

Place: Lurgan Baptist 14:10:2014

Reading: Proverbs 1:1-9

## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

### 21. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

*"Do you know of a good book of advice for young men?"* asked a gentleman of an aged pastor. *"Certainly,"* was his immediate reply, *"I recommend the book of Proverbs. It is full of truest wisdom and the most priceless helps for the conduct of life. It will decide every question, solve every problem, meet every perplexity, and help to build up a noble, manly Christian character."* Now as we approach this book, I want to think about,

#### IT'S PROVERBS:

Our English speaking world has many proverbs. Do you recall some of them? *"A stitch in time saves nine," "Make hay while the sun shines," "Look before you leap," "A penny saved is a penny earned."* We recognize these sayings instantly. They are proverbs pithy sayings that in a few pungent words give the results of years of human experience. Our English word *"proverb,"* is actually made up of two Latin words, pro ( instead of ) and verba ( words ) So a proverb is a sentence that is *"instead of many words."* It is a short sentence that summarizes a wise principle. The English word *"proverb,"* is a translation of the Hebrew word

*"mashal."* And *"mashal,"* has been defined as *"a brief, pithy saying which expresses wisdom."* But keep in mind that these proverbs are included in the literature which is *"given by inspiration of God."* ( 2 Tim 3:16-17 ) My .... this is wisdom from God. These proverbs or maxims set out what is right and what is wrong in the sight of the Lord. They show the practical outworking of godliness in the spiritual, moral and social spheres. Here the wise man is the one who lives his life according to the revealed will of God. He walks in the way of truth and righteousness and consequently he is blessed by the Lord. You see, what the Psalms is to our *devotional life* Proverbs is meant to be to our *practical life*. Psalms tells us how to *worship*, Proverbs tells us how to *walk*. Psalms was the Hebrew *hymnbook*, Proverbs was the Hebrew *handbook*. The one is chiefly concerned with *what I believe*, the other is chiefly concerned with *how I behave*.

So here are laws from heaven for earth. Here are counsels from above for conduct here below. Here are the words of the wise on the ways of the world. Here is prudence through precept.

#### T'S PERSONALITIES:

You see, there are a number of personalities that are credited with utterings these proverbs. Do you see how the book begins? *"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel."* Likewise ( Ch 10 ) begins *"the proverbs of Solomon."* Yet again ( Ch 25 ) begins *"These are the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah copied out."* So the book itself testifies to the authorship

of Solomon. It was King Solomon, son of King David who " *spoke three thousand proverbs.*" ( 1 Kings 4:32 ) From this vast number of proverbs the Spirit of God led him to choose a much smaller collection for the instruction of believers in all ages. You see, Solomon was wiser than all the philosophers of his day. How did Solomon acquire this wisdom ? Well, in the earlier days of his life, the Lord appeared to him at Gibeon and said, " *Ask what I shall give thee.*" ( 1 Kings 3:5 ) Aware of the great responsibility of being a king over Israel he said " *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people that I may discern between good and bad for who is able to judge this thy so great a people ?*" ( 3:9 ) The Lord was pleased with this request and responded by giving him " *a wise and understanding heart.*" ( 3:12 )

But other servants, guided by God's Spirit were also involved in producing this book. " *The men of Hezekiah,*" ( 25:1 ) were a group of scholars in King Hezekiah's day who compiled the material in ( Chs 25-29 ) and in Proverbs ( 30 & 31 ) you meet " *Agur the son of Jakeh,*" and " *King Lemuel,*" which many scholars think was another name for Solomon. But most of this book came from the hand of Solomon.

You see, Solomon wrote three books of the Bible. He wrote the Song of Solomon when he was *young and in love*. It is a book of the **heart**. He wrote Proverbs when he was *middle-aged and his intellectual powers were at their zenith*. It is a book of the **will**. He wrote Ecclesiastes

when he was *old, disappointed and disillusioned with the carnality of much of his life*. It is a book of the **mind**.

### IT'S PERIOD:

Well, we have established that. King Solomon ruled Israel from 971-930 BC. Taking into account " *the men of Hezekiah,*" we are talking about a time period that spans from 971 to 686 BC.

