

Ecclesiastes 12:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

Analysis

The words of the wise are as goads (דָּרְבָּנוֹת, darvonot)—pointed sticks used to prod cattle into productive work. Wise words disturb complacency, pierce self-deception, and provoke necessary action. **And as nails fastened** (מְשִׁמְרוֹת נֶטוּעִים, masmerot netu'im)—firmly driven tent pegs or construction nails that provide stability and permanence.

The dual metaphor captures wisdom's paradoxical functions: goads are sharp, uncomfortable, mobile—they push and disturb. Nails are secure, permanent, stabilizing—they anchor and fix. True wisdom both unsettles and establishes, wounds and heals. **Given from one shepherd**—ultimately from God Himself, the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1). All genuine wisdom, despite multiple human authors ('masters of assemblies'), derives from the one divine source. This anticipates Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) and the incarnate Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Historical Context

Agricultural metaphors resonated powerfully with ancient Israel's predominantly rural population. Every farmer knew goads' necessary pain and nails' essential stability. The reference to 'masters of assemblies' (בָּאָלֵי אָסְפּוֹת, ba'alei asupot) likely indicates the wise teachers who compiled Israel's wisdom tradition—not just Solomon but sages across generations. Jewish tradition recognized multiple

authors of Scripture's wisdom literature while affirming ultimate divine authorship. The Reformers emphasized this dual authorship: human authors wrote in their own styles and historical contexts, yet the Holy Spirit superintended all Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), making God the one Shepherd-author behind diverse human voices.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How have God's words functioned as painful 'goads' in your life, disturbing comfortable patterns and provoking necessary change?
2. In what areas do you need Scripture's 'nails'—firmly anchoring truths that stabilize your thinking and provide security?

Interlinear Text

בָּעֵל יְנֻטוּעַ יִם וְכִמְשָׁמָר וְתַּפְּצֵת רְבָנָה וְתַּחֲכָמִים דְּבָרָה
The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the masters
H1697 H2450 H1861 H4930 H5193 H1167

אָסֹפָה וְתַּחֲנֵן וְהַמְּרַאֲתָה מִרְאֵעַת אֶחָד:
of assemblies which are given shepherd from one
H627 H5414 H7462 H259

Additional Cross-References

Acts 2:37 (Parallel theme): Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Hebrews 4:12 (Word): For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Isaiah 40:11 (Parallel theme): He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 22:23 (Parallel theme): And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.

Psalms 80:1 (Parallel theme): Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Jeremiah 23:29 (Word): Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

John 10:14 (Parallel theme): I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

Ezekiel 34:23 (Parallel theme): And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.