

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 36: The Book of Proverbs, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Introduction

If you were to go to a Christian Living Seminar that lasted for several days, you might receive a syllabus listing workshops on various areas of study such as: Christian Living; Personal finances; Self-esteem; Common Problems; Dealing with Adversities; Personal Relationships; Human Sexuality; Life Purposes; etc. The goal of this seminar would be to change your life.

READ PROVERBS 1:1-6

The goal of the Book of Proverbs is also to change the lifestyle of the reader. Since this is true, it is especially valuable for young people who can, by observing them, avoid much of the grief we bring upon ourselves in life. However, as an old guy, I found them convicting and instructive as well. It deals with all the above topics and many more.

Author

Following the Book of Psalms, of which David was the primary lyricist, we find three books credited to his son, Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

We don't know for sure the order in which they were written. But it is logical that Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon when he was young and in love, Proverbs when he was at the peak of his mental prowess, and Ecclesiastes when he was old and disillusioned after a long life of "striving for the wind."

There is, however, no question who wrote and compiled Proverbs. Verse 1 states that these are, *"The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel."* According to I Kings 4:32, he wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1005 songs. We also know that he collected *"sayings of the wise"* (22:17; 24:23) which were the traditional teachings handed down for generations from the "fathers." There were schools of scribes that also compiled and wrote wisdom literature.

We already know much about Solomon from our study of I Kings and II Chronicles. Here is a quick review:

Solomon was healthy, wealthy, and wise.

1. He expanded David's kingdom to over 60,000 square miles.
2. He became a trading and shipping magnate
 - controlling camel caravans throughout his kingdom
 - running a fleet of cargo ships from Tarshish to Arabia, on to India and to all points East.

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3. He became world renowned for his (God given) wisdom, power, and leadership.

BUT, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely! Influence, money, and stuff are temporal . . . the important things are eternal!

As he grew older Solomon made some very bad choices and his relationship with God deteriorated:

1. He married the daughters of many pagan princes in order to add their land to his, expanding his kingdom.

2. He allowed his wives and concubines to import their pagan deities and worship them, even allowing them to build shrines in the palace.

3. He became a cruel dictator, much like the pagan kings around him. He became obsessed with his palace, gardens, and other building projects and increased both the number of slaves and the taxes on his subjects in order to complete them.

FINALLY, he lost his moral compass.

1. He lost his lofty view of the very God for whom he built the temple.

2. He became an idol worshipping heathen himself, following his wives into the worship of their many gods, including the sexually perverted worship of Asheroth, and even worshipping Moloch which included human (child) sacrifice.

It is against this backdrop of wisdom, wealth, women, and worship that we study all of the Books of Solomon.

Method

What is the difference between a parable and a proverb?

A Parable is a story told to teach a lesson (earthly story, heavenly point)

A Proverb is a saying spoken to teach a lesson

Definition: *A proverb is a short statement that conveys moral truth in a concise and honest form.*

The Hebrew word, which was translated parable, means "a comparison" and was used for any short, wise, moralistic saying. The choice of this word makes sense since many actually are couplets or triplets arranged to be compared or contrasted against one another.

Actually the Book of Proverbs includes several lengthy lectures (i.e. chapters 1-9), and a beautiful praise poem (chapter 31), but is mainly made up of short moral teachings.

This style is not unique to the Jews or the Bible, but one of the major ways of teaching in ancient and modern literature, especially in the nations of the East (i.e. Confucius say, Chairman Mao's Little Red Book, etc.).

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Collections of Proverbs were found in many ancient libraries including wisdom sayings from Mesopotamia, Sumeria, Egypt, etc. In fact, the Egyptians used this genre to perfection as far back as 2700 B. C.

The study of these sayings or proverbs seems to have been a favorite pastime of the scribes of many lands.

In most cases these collections were textbooks for educating young aristocrats. When it says, "my son" it usually means student. One thing all wisdom writing has in common is the very practical, day-to-day, hands on approach to living. Parallel structure, repetition, and comparison are all calculated to help a student learn and *remember*.

