

Introduction to Proverbs and Wisdom Literature

Lecture by Steve Gregg

I. Wisdom of the ancient Israelites

A. *Early eastern wits*

1. The wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam.14)
2. The city of Abel (2 Sam. 20:18)
3. Ethan, Heman, Calco & Darda (1 Kings 4:31)
4. Samples of Jewish witticisms (1 Sam.24:13/ 1 King 20:11/Jer. 31:29/ Luke 4:23)

B. *Court counsellors*

1. Ahithophel & Hushai (2 Sam.17)
2. Prov.20:18/Jer.18:18

C. *Solomon, the sage*

1. His unique calling and gifting (1 Kings 3:10-13)
2. Factors of his youth that formed his disposition toward wisdom (his father's exhortations-Prov.4:3-9; family problems-1 Kg 1:6, etc.)
3. His reputation (1 Kings 3:28/4:29-34/ 10:6-9)
4. His lapse (1 Kings 11)
5. His last words (Eccl.12:1, 13-14)

D. *Forms of distilled wisdom*

1. Proverbs (1:1) Pithy aphorisms or similes summarizing general, observable truths
2. Parables/fables (Judges 9:8-15/2 Sam 12:1-4)
3. Riddles (1:6/ Judges 14:14)
4. Number sayings (30:15-31)
5. Poems/songs (31:10ff)

E. *Biblical Books of the "wisdom" genre*

1. Job — an enquiry into the mysterious ways of God
2. Proverbs — reflections on a well-ordered life
3. Ecclesiastes — concluding reflections from a life of mixed wisdom and vanity
4. Fragments in other canonical books (John 4:35, 37/ Matt.24:28; Luke 21:37; Job 39:30)
5. Apocryphal wisdom Books: *Ecclesiasticus*; *The Wisdom of Solomon*

II. The role of Wisdom in the spiritual life

- A. *The rational God made man to be rational (2:6)*
- B. *True wisdom is moral and spiritual in nature (9:10/8:7-8/21:30)*
- C. *Wisdom is a legitimate means of Divine guidance (8:32-35)*
- D. *Wisdom is to be desired above many other things of value (3:13-15/16:16)*
- E. *The Wisdom of God obtains its highest expression in Jesus Christ (1 Cor.1:30/Matt.7:24ff)*

III. **Proverbial Patterns of life** (*not to be confused with “laws” nor “guarantees”*)

- A. *Things you missed while you were “sleeping”: lessons learned by observation*
 - 1. Observations from nature (1 Kings 4:33/ Pr.6:6-11/24:30-34/30:24-28)
 - 2. Observations of human nature (12:25/13:12/18:1/23:6-7/20:14/29:5)
 - 3. Observations of characteristic providence (12:2/14:34/22:9/23:10-11)
 - 4. Observations of causes and effects (12:24/13:18/14:4/29:15, 17)
- B. *Generalities, not universalities: not always true, but usually*
(e.g., *a soft answer, 15:1; diligent will be rich, 10:4; fear God, live long, 10:22*)
- C. *Generalizations in tension: though valid, depends on other variables*
(e.g., *answer a fool? 26:4-5; predictable success? 15:22 with 19:21*)
- D. *Pregnant specifics: statement may apply more broadly in principle*
(e.g., *too much honey, 25:16; dig pit, fall in, 26:27; loud blessings, 27:14*)
- E. *Striking similes: did you ever notice the resemblance?*
(e.g., *10:26/11:22/25:13, 19, 20, 25/26:9, 17, 18-19, 21, 22...etc., etc.*)
- F. *Enlightened values*
 - 1. Choosing the best: “X is better than Y” (e.g., *15:16/16:16, 19, 32/17:1/ 25:24*)
 - 2. The long-term view of things: “...*but in the end...*” (5:4, *11/14:12-13/19:20/ 20:21/23:18, 32/24:14, 20/25:8/29:21*)

