Short Studies in
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



THE WISDOM OF GOD

REVEALED, REVILED, AND REVERBERATED

MATTHEW S. HARMON

"In this short, wise, and accessible book, Matthew Harmon introduces us to the way wisdom works in Scripture, how people respond to it, and what God does next. This book is a clear and concise introduction to an important (and often neglected) theme."

Andrew Wilson, Teaching Pastor, King's Church London

"When people consider the storyline of the Bible, the theme of wisdom is often overlooked. But in this insightful work, Harmon demonstrates that wisdom is a major thread woven throughout Scripture—from the garden of Eden to its fulfillment in Christ. With clarity and faithfulness, Harmon traces this theme and illuminates the profound depths of God's wisdom in his redemptive plan."

Patrick Schreiner, Associate Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Matthew Harmon has given us a unique and readable primer on the role of wisdom in Scripture. Rather than surveying the content of wisdom books, he uncovers the function of wisdom within a recurring narrative paradigm in redemptive history. *The Wisdom of God* offers a reading of Scripture that underscores the worth of wisdom even while demonstrating our need for the one who is wisdom incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ."

L. Michael Morales, Professor of Biblical Studies, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

"A notable characteristic of the Bible is its emphasis on 'wisdom' rather than just 'knowledge.' Matthew Harmon's *The Wisdom of God* offers an excellent and trustworthy introduction to this theme, underscoring its significance throughout the Scriptures. Significantly, his study elucidates how divine wisdom can positively influence all aspects of our lives. For those looking to understand the Bible better, this brief study is a worthwhile read."

T. Desmond Alexander, Senior Research Fellow in Biblical Studies, Union Theological College, Belfast

"Wisdom means many things to many people. Is it synonymous with common sense? Personal insight? Experiential intuition? Not quite. In this wonderful little volume, Matthew Harmon unpacks a big truth: Wisdom is a gift from God that allows us to relate rightly to him and to each other. I warmly recommend this book to pastors, students, and thoughtful laypeople who want to better understand and grow in biblical wisdom."

Brandon D. Smith, Chair of the Hobbs School of Theology and Ministry and Associate Professor of Theology and Early Christianity, Oklahoma Baptist University; cofounder, Center for Baptist Renewal

"In a world where there is a myriad of facts and little coherence, Matthew Harmon takes a big-picture look at the importance of wisdom in the storyline of the Bible. He explores this important biblical theme by providing a concise biblical definition of wisdom and by tracing its pattern of revelation in Scripture, its rejection by humanity, and the consequences of that decision. This study provides a great framework for understanding the storyline of Scripture and gives us a powerful vision for making sense of the world of information around us."

Stephen G. Dempster, Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University

"What is the Bible about? The main storyline of the Bible can be told from many different angles. Matthew Harmon's book traces a neglected theme across the entire canon of Scripture: He demonstrates that the Bible is about God's revelation of wisdom, humanity's rejection of wisdom, and God's final vindication of wisdom. The result is a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and Christ-centered narrative of God's work in our world. A gem of a book, *The Wisdom of God* is biblical theology at its best—fresh, faithful, and full of practical application."

Brian S. Rosner, Senior Lecturer in New Testament and Director of Research, Ridley College, Australia

The Wisdom of God

Short Studies in Biblical Theology

Edited by Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

The City of God and the Goal of Creation, T. Desmond Alexander (2018)

Covenant and God's Purpose for the World, Thomas R. Schreiner (2017)

Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God, William R. Osborne (2020)

From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to New Creation, Sidney Greidanus (2018)

The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross, Patrick Schreiner (2018)

The Lord's Supper as the Sign and Meal of the New Covenant, Guy Prentiss Waters (2019)

Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel, Ray Ortlund (2016)

The Mission of God and the Witness of the Church, Justin A. Schell (2024)

The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture, Frank Thielman (2021)

Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom, G. K. Beale (2019)

Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death, Mitchell L. Chase (2022)

Return from Exile and the Renewal of God's People, Nicholas G. Piotrowski (2025)

The Royal Priesthood and the Glory of God, David S. Schrock (2022)

The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God, Guy Prentiss Waters (2022)

Sanctification as Set Apart and Growing in Christ, Marny Köstenberger (2023)

The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer, Andrew David Naselli (2020)

The Son of God and the New Creation, Graeme Goldsworthy (2015)

The Wisdom of God: Revealed, Reviled, and Reverberated, Matthew S. Harmon (2026)

Work and Our Labor in the Lord, James M. Hamilton Jr. (2017)

The Wisdom of God

Revealed, Reviled, and Reverberated

Matthew S. Harmon

CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Wisdom of God: Revealed, Reviled, and Reverberated

© 2026 by Matthew S. Harmon

Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design and illustration: Jordan Singer

First printing 2026

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

Scripture quotations marked AT are the author's translation.

