

## Wisdom and the Fool

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## 1. Introduction

Humanity is struggling with its folly and needs wisdom for life. Since God is the only source of wisdom, we need to study His Word. Likewise ‘folly’ can only be understood from the biblical perspective. Complementing the word study of ‘wise’, we now provide a word study of ‘fool’ to learn even more for practical living. Here the ‘fool’ is portrayed with his characteristics before he is contrasted with the ‘wise’. The book of Proverbs is the main source for our subject, but we will expand the focus on the other wisdom texts Ecclesiastes and Job, then on the whole Old Testament canon and finally we search for the fool in other ancient Near Eastern texts.

There are three<sup>1</sup> terms for ‘fool’ in Proverbs (*kâciyl*, *’eviyl* and *nabal*) and one more word-group apart from the book (*cahal*).<sup>2</sup> Related words that are usually used for ‘foolish’ or ‘folly’ are not considered here (*pethi*, *ba`ar*, *taphel*, *toholah*).<sup>3</sup> The Septuagint provides the book of Sirach in Greek language, where ‘fool’ is translated as ‘*moros*’.<sup>4</sup> While we have to go into detail of the individual terms, we will also try to develop and conclude with a rather unified picture of the subject of ‘fool.’

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<sup>1</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Proverbs*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 23; also Harris, R. Laird et al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), no. 1011.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 3.a. below.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walker, W.L., "Definition for 'fool; folly'", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr [home page on-line]; available from *Bible History*, <<http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/f/fool+folly/>>; accessed 14 January 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3.b. below.

## 2. The Proverbial Concept of ‘Fool’

### a. Word Study of ‘Fool’

The concept of ‘fool’ is most clearly developed in the book of Proverbs. There are three Hebrew expressions translated as ‘fool’ (or ‘foolish’) in Proverbs.<sup>5</sup>

אָוִיל ( <i>'eviyil</i> )	Prov 1:7; 7:22; 10:8.10.14.21; 11:29; 12:15.16; 14:3.9; 15:5; 16:22; 17:28; 20:3; 24:7; 27:3.22; 29:9
כָּסִיל ( <i>kâciyl</i> )	Prov 1:22.32; 3:35; 8:5; 10:1.18.23; 12:23; 13:16.19.20; 14:7.8.16.24.33; 15:2.7.14.20; 17:10.12.16.21.24.25; 18:2.6.7; 19:1.10.13.29; 21:20; 23:9; 26:1.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12; 28:26; 29:11.20
נָבַל ( <i>nabal</i> )	Prov 17:7.21; 30:22

The strongest expression for ‘fool’ among the three is *kâciyl*, followed by *'eviyil* and then *nabal*.<sup>6</sup> *Kâciyl* appears again only in Psalms (49:10; 92:6; 94:8) and in Ecclesiastes (2:14-16; 4:5.13; 5:1.3.4; 6:8; 7:4-6.9; 9:17; 10:2.12.15). It is derived from the primitive root *kacal* that is used in Jer 10:8 where the idolaters are called ‘foolish.’ Thus foolishness is strongly related to God and his decrees. The Arabic cognate means ‘sluggish’ and originates from ‘thick, plumb, fat.’<sup>7</sup> Such sluggishness

<sup>5</sup> John Hurt, “King James Bible Hebrew Concordance,” *The HTML Bible* [home page on-line]; available from <<http://www.htmlbible.com/sacrednamebiblecom/kjvstrongs/>>; accessed 29 October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), no. 44; an even stronger negative term is *luwts* usually translated as ‘scoffer’ (e.g. in Prov 9:7).

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English*

may suggest a slow, self-confident person.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Proverbs also teaches much about the sluggard who sits close to the fool since he also is not wise. (Prov 6:6; cf. 6:9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16)

The *kâciyl* is not mentally deficient but ignores knowledge and understanding. (Prov 1:22; 18:2; cf 26:12) In result he makes wrong and immoral choices that lead him to destruction. (Prov 1:32; cf. 10:23; 13:16) The fool is recognized by his speech. (Prov 10:18; 12:23; 15:2.7.14; 18:6.7; 29:11) Those who live with him suffer from his folly (Prov 13:20; 17:12; cf. 14:7f.), especially his parents. (Prov 10:1; 15:20; 17:12.21.25) Much is taught on how to treat the *kâciyl*. (Prov 19:29; 23:9; 26:1-11)