The great distinction between the Hebrew wisdom literature and others is an important one, THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. This is made clear in 1:7, "*The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge; . . .*"

"God has condescended to become our teacher on the practical affairs of life, adapting His wisdom to the plain and simple language of the common man."--Jamieson, Fausset and Brown

So, the method of teaching in Proverbs is primarily one of comparing and contrasting:

Wisdom VS foolishness

Wise person VS the foolish person

Lover and fearer of God VS the despiser and scorner of instruction

Final end of the wise VS the ultimate end of the fool

Like any good teacher, Solomon varied his teaching styles using many creative methods to drive his lessons home. **Watch for these as you read:**

1. Proverb (already defined) 14:1
2. Command 16:3
3. List 30:24-31
4. Comparison (better saying) 21:19
5. Rhetorical question 30:4
6. Illustration (antidote to prove a point) 7:6-27
7. Riddle (question without an obvious answer) 30:15

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Like the Book of Psalms, the Book of Proverbs is a rough book to organize or outline but we will try to do so in the next lesson.

Homework:

Read: Continue your reading in the Book of Proverbs

Think: Continue to work on the area of weakness in your Christian life.

Apply: Build a list of proverbs to help you overcome your weakness

Bible Survey Lesson 37: The Book of Proverbs, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Introduction

The Book of Proverbs challenges the young and inexperienced, as well as the old and scared to seek wisdom through its study.

John MacArthur condenses the thrust of Proverbs very well:

"The two major themes which are interwoven and overlapping throughout Proverbs are wisdom and folly. Wisdom, which includes knowledge, understanding, instruction, discretion, and obedience, is built on the fear of the Lord and the Word of God. Folly is everything opposite of wisdom."

Ancient Hebrew wisdom literature begins with several assumptions:

1. God is the designer/creator!

Everything-- "*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth.*" (3:19)

Everybody-- "*The Lord possessed me at the beginning of its way, before His worlds of old.*" (8:22)

2. God is the just judge!

Observes-- ". . . *God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" (1 Sam. 16:7)

Acts-- "*The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.*" (Ps 19:9)

3. God speaks to His people

Through His leaders-- "the Fathers"

Through His Law-- "the Writings"-- "*For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching a light, and reproofs for discipline are a way of life.*" (5:23)

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Ancient Hebrew wisdom was practical:

1. It came from experience.

Chapter 31, for example contains, *"the words of king Lemuel, the oracle (message or lesson from God) which his mother taught him,"* and, 1:8 says, *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching."* And, where do you think dad and mom learned it?

2. It came from observation.

Proverbs 6:6 is famous. *"Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise."*

3. It came from God.

In the Torah, the word we have translated teaching is rendered law or commands. *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding (wisdom) is infinite."* (Psalm 147:5)

Wisdom teachers viewed life through the lens or grid of God's teachings (the Law and the prophets). We could call it being "God conscious" or teaching with a godly or Biblical world-view.

The wise, motivated by a healthy fear of God, will accept His revealed moral order and His objective standard for wisdom. With this attitude God's people find strength to face even the toughest problems raised in this book: tongue, immorality, gluttony, death, whatever.

What promise do we have that this stuff works?

Proverbs 3:5 and 6--*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean unto your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight."*

I. PROLOGUE TO WISDOM (Chapter 1:1-7)

Proverbs is unusual because it gives you it's author, purpose, and theme in the first paragraph.

A. Purpose--To Know

To know what? Wisdom, instruction, understanding, righteousness, prudence, knowledge, learning, counsel, and discretion.

B. Process--To Fear

Whom? THE LORD

To know why? *Because it makes sense.* He is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Ultimate Power in the universe, so we should have a HIGH VIEW OF GOD. If we study the attributes of God in Psalms we are forced to our knees before Him in awe (fear). *That should make us really listen!*

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II. PRECEPTS OF WISDOM (Chapter 1:8-9:18)

Now comes a series of lectures (sons and students love those) that are packed with proverbs.

