

Books of The Bible

Survey of Proverbs - Part 2

Introduction

As with any book of the Scriptures, there is never an end to musing on its sacred truths. Therefore, if one were to look at numerous commentaries, it would be that the outlines are like roads on a map. If I am on a road I want to know where it is leading to and the same is true with the books of the scriptures. While outlines and structures are very useful, they do not tell the readers what the thought flow is leading to. Like the road map, they inform the name of the road, but nothing more.

The Scope Of It's Instruction

Due to the God given wisdom of Solomon, He was able to make observations regarding God's providential dealings with humanity, man's relationships and their consequences to men and governments. It is almost impossible to think of any aspect of life which escaped Solomon's attention. For instance, matters pertaining to personal conduct; sexual relations; business; wealth; charity; ambition; discipline; debt; child-rearing; character; alcohol; politics; revenge; and godliness are among the many topics covered in this collection of his wise sayings.

Terms For Wisdom In Proverbs

In the consideration of life, Solomon uses a number of different words to describe "Wisdom".

- a) **Hokmah** - a proper grasp of the basic issues of life, particularly one's relationship to God as a moral agent. It includes the ability to determine right from wrong and make the proper judgment on moral and ethical issues.
- b) **Bina** - denotes the ability to determine between sham and reality. The root is from "ben", which means "between", hence the ability to choose between two issues.
- c) **Tasiyya** - this denotes wisdom in terms of spiritual or psychological truth. The basic idea is that the source of this wisdom is divine and not earthly.

Knowledge is nothing more than an accumulation of raw facts, but wisdom is the ability to see people, events, and situations as God sees them.

- a) Wisdom is knowing when to apply knowledge and understanding to a proper situation.
- b) Instruction is literally "discipline," both negative and positive. Proverbs rebukes bad behaviour while showing what is good behaviour.
- c) To discern understanding means to be able to see how related facts come together, to have a greater insight into how things function etc.

The Author

After the initial introduction and beginning in chapter 1:1-6, verse 7 begins the proverbs of Solomon which go until chapter 29:27. These are divided into two groups, those which an unknown compiler wrote and those which, under the direction of King Hezekiah, the men of Judah copied out (ch. 25:1). Since Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs, it is evident not all of his proverbs have been preserved (1 Kgs. 4:32).

Furthermore, Solomon did not speak all the proverbs. Agur spoke the proverbs of chapter 30:1-33 and King Lemuel spoke the ones his mother had taught him (ch. 31:1-31).

Structure

No doubt Proverbs presents a major difficulty relating to structure, yet several basic observations can be made. A structure can be seen in viewing it by who wrote what part of the book.

- a) ch. 1:1-7 - basic introduction detailing the purpose of the book
- b) ch. 1:8-24:33 - the proverbs of Solomon

Books of The Bible

Survey of Proverbs - Part 2

- c) ch. 25:2-29:27 - the proverbs of Solomon which Hezekiah had written out (ch. 25:1)
- d) ch. 30:1-33 - the words of Agur
- e) ch. 31:1-31 - the prophecy King Lemuel's mother taught him.

The immediate recipient:

- a) The primary function of the book of Proverbs is to instruct youth. The recurrent phrase "my son" (which is typical of all Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature) points to this purpose. Throughout the book of Proverbs the "advice to youth" motif is loud and clear. Youth is warned against the adulteress; to hold his tongue; to pay diligent attention to wisdom's teachings; to deal honestly with his fellow human beings; and to avoid association with the wicked.

One Of The Major Themes Of The Book

In daily life we meet those who are "scorners", a subject which Proverbs has a lot to say about. A scorner is an individual who despises any counsel outside his own thoughts and determination. He is set in direct contrast to those who are wise for the wise man will listen to the advice of others. For example:

- a) A wise son will hear his father's instruction, "a scorner heareth not rebuke" (ch. 13:1).
- b) A truly wise man will value advice as well as the advisor (ch. 9:8); but "a scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise" (ch. 15:12). Furthermore, the scorner, whether "smitten" (ch. 19:25), "punished" (ch. 21:11), or "reproved" (ch. 9:7), never benefits from the correction or discipline.
- c) When this is contrasted with David when confused by the treachery of Saul, he went to "the wise" Samuel, an older man of God who could help by giving solidification to the confused Psalmist (1 Sam. 19:18).
- d) Paul did the same thing when he went to Jerusalem to consult with those who seemed to be pillars, wisely wishing to obtain the advice of more experienced saints and servants (Gal. 1:17).

Sadly, not only will a scorner reject the warnings and advice of man, the individual will also do it when the instruction comes from God. Such a one is marked by pride which is at the root of the scorner's attitude by their insightful observations on this verse, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God: "But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5). Lacking the grace of self-control, the scorner's pride causes him to strike out at others, "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath" (ch. 21:24). "Surely He scorneth the scorners: but He giveth grace unto the lowly" (ch. 3:34). In the New Testament, James and Peter confirm that (Jam. 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

Sad beyond words when an individual rejects the admonition of God for to them the question comes, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" (ch. 1:22).

Man

The responsibilities of humanity

- a) To be aware that there are consequences for how one behaves or what they do (ch. 10:4-21; 23-11:8).
- b) In his dealings with others (ch. 11:2, 5, 6, 17, 18, 20).

God

- 1) God is the Source of all wisdom (ch. 2:6).
- 2) God is the moral God (ch. 11:1, 29).
- 3) God is the Sovereign providential responder to man's activities (ch. 10:3, 22; 11:9-13, 25-27).

Books of The Bible Survey of Proverbs - Part 2

Repeated features

While it is just about impossible to find a developing structure in Proverbs, yet there are features which when observed can be easily traced. I read somewhere that Proverbs is a book of parallels. For instance, there are:

- a) Directly opposed parallels:
 - i) “The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand (ch. 12:7).
 - ii) “A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness” (ch. 12:23)
- b) Parallels which complete a truth:
 - i) The Lord hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (ch. 16:4).
- c) Parallels which are a couple and then have a contrast:
 - i) “As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him” (ch. 10:26).
 - ii) “A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring” (ch. 25:26).
 - iii) “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come (ch. 26:2).
 - iv) “He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread” (ch. 12:9).
 - v) “Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly” (ch. 17:12).

Numerical

“For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress” (ch. 30:21-23).

One Line Truths

- 1) “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones” (ch. 12:4).
- 2) “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit” (ch. 15:4).

Practical Application:

There is an undeniable practicality found in this book providing sound and sensible answers to all manner of complex human difficulties within its thirty-one chapters. In a day of “how to” books, Proverbs is far above all others in the matter of spiritual guidance, personal potential, and the greatest “how-to” book ever written. Those who have the good sense to take Solomon's lessons to heart will quickly discover godliness, prosperity, and contentment are theirs for the asking.

Summarizing

The Book of Proverbs is a bit difficult for unlike many other books of Scripture, there is no particular plot or storyline found in its pages. Likewise, there are no principal characters in the book. It is wisdom that takes center stage, a grand divine wisdom that transcends the whole of history, peoples, and cultures. Even a perfunctory reading of this magnificent treasury reveals the pithy sayings of the wise King Solomon are as relevant today as they were some three thousand years ago.

May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.

John 16:13

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