The *'eviyl* is morally insolent, self-sufficient, hasty and impatient, thoughtless, ill-tempered and unrestrained. He despises wisdom and discipline (Prov 1:7; 15:5) and does not listen to advice (Prov 12:15). He even mocks at sin. (Prov 14:9) The *'eviyl* does not control his speech, which leads to ruin or death. (Prov 10:8.10.14; 10:21; cf. 12:16; 14:3; 20:3) His folly deprives his family of livelihood, and his mismanagement may even lead to slavery.<sup>9</sup> (Prov 11:29) In summary, wisdom is too high for the fool (Prov 24:7), and his company is hard to bear. (Prov 27:3; cf. 29:9)

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*Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 492.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, W.L., "Definition for 'fool; folly'", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, no. I.2.(3).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 966.

The word *nabal* appears only three times in Proverbs but in total 18 times in the Old Testament canon.<sup>10</sup> The term “includes the concepts associated with *kâciyl* and *'eviyl*, and also emphasizes being ignoble and disgraceful, a downright boor.”<sup>11</sup> His folly is related to his speech (Prov 17:7) and affects his whole family (Prov 17:21), like with the two terms above. In the Psalms David writes that the *nabal* does not even believe in God. (Ps 14:1; 53:1) About the *'eviyl* and the *kâciyl* it is written that they do not fear God. (Prov 1:7; 14:16) Since there is no wisdom apart from the fear of God, we can conclude that the fool’s lack of faith is the trigger for his immorality.

#### **b. ‘Fool’ in Contrast to ‘Wise’**

The concept of ‘fool’ is closely related to the concept of ‘wise.’ Folly is opposite to wisdom and so the fool is the antonym of the wise. This principle is most clearly seen in regard to the fear of God: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” (Prov 1:7) A common pattern in proverbs is that the two lines of a bicolon complement each other. Here, they refer to a unified whole from two antithetical perspectives (‘knowledge’ and ‘fools’), and in this way

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<sup>10</sup> According to James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (electronic ed.) (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), no. 5036; cf. John Hurt, “King James Bible Hebrew Concordance”; see also chapter 3.a. below.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, R. Laird et al., *Theological Wordbook*, no. 1285.

the second line highlights the truth of the first (*'proverbial merismus'*).<sup>12</sup> Those who fear God are wise, and those who reject wisdom (and therefore God himself) are fools. “In this fashion the polarity of the entire Book of Proverbs – the way of the wise and the way of the fool – is introduced.”<sup>13</sup> The concept is further developed in Prov 10:23: “A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.” Again, the two perspectives are contrasted – the fool and the wise.

Thus the characteristics of the fool are opposite to the characteristics of the wise. Whereas the wise “delights in wisdom” (Prov 10:23), the fool despises it. (Prov 1:7.22; 15:5; 18:2; cf. 12:15; 26:12) In result, their different attitudes produce their different styles of speech. The words of the wise are shaped by the wisdom he attained, but the folly of the fool is recognized by his speech. Moreover, the wise often “holds his tongue” (Prov 10:19), whereas the fool lies and slanders (Prov 10:18; cf. 29:11), and his heart “blurts out folly.” (Prov 12:23; cf. 15:2; 20:3) Therefore, since “the tongue has the power of life and death” (Prov 18:21), the fool – unlike the wise – reaps destruction from his speech. (Prov 18:6.7) In other words, “The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.” (Prov 10:8) Eventually, destruction is the fate of the fool because he despises wisdom.

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<sup>12</sup> Duane A. Garret, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

Unfortunately, the fool's destroying words also affect his listeners. Ross comments on Prov 18:21 with the Midrash: "The evil tongue slays three, the slanderer, the slandered, and the listener."<sup>14</sup> The characteristic of the wise and his speech stands in stark contrast: "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked." (Prov 10:11) And again, "The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment." (Prov 10:21) Thus the wise leads his listeners to life, but the fool draws his people to death.

Apart from the strong emphasis of wisdom on proper words, the fool is also characterized by his immoral deeds. Proverbs does not go into detail at this point, but says that the "fool finds pleasure in evil conduct" and even "mocks at sin" in general. (Prov 10:23; 14:9) Again, the life of the wise provides the counterpart. Contrary to the fool, "the righteous hate what is false." (Prov 13:5) And in result, "the truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death." (Prov 11:19) Both the fool's words and his deeds bring about his destruction.

In summary, Proverbs teaches the doctrine of the two ways, a 'black-and-white' concept. There is no middle way between right and wrong, wise and foolish. The reader must decide to follow the wise or the fool. The framework of this doctrine reveals the truly 'black' characteristics of the fool and the seriousness of his state.