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-8437-4
ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-8440-4
PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-8438-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Harmon, Matthew S. author
Title: The wisdom of God: revealed, reviled, and vindicated / Matthew S. Harmon.
Description: Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, [2026] | Series: Short studies in biblical theology | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025016379 (print) | LCCN 2025016380 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433584374 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781433584381 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433584404 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc. | God—Wisdom—Biblical teaching
Classification: LCC BT150 .H37 2026 (print) | LCC BT150 (ebook) | DDC 231/.6—dc23/eng/20250903
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025016379
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025016380

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

BP 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Jon, Jake, and Autumn.
May you walk in the fear of the Lord all the days of your lives and gain hearts of wisdom (Ps. 90:11–12).

Contents

List of Tables ix

Series Preface xi

Introduction 1

1 Wisdom in Eden 9

2 Wisdom at Sinai 29

3 Wisdom in Solomon 39

4 Wisdom in Daniel 51

5 Wisdom in Christ 65

6 Wisdom in the Church 79

7 Wisdom in the New Eden 93

Conclusion 103

Acknowledgments 105

For Further Reading 107

General Index 109

Scripture Index 113

Tables

Table 1.1 Embracing versus rejecting God's wisdom....26

Table 2.1 Parallels between Adam and the Israelites....35

Table 2.2 God's judgments on Adam and the Israelites....37

Table 3.1 Parallels between Adam and Solomon....45

Table 3.2 Additional parallels between Adam and Solomon....47

Table 3.3 God's judgments on Adam and Solomon....48

Table 4.1 Sections of the great image....58

Table 4.2 The four kingdoms....58

Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God's covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given

theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

Introduction

Never before has there been more knowledge in the world.

While there are any number of different ways to attempt to measure the amount of knowledge in the world, one interesting approach is the Knowledge Doubling Curve, which was originally created by Buckminster Fuller. He observed that up until 1900, human knowledge was doubling roughly every one hundred years. By 1945 the rate of knowledge doubling had shrunk to just twenty-five years. Scholars disagree on what the current rate is today, though according to one estimate, *the rate at which knowledge doubles is now at a staggering twelve hours*.[1] Even if that estimate is too high, there can be no doubt that knowledge continues to expand at an astonishing rate.

Whereas in past generations keeping up even in a general sense with advances in human knowledge was simply difficult, today it is actually impossible. We live in a world that is drowning in a tsunami of information, which increases exponentially on an hourly basis.

Never before has there been less wisdom in the world.

Okay, that might be an exaggeration, but there should be no doubt that the explosion of knowledge (or at least what passes for knowledge) makes it increasingly difficult to determine how different elements and forms of knowledge relate to one another. This

1. See Paul Chamberlain, "Knowledge Is Not Everything," *Design for Health* 4 no. 1 (2020): 1–3, https://doi.org/10.1080/24735132.2020.1731203.

proliferation of information has been accompanied by a cultural preference for what is new and innovative over what is old and, in many cases, has stood the test of time.

Jeremiah faced a similar challenge. At a time when the leaders of Jerusalem and many of the people had abandoned Yahweh for the "new and exciting" gods of the nations around them, the prophet said,

> Thus says the LORD:
> "Stand by the roads, and look,
> and ask for the ancient paths,
> where the good way is; and walk in it,
> and find rest for your souls.
> But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (Jer. 6:16)

Within the context, the ancient paths refer to faithfulness to what God had revealed about himself through his word (18:15). In the face of a culture enamored with what was new and innovative, God called his people back to find the ancient paths of fearing the Lord and walk in his ways. In other words, God called his people to wisdom.

Never before have God's people needed wisdom more than today.

Definition of Wisdom

In a world awash with information, we as believers desperately need wisdom. But what is it exactly? That is a surprisingly difficult question to answer simply. Based on the Bible, we can define wisdom as the ability to *discern good from evil and apply knowledge, skill, and experience in order to live in right relationship with God and others within the world that God made*. Let's briefly unpack the elements of this definition.

Discern good from evil. Discernment refers to making distinctions. The most fundamental distinction is between good and evil,

right and wrong. Yet oftentimes the hardest distinctions to make are between good, better, and best. Wisdom is the ability to make such distinctions, especially when the issue at hand is not one of obvious right from wrong.