IV. **Survey of the book of Proverbs**

- A. *A father’s attempt to impart a love for wisdom in his son (Ch.1-9)*
Wisdom personified as a lovely woman, and foolishness as a dangerous seductress
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-7)
 - 2. Warning against youthful neglect of wisdom (1:8-19)
 - 3. Wisdom’s sermon to the simple-minded (1:20-33)
 - 4. Exhortation to observe parental instructions and commands (ch.2-7)
 - 5. Another song of wisdom (ch.8)
 - 6. Wisdom’s hospitality contrasted with that of the seductress folly (ch.9)
- B. *Solomon’s notebook (ch.10—22:16)*
- C. *Exhortations of the wise men transmitted to a son (22:17—ch.24)*
 - 1. First sermon (22:17-24:22)
 - 2. Second sermon (24:23-34)

D. A collection of Solomon's sayings compiled by Hezekiah's men (ch.25-29)

E. An unpretentious man's observations (ch.30)

1. Disclaimer (vv.1-6)
2. A prayer for mediocrity (vv. 7-9)
3. Various observations about life (vv.10-33)

F. Womanly wisdom (ch.31)

1. A queen mother's advice to her son, the king (vv 1-9)
2. Marks of the quintessential wise wife (vv 10-31)

V. Primary Themes of the Proverbs

A. Wisdom (see separate sheet #1)

B. God-conscious living

1. The fear of God (1:7/8:13/14:26/16:6/23:17/28:14)
2. The knowledge of God (2:1-5/9:10)
3. The sovereignty of God (16:1, 4, 7, 9, 33/19:21/20:24/21:1, 31)
4. The omniscience of God (5:21/15:3, 11)
5. The sympathies of God
 - a. delights in the righteous/detests the wicked (11:20/15:8-9, 29/21:3, 27/28:9)
 - b. delights in truthful people/detests liars (6:16-17, 19/12:22)
 - c. delights in righteous words/detests wicked thoughts (6:18/15:26)
 - d. detests the proud heart (and look) (6:16-17/16:5/21:4)
 - e. detests those who justify the wicked and condemn the just (17:15)
 - f. sympathizes with the poor (19:17/22:22-23)
 - g. detests corrupt business practices (20:10, 23)
 - h. detests violent crime (6:16-18)
 - i. detests those who sow discord among brethren (6:19)
6. The justice of God (21:12/24:11-12/29:26)
7. Security in God (18:10/20:22/21:31/29:25/30:5)

C. Attitude and mood management

1. The all-important "heart" (4:23)
 - a. Not Freud's "unconscious mind" (14:10)
 - b. The real "you" (23:7/24:12/26:23-25/27:19)
 - c. The need to keep and correct (14:14/22:15/20:9/23:19)
2. Moods and "tudes"
 - a. Depression (12:25/14:10/15:13, 15/17:22/18:14)
 - b. Envy & Jealousy (3:31/14:30/23:17/6:34/27:4)
 - c. Resentment (13:12/18:19)

- d. Anger (14:29/16:32/19:11/29:22/30:33)
- e. Self-composure (17:27/20:3/25:28/29:11)
- f. Self-confidence (28:26)

D. Human relationships

1. Parent-child
 - a. children & blessing (13:22/17:6/20:7/31:28)
 - b. training (13:24/19:18/22:6, 15/23:13-14/29:15, 17)
 - c. counsel to children (6:20/13:1/15:5/17:6/27:10)
2. Husband-wife (see separate sheet #2)
3. Servant-master (12:9/17:2/29:19/29:21/30:10)
4. Ruler-subject
 - a. obtaining a king's favor (23:1ff/25:15/14:35/16:14/22:11/25:6)
 - b. what's good about kings? (20:8, 26. 28/21:1/25:5/29:14)
 - c. bad rulers are bad news (28:15-16, 28/29:2, 4, 12)
5. Friends & brothers
 - a. what friends are for? (17:17/18:24/27:6, 9, 17)
 - b. false friends (12:26/14:20/19:4, 6-7)
 - c. endangering friendships (6:1-3/16:28/17:9, 18/27:10, 14)
6. Enemies
 - a. don't fear enemies, fear God (16:7)
 - b. don't trust an enemy (27:6)
 - c. don't despise an enemy (24:17-18/25:21-22)
7. Neighbors
 - a. the value of neighbors (18:17/27:10)
 - b. don't cheat you neighbor (3:27-29/6:29/24:28/26:19)
 - c. don't tax a neighbor's hospitality ~or~ don't mistake a neighbor for a friend! (25:17)
 - d. bad neighbors (11:9, 12/14:20-21/16:29/21:10/29:5)
 - e. settling neighborly disputes (25:8-9)