### IT'S PROBLEM:

And the problem is this. *Many of us have treated these proverbs as if they were promises.* You see, Hebrew proverbs are general statements of what is usually true in life, and they must not be treated like promises. For example ( 17:17 ) says " *A friend loveth at all times,*" but sometimes even the most devoted friends have disagreements. Take another proverb " *a soft answer turneth away wrath.*" ( 15:1 ) in most instances but our Saviour's lamblike gentleness did not deliver Him from shame and suffering. Take another proverb, " *the fear of the Lord prolongeth days but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*" ( 10:27 ) Generally speaking this is true but some godly saints have died while very young while more than one rebel has had a long life. David Brainerd missionary to the American Indians died at thirty. Robert Murray McCheyne died just two months short of his thirtieth birthday.

Henry Martyn missionary to India and Persia died at thirty two. William Borden who gave away all his fortune to the

work of the Lord, was only twenty five years of age when he died in Egypt on his way to China. " *The righteous is delivered out of trouble and it comes on the wicked instead,*" (11:8 ) certainly happened to Mordecai ( Est Ch 7 ) and Daniel ( Ch 6 ) but millions of Christian martyrs testify to the fact that the statement is not an absolute in this life. ***So keep in mind that the proverb is not a promise, it's a guideline not a guarantee.*** Now this book of Proverbs falls into three main sections, each division beginning with the phrase " *the proverbs of Solomon.*" Notice,

### **(1)THE FIRST SECTION OF THE BOOK** **Ch's 1-9**

Proverbs is unusual among the books of the Bible in that it tells us why it was written. The prologue says that learning from proverbs will lead us to wisdom. Look at ( 1:1-3 ) The theme of the book of Proverbs is **wisdom**. A man was pulled over by a policeman asked if he knew he was going to fast. He said, " *I'm sorry officer I had my cruise control on and just forgot the speed limit changed* " His wife said, " *Harry I told you two miles ago that you were speeding.*" Harry gave his wife a dirty look. As the policeman took his ticket book from his pocket he said, " *By the way sir, did you know that your left rear signal light was broken ?* " Harry replied, " *it must have just happened in the car park we left.*" His wife piped up, " *Harry, how can you sit there and lie to that nice policeman ? I told you to fix it three weeks ago.* " Harry gave his wife another look that could kill. The policeman continued, " *I am going to have cite you for not wearing a*

*seatbelt also.*" Harry protested, " *But I just unbuckled it as you came up the side of the car* " Again his wife piped up, " *Harry, you know good and well I tell you all the time to buckle up because you never wear your seat belt.* " Having taken all he could Harry turned to his wife and shouted, " *Woman, would you keep your big mouth shut.*"

The policeman looked at him and addressed the little lady 'Ind asked, " *Does he verbally abuse you like this often madam ?*" She said, " *Oh, no only when he has one drink too many*" My .... the need for wisdom is great.

Abraham Lincoln said on one occasion, " *I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday*" Surely one of the greatest needs of modern man is wisdom. Think about this for a moment. In many ways our generation is the most prolific of all generations. We have more college graduates. In our day and age it is not enough to have a simple degree. It is increasingly important to have master's degrees to excel in our chosen professions. Knowledge is exploding. We travel farther and fly higher than any previous generation in history. We accumulate data as never before. The computer age is advancing in such a way that information becomes outdated with virtually every passing minute.

But while such knowledge is increasing, wisdom is often lacking. Many lives are in shambles. Suicide rates are higher than ever before. Morals are at a record low. Divorce is ever on the increase. In many ways the world is on the brink of chaos. And yet to such a generation the book of Proverbs says here is wisdom. For this first section of the book talks about,

**(a) OUR WISDOM:**

Look at ( 2:10 ) Now we commonly think of wisdom as the ability to use knowledge in the right way, and this is a practical definition. But in the Bible wisdom means so much more. It's a matter of the heart not the mind alone. It's a spiritual matter. There is a " *wisdom of this world*," ( 1 Cor 2:1-8 Jm 3:13-18 ) and there is a divine wisdom from above. Well, what is wisdom ? Well, look at the key verse that unlocks the book. ( 1:7 ) This statement is amplified in ( 9:10 ) where it says, " *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*" Two major themes overlap in the book of Proverbs and they are " **wisdom and folly.**" In the book of Proverbs wisdom is actually pictured as a lovely woman who calls to men to follow her into a life of blessing and success. Folly is pictured as a wicked woman who tempts the foolish and leads them to hell. So what is wisdom ?