Apply knowledge, skill, and experience. Wisdom is based on knowledge but goes beyond it. Skill refers to abilities that one acquires over an extended period of time. Experience provides necessary perspective, enabling one to interpret one's present circumstances in light of insights gained from the past. Wisdom is the ability to weigh and combine these realities to determine the best course of action. By its very nature, wisdom is something that manifests itself in action.

Live in right relationship with God and others. Wisdom is a relational concept. It is meant to infuse the way we relate to God. It means ordering our lives in a way that is consistent with God and his ways. Wisdom should also characterize the way we interact with those around us (Eph. 5:15).

Within the world that God made. Because an all-wise God made the world, the way that it operates reflects his wisdom. Wisdom is necessary to live in a way that is consistent with both how God made the world and how it has been affected by sin and the curse.

While there is much more that could be said about the nature of wisdom, this working definition provides us with a good starting point. But first we need to answer the question "Where does wisdom come from?"

Source of Wisdom

Scripture is unambiguous when it comes to the starting point for pursuing wisdom:

> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
> and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Prov. 9:10)

Similar statements are found numerous times in Scripture. Here is just a sampling:

> And he said to man,
> "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
> and to turn away from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)

> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
> all those who practice it have a good understanding.
> His praise endures forever! (Ps. 111:10)

Although each of these texts has its own nuance, the general principle is clear: From a biblical perspective, the fear of the Lord is the starting point for gaining wisdom.

Proverbs 2 provides a window into the nature, source, and outcome of wisdom. Framed as a father speaking to his son, Solomon personifies wisdom as a woman to be pursued:

> My son, if you receive my words
> and treasure up my commandments with you,
> making your ear attentive to wisdom
> and inclining your heart to understanding;
> yes, if you call out for insight
> and raise your voice for understanding,
> if you seek it like silver
> and search for it as for hidden treasures,
> then you will understand the fear of the LORD
> and find the knowledge of God.
> For the LORD gives wisdom;
> from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
> he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
> he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints. (Prov. 2:1–8)

The first thing to observe is that wisdom must be pursued; it is not something that we possess by default. Notice the different actions that Solomon calls forth: make your ear attentive, incline your heart, call out, raise your voice, seek, and search. At the same time, Solomon is unambiguous that God is the source of wisdom. He alone is the one who gives it. Indeed, he has it stored up for the upright. The remainder of Proverbs 2 spells out the various blessings that wisdom bestows on those who possess her: righteousness, justice, equity, and discretion (2:9–11); deliverance from wicked ways and people (2:12–15); deliverance from the forbidden woman (2:16–19); and a righteous path to walk on and land to inhabit for the upright (2:20–22).

That the fear of the Lord is the starting point for wisdom does not mean that unbelievers are incapable of discerning and doing what is wise in any situation. God has made the world in such a way that "his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). Proverbs is filled with statements that even the most hardened atheist can recognize as wise. The issue is not that unbelievers cannot recognize wisdom but rather that the rebellious human heart suppresses what creation reveals about God:

> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom. 1:21–23)

As a result of suppressing what can be learned about God from creation (and certainly Scripture as well), the unbeliever's mind descends into futility, darkened by the foolish refusal to recognize God as God. This futility leads to the ultimate inversion. Though unbelievers think they are wise in their own eyes, they demonstrate by their actions that they are fools instead. The inevitable result of such deeply entrenched folly is idolatry—elevating anything or anyone (including oneself) above God.

Thus Romans 1 helps us understand why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. To fear the Lord is to give him the honor and glory that he deserves as the all-knowing, all-wise Creator and to submit oneself to him in all areas of life. Fearing the Lord means recognizing that God is the source of all wisdom. Missing the mark on this fundamental reality leads to a disordered life.

A Recurring Pattern

Throughout Scripture God reveals himself in many ways, one of which is through recurring patterns. God has built these patterns into human history and inspired his people to write them down to reveal who he is, how this world works, and what his plan is for this world. These patterns often point forward to later realities in redemptive history and escalate in their intensity and significance.

The main goal of this book is to explore one of those patterns. All throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation and at various points in between, there is a threefold pattern when it comes to wisdom:

1. God reveals his wisdom.
2. Humanity reviles God's wisdom.
3. God reverberates his wisdom.

Although God's wisdom is evident within creation itself, Scripture is the place where God's wisdom is clearly and explicitly revealed. Yet all Scripture is oriented toward the clearest revelation of God's wisdom—Jesus Christ. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for his people, the church itself displays God's wisdom.