E. Avoiding the world's traps

1. The lusts of the flesh
 - a. Food obsession (21:17/23:1-3/25:16, 27/30:22)
 - b. Drug (alcohol) abuse (20:1/21:17/23:29-35/31:4-6)
 - c. The sluggard: love of sleep (12:24/6:4, 9-11/19:15/20:13)
 - d. Sexual temptation (see separate sheet #3)
2. The lust of the eyes (see separate sheet #4)
3. The pride of life
 - a. Self-importance exposed (3:7/12:15/16:2/18:2/18:11/20:6/21:2/25:27/26:12, 16/27:2/28:11, 26/30:12)
 - b. What proud people do (21:24/28:25)
 - c. What the proud can look forward to (8:13/11:2/13:10/15:25/16:5, 18/29:23)

- d. Social climbing (16:19/23:1-8/24:1/28:23)
- e. Peer pressure/choice of companions
(1:10-18/13:20/22:24-25/23:20/24:21/28:7/29:3, 24)
- f. Speech defects (see separate sheet #5)

Themes in Proverbs #1:
Wisdom

I. Moral in Nature 9:10/14:16/8:7-8/21:30

II. Her Value 3:13-15/4:3-13/8:10-11

III. Her Promises 1:33/2:10-16/3:16-18, 21-26, 35

IV. Attaining Wisdom

A. Qualifying 14:6/17:16

B. Seeking 2:1-5/8:17

1. By associations 13:20

2. By a teachable spirit

a. Not wise in own sight 3:7/26:12

b. Appreciate correction 1:5/9:9/10:8/17:10

c. Wisdom through correction 8:33/10:17/12:15/15:31/19:20/29:15 (3:11-12)

d. Not gullible 14:15

**Themes in Proverbs #2:
*Wives and Husbands***

I. The power of a woman, for good or for ill 12:4/14:1

II. The wrong kind of wife 31:3

- A. Pretty, but repulsive 11:22/31:30
- B. Contentious
 - 1. Continual dropping 19:13/27:15
 - 2. Can't be restrained 27:16
 - 3. Better to be alone 25:24/21:9, 19
- C. Hateful 30:23

III. Gracious and virtuous 31:10-31

- A. A rare jewel 31:10
- B. A gift from God 18:22/19:14
- C. Faithful 31:11-12
- D. Well-spoken 31:26
- E. Industrious 31:13-22, 24, 27/ 14:1
- F. Brings honor to husband 12:4/31:23
- G. Honored 31:25, 28-31/11:16

IV. The virtuous husband

- A. Jealous over wife 6:34
- B. But not unduly suspicious 31:11
- C. Danger of too much time away from home 7:19
- D. Faithful and satisfied with his wife 5:15-21
- E. Praises (even flatters) his wife 31:28-29
- F. Avoids harsh words 15:1/Col.3:19

V. Strife in the home

- A. Few things make home more unpleasant than does strife 17:1
- B. Avoid the beginning of strife 17:14
- C. If strife begins, be the first to end it 20:3
- D. The causes of strife
 - 1. A Contentious nature 26:21/17:19
 - a. Hatred (Strong's 8135: posturing oneself as an enemy: enmity, rivalry, hostility) 10:12
(this can be concealed below the surface 10:18/26:26)
 - b. Pride 13:10/28:25
 - 2. A Short fuse 15:18/29:22
 - 3. Influence from malicious or stupid outsiders (even "marriage counselors!") 16:28/26:20

Themes in Proverbs #3: *Sexual Immorality*

I. The nature of seduction 6:26/23:27-28

- A. The prevalence of seduction in western society and Christian community
- B. Social structures of seduction:
 - 1. The entertainment & marketing culture (Rom.1:28-32/Phil.4:8)
 - 2. The dating ritual (Judges 16:4-ff/2 Sam.13:9-10/2 Tim.2:22)
 - 3. Individual leisure & privacy (2 Sam.11:1-2)
 - 4. Women in the workplace (Tit.2:4-5)
 - 5. Clothing styles (1 Tim.2:9-10)

