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Wise and Foolish Speech

12: 15-28

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

The wise: Lady Wisdom shouts in the streets, she lifts her voice in the square. She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered at the city gate. How long will you mockers delight in your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge (1:20-23)?

The foolish: They hated knowledge and did not choose to fear ADONAI. They would not accept my counsel, and spurned my rebuke. So they will eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes. For the simple turn away from Me to their own demise. Fools are destroyed by their own complacency (1:29-32).

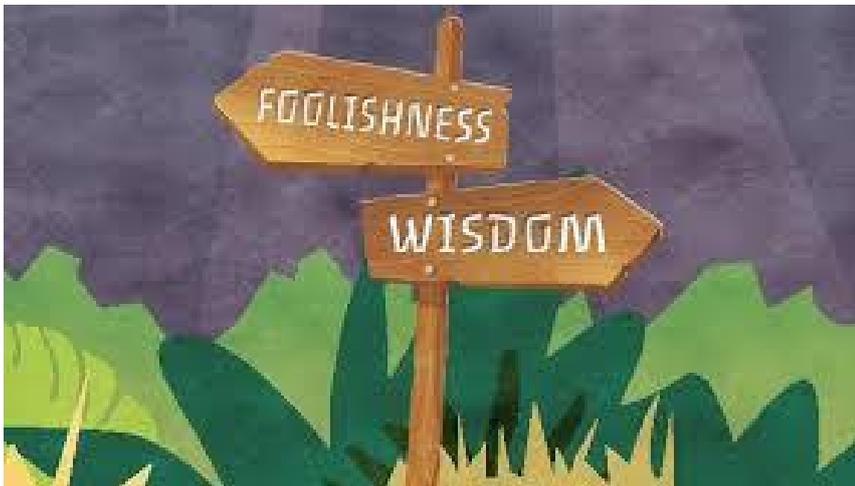
I am amazed at the difference among believers when it comes to accepting instruction. Some never seem to learn. Many believers remain keenly aware of **God's** leading, submitting to every nuance of **His** internal prompting, but many other followers of **Messiah** insist on learning the hard way. They are exposed to the same truths year after year, but **wisdom** fails to soak in. Multiple warnings from family and friends go unheeded. Brushes with disaster fail to alter their course. Even as they sit in the rubble of sin's consequences, they typically ask, "How did this happen? Why am I suffering?" When we look at the **three types of people** in Scripture, we can understand these people struggle with a common problem. They are people of opposition; they oppose **God's** instruction. These rebels come in three varieties, each described in **Proverbs** by **Solomon** and **his fellow wise men**.

The simple minded: They are insensitive to danger or evil (7:6-9 and 22); they do not foresee or even consider the consequences of **their** decisions (9:16-18); **they** are gullible and lack discernment (14:15); **they** fail to learn, repeating the

same mistakes time and again **(22:3)**.

The fool: They are absolutely convinced that **they** can get along without **God**. Appearing to be rational, **they** participate in nothing more than modern day idolatry. **They** create an idol for **themselves** and then convince themselves it has supernatural power **(Isaiah 44:16-17)**.

The mocker: They won't listen to words of correction because **they** don't believe in **God**. **They mock** because **they** refuse to acknowledge **God's** sovereignty. This character trait rejects all submission to authority and affects all of **their** relationships **(9:7-8, 13:1, 22:10)**.²⁵⁶



The way of fools seems right to them (12:15a NIV) and are not sensitive enough to realize the problem with their lives. **They** are self-opinionated and reject advice. **Wisdom** teachers were suspicious of those who thought **themselves** wise in **their** own eyes and were not open to outside criticism and just kept marching forward to **their** own destruction. **But the wise listen to advice (12:15b NIV)**. **They** are willing to pay attention to advice gathered along the way. **The proverb** is about remaining open to the counsel of other people, which involves humility and lack of pride.

A fool is quick tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted (12:16 NLT). Doing this in the heat of anger, **he** arouses contention. This **proverb** values staying calm over impulsive displays of emotion. Thus, it is similar to those **proverbs** that value **silence** over **much speech (10:14, 13:3 and 16, 17:27-28)**. **Prudence (1:4)** is the ability to regulate one's emotional display for

one's own advantage. **The wise person depends on the integrity of his life and it does not fail him. This verse expresses a thought common in Proverbs: the instability of the fool and the security of the righteous of the TaNaKh. The wicked die and disappear, but the family of the godly stands firm (12:7).**

An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies (12:17 NIV). The setting seems most natural in a court of law, though the principle may be applied outside the courtroom, the consequences of lying in a legal setting make the contrast even more dramatic. This theme is so important that it is often repeated throughout **the book (6:19, 14:5 and 25, 19:5 and 9, 21:28)**. The point may be summarized by saying, on the one hand, **the wise** speak **the truth** and therefore **their speech** is just. On the other hand, **false witnesses** are **deceitful** and thus **their** words twist **the truth**.²⁵⁷

Idle talk can pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise can heal (12:18 CJB). Reckless words cause damage, here depicted in a vivid image of piercing like a sword. Truthful words endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only for a moment (12:19 NIV). The tongue, or idle talk, harms through insults and negative comments. It can demean people and, like **a sword**, injure others. Boasting is ultimately a self-injuring form of **speech**. **Solomon** says that **fools** spout pride, but **the wise** protect **themselves** from this danger **(14:3)**. Comparable to the sin of **the evil tongue** (gossip), reckless talk slashes the heart of another like **a sword**. In contrast, **the tongue of the wise heals relationships. According to Rashi, unlike idle talk, truthful words will endure, as the Talmud (Shabbat 104a) says, "Truth stands while falsehood does not stand."** And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires **(2 Peter 1:4)**.²⁵⁸

