

## *Sophia*

In classical Greek, the noun *sophia* was used to mean “cleaverness” or “skill” in any kind of handicraft, art or knowledge. However, eventually the word was used exclusively in philosophical discussions (Liddell-Scott, page 1621-22).

In these discussion it was acquired various meanings such as “insight, sound judgment and practical wisdom” pertaining to matters of everyday life. It was also used of “speculative wisdom” when used of the complexities of life and existence and theoretical knowledge.

In the Septuagint, the noun *sophia* primarily is used to translate the Hebrew *chokhmah* although it does translate other terms as well. Like *sophia*, *chokhmah* describes “skill” or “expertise” in some practical matter or task (See Exodus 28:3; 31:2-6; 35:25f., 30f.; 36:1f; 1 Chronicles 28:21; 2 Chronicles 2:12 [LXX 2:11]; 1 Kings 7:13-36 [LXX 3 Kings 7:13-46]; 2 Chronicles 2:7 [2:6]; Isaiah 40:20; Jeremiah 10:8-9).

In the Septuagint, *chokhmah* also means “judgment, insight, wisdom” (Proverbs 2:10f.; 5:1f.; 7:4f.; 16;23; 20:1; 23:19-23; Ecclesiastes 10:10; Psalm 37:30 [LXX 36:30]). The Old Testament teaches that true wisdom comes only through a relationship and fellowship with God (Psalm 111:10 [LXX 110:10]; Proverbs 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28).

Wisdom in the Old Testament is the result of listening and obeying God’s Word (Proverbs 10:8; 11:2; 13:10; Hosea 14:9 [LXX 14:10]). All wisdom originates with God and resides in His character and nature (Job 12:13; Isaiah 28:29). God reveals His wisdom through His creation (Psalm 104:24 [LXX 103:24]; Proverbs 3:19f.; Isaiah 40:13f.; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15 [LXX 28:15]).

The laws governing His creation were determined by His wisdom (Job 37:16; 38:36f.) but do not restrict His power (Job 9:4f.). God’s wisdom is manifested by guiding individuals and nations (Job 11:5f; 12:16-25; Daniel 2:19-22). His wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8:12-36 as a description of God’s character and nature.

In the Greek New Testament, the noun *sophia* is only understood from the background of the Old Testament. It appears 14 times in the Synoptics and Acts, 15 times in the general epistles and 4 times in Revelation.

*Sophia* also appears 28 times in Paul’s writings and no less than 15 instances occur in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians. The word applies exclusively to God and believers. It is applied to others in a sarcastic sense such as the “wisdom” of the world, 1 Corinthians 1:20, fleshly wisdom, 2 Corinthians 1:12.

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature-Third Edition lists the following meanings for the *sophia*: (1) the capacity to understand and function accordingly, wisdom (a) natural wisdom that belongs to this world (b) transcendent wisdom that God imparts to those who are

close to Him (2) personified wisdom (3) a book titled ‘Wisdom of God’ (Pages 934-935).

Vine commenting on the word, writes, “*Sophia* is used with reference to (a) God, Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 1:21,24; 2:7; Eph 3:10; Rev 7:12; (b) Christ, Matt 13:54; Mark 6:2; Luke 2:40,52; 1 Cor 1:30; Col 2:3; Rev 5:12; (c) ‘wisdom’ personified, Matt 11:19; Luke 7:35; 11:49; (d) human ‘wisdom’ (1) in spiritual things, Luke 21:15; Acts 6:3,10; 7:10; 1 Cor 2:6 (1st part); 12:8; 1:8,17; 1:9, RV, ‘(spiritual) wisdom,’ 28; 3:16; 4:5; 5; 3:13,17; 15; 18; 17:9; (2) in the natural sphere, Matt 12:42; Luke 11:31; Acts 7:22; 1 Cor 1:17,19,20,21 (twice), 22; 2:1,4,5,6 (2nd part), 13; 3:19; 12; 23; (3) in its most debased form, James 3:15, ‘earthly, sensual, devilish’ (marg., ‘demoniacal’) (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c) 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

Louw and Nida’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains lists the following meanings for the noun *sophia*: (1) the capacity to understand and as a result, to act wisely – ‘to be prudent, wisdom’ (volume 2, page 384) (2) the content of what is known by those regarded as wise – ‘wisdom, insight, understanding’ (volume 2, page 385) (3) knowledge which makes possible skillful activity or performance – ‘specialized knowledge, skill’ (volume 2, page 335) (4) a document or book containing wise sayings (volume 2, page 385).

The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised lists the following meanings, “wisdom in general, knowledge; ability; practical wisdom, prudence; learning, science; scientific skill; professed wisdom, human philosophy; superior knowledge and enlightenment; divine wisdom; revealed wisdom; Christian enlightenment” (Page 371).

In Romans 11:33, the noun *sophia* is used of God’s wisdom, which is based upon His omniscience and is His unique ability to devise a perfect plan to accomplish His goal to glorify Himself. The word denotes God’s ability to perfectly execute His plan of salvation and as a result glorify Himself.

The wisdom of God is expressed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, which presents God’s provision of eternal salvation for the entire human race through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, the apostle Paul condemns the wisdom of the cosmic system, teaching that the wisdom of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ is superior and has made foolish the wisdom of the cosmic system. In 1 Corinthians 1:17-31, Paul attacks the self-confidence of the Greeks, who boast of their human wisdom, which is cosmic viewpoint (1 Co. 1:29; cf. 1 Co. 3:21). He rejects human wisdom and boasts in the wisdom he received from the Lord through the Spirit.

God's wisdom resides in the mind and thinking of Christ, which appears in the written Word of God.

**Colossians 2:3, "in whom (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."**

The believer acquires the wisdom of God by letting the Word of Christ richly dwell in his soul, which gives him the capacity to glorify God in whatever circumstance or relationship in life.

**Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."**

James describes God's wisdom.

**James 3:17, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."**

In Ephesians 3:1-12, the apostle Paul teaches that the multi-faceted wisdom of God is being made known through the church to the "rulers" and "authorities." In Ephesians 1:16-17, Paul informs the Ephesian believers that he prays that they would receive spiritual wisdom and revelation from the Holy Spirit regarding their union and identification with Christ, which is by means of an experiential knowledge of the Father.

"**Spiritual wisdom**" is an attribute of God that is found in the Person of Christ and expressed in the Word of Christ, which is the mind and thinking of Christ and refers to the ability and know how to execute the Father's will.

J. I. Packer writes, "God's wisdom is seen in His works of creation, preservation and redemption: it is His choice of His own glory as His goal (Ps 46:10; Isa. 42:8; 48:11), and His decision to achieve it first by creating a marvelous variety of things and people (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19, 20), second by kindly providences of all sorts (Ps. 145:13, 14, 15, 16; Acts 14:17), and third by the redemptive 'wisdom' of 'Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16) and the resultant world church (Eph. 3:10). (J. I. Packer Concise Theology)