" *The fear of the Lord.*" Eighteen times Solomon uses this phrase in his book. ( 1:7 2:5 8:13 ) My .... if we truly fear the Lord then we'll acknowledge from our hearts that He is the Creator we are the creatures, He is the Father, we are His children, He is the Master we are the servants. Do you fear God like that ? Do you respect Him for who He is ? Do you listen carefully to what He says ? Do you obey His Word ? " *The fear of the Lord,*" is not the fear that God might hurt us, but rather the fear that we might hurt Him. In other words, it is the fear that something we do might offend Him or grieve His loving heart. In this sense "fear," means reverence or respect and it is this

kind of loving respectful fear that is the beginning of wisdom. Now please notice something important. ***The fear of the Lord is not the end of wisdom.*** It is not all that is required for being wise, it's only the beginning. For true wisdom is not only built on the fear of the Lord, its build on the Word of the Lord. My .... Solomon was the wisest of men and yet in his latter years he did not live out the wisdom he taught. In Solomon we see the fulfilment of the maxim which says, "*Do as I say, not as I do.*" Here we see him pleading with his son Rehoboam to pursue a life of godliness as he talks about,

**(b) OUR WALK:**

For he says, "*My son walk not thou in the way with them.*" ( 1:15 ) You see, bad companionships lead to debased behavior. When you read these opening chapters its like the advice of an affectionate father to his son before he goes up to the wicked city. Look at ( 2:10-22 ) I mean did you ever say anything like that to your son or daughter ? Did you ever say to them "*Now you are going up to work or university in the city, there will be the bright lights, the evil companions, the sexual sins, the demon drink, the godless colleagues, keep close to the Lord, keep yourself pure and fear the Lord.*" You see this book presents wisdom as a **moral** choice rather than a **mental** one. You see, when the world speaks of fools is means people whose IQs aren't very high. But in the Bible someone who is intelligent can be very foolish. ***Someone can be mentally clever and morally silly.***

I heard about a country yokel down in Somerset many

years ago who had a strange reputation. If you offered him a sixpence or a £5 note he always took the sixpence. Thousands of tourists heard about this man and tried the trick on him. This poor foolish man always took the coin and never the note. ***But really he was no fool, he made a fortune out of it.*** Do you recall what the Devil told Eve ? That eating the fruit would lead to wisdom but in fact it only led to independence from God the source of all wisdom. Worldly wisdom seeks to find the most profitable option but Biblical wisdom seeks what is best for your character. I mean look at ( 6:20-29 )

My .... today's society is permissive. John Phillips tells us that by the time the average American child has reached the age of eighteen he has spent 20,000 hours before the television more time than he spends at school. And what is he watching ? Drug and alcohol use, violence, sex, greed and gambling. Meanwhile so many of you mothers are being brainwashed by the soaps and what are you watching ? Abortion, premarital sex, extramarital sex, drugs, and sexual perversion of every kind. My .... do we not need to get back to the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs ?  
(a) (b)

### **(c) OUR WORDS:**

For a key subject in the book of Proverbs is the tongue. Look at ( Ch 6:16-19 ) Go through the book of Proverbs sometime and write the dozen or more references to the phrase " *abomination to the Lord.*" My .... do you see the things the Lord detests ? Here are seven abominations to the Lord. Snobbery, lies, murder, conspiracy, mischief,

perjury and gossip. The tongue figures in four of those. So sins of speech are a major topic throughout the book for what is in the heart comes out of the mouth. ( 4:20-27 6:1-5 ) Do you know something ? *Our tongues are a barometer of whether we are living a life that is pleasing to God or not.* I tell you the tongue is a dangerous weapon. Some believers use their tongues for *Blasting:* they gossip. Some use it for *Blistering:* they tear down ethers. Some use it for *Boasting:* Few use it for *Blessing.* Have we not at all times used our tongues and said things that were unkind, unjust, untrue, unfair and unloving ? I heard about a lady who was a notorious gossip. She would spend most of her day on the phone sharing tidbits with any and with all who would listen. She came to the pastor one day and said, " *the Lord has convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me and others into trouble.*"

Well, the preacher knew she was not sincere because she had gone through this routine before. Guardedly he asked, *what do you plan to do ?* " *I want to put my tongue on the altar,* " she replied. Calmly he replied, " *There isn't an altar big enough.*" My .... is it not time that your tongue <sub>w</sub>as under the control of the Spirit of God ?