Despite God's persistent revelation of his wisdom in creation, Scripture, his Son, and the church, humanity consistently reviles his wisdom. Rather than joyfully submit to God's revealed wisdom and order our lives according to it, we frequently pursue our own distorted form of wisdom and what we think will bring us the greatest joy. The irony is that in rejecting God's wisdom for our own, we are cutting ourselves off from the source of life and true joy, which can only be found in God himself, and choosing the path that leads to death.

God will not permit his wisdom to be reviled forever. In the face of human rejection, God's wisdom reverberates even louder. Sometimes God vindicates his wisdom in this life for humanity to see, though because of our sin-hardened hearts, we often are blind to it. At other times he simply withholds that vindication for the last day, when he will set all things right once and for all.

1

Wisdom in Eden

Genesis 1–3 establishes the foundation for who God is, what human beings are like, the nature of creation, and God's purpose for creating the world. It also reveals the pattern that we are tracing: (1) God reveals his wisdom, (2) humanity reviles his wisdom, and (3) God reverberates his wisdom through both judgment and mercy. Because these chapters are so important for both the biblical storyline and the pattern of God's wisdom being revealed, reviled, and reverberated, we spend a bit more time exploring each element in this chapter to ensure that we have a proper foundation for what we see throughout the rest of Scripture.

When it comes to significant events, it is only sometime after the fact that we gain a fuller understanding of what actually happened. Consider the historic events of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. On that day, many Americans saw repeated footage of the two planes crashing into the World Trade Center and eventually of a third plane slamming into the Pentagon. In those early moments, it was evident that terrorists had orchestrated this attack, but the specific individuals responsible and the means by which they were able to carry out those attacks were unknown. Over time, of course, more

of those details began to emerge, as investigators were able to gather more evidence and even testimony from the larger network of people who were involved in the planning and execution of those attacks.

A similar dynamic is at work in creation. Genesis 1–2 provides two overlapping accounts of how God creates the world. These chapters establish the foundation for our understanding of who we are as human beings. Even more importantly, they reveal that God is the sovereign Creator who creates the universe out of nothing and brings that creation into order. Genesis 3 explains how human rebellion against God has plunged creation under the curse of God's judgment, as Adam and Eve believe what the serpent says over what God said. A proper understanding of Genesis 1–3 is essential for understanding who God is, who we are as human beings, and why the world is the mess that it is.

But as Scripture unfolds, God reveals further insight about his work in creation. Put another way, Scripture tells us that there is more to the story than is immediately evident in Genesis 1–3. So although Genesis 1–3 is our starting point for seeing how God's wisdom is revealed, reviled, and reverberated in creation, we are going to draw insights from other texts that provide additional depth, color, and richness to the picture that emerges from Genesis 1–3.

God's Wisdom Revealed in Creation

Although wisdom themes and concepts run throughout the creation account in Genesis 1–2, we focus on three primary ways that God reveals his wisdom in creation.

The Orderliness and Beauty of Creation

First, Genesis 1 presents God's creation of the universe in six days.[1] One of the most noticeable features of the account is the orderly

1. Christians disagree on whether these six days are twenty-four-hour periods or much longer stretches of time. Nothing I explain in this chapter depends on either interpretation.

manner in which God creates. Genesis 1:1–2 indicates that God creates the earth "without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." Over the course of the first three days of creation, God brings order to creation by separating light from darkness, waters from the sky, and waters from the dry ground. Then in the three days that follow, God fills the spaces with inhabitants: the two great lights in the heavens, swarms of great sea creatures for the waters and birds for the sky, and beasts of the earth and humanity for the dry ground. He even provides food to sustain the creatures he has created. God rests on the seventh day to signal the completion of his work in creation because, in his wisdom, God has anticipated and provided for every need that creation might have.

Indeed, it is these very realities that Psalm 104:24–30 highlights as evidence of God's wisdom in creation, even picking up specific language from Genesis 1–2:

> O Lord, how manifold are your works!
> In wisdom have you made them all;
> the earth is full of your creatures.
> Here is the sea, great and wide,
> which teems with creatures innumerable,
> living things both small and great.
> There go the ships,
> and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.
>
> These all look to you,
> to give them their food in due season.
> When you give it to them, they gather it up;
> when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;

when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 136:4–9 strikes a similar note when it calls God's people to give thanks

to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who spread out the earth above the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Proverbs 3:19–20 echoes this same point:

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

Thus not only does God employ wisdom in creating, but he also embeds within creation clear evidence of his wisdom in the way the world has been made and continues to function.

Further, Genesis 1 emphasizes that God creates by speaking. The expression "And God said" begins each day of creation (Gen. 1:3, 6,

9, 14, 20, 24), and on some days it occurs multiple times: twice on day 3 and four times on day 6. God's words are also the means by which he blesses his creatures (1:22) and humanity (1:28). Although less prominent in Genesis 2, God still accomplishes important tasks by speaking. He commands Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16–17). He also announces his intention to provide Adam with a helper suitable for him (2:18). From start to finish in Genesis 1–2, God creates by his word.

