

## Introduction

This has been called the age of anxiety, although it is unlikely that we have more to worry about than any past generation. Anxiety is widespread, I believe, because there is a widespread loss of faith, loss of faith both in God and in mankind. And lost faith encourages fear and despair. In desperation some are looking to the stars. In fact, our own government has already spent several billion dollars on projects designed to probe the heavens for signs of intelligent life with the possibility they might give us answers to restore our hope.

A number of conferences have been conducted by scientists on the subject of life in outer space. The consensus appears to be that other life forms exist out there (in spite of the total lack of what is currently considered to be scientific evidence) and that they include creatures who are not only, in their words, “non-human” and “incredibly alien,” but are also “vastly more intelligent than we.” The director of one conference, sponsored jointly by Boston University and NASA, expressed the hope that contact with these creatures “might also lead us to better social forms, possibly to ways to solve our environmental crisis, even improve our own social institutions.”<sup>1</sup> Another participant hoped that such beings can give us “the means by which we can control the application of our knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> He went on to say, “This is where we have, I think lamentably failed.”

I find all of this incredibly ironic. Modern atheistic science is looking toward heaven for salvation! As a matter of fact, the ancient Hebrews recorded many encounters with non-earthly creatures of vastly superior abilities who provided them with information vital to their survival and prosperity. Many of their great men told of having personally received knowledge from beyond earth. For example, Moses credited both his power to lead the people out of Egyptian bondage and all the details of his great law to an ongoing encounter with an extra-terrestrial being. Joseph was a Hebrew

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1. Richard Berendzen, in *Life Beyond Earth and the Mind of Man*, Richard Berendzen (ed.) (Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1973). p. 49.
  2. Ashley Montagu, in Berendzen, p. 62.

slave who rose to the highest administrative position in ancient Egypt. And Daniel, another captive Hebrew, was a chief adviser to Nebuchadnezzar, who was king of the great Babylonian Empire. Both of those men achieved greatness because of special knowledge personally provided to them by non-earthlings.

Ancient Hebrew documents contain many similar reports. Indeed, from the time of their founding father, Abraham, those Hebrews were told by heavenly beings that they had been chosen for a special role in the development of mankind. Through them the entire world would gain access to special knowledge needed to promote the progress of civilization and combat our destructive tendencies. It is noteworthy that this heavenly knowledge contains very little technological information, or knowledge about natural science. What was revealed includes knowledge relevant for understanding ourselves, and for information about how we can live together peacefully and productively. That is timeless knowledge, and is the most crucial kind we need.

It is, of course, an old familiar story told in an old familiar book, the Holy Bible. The Bible tells of another world in another realm or dimension in the heavens inhabited by superior creatures and ruled by a Supreme Being whose incomprehensible power and wisdom created not only this universe but all things. In the past, from time to time, communication was made from that realm to some select citizen of earth. Sometimes those creatures simply materialized in human form and were recognized only by their supernatural powers. More often, however, the contact was made through a form of mental telepathy by means of a spectacular vision or dream. Soon after Solomon inherited the throne of Israel (about three thousand years ago) he experienced one of those rare visitations in the form of a dream.

Israel had entered into its most prosperous era, and Solomon was troubled about his ability to lead that great nation. It was then that the Creator himself offered Solomon what no other man had ever been offered—a gift of his choosing from him who could make all things possible. Solomon asked not for power, wealth, or such things. Instead, he asked for a mind capable of making good decisions to help him rule his people (see 1Ki. 3:6-9). God was pleased with this response, and he granted his request. Furthermore, he

gave him what he had not ask—wealth, power, honor—because, you see, Solomon had asked for wisdom, which happens to be the key to all prosperity and success.

Solomon's wealth, power, honor, and glory were certainly very great, but he is best known for his wisdom. Indeed, his very name has been synonymous with that word ever since he lived. We can read the record of Solomon's life primarily in First Kings 1-11, First Chronicles 28-29, and Second Chronicles 1-9.

