

Oct 25 Proverbs 1-5

Introduction

The book of proverbs is an anthology of wisdom, containing not just proverbs (one-line, pithy sayings), but also lectures, instructions, speeches, and poems. Instructions was a common genre of wisdom literature, in which a king, priest, or father would pass down the wisdom of their own experience to their successor so that whoever followed after them could fully enjoy the blessings they received and avoid unnecessary troubles. Proverbs was compiled over many centuries, and could actually date back to Solomon's time, as it seems that the wisdom of King Hezekiah was added to the collected wisdom of Solomon in chapters 25-29. The most recent parts of Proverbs are chapters 1-9 and chapter 31.

Proverbs chapters 1-9 is especially important for Christian readers, as the gospel of John drew heavily from proverbs in portraying Jesus as the incarnate Word of God, a manifestation of wisdom itself. Jesus and Sophia (Lady Wisdom) are similar in the way they speak to those who are listening. The instructions contained within the first 9 chapters are concerned with forming the character of the reader to be open-hearted and faithful to the basic relationships of life (God, spouse, household, neighbor).

Chapter 1

Solomon, famous for his wisdom, is named as the patron of the entire book, even though much of it would have been written at later points in history. Vs 7 is really the thesis statement of the entire work, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*" To fear the Lord is literally to revere the Lord, to understand and accept one's rightful place in the universe and to offer to God what is due. Fear of the Lord implies the conviction that one should honor and serve God. Vs. 8-19, the author urges us to heed our parents instructions, the instructions of those who are wiser than us. These instructions begin as if to a youth leaving home for the first time, by urging us not to give in to peer pressure that would lead us down the path to greed or violence. Vs. 20-33 introduces Lady Wisdom who calls out to the simple ones (perhaps to those from the previous verses who were trying to lead the youth astray through greed and violence). She laments that she has tried so many times before to reach the wayward, and they have not heeded her. She warns them that their behavior and their rejection of wisdom will be their undoing. And finally in verse 33, she gives them one final chance to listen to her and to live without dread of disaster.

What wisdom instructions have you received or given?

Chapter 2

This chapter is written as an acrostic poem (22 lines for the 22 consonants in the Hebrew aleph-bet). The main point is that if you seek wisdom diligently, it will come to you, for the Lord delights in giving wisdom, and the Lord shares generously with those who seek him and strive to walk in his ways. What does it look like to seek wisdom diligently? Vs. 1 Treasure the commandments of God. 2. Listen. 3. Ask questions. 4. Study.

The adulterous woman in verses 16-22 is likely intended as a foreign woman. Foreign women were "dangerous" to Jewish men because they were forbidden as marriage partners, therefore any "entanglements" they may have participated in would have been akin to adultery. Proverbs is not just concerned with the seductive nature of the woman, but also with her deceitful speech. Both are dangerous to an impressionable youth.

Chapter 3

Vs 1-13, Loyalty and faithfulness are virtues that lead to trust in God (faith), as well as healthy human relationships. We are encouraged to do all we can to embody loyalty and faithfulness. Trust is a fundamental part of living a life of faith, we are called to trust in and rely on God above all else, to be humble (not wise in our own eyes), and to acknowledge God in all our ways so that he may make clear the right roads we are to take. Vs 9 & 10 give instructions on faithful stewardship –as we offer God our first fruits, so God will provide for all our needs and fill our storehouses with abundance.

Vs. 14-35, Wisdom is our greatest treasure –she yields long life, honor, and riches for those who eagerly seek her. Her ways are pleasure and peace, and she yields a tree of life –a firm foundation- for those who cling to her. The tree of life is imaged in the Bible here and in Genesis 2-3 which give knowledge and prosperity, she is also pictured in Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22 as the tree with fruit and leaves which heal the nations. This chapter concludes with several sayings about how to best treat neighbors, with the sense that treating our neighbors well brings blessing to us.

Chapter 4

The teacher now shares an anecdote with his son about his own life, when he was young, learning from his own father. The point of this anecdote is that his authority as a teacher of wisdom comes from the fact that he was once the naïve learner who obeyed his own father's instructions and sought wisdom diligently. The father's words paint a picture of a loving, committed relationship between a person and wisdom, the person seeks wisdom and wisdom guards the person –the love between human and wisdom is a two way, mutual relationship.

Two competing ways of life are presented, one moral and wise, the other wicked. Both the wise and the wicked have their paths to tread, and their destinies that await –either light or darkness. It is hard work staying on the path of wisdom and righteousness.

Chapter 5

The teacher now instructs the youth to choose the right partner (in this case, the right woman). Just as the previous chapter had two competing paths to walk in life, this is now illustrated by the path of choosing a woman to be with. The teacher instructs the youth to avoid foreign (loose) women, for they are seductive and enticing, but lead to poor health (perhaps disease), dissipation of the family's wealth, a ruined reputation, and bitter regret for not heeding the wisdom of the elders. Vs. 15-16, is likely a metaphor for sexual pleasure, indicating that a man should exercise his sexuality only with his own spouse in his own household (and not in an adulterous way, with prostitutes in the streets, or with "foreign" partners who would lead the youth away from his relationship with God). Sexuality within marriage is blessed, and the teacher's hope for the youth is for him to be "intoxicated always by his wife's love."