Later Scripture sheds further light on God creating the universe by his word. Proverbs 8:22–31 peels back the curtain to give us further insight as to the role that wisdom played in creation:

> The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work,
> the first of his acts of old.
> Ages ago I was set up,
> at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
> When there were no depths I was brought forth,
> when there were no springs abounding with water.
> Before the mountains had been shaped,
> before the hills, I was brought forth,
> before he had made the earth with its fields,
> or the first of the dust of the world.
> When he established the heavens, I was there;
> when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
> when he made firm the skies above,
> when he established the fountains of the deep,
> when he assigned to the sea its limit,
> so that the waters might not transgress his command,
> when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
> then I was beside him, like a master workman,

and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.

This passage has much to say about wisdom's role in creation, but we focus on three particular insights.

First, wisdom exists before creation. As Solomon, inspired by God's Spirit, reflects on Yahweh creating everything in the opening chapters of Genesis, he directs our attention to the fact that at every step along the way, wisdom is there with God. Before the beginning of the earth, wisdom is there. Before there are depths and springs flowing with water, wisdom is there. Before the mountains are shaped and the hills are formed, wisdom is there. Before the fields of the earth and the dust of the ground are made, wisdom is there. When the heavens are established, wisdom is there. When the border between earth and sky is drawn, wisdom is there. When the skies above and the deeps below are established, wisdom is there. When the limits of the sea are set, wisdom is there.

As Solomon directs our attention to Yahweh creating the heavens and the earth, he is in effect inviting us to look closer and realize that somehow, in a way that he himself cannot fully grasp, wisdom is present with God as he creates everything. Wisdom is like a character that you didn't notice the first time you watched a movie. But when you watch it again, you realize just how important that character really is.

Second, wisdom is the master architect of creation. If we look a little closer at this passage, we see that wisdom is not just present with God at creation but an active participant in creation. Proverbs 8:30 refers to wisdom as a "master workman." As used here, this Hebrew word describes a craftsman who combines skill with

artistic ability to produce something of excellent quality. To be a master craftsman, one needs to be able to blend knowledge, skill, and creativity and harness them toward the goal of producing something that is not only made well but also beautiful to behold. This is the role of wisdom in creation, working alongside Yahweh to produce this remarkably complex and beautiful universe that we so regularly take for granted. So wisdom is not only present with God at creation but also involved in the creative act as God's master craftsman.

Third, wisdom is Yahweh's constant delight. In the midst of all the language describing wisdom's presence at and participation in creation, it would be easy to miss the fact that Yahweh delights in wisdom. Look again at Proverbs 8:30, where wisdom says,

> Then I was beside him, like a master workman,
> and I was daily his delight,
> rejoicing before him always.

The word "delight" expresses a blend of happiness, joy, and pleasure. While we often think about what brings us delight, how often do we stop to consider what God delights in? In one sense, there are many things that God delights in. But as John Piper points out, what God delights in most is himself.[2] At first this may seem arrogant, but upon further reflection, this makes perfect sense. Since God is the most excellent being in the universe, it makes sense that he delights in himself above anything else.

With that important concept as the backdrop, the fact that Yahweh delights in wisdom as the master architect takes on new significance. And Yahweh's delight in wisdom is something that never ends but continues day after day after day.

2. John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, rev. ed. (Crossway, 2026), introduction and chap. 1.

Did you notice that this passage tells us not only what Yahweh delights in but also what wisdom delights in? Look again at Proverbs 8:30–31:

> Then I was beside him, like a master workman,
> and I was daily his delight,
> rejoicing before him always,
> rejoicing in his inhabited world
> and delighting in the children of man.

The delight that God has in wisdom overflows into wisdom's delight in humanity as well as the goodness and beauty of creation. As they work together and reflect on the beauty of creation, culminating in the creation of humanity as God's image bearers, they say in unison, "It is very good."

The beauty that we see around us in the created world is intended to draw our hearts and minds to the one who made it. From the beauty of the evening sky to the majesty of the mountains to the depths of the oceans, God's glory is proclaimed and his wisdom in ordering creation is on display (Ps. 19:1–6). Consider how Job 9:4–10 puts it:

> He is wise in heart and mighty in strength—
> who has hardened himself against him, and
> succeeded?—
> he who removes mountains, and they know it not,
> when he overturns them in his anger,
> who shakes the earth out of its place,
> and its pillars tremble;
> who commands the sun, and it does not rise;
> who seals up the stars;
> who alone stretched out the heavens
> and trampled the waves of the sea;

who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;
who does great things beyond searching out,
and marvelous things beyond number.