Solomon's legacy consists of three books in the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. In the opening words of each book Solomon is mentioned as its author. However, two chapters of Proverbs are attributed to two other men who are otherwise unknown: Agur and king Lemuel. It is quite possible, however, that Solomon added their words to his collection, and acknowledged their authorship, just as any writer might do today. Many believe he also wrote Psalm 127.

Solomon recorded information and advice about many things in his three books. Ecclesiastes primarily contains his conclusions about the nature of this world. The first third of Proverbs has been called its introduction because the focus there is upon proclaiming the importance of wisdom and the dangers of folly. Most of the remaining part of the book contains approximately six hundred proverbs about various aspects of life. There is apparently no particular order to that listing. The last part of the book contains the advice of Agur and Lemuel.

Song of Solomon presents a dialogue between Solomon and his wife. There is some disparity between its theme—one man, one wife—and the fact that he ended with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Although Solomon is addressed as king in that beautiful book, it is quite likely that it tells the story of his first marriage, in his youth, during a time when his heart was close to God, long before his many foreign wives led his heart astray.

There have been many fine commentaries written about those three books. My chief goal in writing this one has been to help show that the wisdom God gave Solomon, which is preserved in those books, is relevant for life in any generation.

I have chosen a type of topical analysis to organize the textual material for the purpose of clarifying many of its lessons. As in

Nave's Topical Bible,<sup>1</sup> verses, parts of verses, and series of verses are quoted as often as they were seen relevant to each topic; although no attempt was made to include every possible topic. The handling of topics, however, is quite unlike that of Nave's digest. After compiling various topics, I then compared, subdivided, and integrated them in an effort to uncover their latent patterns and interrelationships, while also drawing attention to the harmony of its knowledge.

The analysis begins with the book of Ecclesiastes, presenting what Solomon discovered about the nature of the world and our existence in it. There the story is told about how he both experimented with his own life, and observed the lives of others, in his search for the way to happiness. He also tried to understand the nature and meaning of the world with its mysterious mix of good and evil. All that he found deeply troubled him, yet he remained convinced that God rules the world with great wisdom and purpose. Chapter Two and Chapter Three explain Solomon's meaning of wisdom using material taken primarily from the first third of Proverbs, but also from Ecclesiastes. His concept of wisdom is complex. According to Solomon, wisdom in its broadest sense includes the whole of God's plan for creation. Included in that material are his words about the importance of wisdom for mankind and its relevance to our personal freedom, responsibility, and destiny.

The next four chapters present what Solomon said about the four most often mentioned personalities: the wise, the righteous, fools, and the wicked. Chapter Four contains his advice about how to become wise. It begins with what is involved in discipline and the development of a love for knowledge. It includes an analysis of the basic qualities that are characteristic of all wise men. Chapter Five explains the relationship between wisdom and righteousness, and presents the special qualities of righteous men. Chapter Six describes the meaning of folly with its basic processes. It also reveals the characteristics of various kinds of fools and the penalties they receive. Chapter Seven is about the wicked. This type of man mixes folly with his wisdom to create a perverted mentality. Unlike a simple fool, he is the man who lives a devious life of

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1. Orville J. Nave, *Nave's Topical Bible: A Digest of the Holy Scriptures* (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1921).

hypocrisy. From Solomon's various descriptions a composite is also formulated about this type of man to reveal his basic nature. He also mentioned in considerable detail what can be expected from that manner of life.

The remaining five chapters contain Solomon's advice about some of the common aspects of our lives: controlling our feelings, using our language, managing our finances, developing marriage and family relationships, and finally, advice about friends, neighbors, and society in general. Chapter Eight gives Solomon's advice about such emotions as anger, envy, and pride. It also deals with the problem of regulating our various appetites. Chapter Nine tells about the power of language for good and evil, and how best to use it. Chapter Ten is about work and money. It contains Solomon's advice about how best to manage our business and occupation. It includes information about the care and maintenance of our possessions. It also contains what he said about the rich and the poor: what they are like, how they relate to each other, and a discussion of those factors responsible for poverty and wealth. Chapter Eleven is about marriage and family. It is primarily based upon the Song of Solomon which is treated as a model marriage demonstrating how best to succeed in promoting that most beautiful and intimate human relationship. It also contains Solomon's advice about the relationship between parents and children. The last chapter presents Solomon's advice about living with our friends and neighbors in the most peaceful and constructive way. Also included there is advice for and about rulers and high officials together with information about those qualities that best promote the national health. The book concludes with a brief epilogue showing something of the relationship of Jesus with the wisdom of Solomon.