### **(d) OUR WORK:**

Do you know what they say ? Enjoy hard work. My .... we live in age of benefits where it seems at times that laziness is encouraged and hard work is shunned. In the book of Proverbs the idle man or woman is despised. Look at ( 6:6-11 ) Later on we read, " *The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing but the soul of the*

*diligent shall be made fat.*" ( 13:4) Tell me, do you bring your best to your daily work ? Do you "*do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men* ? " ( Col 3:23 ) (1)

## **(2) THE FURTHER SECTION OF THE BOOK Ch's 10-24**

Now remember the three divisions come where the book ascribes the authorship to Solomon. Look at ( 10:1) Now this book is full of advice about relationships especially family relationships. There are,

### ***(a) ISSUES RELATING TO PARENTHOOD:***

Do you know the proverb ? "*Spare the rod and spoil the child.*" Where do you think it comes from ? Let me show you the Holy Spirit views on parental discipline ? Look at ( 13:24 ) That is "*carefully seeks discipline for him.*" Do you know what this book says ? "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*" ( 22 :15 ) "*Withhold not correction from the child for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell.*" ( 23:13-14 ) Is this not diametrically opposed to today's philosophy which says "*Wee Johnny is basically good and will turn out well if given the right environment.*" Is that what this book of Proverbs says ? It says that if you don't punish your kids quickly when they are doing wrong you don't love them.

Some years ago a columnist in one of Chicago's daily newspapers printed a letter he had received from a

distraught mother of a rebellious teenage son. She said, "*My son is running around with the wrong crowd and breaking my heart. He will not listen to me and he defied me to my face. What can I do about it* ? " Jack Mably's answer was short and to the point, "*Shrink him down to seventeen months and begin all over again.*" In other words for this lad the mother's awakening had come too late. But not for you ? (a)

### ***(b)ISSUES RELATING TO PROSPERITY:***

We are living in an materialistic age, the wisdom of which is to get rich and stay rich. Nor are most people too concerned as to how they acquire their wealth. Do you recall that Solomon was one of the wealthiest men in the world ? His wealth was the talk of every kingdom and tribe of his day. His ships plied the trade lines of the Mediterranean, his camels crossed the desert spreading his fame far and wide and returning with riches for the king. But here is what he said about wealth. "*Treasures of wickedness profit nothing.*" ( 10:2) "*Riches profit not in the day of wrath.*" ( **11:4**) "*In the house of the righteous is much treasure but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.*" ( 15:6 ) Wealth is not wrong if you get it honestly and use it wisely. But remember what the Bible says, "*But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.*" (Deut 8:18 )

### ***(c) ISSUES RELATING TO POLITICS:***

Remember that Solomon was a king and he was a capable and successful administrator. He knew all about

diplomacy, politics and the matters of the state. His observations on practical government should be a handbook for all on office today. He says, " *When it goeth well with the righteous the city rejoiceth, and when the wicked perish there is shouting.*" (11:10 ) He says that " *Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.*" ( 14:34 ) There was a time when the secret of England's greatness was the open Bible, but not now ? During World War 2 King George the 6<sup>th</sup> of England called the nation to prayer. Just after the end of the War W. E. Vallance wrote a book entitled, " ***The War, the Weather and God,***" in which the author showed that God honoured those national days of prayer with one exception. That was when the British government ignored the king's call and urged workers, in view of the national emergency to put in longer hours on the very day the king had requested a day of prayer. Sadly, we have been like that ever since. My .... do we not need in government today men who "fear the Lord ? " Men who have a " *wisdom from above,*" because they fear the Lord more than they fear the press, the public and their peers.