It should not be surprising, then, that the creation account of Genesis 1 culminates with God surveying all he has made and concluding that "it [is] very good" (Gen. 1:31). As we will see in our discussion of Genesis 3, distinguishing good from evil is a central element of wisdom.

Making Humanity in His Image

The second way that God's wisdom is evident in Genesis 1–2 is in God's creating humanity in his own image and likeness:

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
>
> So God created man in his own image,
> in the image of God he created him;
> male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26–27)

The entirety of Genesis 1 builds to this climax, with humanity presented as God's masterpiece.[3] Although "image" and "likeness" are essentially synonymous terms, the idea may be that "likeness" is intended to reinforce the meaning of "image." As David Clines puts it, "Man is not just an image but a likeness-image. He is not simply

3. What follows is adapted and condensed from Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme Through the Canon*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 54 (Apollos, 2020), 8–17. Used with permission.

representative but representational. Man is the visible, corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God."[4]

The fundamental starting point for understanding what it means to be human is acknowledging that we are divine image bearers. A helpful, though far from exhaustive, way of summarizing what it means to be made in God's image is that we have been created to (1) rule, (2) reflect, and (3) represent.

First, within the immediate context of Genesis 1, the emphasis clearly falls on ruling. Before he actually makes humanity, God indicates that they are being made to exercise dominion over creation (Gen. 1:26). Once humanity has been created, God reiterates this responsibility to rule later in the passage: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth' " (1:28). In addition to repeating the verb "have dominion" from 1:26, God also uses the verb "subdue" to emphasize humanity's responsibility to rule over creation. God, the great King, has made humanity in his image to rule over creation under his sovereign authority. They are to enact, in tangible form, the rule that God himself has over creation.

Second, as divine image bearers, humanity reflects who God is to creation. By its very nature, an image tells us something about the object it reflects. Human beings were created to reflect the character and beauty of God himself in ways that nothing else in creation can. Put another way, we are like God in many respects, though in other ways, we are not like God. The parallel language in Genesis 5:1–3 describing Adam's sons reinforces this point:

> This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and fe-

4. David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 101.

> male he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

Just as children are like their parents in certain characteristics but not in every way, so too human beings are like God. God intended that as we look at other human beings, we should be able to draw conclusions about what he is like. Because God is a relational being, he made us relational creatures, capable of relating to him and to each other. Because God is a moral being, we are moral creatures, capable of making moral decisions. Because God is wise, we are made to embody and enact his wisdom by ordering our lives according to his ways.

Third, being made in the image of God means that humanity represents God. We were made to act in ways that advance his purposes and priorities within this world. As divine image bearers, we are not free to do as we wish. Just as an ambassador represents the interests, values, and policies of the president, so we as human beings are called to act and advocate for God's purposes in this world.

When God made human beings in his image, he intended us to display his wisdom for all creation to behold, as signposts to the all-wise Creator who made us.

Establishing Boundaries

The third way that God reveals his wisdom in creation is through boundaries. In addition to giving his image bearers a commission (Gen. 1:26–28), God establishes parameters for humanity to live within to enable them to flourish. When God makes man, he places him in the garden (2:7–8), where, among all the vegetation, there are two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil (2:9). Although shrouded in mystery, these two trees play a central role in Genesis 2–3.[5] Both trees apparently produce fruit that can be eaten, yet they are distinct from each other and the rest of the trees in the garden.[6]

By calling it the tree of life, God indicates that this tree, in some way, gives life. Later Scripture sheds light on the tree of life. Note the following verses from Proverbs:

> She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
> those who hold her fast are called blessed. (3:18)

> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
> and whoever captures souls is wise. (11:30)

> Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
> but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. (13:12)

> A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
> but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (15:4)

These texts from Proverbs make it clear that the tree of life is closely associated with wisdom. Indeed, Proverbs 3:18 equates the tree of life with wisdom. The other proverbs show different aspects of the kind of life that God intends his image bearers to live, a life that flourishes because it is governed by and surrendered to God's wise ways. One cannot have true life apart from God's wisdom.

But within Genesis 2, more emphasis falls on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The only restriction God gives to humanity in the garden is related to this very tree: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the

5. The discussion of the two trees that follows is indebted to Mitchell L. Chase, *Short of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Exploration of the Fall* (Crossway, 2023), 19–31.

