

Third Term Course: Men and Women of the Bible

### ***Study Four: The Poor Wise Man***

Introduction: Passage Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

This is a story concerning wisdom, written by a man who was possibly Solomon, and who, in any case was an extremely wise man. His desire to communicate wisdom is evident in the book he wrote— 'Ecclesiastes'. He was known as 'Ile Preacher' which in Hebrew is 'Kohleth'.

#### **The Details of the Story**

(i) There was a little city. We do not know its name or place, or the date of the story.

(ii) The story Kohleth tells is 'an example of wisdom'.

(iii) To Kohleth it seemed 'great under the sun', i.e. outstanding in the affairs of mankind.

(iv) A great king came against the city and set out to destroy it by building siegeworks against it. He was obviously going to succeed.

(v) One of the citizens of the city was 'a poor wise man'. It seems he gave advice which saved the city. What that advice was we do not know. In II Samuel chapter 20 there is the story of 'a wise woman' who also saved a city, that of Abel, when Sheba the son of Bichri 'a worthless fellow' tried to overthrow David. Some commentators think this was the event Kohleth refers to, but this is unlikely.

(vi) The city having been saved, no one considered the wise man. They forgot what he had done. He had no recognition, no accolades, and remained poor-but yet wise.

#### **Assessment of the City Populace**

(i) In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes much is made of wisdom. Wisdom is really 'the whole of Man' in fearing God and keeping His commandments (Eccles. 12:13). The fear of the Lord is spoken of as 'the beginning of wisdom' and 'a fountain life'. Doing God's commandments is the whole of life and at the point of doing one is in full wisdom. One knows what God is about.

(ii) In Ecclesiastes 4:13 it is written, 'Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king. The youth of this statement was to come to be king. In our passage the poor wise man seemed to remain forever just that-wise but poor!

(iii) The poor wise man's wisdom is despised. His wise words go unheeded. By comparison the city opts for foolishness.

(iv) In 9:17-18 it may be that the shouting ruler is the same as the 'one sinner' who does enormous damage.

## MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

### **Assessment of the Poor Wise Man**

(i) From 9:18 we see that the poor wise man speaks quietly, and that his utterance is better than the 'shouting of a ruler among fools'. This seems to refer to the poor wise man and the ruler of the city.

(ii) The poor wise man seems unfazed by the populace despising his wisdom and forgetting what it did to save them from the enemy.

(iii) Since 'Wisdom is better than weapons of war' the poor wise man is greater in character and action than 'the fool'.

(iv) The poor wise man is sufficient in his wisdom. Poverty does not seem to distress him. He fears God and keeps His commandments and this is 'the whole of Man' and is practical wisdom wisdom is knowing the will of God.

The personal question is, "Would we be content to be poor if we could wise?"

### **A Conclusion from the Character of the Great Person, 'the Poor Wise Man'**

(i) *We need to read about, seek for, and come to understand biblical wisdom.* Solomon sought this as the greatest gift. If we desire sincerely and then ask we can receive wisdom (James 3:13-18) for God gives it liberally and willingly. A reading of Proverbs will help to bring such wisdom. See especially 4:7-9,

7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

9 She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

10 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.

(ii) *God does what He does through His 'weakness'* as in I Corinthians 1:19-2:5 (cf. II Cor. 12:7-10; 13:3-4). Christ is the wisdom and the power of God (I Cor. 1:24, 25, 30).

(iii) *God never lets the foolish*—those who think themselves wise and oppose Him, get away with their so-called wisdom (I Cor. 1:19; 3:18-21).

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.' So let no one boast of men.

We conclude that the poor wise man was a man of great greatness. He was content to be weak in the eyes of others, he must have found his wisdom to be authentic in his poverty, and he seems to have been willing to share that wisdom with others. He seems to be gentle, unambitious, and without anger for his state of poverty. Such a living example of true wisdom is rare. This is a paradigm for us knowing that Christ is our true wisdom (I Cor. 1:30; cf. Col. 2:2-3).