#### ***(d) ISSUES RELATING TO PIETY:***

Are you beginning to see what this book of Proverbs is all about ? Its describing life as it really is, not life in church, but life in the street, the office, the shop and the home. Proverbs is interested in where most of our waking life is lived. Proverbs is all about " *where the rubber hits the road.*" That's why in

For this section draws scores of little word pictures, little ( Ch 12) Solomon deals with Lying: He says, " *The lip of*

*truth shall be established for ever but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*"( 12:19)

( Ch 18) Solomon deals with Tale-bearing: He says, " *The words of a talebearer are as wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly*" ( 18:8 ) Do you what a talebearer is ? One who runs from person to person telling matters that ought to be concealed whether they are true or false. ( 10:12 )

( Ch 26) Solomon deals with Flattery: He says " *A flattering mouth worketh ruin.*" ( 26: 28 ) Do you know what flattery is ? Insincere praise given by one who has selfish motives. " *Flatter,* " and " *flutter,* " belong to the same family of words, and you can just see the flatterer as he " *flutters,* " over all his victims trying to impress. Like Absalom who " *fluttered,* " all over the men of Israel ( 2 Sam 15:5 ) stole their hearts and divided the kingdom. My .... beware of the flatterer indeed Proverbs says, " *Meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*" ( 20:19 ) (1) (2)

#### **(3) THE FINAL SECTION OF THE BOOK Ch's 25-31**

And in this final section I just want to draw your attention to,

#### ***(a) THE VARIOUS PICTURES:***

illustrations, that glow like little sections in a stained glass

window. Here are a few examples, "*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver*" ( 25:11 ) "*As the cold of snow in time of harvest so is a faithful messenger to them that send him for he refresheth the soul of his masters.*" ( 25:13 ) You see, words can be like lovely fruit and refreshing cold water from the mountain snows. Using the right words, presenting them in the right way, at the right time what a blessing they are "*fitly spoken.*" Now if you look at these chapters you will find lots of these word pictures. (a)

### **(b) THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN:**

Dr. Sidlow Baxter call's her " **Mrs. Far Above Rubies.**" My .... here is an example of what God intended when He created Eve, a woman who was fashioned out of Adam's rib to show that she is to be at *his side, not on his back, or under his feet.* Now Solomon has talked about "*wicked women,*" in ( Ch's 1-9 ) he has talked about "*nagging wives,*" ( 21:9 25:24 ) but the book closes with a tribute to the godly dedicated wife who brings honour to God and joy to her family. My .... next to making a decision for Christ the most important decision a Christian will make is the choice of a life's partner. The book of Proverbs says, "*A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband,*" ( 12:4 ) "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord.*" ( 18:22) "*A prudent wife is from the Lord.*" Do you notice her fine qualities here ?

#### **1. Her Spirituality:**

The king's mother is teaching her son the things of God.

She is warning Lemuel about sinful companions, strong drink, and a failure to obey the Word of God. Tell me, do you have a God fearing mother ? Have you thanked God for her ?

#### **2. Her Loyalty:**

Look at ( 31:10-12 ) The two key words are heart and trust love and faith. Is this not what marriage is all about ? It's a matter of the heart, there must be true love between a husband and his wife.

#### **3. Her Industry:**

Look at ( 13:22 ) This priceless woman is a worker. Whether it be sewing or cooking or helping her husband in the family business she is faithfully doing her share. Did you notice that she works *willingly* ? ( 31:13 ) That she is up early. ( 31:15 ) She is not of these women that lie in bed all day. Could you handle a woman like that ? I could not.

#### **4. Her Modesty:**

Have a look at ( 31:23-26) Her husband is known in the gates and she is known for her faithfulness at home. You see, husband and wife have a place in the economy of God and when one steps out of place there is trouble and confusion. Can you see that she does not depend on fancy clothing in ( 31:25 ) and that the law of kindness rules her tongue.



## 5. Her Piety:

Look at ( 31:30) My .... is this not the secret of her life ? No doubt she would meet with the Lord in the morning. She would pray for her husband and family, and though the years might mark her body her beauty in the Lord only grows greater. She is a Good **Woman:** ( 31:25 ) She is a Good **Wife:** ( 31:12) She is a Good **Mother:** ( **£1:21** ) She is a Good **Neighbour:** ( 31:20 ) And so while the early chapters have much to say about the bad woman and her temptations. The final chapter has much to say about the good wife and her trustworthiness. My .... I wonder are these qualities found in you ? Are you Spiritual ? Loyal ? Industrious ? Modest ? Godly ?

This then is the Book of Proverbs, an excellent book to read and reread on a regular basis. Since it has 31 chapters you may want to read it through one month each year. If you do, you'll discover this. **Reading a proverb, takes seconds, memorizing a proverb takes minutes, applying a proverb takes a lifetime.**