6. Chase, *Short of Glory*, 20.

garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen. 2:16–17). The command begins with a positive statement that Adam can eat from every tree in the garden *except* for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Framing it this way emphasizes the generosity of God's provision. God does not explain why he cannot eat from this tree, only that if he does eat from it, he will certainly die. But the name of the tree is a clear hint. The knowledge of good and evil refers to more than an intellectual understanding of the concepts of good and evil. As we will see in our discussion of Genesis 3:1–7, the knowledge of good and evil refers to *determining* good and evil. Thus together with the tree of life, these two trees represent two alternative paths: obedience leading to life and disobedience leading to death. Put another way, these two trees present the path of wisdom and the path of foolishness. Eating of the tree of life is the way for Adam and Eve to submit themselves to the wisdom of God, while eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the way of rejecting God's wisdom for their own foolish "wisdom."

By establishing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and prohibiting humanity from eating of its fruit, God establishes a clear boundary for humanity. As the all-wise and all-good Creator, God knows what is best for us. In order for us to experience the fullness of life that God intends for us, we must submit ourselves to his wisdom and live within those boundaries.

God's Wisdom Reviled in the Garden

Scripture does not indicate how long Adam and Eve remained in the idyllic state described at the end of Genesis 2, but the impression is that it was not very long. We see the first hint of trouble in Genesis 3:1: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman,

'Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?' " The Hebrew word rendered "more crafty" (*arum*) stresses a person's shrewdness or cleverness, but only the context can indicate whether this is a good or bad thing. For example, it is used both positively and negatively elsewhere in the Old Testament:

> For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
> and you choose the tongue of the crafty [*arumim*].
> (Job 15:5)

> Every prudent man [*arum*] acts with knowledge,
> but a fool flaunts his folly. (Prov. 13:16)

The determining factor is whether the cleverness or shrewdness is oriented toward conformity with God's word and ways or toward rejection of them. The content of the serpent's question to the woman makes it clear that the craftiness of the serpent is directed away from God and his ways. The serpent attempts to sow doubt in the woman's mind regarding the very source of true wisdom—God's word.

When the woman responds by restating God's command and then adding to it (i.e., God never prohibited touching the tree; cf. Gen. 3:2 with 2:16–17), the serpent moves from questioning God's word to rejecting it outright, claiming that the woman will not die if she eats from the tree (3:4). The serpent explains his rationale for rejecting what God said: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). The serpent promises two outcomes. The first is that the woman's eyes will be opened. The serpent implies that the woman is living in a state of blindness and claims that if she rejects God's commandment, she will experience a new and superior understanding of reality.

As brazen as this claim is, the second is even more so. The serpent promises that the woman will be "like God." Genesis 1:26–31 has

already emphasized that humanity was created in the image of God and according to his likeness. The serpent is not so much denying this as he is claiming that the woman could be even more like God than she already is. But what does he have in mind?

The following clause makes it clear: He is inviting Eve to be like God in "knowing good and evil." The serpent has more in mind than simple intellectual knowledge of good and evil; he means that the woman will be able to *determine* good and evil for herself, without reference to what God says. Consider, by contrast, what King Solomon requests from God: "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (1 Kings 3:9). As the king over God's people, Solomon needs to be able to discern between good and evil. But rather than determine it for himself, he asks the Lord to give him such knowledge. For the woman, the act of eating from the tree will be the first act of determining good and evil for herself, and according to the serpent, this will set her on a path to being like God.

That the meaning of the phrase "knowing good and evil" entails determining good and evil is confirmed by the woman's rationale for eating from the tree: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). The woman's decision to eat from the tree is driven by her desire to be wise. The Hebrew verb used here refers to having wisdom or insight (Prov. 15:24; Isa. 44:18; Jer. 9:23), with particular emphasis on the results of that wisdom, such as success (1 Sam. 18:5).[7] The woman believes the false promise of the serpent that the path to true

7. Terrence Fretheim, "שָׂכַל," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1997), 3:1243.

wisdom rejects God's revealed wisdom. She is so confident in this choice that she gives some to Adam, who apparently has been there with her for the entire time that the serpent is tempting the woman. Rather than submit herself to God's wisdom revealed in creation and his word, the woman reviles it and leads Adam to follow in her rebellious footsteps.

This reviling of God's wisdom sets the trajectory for every subsequent rejection of God's wisdom in human history. Every sinful action is at root a rejection of God's revealed wisdom. Doing what God prohibits may begin with questioning God's word, but it always culminates in us determining good and evil for ourselves.

