

Bite Size Bible Study

Proverbs #122

By Pastor Lee

The book of Proverbs is not an easy book to study. It is long and seems to repeat itself as well as give contradictory advice.

The Hebrew word for Proverbs is *mashal*, meaning to rule. When used in the participle form it can mean “a ruler” or “one who rules”. When used as a noun it means a parable or proverb, and its function is to set a standard by which one is to live. Thus the book of Proverbs is to set the standard by which one lives his/her life.

The opening verses of the book detail the goal of the wisdom sayings”

¹ *The proverbs of Shlomo the son of David, king of Isra'el,*

² *are for learning about wisdom and discipline;*

for understanding words expressing deep insight;

³ *for gaining an intelligently disciplined life,*

doing what is right, just and fair;

⁴ *for endowing with caution those who don't think
and the young person with knowledge and discretion.*

⁵ *Someone who is already wise*

will hear and learn still more;

someone who already understands

will gain the ability to counsel well;

⁶ *he will understand proverbs, obscure expressions,*

the sayings and riddles of the wise.

Proverbs 1:1-6 CJB

The first important point to realize is that a proverb is by definition a generalization, which is considered useful and usually true, but not a guarantee or promise. At times there may seem to be contradictory statements. In those situations one is expected to consider both as correct, but to use wisdom to discern in what circumstances to use one or the other. An example might be:

⁴ *Do not answer a fool according to his folly,*

or you yourself will be just like him.

⁵ *Answer a fool according to his folly,*

or he will be wise in his own eyes.

Proverbs 26:4-5 NIV

Proverbs are not a self-study program. They were to be taught by someone who already had wisdom. In the case of the Book of Proverbs, it is the rest of the teachings of the Bible. The combination of the two, if followed, will lead to a life pleasant to God.

We mustn't think that Israel was the only nation to have parables and proverbs. Most of the Near East had similar writings. In many ways those of other nations were similar to those of Israel.

In Egyptian Literature:

The instruction of Viaier Ptah-hotep (5th dynasty c.2500-2350 BCE):

where an aged councilor instructs his son in how he should conduct his life.

The instruction for Merikare (10th dynasty c.2106-2919 BCE): A Pharaoh initiates his son in the principles of proper and effective ruling. This text asserts that Merikare must earn the respect of the nobles through just governance in order to maintain his hold on the throne.

The instruction of Amenemope (some where between the 10th and 6th centuries BCE): The text is remarkably similar to Prov. 22:17 – 24:22, includes an introduction and 30 sections of teaching on wise behavior.

In Mesopotamian Literature we have:

Counsels of Wisdom: This Akkadian book of practical advice also addresses the reader as “my son”. Examples of advice include a warning about marriage and an admonition that a steward of a ruler's property should not give into covetousness.

While we must admit that much of the Near East had similar proverbial teachings, we must remember that they were still worshiping pagan gods. While the expected proper behavior is similar there are vast difference in some of the teachings.

The book of Proverbs conforms with the rest of the teachings of the Words of God (Torah or Bible). Even when it is difficult to see the parable as a teaching of God it must be considered truthful and a careful attempt made to equate the two.

Currently the Wednesday Night Bible Study is studying the Book of Proverbs, line by line and precept by precept. You are invited to join the group and participate in the discussions. The meeting is on the church zoom website at 7:00 pm, each Wednesday.

Cornerstone Community Church

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