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<sup>14</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," 1028.

### 3. Additional Studies of ‘Fool’

#### a. Biblical Examples of ‘Fool’

The Hebrew terms for ‘fool’ also appear in several other Old Testament books apart from Proverbs.<sup>15</sup> Mostly they are used in the other wisdom books Ecclesiastes and Job, but they also appear in passages of Psalms associated with wisdom. Moreover, some prophets speak of the ‘fool’ and the word *nabal* also occurs in Deuteronomy<sup>16</sup> and 2 Samuel. And in 1 Samuel 25, a man who is even named ‘Nabal’ provides the one classical model of ‘fool’ in the Old Testament.

David asked Nabal for his favour, but Nabal refused harshly and arrogantly: “Who is David?” (1 Sam 25:10) His example vividly portrays the importance of proper words. As Proverbs says, “Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.” (Prov 27:3) David was provoked to react accordingly; he put on his sword to fight against Nabal. The servants reported to Nabal’s wife: “Disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no-one can talk to him.” (1 Sam 25:17) Nabal was a typical fool whose folly led him to disaster. Even his whole household suffered from him, and there is no way to talk with such a fool to avoid the ruin. Only Abigail his wife could help.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Hurt, “King James Bible Hebrew Concordance.”

<sup>16</sup> See Deut 32:6,21; Moses in his Song laments Israel’s apostasy and equals folly with the lack of faith in Israel (v.6) and the heathen nations (v.21).



Like in Proverbs, folly is contrasted by wisdom. Abigail knew how to speak and act wisely. “The lips of the righteous know what is fitting” (Prov 10:32), and so she humbled herself before David. In addition, she knew that “A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath” (Prov 21:14), bringing presents to David. Her wisdom shines bright in the darkness of Nabal’s folly; he was “just like his name – his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.” (1 Sam 25:25) While his wife acted wisely, he was drinking. Finally, “the Lord struck Nabal and he died.” (1 Sam 25:38) Nabal’s sudden end is typical for the proverbial fool.

When Saul was chasing David and David spared his life, he saw his sin and added: “Surely I have acted like a fool.” (1 Sam 26:21) Unlike in Proverbs, the Hebrew expression in this case is *akal*. The word appears in seven more verses, mostly relating folly with sin in the sense that the foolish people were acting without faith and dependence on God.<sup>17</sup> (Gen 31:28, 1 Sam 13:13, 2 Sam 24:10, 1 Chr 21:8, 2 Chr 16:9; cf. 2 Sam 15:31; Is 44:25) The root form may have the meaning “to be stopped up”, denoting thickheadedness.<sup>18</sup> Despite the different Hebrew wording in Proverbs, a connection can clearly be seen: Thickheaded self-sufficiency and independence from God is opposed to the fear of God that is essential for wisdom.

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<sup>17</sup> Harris, R. Laird et al., *Theological Wordbook*, no. 1493.

<sup>18</sup> Walker, W.L., "Definition for 'fool; folly'", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, no. I.2.(4).

In the wisdom literature, the proverbial fool appears more often. As mentioned above, Ecclesiastes describes the *kâciyl* many times (but not the *'eviyl* and the *nabal*). The Teacher often relates the fool to the wise and contrasts their opposing conduct. (Eccl 2:14-16; 4:13; 6:8; 7:4-6; 9:17; 10:2.12) Like in Proverbs, the fool speaks and acts folly (Eccl 5:1.3.4; 7:9; 10:15), and so his end is ruin. (Eccl 4:5; 10:12)

In Job, Eliphaz justifies his deuteronomic theology with the proverb, “resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.” (Job 5:2) His point is that the *'eviyl* reaps what he sows, and “suddenly his house was cursed.” (Job 5:3) This is in harmony with Proverbs, but disproved as a generalization by the exception of Job. Earlier, Job himself exhorts his wife to keep the faith in the fear of God and not to curse God while talking like a *nabal*. (Job 2:10) Thus in summary, the book of Job confirms Proverbs but also adds to it by Job’s exceptional testimony.