God's Wisdom Reverberated in Eden

The results of reviling God's wisdom are catastrophic and swift. In one sense, the serpent was right—the eyes of Adam and Eve are, in fact, opened (Gen. 3:7). But rather than seeing the promised glories of a life determining good and evil for themselves, what they see is their own nakedness. Whereas before, their nakedness was a visible representation of the perfect intimacy and openness they shared with each other and God (2:25), now it is a source of shame that needs to be covered (3:7).

The rift in their relationship with God and each other is immediately evident. When they hear the sound of God walking in the garden, they hide from him (3:8–11). When God confronts them about their actions, both the man and the woman shift the blame for their actions (3:12–13). Rather than receive godlike freedom by determining good and evil for themselves, which the serpent promised, Adam and Eve experience the terrifying effects of rejecting God's revealed wisdom instead.

The judgments announced spell out further consequences of rejecting God's revealed wisdom. Instead of perfect intimacy between

the man and woman, now they will experience hardship and conflict with each other (3:16). Instead of exercising dominion over creation as God's image bearers, they will now toil in frustration as they seek to cultivate the earth and eventually return to the ground, from which God made them, when they die (3:17–19). Indeed, creation itself is placed under a curse because of humanity's rejection of God's wisdom. In contrast to the lush garden with a river flowing out of it to water the land (2:10–14), thorns and thistles will spring from the ground, making it difficult to cultivate.

Even though Adam and Eve do not physically die the moment they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they do die spiritually. Through their sin, death enters the world—both physical and spiritual death (Rom. 5:12). Their spiritual death is immediately evident in the breach of their intimate relationship with God. But their rejection of God's wisdom is also the beginning of their physical death as well. God pronounces judgment that they will return to the dust from which he made Adam (Gen. 3:19). The genealogy of Adam and his descendants in Genesis 5 reinforces this reality with its constant refrain: "And he died." Physical death may not be immediate, but it is now certain.

God's judgment culminates in exiling humanity from the garden (Gen. 3:23–24). Notice the reason that God gives: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever' " (3:22). God acknowledges that Adam and Eve have become like him in the sense that they now determine good and evil for themselves. As a result, God bars them from eating of the tree of life (3:24). Whether they ate from this tree before their rebellion against God is unclear, but apparently eating from it in their fallen state would have enabled them to live forever in that fallen state, without the possibility of redemption.

At a minimum, preventing them access to the tree of life "cut[s] them off from this vital source of life and nourishment. Access to the tree mean[s] life, exile from it mean[s] death."[8] Their ejection from Eden is a picture of their separation from God himself.

From Genesis 1–3 a stark contrast emerges between embracing God's wisdom and rejecting it (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Embracing versus rejecting God's wisdom

Embracing God's Wisdom	Rejecting God's Wisdom
Ruling over creation (1:28)	Working a cursed ground (3:19)
Authority over creation (1:28)	Conquered by the serpent (3:1–7)
Living in the garden of Eden (2:8–25)	Exiled from the garden of Eden (3:23–24)
Access to the tree of life (2:9, 15–17)	Denied access to the tree of life (3:22)
Blessing	Curse
Life	Death
Freedom to live as God designed them to live	Slavery to sin and subject to Satan

The disastrous consequences of rejecting God's wisdom vindicate God's wisdom. Had they lived in joyful submission to God's revealed wisdom, Adam and Eve would have experienced life and blessing as a result of their unbroken relationship with God. God values his image bearers and his relationship with them to such a degree that he reveals his wisdom to them as the means of maintaining and deepening the joy of his image bearers and the intimacy of his relationship with them.

Conclusion

The opening pages of the Bible demonstrate that God reveals his wisdom in creation in a wide variety of ways. Despite these manifold revelations of God's wisdom, Adam and Eve reject that wisdom,

8. Chase, *Short of Glory*, 22.

choosing instead to assert their own wisdom. The results are disastrous. God vindicates his wisdom through the various forms of judgment that he pronounces on the serpent, rebellious humanity, and even creation itself.

Yet God vindicates his wisdom in another way. In the midst of judgment, God announces that the rejection of his wisdom will not be the final word. He graciously replaces their pathetic fig-leaf coverings with animal skin coverings. Instead of the immediate physical death that they deserve for their rejection of God's wisdom, God provides a substitute that he sacrifices in their place (Gen. 3:21).

Even more significantly, God promises that the apparent victory of the serpent over Adam and Eve will not be the last word. A day will come when a descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (3:15). Yet in the process of crushing the serpent's head, the descendant of the woman will be bruised on his heel. It will be through his suffering that the serpent crusher will defeat the serpent and restore humanity to live within God's blessing provided through his unmatched wisdom. That will be the ultimate reverberation of God's wisdom.