Deceit fills the heart of those plotting evil; joy fills the heart of those planning peace (12:20 Hebrew). Deceit in the hearts of **those** who **plan evil** is also the topic of **11:1, 12:5 and 17**. They don't care for **the truth**; **they** are happy to deceive others or even **themselves**. On the other hand, **joy** comes to **the peacemakers**. The difference between **plotting evil** and **planning peace** seems to be that the former leads to social chaos, **while the counselors of peace work for a harmonious society, and their endeavors bring them a feeling of joy.**

No harm can come to the righteous, but the wicked are overwhelmed with evil (12:21 CJB). This statement taken alone is quite bold. It simply says that the righteous person will avoid the pitfalls of life, but the wicked person will not escape trouble. However, anyone with a little life experience realizes that this cannot be taken as an ironclad promise. Nor can it be used as a kind of barometer of righteousness of other people in the way that Job's three friends did. As stated above, it is important to note that **proverbs** are not promises; **they** are generally true principles, all other things being equal. It is more likely that life will be easier for **the righteous** (who has Torah as **his** blueprint for living), than it is for the **wicked**, following the desires of **his** sin nature. This verse deals with the issue of retribution (**to see link click [Bv](#) - Security Through Righteousness**). The intention behind this principle is to encourage **righteous** behavior rather than **wicked** behavior.

Lying words are an abomination to ADONAI, but He delights in those who tell the truth (12:22 Hebrew). Many times in the book of **Proverbs** we hear that **lies** are **evil** and **truth** is **godly**. It is a fundamental principle of **the book** that **words** ought to reflect reality of the heart (**16:23** and **18:4**) as well as the reality in the world. Here, the principle is stated with great force by using the phrase **an abomination to ADONAI**. The opposite of this is the phrase **His favor** as seen in **11:1**.

A prudent person doesn't make a show of their knowledge, but fools broadcast their foolishness (12:23 NLT). This **proverb** draws a contrast between **a prudent person** and **a fool**. **Prudence** is a word associated with **wisdom (1:4)**. **The prudent person** conceals **their knowledge**, while the fool proclaims **their** stupidity. We would expect the opposite! But the idea fits the humility/pride theme of **the book (3:5** and **7, 21:4, 25:6-7, etc)**. It's not that **prudent people** don't act on **their knowledge**; **they** just don't make a big deal about **it**. But, by proclaiming **their** stupidity, **fools** let everyone realize just how stupid they are. The idea expressed by this **proverb** is similar to another important theme in **the book**, the contrast between the silence of **the wise person** and the chattiness of **the fool (10:14, 12:18** etc).

Those who work hard become leaders, while those who are lazy become slaves (12:24 Hebrew). We have already learned in **10:4** that **idle hands bring poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth**. The contrasts in these two verses support the larger teaching in **Proverbs** that pits a negative view of **laziness** over a positive picture of **hard work** (see **[Be](#) - Don't be Lazy**). Here, the one who

works hard, will be in charge, while **the lazy person** will be forced to work.

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up (12:25 NIV).

The Hebrew word **anxiety** (*de'agah*) refers to one's emotional response to a threat to one's well being. **Anxiety** rises because of uncertainty about the future.

Persistent **anxiety** leads to depression. This **proverb** provides an observation of life that suggests an antidote to depression: **kind words**. The truth of this **proverb** is rather self-evident, but it nevertheless reminds the reader of it. This **proverb** fits in with the general teaching of **the book** about the impact that **speech** has on **people**. It also catalogues **Solomon's** concern for **people's** psychological state.

The godly give good advice to their friends; but the wicked lead them astray (12:26 NLT). This **proverb** contrasts one who knows where they are going (with the ability to lead others in the right direction) and being lost. Thus, **righteous people** benefit not only **themselves** but also others. **They** lead **their** neighbors on the right path. On the other hand, while **the righteous** and those **they** influence move in the right direction, **the wicked** have no certain guide and thus wander aimlessly. This encourages **people** to **righteous** behavior.

Lazy people don't even cook the game they catch. All proverbs with reference to the lazy seem to have more or less of a humorous character, and this one means either that the man is too lazy to cook what he has caught, or to catch his own game at all. But the diligent make use of everything they find (12:27 NLT). The obvious intention here is to encourage determination and diligence so as to discourage **laziness**.

The way of the righteous leads to life, and in its pathway there is no death (12:28 Hebrew). **Since death is the penalty for sin. Life is prolonged for the righteous - a basic teaching of this book.** This is another example of the contrast between two paths, the path of **wisdom** (connected with **righteousness**) and the path of **foolishness** (or the path of **abomination**). By naming the positive ultimate consequences of the former and the negative consequences of the latter, **the proverb** intends to guide **people** toward **godly** behavior.²⁵⁹

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** perfect holy **wisdom** wrapped in your awesome steadfast love! Life in this world will be over in a blink. The only thing that really counts, is to believe in **You** and serve **You**. **The words** that we say reflect on **You** because we are **Your** children. Sadly, many are **fools, simple minded** or **mockers**, and **they** do not think with **wisdom**, but instead **they** choose to say and*

to do whatever pleases **them** and makes **them** happy for the moment. May we, like King David, seek to please **You** in all we **say**, and in our heart **meditations**. **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, ADONAI, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalms 19:15).** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen