the beatitude form in 18b:

She is a tree of life to *those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.*

The imagery now turns first to a characterization of Wisdom. What is her nature? She is a "tree of life." In virtually every ancient culture some version of a [tree of life](#) image existed. Basic to human existence is the desire to define life and its source. In the OT, [the image](#) is used in two distinct ways. In the second creation narrative of Genesis two and three, the tree of life was placed in the Garden of Eden and became the symbolic expression of life that transcended death (Gen. 2:9): "Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, *the tree of life* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This theological/philosophical meaning corresponds to the usage in most other ancient cultures. [Elsewhere](#) in the OT, notably the four uses in Proverbs, the image does not go back to the theologically oriented tree of life in Genesis, but has the broader, less theological meaning of "source of life." The life here is life during one's earthly existence, not the life that transcends death as declared in Genesis. Various trees of life are asserted in Proverbs: wisdom (3:18); fruit of righteousness (11:30); fulfilled desire (13:12); and a gentle tongue (15:4). To be sure, these subsequent references build off the foundational concept of wisdom as the fundament tree of life.

Thus the image of "tree of life" in verse 18 serves to sum up the qualities of life claimed for wisdom in the preceding verses. To possess wisdom is to possess life in its fullness as God intended in creation.

One trait asserted in the two Hebrew verbals "lay hold of" ([חזק](#)) and "hold her fast" ([תגמד](#)) underscore her illusiveness. She doesn't wait passively for the seeker to capture. She must be pursued like one courting his lover. The seeker of wisdom must exert considerable effort and attention to gaining and retaining Lady Wisdom.

Finally, we come back to the beginning emphasis on blessedness in the final strophe of verse eighteen. The blessedness sought in the beginning is now achieved in gaining Lady Wisdom. As the expression of God's perspective on life, we have come to possess a perspective on life directly from its Creator. As such, we now are in a position to approach and enjoy life to its fullest. God help us to pursue Lady Wisdom with all our might! She is no foolish or loose woman like so many chase after!

**LXX**

<sup>13</sup>μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὃς εὕρει σοφίαν καὶ θιητὸς ὃς εἶδεν φρόνησιν <sup>14</sup>κρείττον γὰρ αὐτὴν ἐμπορεύεσθαι ἢ χρυσίου καὶ ἀργυρίου θησαυρούς <sup>15</sup>τιμιωτέρα δὲ ἐστὶν λίθων πολυτελών οὐκ ἀντιτάξεται αὐτῇ οὐδὲν ποιηρὸν εὐγνωστός ἐστιν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐγγίζουσιν αὐτῇ πᾶν δὲ τίμιον οὐκ ἄξιον αὐτῆς ἐστὶν <sup>16</sup>μηκος γὰρ βίου καὶ ἔτη ζωῆς ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτῆς ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀριστερᾷ αὐτῆς πλοῦτος καὶ δόξα ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῆς ἐκπορεύεται δικαιοσύνη νόμον δὲ καὶ ἔλεον ἐπὶ γλώσσης φορεῖ <sup>17</sup>αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτῆς ὁδοὶ καλαὶ καὶ πάντες οἱ τρίβοι αὐτῆς ἐν εἰρήνῃ <sup>18</sup>ξύλον ζωῆς ἐστὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀντεχομένοις αὐτῆς καὶ τοῖς ἐπερειδομένοις ἐπ' αὐτὴν ὡς ἐπὶ κύριον ἀσφαλῆς

**NASB**

13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. 14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

**NRSV**

13 Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, 14 for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

**NLT**

13 Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. 14 For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. 15 Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. 17 She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. 18 Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.



### Hebrew Text:

13 אֲשֶׁרֵי אֶדְרֹם לְמַצָּא חֵכְמָה וְאֶדְרֹם יִפְיֵק תְּבוּנָהּ<sup>14</sup> כִּי טוֹב  
סִחְרָהּ מִסִּחְרֵי כֶסֶף וּמִחֲרוֹץ תְּבוּאֹתָהּ  
15 יְקָרָהּ הִיא (מִפְּנִינִים) [מִפְּנִינִים] וְכֹל־חֲפֵצֶיךָ לֹא יִשׁוּבֶהָ  
16 אַרְךְ יָמִים בְּיַמֶּינָהּ בְּשִׂמְאוֹלָהּ עֵשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד  
17 דְרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי־נְעָם וְכֹל־נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם  
18 עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתִמְכֶיהָ מֵאֲשֶׁר פ

### Brenton Translation of LXX:

<sup>13</sup> Blessed is the man who has found wisdom, and the mortal who knows prudence. <sup>14</sup> For it is better to traffic for her, than for treasures of gold and silver. <sup>15</sup> And she is more valuable than precious stones: no evil thing shall resist her: she is well known to all that approach her, and no precious thing is equal to her in value. <sup>16</sup> For length of existence and years of life are in her right hand; and in her left hand are wealth and glory: {03:16A} out of her mouth proceeds righteousness, and she carries law and mercy upon her tongue. <sup>17</sup> Her ways are good ways, and all her paths are peaceful. <sup>18</sup> She is a tree of life to all that lay hold upon her; and she is a secure help to all that stay themselves on her, as on the Lord.

### Modern Greek Text:

<sup>13</sup> Μακάριος ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὅστις εὗρηκε σοφίαν, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὅστις ἀπέκτησε σύνεσιν. <sup>14</sup> Διότι τὸ ἐμπόριον αὐτῆς εἶναι καλῆτερον παρὰ τὸ ἐμπόριον τοῦ ἀργυρίου καὶ τὸ κέρδος αὐτῆς παρὰ χρυσοῦ καθαρόν. <sup>15</sup> Εἶναι τιμιωτέρα πολυτίμων λίθων· καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἐπιθυμῆσης δὲν εἶναι ἀντάξια αὐτῆς. <sup>16</sup> Μακρότης ἡμερῶν εἶναι ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτῆς· ἐν τῇ ἀριστερᾷ αὐτῆς, πλοῦτος καὶ δόξα. <sup>17</sup> Αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτῆς εἶναι ὁδοὶ τερπναὶ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ τρίβοι αὐτῆς εἰρήνη. <sup>18</sup> Εἶναι δένδρον ζωῆς εἰς τοὺς ἐναγκαλιζομένους αὐτήν· καὶ μακάριοι οἱ κρατοῦντες αὐτήν.

### NIV (1984 US)

<sup>13</sup>Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, <sup>14</sup>for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. <sup>15</sup>She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. <sup>16</sup>Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. <sup>17</sup>Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. <sup>18</sup>She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

### New Jerusalem Bible

13 Blessed are those who have discovered wisdom, those who have acquired understanding! 14 Gaining her is more rewarding than silver, her yield is more valuable than gold. 15 She is beyond the price of pearls, nothing you could covet is her equal. 16 In her right hand is length of days; in her left hand, riches and honour. 17 Her ways are filled with delight, her paths all lead to contentment. 18 She is a tree of life for those who hold her fast, those who cling to her live happy lives.

### Bible in Basic English

<sup>13</sup> Happy is the man who makes discovery of wisdom, and he who gets knowledge. <sup>14</sup> For trading in it is better than trading in silver, and its profit greater than bright gold. <sup>15</sup> She is of more value than jewels, and nothing for which you may have a desire is fair in comparison with her. <sup>16</sup> Long life is in her right hand, and in her left are wealth and honour. <sup>17</sup> Her ways are ways of delight, and all her goings are peace. <sup>18</sup> She is a tree of life to all who take her in their hands, and happy is everyone who keeps her.