Psalms contributes to the topic with its wisdom passages. Even twice David contemplates, “The fool says in his heart, There is no God.” (Ps 14:1; 53:1) Psalms confirms that the fool’s main failure lies in his lack of proper relationship with God. In line with Proverbs, the Psalmist also suffers from the *nabal* and so he prays for vindication. (Ps 39:8; 74:18.22) Rebellion against God are characteristic for the *'eviyl*. (Ps 107:17) Again compared with the wise, the *kâciyl* has no understanding, and eventually he will be forever destroyed. (Ps 92:6-7; 94:8)

The prophets mention *'eviyl* four times (Hos 9:7; Jer 4:22; Is 19:11; 35:8) and *nabal* three times (Jer 17:11; Ezk 13:3; Is 32:5-6), but *kâciyl* not at all. Reason for this might be that the wisdom texts emphasize the lack of wisdom and understanding of the fool, whereas the prophets focus more on the fool's immorality.

Jeremiah provides a good summary for the fool that includes all elements of folly – lack of faith, lack of understanding and immoral behavior: “My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.” (Jer 4:22) Also Isaiah pinpoints: “The fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil.” (Is 32:6) Besides, Isaiah shows that the characteristic of the fool is his separation from God. (Is 19:11; 35:8)

Although, one cannot decide whether such separation is the root of their foolishness or whether, the other way around, the foolishness is reason for the apostasy of Israel. For example, the fool “gains riches by unjust means” (Jer 17:11) but soon loses his wealth, a pattern that is also exposed in Proverbs. (Prov 1:10-19; 28:8) But while in Proverbs there is no wisdom apart from the fear of God, the prophets teach from another perspective that “your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.” (Is 59:2) From the viewpoint of the prophets, injustice is not just folly but sin that separates from God. Such sin may even lead to the perverse situation that the prophet is considered a fool. (Hos 9:7)

## b. Non-Canonical Documents

Search for the term ‘fool’ in the King James Version Apocrypha<sup>19</sup> results in a list of 34 verses. Most of them (31) occur in “The wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach” (‘Ecclesiasticus’).<sup>20</sup> The book has been accepted as canonical only by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches but not by the Jews and Protestants. According to the prologue it was originally written in Hebrew by Jesus son of Sirach (~180 BC) and then translated by his grandson into Greek (~130 BC). The book’s style and content is similar to biblical Proverbs; the bulk of Ecclesiasticus is wisdom sayings or groups of sayings covering a wide variety of subjects. The author makes only little reference to specific social or historical events.

The Greek term for ‘fool’ in Ecclesiasticus is μωρός (*moros*). (Sir 18:18; 19:11, etc.; 20:13; 21:16, etc.) The word also appears in the New Testament and essentially denotes foolishness in relation to God and his salvation.<sup>21</sup> (Mt 5:22; 7:26; 23:17.19; 25:2.3.8; 1 Cor 1:25.27; 3:18; 4:10; 2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9) Sirach teaches about the fool

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<sup>19</sup> Includes the books of I & II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of Three Youths, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, and I & II Maccabees; *The Apocrypha: King James Version* (electronic ed.) (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> The other references are: Wisdom of Solomon 5:4; 15:5 and Susanna 14:48.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “Moros”; available from “Dictionary and Word Search for ‘moros’ (Strong’s 3474)”, *Blue Letter Bible* [home page on-line], <<http://cf.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/>>; accessed 15 January 2008.

mainly in the instructions and proverbs section of chapters 18-22. Heavy emphasis is laid upon proper and gracious words that the fool cannot speak. On the contrary, the fool is unrestrained and hasty with his words. (e.g. Sir 18:18.27; 20:7.13.20; 21:14.16.20.26) The proverbial language in Sirach is picturesque and striking:

“Having heard something, the fool suffers birth pangs  
like a woman in labor with a child.  
Like an arrow stuck in a person's thigh,  
so is gossip inside a fool.”  
(Sir 19:11.12, New Revised Standard Version)

Much is taught on how to treat the fool, e.g. not to tell him secrets. Like an arrow stuck in the flesh, the fool wants to – even must – pull it out. (cf. Sir 8:17)

A great portion of teaching on wisdom and folly is found in chapter 22:9-18, where the author sums up his contempt of the fool, again in powerful language:

“Weep for the dead, for he has left the light behind;  
and weep for the fool, for he has left intelligence behind.  
Weep less bitterly for the dead, for he is at rest;  
but the life of the fool is worse than death.”  
(Sir 22:11, NRSV; cf. 22:12)

Thus in summary, the fool is simply “wanting in wisdom” (Sir 19:23; cf. 21:18f.) in Sirach just as in the Old Testament. Distinctively, biblical wisdom’s dependency on God is to some extent replaced in Sirach by wisdom’s link to the Torah.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul J. Achtemier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985); available from *BibleTexts.com Bible Commentary* [home page on-line],

