

Books of The Bible

Survey of Proverbs - Further Considerations

Introduction

As with any book of the Scriptures, there is never an end to studying and musing on the sacred truth. Irrespective of which portion of the scriptures one considers, no matter how much time is given to the study, the student would confess they are scarcely touching the surface of the book.

Clarification

The Proverbs are short, easy to remember life statements. Their benefits come to the fore in decision making. In the recollection of them they give good sense to those who are foolish (lacking sense or at times wisdom in assisting in looking at the long term), causing one to not make hasty decisions, but gives the individual more to think about and gives thoughtful guidance, therefore, enables one to plan more perfectly.

It is important to observe that with wisdom there is the need for understanding:

- a) Where there is no understanding there will be no true evaluation on the value of anything.
- b) When there is no knowledge there is no understanding of that which one is best to do.
- c) When there is no knowledge there can be little consideration of the ramifications for actions taken either for good or bad.
- d) When there is no understanding or wisdom, there will be no correct prioritizing of that which needs to be done.

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, making correct 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 the accumulation of facts, 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 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 give you greater insights into how things are.

Author

After the initial introduction and beginning in chapter 10:1 through chapter 22:16, there are some 375 proverbs recorded which had been spoken by Solomon. 1 Kings 4:32 informs us that Solomon spoke over three thousand proverbs. Clearly, not all of his proverbs have been preserved.

In considering the author of Proverbs, any doubt of Solomon being its author is highly questionable. To do so is to present the matter of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles are nothing more than exaggerations at the least, or legends at the worst. Such erroneous teachings then indicate Solomon's wisdom is not true, the book of Proverbs cannot be Solomon's, neither is it the inspired Word of God. This leads to the questioning of what else is there in the scriptures that is just ancient legends, i.e the flood, Moses on the mount, etc. This then gives way to the reducing of the miracles of the Lord to nothing other than fanciful stories.

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It was written by a middle aged Solomon having seen among his peers the folly of failure to learn from those who have lived life with its ups and downs. Scripture records Solomon having only one son, Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 4:3) and two daughters, Taphath and Basemath (1 Kgs. 4:11, 15).

Primary Recipient/s

After the major section (ch. 1:8-9:18), the primary function of the book of Proverbs is to instruct young men of marriageable age (Prov. 1:3-5). The young man and all young men are 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.

Proverbs Teaches Truths For Man To Live By

Today we live in the "irresponsible world". An often heard statement is, "it is not my fault", "my parents did not treat me well", and such like statements. To discipline our children is not harmful to the child. It is training to the end, they grow to be responsible adults knowing there are consequences for rebelliousness. Many such children grow up disrespectful to teachers and authority, oftentimes destroying property, robbing stores in riots without any or very little consequences. This is totally against the intelligent instruction of God where He teaches that justice necessitates righteous reward of punishment (Col. 3:25). It was a lesson Israel learnt as the book of Judges reveals. God teaches a very important lesson, there are consequences for decisions made in life. Wise decisions result in a better life, foolish childish decisions result in a wasted life. This is a major lesson in Proverbs in the reading of passages such as chapter 8:10, 13; 10:4, 14; 11:5, 14; 12:15; 14:7 etc.

God Is The Source Of All Wisdom

In a library there are two sorts of books, fiction and non fiction. One is (as far as is known truth) the other is fanciful imaginative thinking. Yet, in the absolute there is only one non fiction book which is truth in each statement it makes on any subject, that being the Bible. Sadly, today humanity thinks they know more than God and are superior to Him, therefore, His counsel is of little or no value. Foolishly man says that there is no Absolute and yet in saying such they are contradicting themselves for they are making an absolute statement. Proverbs teaches that God is a moral individual (ch. 11:1) and to follow His instruction is wisdom, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25); and again, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3:19). "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

Repeated Features

1) Structure:

No doubt Proverbs presents a major difficulty relating to structure, yet several basic observations can be made:

- a) Such as who wrote what parts of the book.
 - i) ch. 1:1-7 - Solomon speaking to his son and seeking to instill in him the blessings and way of wisdom.
 - ii) ch. 1:8-9:18 - Solomon giving instruction to his son in plain speaking. Fifteen times he repeats the words, "My son".
 - iii) ch. 10:1-14:33 - is the proverbs of Solomon.
 - iv) ch. 25:2-29:27 - the proverbs of Solomon which Hezekiah had written out (ch. 25:1).
 - v) ch. 30:1-33 - the words of Agur.
 - vi) ch. 31:1-31 - the prophecy King Lemuel's mother taught him.

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2) Features of the book:

The first observation is that which another wrote (I know not whom), Proverbs is a book of parallels. For instance:

- a) Parallelism
 - i) Directly opposed parallels: “The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand” (ch. 12:7); “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: “As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him” (ch. 10:26).

3) Contrasts:

- a) Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than to pretend to be somebody and have no food (ch. 12:9).
- b) Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly (ch. 17:12).
- c) “A virtuous woman *is* a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed *is* as rottenness in his bones” (ch. 12:4).
- d) “The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish *doeth* not so” (ch. 15:7).

4) One line truths:

- a) Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips (ch. 10:14).
- b) “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” (ch. 12:4).

One of the notable feature of Proverbs is the numbering of times. He will speak of “three”, “four”, “six” and “seven”).

- a) Seven things God hates: “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviates wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (ch. 6:16-19).
- b) Four:
 - i) “There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces” (ch. 30:24-28).
- c) Three:
 - i) “There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up” (ch. 30:29-31).
 - ii) “There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid” (ch. 30:18-19).
 - iii) “There are 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. 30:18-23).

One Of The Major Themes Of The Book

In daily life we meet those who are “scorners” and Proverbs gives instruction concerning them. There is a world of distinction between his response to the wise and the foolish. For instance: “A wise son will hear his father’s instruction, a scorner heareth not rebuke” (ch. 13:1). A truly wise man will value advice as well as the advisor

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(ch. 9:8), but “a scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise” (ch. 15:12). The scorner, whether “smitten” (ch. 19:25), “punished” (ch. 21:11) or “reproved” (ch. 9:7), never benefits from the correction or discipline. “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee” (ch. 9:8).

- a) 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 and 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.

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).

Practical Application

There is an undeniable practicality found in this book, providing sound and sensible answers to all manner of complex human difficulties which are found within its thirty-one chapters. In a day of “how to” books, Proverbs is far above all others in the matter of spiritual guidance and personal potential. It is the greatest “how-to” book ever written, and 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.

The Scope Of It’s Instruction

Despite the God given wisdom of Solomon, it was only with the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit Solomon was able to reveal the mind of God in matters both lofty as with God’s providential dealings with humanity, mans 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 rich collection of wise sayings.

- a) In the Proverbs, Solomon speaks about life and wisdom and the enviable dangers of folly.

The wisdom he speaks of here is not that of the wisdom of this world, but of God.

- a) 1 Kings 3:28 - “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.”
- b) 1 Chronicles 22:12 - “Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.”
- c) 2 Chronicles 9:23 - “And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart.”

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 centre 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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