A. Lesson 1: Avoid Bad Company (1:8-33)

This is nothing new coming from mom and dad, or teacher. Verse 1 starts it off, "*Hear oh my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching . . .*" (v 20) "*wisdom shouts in the street,...*"

1. "*Bad company corrupts good morals.*" --I Cor. 15:33 (8-19) If you give in to peer pressure, it leads to tragedy.
2. Listen to wisdom. "*He who listens to me shall live securely and shall be at ease from the dread of evil.*" (v 33)

B. Lesson 2: Avoid Adulterers (2)

The best reason for listening to wisdom is for your own protection. You can be saved from:

1. Crafty men (11-15) and
2. Immoral women (16-19)

"walk in the way of good men and keep the path of the righteous" (v 20)

C. Lesson 3: Seek God (3)

Wisdom is not just avoiding evil, it is knowing God.

1. Trust Him (5-6)

Accept the fact that He knows more than you do and wants what's best for you.

2. Honor Him (7-35)

Accept His principles and discipline and act them out in your life.

D. Lesson 4: Seek Wisdom (4)

(vs. 7) "*the beginning of wisdom is Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.*" The first step in the process is, "just do it !" Next, understand what you've got.

1. Learn right from wrong (the commandments) (1-19)
2. Watch your heart attitude (20-27)

"Watch over your heart with all diligence, from it flows the springs of life." (v 23)

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E. Lesson 5: Avoid Lust (5)

Our society seems to be preoccupied with sexual immorality, lust, adultery, prostitution, etc. The message here is simple:

1. Keep yourself pure before marriage for your own good. *"...you groan at your latter end when your flesh and your body are consumed."* (v 11)
2. Keep yourself pure for your marriage partner. Lest you think the writer thinks sex is dirty he describes it in beautiful poetic terms, as God intended it, in verses 15-19.

F. Lesson 6: Avoid Debt (6)

One of many things I appreciate about Valley Bible is the ongoing teaching on finances. It is an area of struggle in my life and I know there is little peace and freedom with excessive debt. This passage gives two of those principles:

1. Don't sign for others' debts (1-5) and
2. Work hard (6-11)

The chapter ends with another warning about crafty men (12-19) and immoral women (20-35). Some think that is because these people often bring financial ruin to their victims.

G. Lesson 7: Avoid Prostitutes (7)

The lesson of this chapter is clear as the teacher uses a story of a typical encounter and its natural consequences.

1. He *"follows her like a lamb to the slaughter"* (v 22) or, *"as a bird hastens to the snare."*
2. Ultimately *"it will cost him his life."* (v 23)

H. Lesson 8: Seek Wisdom (8)

It is interesting that this is placed in juxtaposition to the last . . . it is a parallel, a positive version of that sad story. Wisdom is out there, "in the streets" seeking you with the same vigor as a professional prostitute lures a mark, but the result is infinitely different.

1. The harlot leads to death (7:27), Wisdom leads to life (8:35)
2. Wisdom is more valuable than any stuff. (vv. 10 and 11) Verse 23 says,

"From everlasting I (wisdom) was established," Moral absolutes are not human inventions. They were established by God and are built into the very fabric of creation.

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I. Lesson 9: Avoid Folly (9)

The lady of wisdom is contrasted with the lady of folly.

1. Romance wisdom, you live.
2. Romance folly, you die

It is interesting that a passage on "scoffing" is placed in the middle of this lesson (vv. 7-12), especially since we who teach sexual purity are the weird ones in our present society.

III. PROVERBS OF SOLOMON (Chapters 10-24)

This section begins with a great verse, "*A wise son makes his father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.*" (1:1)

Why doesn't it say the foolish son is a grief to his dad and a wise son makes his mom glad? Its because men and women are different. To understand it you need to switch, not the parents, but the son. If you do that it would read (Kemble paraphrase), "A foolish son makes his father mad, but a wise son is a relief to his mother."