The words of Solomon found in those three books of the Bible are rich with useful information and helpful advice which is as relevant for these times as it was during his day. However, much of the text is difficult for modern man to interpret and understand. Therefore, I have sought to clarify both its major meaning and its current relevance by means of this type of analysis.

In addition to scriptures from Solomon's three books I have also added some passages from other parts of the Bible when I felt they

would add support and clarity. The Bible is collectively the word of God, and just as a physiologist must at times refer to other related parts of the body when discussing a particular organ, so too Solomon's advice is better understood when related to the entire word of God. I also wish to point out that in some instances I have emphasized certain topics more than he did. I have taken this liberty because of the particular mentality I have perceived in today's world. There are some popular ideas so far afield from his advice that I thought more needed to be said.

Regarding those of you who are less familiar with Bible study, I have some suggestions. Interpreting the Bible involves a search for the meaning of its words. It may help the reader to first recognize some characteristics of words themselves and the various ways they convey meaning. Words are a vehicle of thought. Of course, in themselves they are meaningless vibrations in the air or scribbling on paper. Words are designed to convey a message. There is a danger, however, in becoming bogged down in the words themselves to the neglect of the message they were intended to convey. For example, none of the original *words* of the Bible now exist. That is to say, the original documents are all lost. God has his own good reasons for this. One of them being, perhaps, to insure that men would not worship the paper and ink, and thus shed blood over their possession.

Nevertheless, the Bible message is very much alive and well, preserved first within many ancient documents in their original Hebrew and Greek languages, and (since most men cannot understand those) later translated by scholars into most of the languages of the world. Thus the Bible message, passing from one word vehicle to another, remains available to us all. Nevertheless, like everything else in this imperfect world, the process is not without its problems, and we find Paul saying, **“Because it is God who said, Out of darkness light is to shine, who shone in our hearts for an enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the excellence of the power may be of God and not from us”** (2Co. 4:6-7).

Paul said the Bible treasure is in “earthen vessels.” That is, the knowledge of God we have here in the world is carried by an

imperfect earthly medium. The message is God's truth (which is certainly without error), but it is contained in documents that are imperfect. Part of our job is to search for God's pure and perfect truth that is contained in these imperfect "earthen vessels." Thus we find comments from Bible scholars such as the following by Curtis Vaughan:

The reader will observe that the translators at times differ sharply in their renderings of the same passage. Often this simply indicates a difference of opinion in their understanding of the meaning of the original text. In other cases, however, the difference may be accounted for by the fact that the translators were not rendering the same text. Monsignor Ronald Knox's version, for example, is based on the Latin Vulgate, and George N. Lamsa has translated the Aramaic text. The Septuagint, of course, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew text, and what has been used in this volume is an English rendering of the Greek. Wide divergences of rendering are much more frequently found in the Old Testament than in the New. The reader should remember that at many points the Hebrew Old Testament presents great and ancient textual difficulties. Lacunae in the earliest form of the Septuagint reveals that even the Jewish scholars of Alexandria found some of the text baffling. Where such uncertainty exists, each translator must decide for himself which reading is nearest the original. "A translator of Holy Scripture," wrote Henry Alford, "must be absolutely colorless; ready to sacrifice the choicest text, and the plainest proof of doctrine, if the words are not those of what he is constrained in his conscience to receive as God's testimony."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, a little "noise" can be expected in the signal of any "earthen vessel." But such things should not discourage those seeking God's truth in the Bible any more than scientists are discouraged by similar problems from searching "the scriptures of nature" for God's truths about it. Truth does not hang by a single thread, and a troublesome verse here or there is by no means critical. The vast majority of the scriptures are clear and easy to comprehend.