The Wisdom of Solomon, “a poetic discourse composed in Greek by a Hellenistic Jew, probably in Alexandria, Egypt,”<sup>23</sup> exhorts on the folly of idolatry, esp. in chapter 15:1-15. Verse 5 states, the fools “desire the form of a dead image, that hath no breath.” The language is as strong as in the Old Testament. Yet the emphasis is on the danger of (Egyptian) idolatry alone and not on wisdom vs. folly. Besides, the book’s teaching on wisdom is strongly influenced by Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

The Old Testament books including the wisdom books can also be related to the literature of the ancient Near East. Firstly we may consider Egypt and Mesopotamia. Then, “since Israel emerged from the same Northwest-Semitic background as the Phoenicians and other Canaanite groups which continued to exist down into the Iron Age, one would expect to find extremely close relationships in both material and higher culture.”<sup>25</sup> Besides, not only Israel but also Phoenicia and Canaan had strong ties with Egypt both geographically and historically.<sup>26</sup> Therefore we can reasonably expect parallels between the Old Testament wisdom canon and non-canonical ancient Near Eastern documents from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia or Canaan.

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<<http://www.bibletexts.com/glossary/>>; accessed 15 January 2008, s.v. “Sirach”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, s.v. “Wisdom of Solomon”.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Albright, W. F., “Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

However, a link can be seen mainly in regard to style and language. The metric style of Proverbs often agrees with that of Ugaritic epics, and the book contains many words with Ugaritic and Canaanite background.<sup>27</sup> In regard to content, not much can be said about parallels to our subject of ‘fool’ here. Most of the non-canonical wisdom literature is instructions on proper conduct instead. The famous instruction of Amenemopet that parallels Proverbs 22:17-24:22, for example, does not refer to the fool at all. The older Egyptian instruction of the vizier Ptah-Hotep refers to the fool only twice. One time the reader is warned against the folly of adultery. Then, the fool is also compared with the wise in typical fashion of the wisdom genre: “The wise man rises early in the morning to establish himself, (but) the fool rises early in the morning (only) to agitate himself.”<sup>28</sup>

Little more can be found in the other wisdom texts about the fool. However, similarities with the book of Proverbs nonetheless prevail even if the fool is not explicitly mentioned. The Aramaic ‘Words of Ahiqar’ lay emphasis on proper speech:

“More than all watchfulness watch thy mouth,  
and [over] what [*thou*] *h[earst]* harden thy heart.  
For a word is like a bird: once released no man *can re[capture it]*.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6f.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, vol.1, *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 237.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 246.

And, in parallel to Proverbs 27:3 where the fool is described, Ahiqar says:

“I have lifted sand, and I have carried salt;  
but there is naught which is heavier than [*rage*].”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in sum, biblical Proverbs was not written as an isolated wisdom text of the ancient Near East. Parallels can be seen to the non-canonical apocrypha and texts of the surrounding nations. However, the strong link between the biblical fool and his Creator seems to be absent outside the canon. The proverbial fool of biblical wisdom is first and foremost a fool because of his improper attitude towards God. The non-canonical texts do not stress on the fear of the Lord as the canon does.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The significance of ‘fool’ is best seen in contrast to ‘wisdom.’ The latter was the outcome of observation and meditation in dependency upon God and his revelation. The fool, in contrast, “was he who was thoughtless, careless, conceited, self-sufficient, indifferent to God and his will, or who might even oppose and scoff at religion and wise instruction.”<sup>31</sup> As for us, we now have a decision to make. Two ways are offered to the reader, the way of the wise and the way of the fool.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, W.L., "Definition for 'fool; folly'", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, no. I.2.



Since this essay exposed the life of the fool, the reader is warned by the negative example. The burden of such exhortation lies in the fact that the fool does not listen, neither to the biblical text nor to the present work. This is why the introducing chapters of Proverbs repeatedly warn the reader to listen. In the same spirit the student calls the reader to listen, observe and meditate. Only the fool disregards wisdom.

Most important element of wisdom is the fear of God. Together with the Word of God the fool disregards even God himself. Such lack of faith is crucial here, because wisdom resides with God. However, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pet 5:5b; cf. Prov 3:34) The proud is wise in his own eyes and does not listen – like Nabal. We are called to be humble instead. We should restrain from foolish talk, fear God, listen to his instruction with a humble heart and so become wise for our own benefit as well as for the benefit of our companions.

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