II. Factors leading to sexual sin

- A. Pre-existing sin in the heart 22:14 (Eccl.7:26)/5:22/11:6
 - 1. the appeal of the illicit to our innate rebellion 7:11/9:17
 - 2. possibly anger at God or at spouse 2:17/7:19
- B. Toying with Temptation 6:25 (Job 31:1)/7:8
(dating, entertainment, advertising)
 - 1. Secrecy 7:9
 - 2. self-confidence 5:12-13/7:26
- C. The Temptress 7:21
 - 1. Appeal to pride 2:16/6:24/7:5
 - 2. Immodest/flirtatious 6:25/7:10-13, 16-17
 - 3. Promise of impunity 7:19-20, 14 (Eccl.8:11)
- D. The payoff 2:18-19/5:3-5

III. Strategies of Avoidance

- A. Fear of God 5:21/23:17-18
- B. Keep your heart 7:25/2:10-16/4:23/7:1-5 (Hos.4:11)/25:28
- C. Be satisfied 27:7/5:15,18-19
- D. Safe places 4:14-15/5:8/7:11 (I Tim.2:14-15/Titus 2:4-5)
- E. The abominable thing (Deut.7:26)
- F. Self-restraint 25:16
- G. Accountability 5:12-14

Themes in Proverbs #4:
The Maze of Money Management

I. Attitudes toward money

- A. False sense of security 14:20/19:4/10:15/18:11
- B. Unpredictable 13:7/23:4-5/27:1/28:22 (Eccl. 5:11; James 4:13-16)
- C. Many things are better 15:16-17/16:8/17:1/19:22/28:6,11

II. Obtaining Money: Business Ethics and Practices

- A. Foundational understanding 11:4,28/22:2
- B. Hard work, not easy money 13:11/14:4,23/15:27/21:5,17/28:8,19-20
- C. Sluggard and Diligent contrasted 10:4/12:11/13:4/18:9/20:4,13/26:14-16
- D. Self-employment good 12:9,24/27:23-27
- E. Top priority: a good name 22:1/27:21
 - 1. Integrity 10:9/19:1/21:6/20:7,10,14,23
 - 2. Strive for excellence 22:29
- F. Avoid debt 22:7
- G. Treatment of employees 2:27-28/14:31/22:16
- H. Resource management 6:6-11/27:23-27
- I. Receive advice 13:18

III. Using Money

- A. Honor God 3:9
- B. Give to the poor 11:24-25/14:21,31/19:17/21:13/22:9/28:27

**Themes in Proverbs #5:
*Troubles of the Tongue***

I. The Power of Words for Good or for Ill

- A. A well of life (10:11);
- B. Death and life (18:21)
- C. Choice silver, feeding many (10:20-21)
- D. Injurious or health promoting (12:18)
- E. Fire starter (26:18-19/ James 3:5-6)

II. Defects in habits of speech

- A. Too much 10:19/17:27-28/29:11
- B. Too soon 18:13/10:14 (James 1:19)/15:28/29:20
- C. Too loudly 7:11/9:13 (I Peter 3:4)/27:14
- D. Without tact 10:32/31:26
- E. Untruly 4:24/10:18/12:22
- F. Gossip 11:13/26:17, 20-22
- G. Inappropriate silence 28:13 (Psalm 32:3-5)
- H. Flattery 29:5/2:16/6:24/7:5/26:24-28/28:23

III. Fruits of a well-bridled Tongue

- A. Encouragement 12:25/16:24
- B. Influence 25:15
- C. Peacemaking 15:1
- D. Feeding 10:21
- E. Wise rebuke 25:12
- F. Avoidance of trouble 21:23

Themes in Proverbs #6:
Matters of the Heart

I. The essence of personhood

- A. Not the "unconscious mind" (14:10)
- B. The real "you" 23:7/26:23, 25/24:12
- C. The need to guard 4:23/14:14/22:15/28:26/20:9/23:19

II. Guard from what?

- A. Hope deferred 13:12
- B. Pride 18:12/28:25
- C. Envy of sinners 23:17/14:30/27:4
- D. Anxiety 12:25

III. The issues of life

- A. Health 14:30/17:22
- B. Attitude
 - 1. Reverent = happy 28:14
 - 2. A merry heart 15:13, 15

IV. Help for the heart

- A. No songs for the heavy heart 25:20
- B. Hearty counsel helps 27:9