Consider another characteristic of words. Particular words in

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1. Curtis Vaughan (ed.). *The Old Testament Books of Poetry From 26 Translations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1973).

almost any language can have either a single meaning or multiple meanings. When a man interprets the Bible, confusion can result if that is not recognized. Just as the word *hand* can refer to (1) that part of the body at the end of the arm, (2) the pointer on a dial, (3) a pledge, (4) a round of applause, (5) a worker, et cetera, so also Bible words such as *sinner*, *life*, *law*, *love*, and *heart* all have at least two, and often more than two, meanings. Therefore, they can be properly understood only in the larger context. On the other *hand*, single concepts or ideas may be reflected in many different words. For example, terms such as *sinner*, *evildoer*, and *transgressor* often refer to the same kind of man. Others such as *greed*, *avarice*, and *covetousness* all refer to the same kind of attitude. Also multiple meanings can go beyond the simple word level. Parables are one example of this: each has both a superficial and a deeper meaning.

Understanding God's word, like every other constructive human enterprise, takes time and effort. One thing is certain: God cannot contradict himself, and although paradoxes abound both in nature and in Holy Scripture, and although both nature and Holy Scripture reveal conflict in the world, neither the laws of nature nor the truths of the Bible contradict themselves.

The words of the Bible were intended to convey vital messages from God for our welfare. The apostle Peter said that Bible interpretation should seek for the true message intended in the words: **“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture comes to pass of a personal interpretation. For no prophecy was ever brought by a will of man, but holy men of God spoke, being led by Holy Spirit”** (2Pe. 1:20). And the apostle Paul admonished the younger man Timothy about the same thing, when he said, **“Be diligent to present thyself approved to God, an irreproachable workman, correctly traversing the word of truth”** (2Ti. 2:15).

There are many mysteries in this world, some of which can only be understood with the word of God. For the Holy Bible is an exceedingly powerful source of truth about many things. Indeed, the author of Hebrews said, **“For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints**

**and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart”** (Heb. 4:12).

Some of the conclusions I have reached about various subjects in this book are based upon logical inferences made from various scriptural passages. That kind of reasoning was employed by several men of the Bible, including Christ himself (see John 10:34-36 for one example). Paul’s letter to the Romans contains many examples of that kind of reasoning. Indeed, men of science continually reason that way, even employing the laws of probability to draw many of their conclusions.

Near the end of Proverbs Solomon quoted these words from Agur: **“Every word of God is tried. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar”** (Pro. 30:5-6). Agur warned against adding to the words of God, and Jesus said the way that leads to life is restricted (see Mat. 7:14). Therefore, I tried to limit my words to what I was convinced was correctly traversing the word of truth. It is my hope and prayer to God that what I have written is faithful and true to his holy word.

Dear reader, if you truly want wisdom, then first trust your Creator by reading the words he has provided for us in his holy book. Then work diligently to understand and apply them, keeping in mind what James said:

**And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by wind and tossed about. For that man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways** (James. 1:5-8).

My greatest reward from the hundreds of hours of labor I spent creating this book was the increase in my wisdom. Looking back on my life I certainly had much need for it. There are numerous things I would have done differently if I had known then the things I know now from the teachings of Solomon.

If you want to gain the most from the wisdom of Solomon, you cannot merely read his words, whether from this book or in the Bible directly. You must *study them*, by reading and rereading,

and by spending time thinking about what the words say. If you have a good memory, I highly recommend memorizing the entire book of Proverbs. Wise words are powerful tools and weapons for our intellect. They are tools enabling us to reason more skillfully, be more persuasive, provide aid and comfort for others, and be productive in countless ways. They are powerful weapons to help us resist temptations, combat and expose deceit, and defeat evil in countless ways.

The more you make wise words a part of your life, the more you will be able to succeed in your endeavors. Therefore, I say to you again, do not merely read the wise words of Solomon, *study them* until they become a part of your intellect. Spend time with them the way a bodybuilder does with his exercise equipment. The effect on your mind will be just as apparent.

**“Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, alone wise, to God is honor and glory into the ages of the ages. Truly”** (1Ti. 1:17).

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NOTE: All scripture quotations are from *A Conservative Version*. And I use gender relevant words in their historic meaning.

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