This section is a potpourri of proverbs on every conceivable subject and difficult to outline, but, let's hit some high spots.

A. Godly Living (10-15)

1. Right attitude toward stuff (10)

Earn money honestly, rely on God for needs, don't be lazy, work hard, plan ahead, be honest, watch your mouth, save money, etc. The bottom line (v 16), "*the wages of the righteous is life, the income of the wicked, punishment.*"

2. Right attitude toward people (11-13)

Be honest, humble, righteous, tactful, careful, merciful, generous, smart, faithful, discerning, truthful, and good. Why? (v 11) "*By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.*"

3. Right attitude toward the difficult (14)

This chapter presents a number of difficult situations and how to respond and deal with them: Home, fools, backsliding, gullibility, temperamental people, the poor, etc.

Verse 4 is interesting. Everybody wants the advantage of having an ox to do the work, but nobody wants to feed it or clean up after it. Now that's practical.

4. Right attitude toward teaching (15)

When you teach you should be: Gentle, accurate, joyous, correctable, prayerful, able to answer, etc.

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B. Godly Knowledge (16-24)

1. Know about God (16)

Since God is sovereign and critiques all your plans, "*Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established.*" (v. 3)

2. Know about family (17-19)

Discipline, blessing, peacemaking, love, joy, wisdom, and restraint are all traits of a happy home.

3. Know about choices (20-22:16)

Drinking, anger, laziness, disloyalty, dishonesty, greed, lying, slander, cursing, revenge, and cheating are all choices that will "*not be blessed in the end.*" (v 21)

4. Know about everything else (22:16-24)

These chapters seem to tie up lots of the loose ends.

IV. PROVERBS OF SOLOMON (Chapters 25-29)

as copied by Hezekiah's men, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah

A. Interactions (25-26)

1. With kings (25:11-7)
2. With neighbors (25:8-20)
3. With enemies (25:21-24)
4. With yourself (25:25-26:2)
5. With fools (26:3-12)
6. With lazy (26:13-16)
7. With gossips (26:17-28)

B. Actions (27-29)

1. Selfishness (27)

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." (v. 1)

2. Servitude (28:1-10)

"Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive with them." (v. 4)

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3. Stewardship (28:11-28)

"The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him." (v. 11)

4. Stubbornness (29)

"A man who hardens his neck after much reproof, will suddenly be broken beyond remedy." (v. 1)

V. PROVERBS OF OTHERS (Chapters 30-31)

These are the only two chapters of Proverbs that were not written or compiled "wise sayings" of Solomon. There is much speculation as to the identities of these two men are, but I find it all stretching a bit much. Better just admit, we don't know.

A. Agar (30)

1. Presentation (1-9)

In presenting himself to us, Agar seems to me to overdo his humility (v 2), *"I am more stupid than any man."* But, as we read on to his description of God and then to his prayer, in verses 7-9, we see his true heart.

2. Proverbs (10-33)

These proverbs are written about a number of subjects, but it is the style that is really interesting. Starting with verse 15 begins a series in a numerical or list style, i.e. each is a unit beginning with the words, *"three thing . . . no four."* *It is a very common Hebrew poetry even today."*

B. Lemuel (31)

1. Presentation (1-9)

Lemuel's mother seems to have observed the habit of kings to womanize, get drunk, and forget the poor in their kingdoms. She wants him to *"open his mouth for the unfortunate, afflicted and needy, and judge righteously."* (vv. 8 and 9)

2. This chapter ends with an acrostic poem. We use this poem often at women's retreats and in women's Bible studies, but remember, this book is addressed to young men. Therefore, I believe, it is an instruction finding a good wife. (v. 1),

"An excellent wife, who can find?" A good woman is hard to find and worth more than a fortune.

Lesson

An attempt to condense the Book of Proverbs into a short list of lessons proves to be impossible. My advice is: Read it, study it, take good notes, and **LIVE IT!**