

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7)

Introduction—*"The book of Proverbs is one Old Testament book that has received less than its share of attention at the hands of Christians. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that most want to relegate it to an abrogated law. This is a mistake. For there is very little peculiar to the Mosaic economy that characterizes the wisdom of Solomon... he did not write for the Jew alone. This is a **tragic** mistake, because his practical knowledge is one of the greatest needs of our hour... His concern is the everyday need of an applied religion. He helps us deal with today's task, today's trial, today's dilemma, and today's opportunity." (Maurice A. Meredith, *Studies In Proverbs*, p.4).*

I. AUTHORS OF PROVERBS

- A. Solomon (see 1:1; 10:1; 25:1).
- B. The Wise Men (22:17-24:34).
- C. Agur (30). The name means "gatherer" or "collector".
- D. Lemuel (31). The name means "dedicated unto God" and may have also referred to Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24-25).

II. BACKGROUND OF SOLOMON

- A. His Acquisition of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-15).
- B. His Fame for Wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-10,24-25; cf. Matthew 12:42).
- C. His Downfall (1 Kings 11:1-13). Is it possible for a man to have wisdom, yet not use it? Does that detract from the strength of his words of wisdom?

III. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

- A. What is a Proverb? The word 'proverb' (*mischele*) means *"to be like, a comparison; noting likeness in things unlike."* What would you say a 'proverb' is? Name a modern-day proverb which illustrates your definition.
- B. Characteristics of a Proverb. Proverbs are brief, concrete, and pithy. They illustrate general truths and have diverse applications. Can you name any other characteristics of a proverb?
- C. What is the Main Theme of Proverbs (4:7)?
- D. What is the Purpose of Proverbs (1:1-6)?
- E. Proverbs are Intensely Practical. In what ways? What does the book of Proverbs emphasize in our lives?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How did Solomon obtain his wisdom? How do we obtain our wisdom (cf. James 1:5-8; 3:13-18)?*
- 2) *Is the book of Proverbs an accumulation of many intelligent observations on life, an inspired book of instructions important to man's moral education, or both?*

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- 3) *Why are proverbs beneficial tools for teaching and learning (what beneficial features do they possess)?*
- 4) *Are proverbs statements of unchangeable truth and immovable promises of God?*
- 5) *What areas of life do the Proverbs cover? Which ages, groups, and social classes are instructed in this collection of wisdom?*
- 6) *How are the Proverbs able to span years, locations, and cultures, and still be relevant to all people?*
- 7) *Why should **we** study the book of Proverbs? What are we supposed to learn from all these little bits and pieces of wisdom in this book (1:1-6)?*
- 8) *Is a **smart** person necessarily a **wise** person? Explain.*
- 9) *Jesus said, “Indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31; Matthew 12:42). What does that statement imply about Jesus’ relationship to the wisdom of the Old Testament?*
- 10) *Give a brief, general outline of the book of Proverbs (scan the sections listed for you below for a hint to their groupings).*
- *Proverbs 1-9—*
 - *Proverbs 10:1-22:16—*
 - *Proverbs 22:17-24:22—*
 - *Proverbs 25-29—*
 - *Proverbs 30—*
 - *Proverbs 31—*
- 11) *Think of a time when you used some wisdom in your life. It doesn’t have to be some fabulous display of profundity. Try to think of some simple event where God’s wisdom helped you. Relate that incident to the class.*

WISDOM

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom." (4:7)

INTRODUCTION—*"In the Bible, wisdom is always God-oriented and practical. It is not entirely coextensive with knowledge, for a knowledgeable person may be very deficient in wisdom. Wisdom is the right use of one's knowledge, insight and skill to the glory of God. It originates in the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; cf. Job 28:28; Psa. 111:10). Thus the Bible defines wisdom in terms of one's relationship with God rather than formal education or attainments before men (cf. James 3:13-18). Worldly wisdom is knowledge apart from divine revelation and is often God-opposing in nature. True wisdom is the ordering of one's life by God given counsel." (Rubel Shelley, A Book By Book Study of the Old Testament, p.81).*

I. WISDOM ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

- A. Definition: *"Wisdom... enables one to turn every good thing in life to its rightful purpose. It is something more than wit, shrewd common-sense, or even worldly prudence. It is something more than intellectual excellence, in that it implies a spiritual and moral quality of heart, will and life; and is the practical application of knowledge to its best ends."* (Maurice A. Meredith, *Studies In Proverbs*, p. 9).
- B. Wisdom is not something to do, rather it is a **way** of doing things. Wisdom is finding, in **your own circumstances**, any specific opportunity to use a proverb—then following through in your actions with what was before only a general principle or abstract idea.

II. DISCOURSE ON WISDOM (Proverbs 1-9)

- A. The Call of Wisdom (1:20-33; 8:1-11; cf. 15:24). What is the price for the rejection of wisdom? For acceptance?
- B. The Value of Wisdom (2:1-9; 3:13-18; 8:10-11; 16:16; 24:13-14). What do the proverbs say about godly wisdom? What is more precious for daily living?
- C. The Security of Wisdom (2:10-22; 3:21-26; 4:1-9). How does wisdom keep one secure and protected? From what things does wisdom protect us?
- D. The Rewards of Wisdom (3:13-18; 8:32-36).
- E. The Way of Wisdom vs. the Way of Folly (9:1-18; 19:8). To whom do wisdom and folly both call out and summon? What does each individually have to offer us?
- F. God's Relation to Wisdom (3:19-20; 8:22-31). Describe God's relationship with wisdom. What does that tell us about our source for acquiring such wisdom?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What is wisdom (in your own words)?*
- 2) *Where does wisdom originate (2:6)? How is wisdom acquired... what is necessary on our part (1:7; 9:10)? Explain.*
- 3) *Does **having** wisdom guarantee we will **live by** wisdom? What else does wisdom need besides knowledge?*

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- 4) *Someone has suggested seven pillars which uphold wisdom (9:1; 1:2-6). Explain each of these pillars and describe what each contributes to wisdom:*
- *Understanding –*
 - *Knowledge –*
 - *Prudence –*
 - *Shrewdness –*
 - *Instruction –*
 - *Discretion –*
 - *Perception –*
- 5) *Who can benefit most from the wisdom contained within this book... the simple and inexperienced or the mature (cf. 1:4-5)?*
- 6) *List some of the rewards of wisdom (3:13-18; 8:32-36).*
- 7) *Is the wise man the man who knows it all, or the man who knows he does not know it all (3:5-7; 13:1; 26:12)?*
- 8) *The wise man knows how to acquire wisdom in anything. Along with God's help, where else does he turn (13:20; 10:8)?*
- 9) *Elaborate on the importance of the Divine wisdom, which is related in the book of Proverbs, to our personal lives. Compare any New Testament references to wisdom that you can find.*