

A FEW NOTES ABOUT PROVERBS

Bill Abeler, Camp Lebanon June 2015

WHAT'S A PROVERB? Leave it to some unknown wise guys to make a complex concept simple in a way that matches its relevance and practicality. Check out these definitions:

"Proverbs are short sentences drawn from long experience."

"Proverbs capture the wit of one and the wisdom of many."

Life is full of proverbs. Can you think of some?

"The early bird catches the worm...but the second mouse gets the cheese."

"He that speaketh by the yard, but thinketh by the inch will be kick-ed by the foot."

In the world of fishing, many truisms have taken proverbial forms. What proverbs are in your tackle box?

"Wind from the south blows the hook into the fish's mouth."

"Wind from the east fishing is least."

"You can't measure a fish that's swimming in the water."

"A bad day of fishing is better than a good day of work."

"We ask a simple question and that is all we wish: Are fishermen all liars? Or do only liars fish?"

"Calling fishing a hobby is like calling brain surgery a job."

The book of Proverbs has some zingers, too. Can you think of any?

"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." (11:22)

"For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife." (30:33)

"Even a fool when silent is thought to be wise."(17:28)

The website Gotquestions.org adds more insight. **"A biblical proverb is 'a short saying that expresses a general truth for practical, godly living.'** The word *proverb* means 'to be like'; thus, the book of Proverbs is full of comparisons showing us how various images illustrate the fundamental truths of life. The purpose of a proverb is to present wisdom in a short, memorable format. Proverbs are simple yet profound. Many deal with the commonplace yet clarify the deepest realities of life."

Proverbs are not promises and they are not necessarily intended to be taken literally. What they are is an **acknowledgement of a common reality that offers instruction for the everydayness of life.**

Outside of the book of Proverbs, proverbs are found in both the Old (e.g. Ecclesiastes) and New Testaments. Jesus is the master of parables, often teaching in parables which can be thought of as an expanded proverbial form. He also was the rabbi of the wise one liner. He gets credit for the #1 proverb of all time: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

Applied to life, proverbs will lead to success and away from the abyss. In this the wisdom personified in Proverbs echoes the call of Moses to his people in Deuteronomy 30. *"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."*

BENEFITS OF WISDOM:For an even more complete list of the benefits of wisdom, study **chapters 3 and 4** and circle all the good things that come (and the bad things that are avoided!) by following the way of wisdom. One would have to be awfully stupid to not want to be wise.

ONE WAY TO READ PROVERBS:So here's one more proverb for you: *"A proverb a day keeps the devil away...as well as the undertaker and the over-taker."* Match up the 31 chapters of Proverbs with the 30 or 31 days of the calendar and your life will never be the same. Some read the entire chapter, others read until they find a nugget upon which to spend the rest of day chewing.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

- I. **Introduction: The Goals of Wisdom and It's Motto** (1:1-7)
- II. **Exhortations to Embrace Wisdom** (1:8 – 9:18)
 - A. A Father's Warnings against the allures of evil and folly of rejecting wisdom (1:18-33)
 - B. Say "YES!" to Wisdom (2-4)
 - C. Say "NO!" to Folly (5-7)
 - D. Wisdom's Call (8)
 - E. The Son's Choice: Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly? (9)
- III. **The Proverbs of Solomon** (10:1 – 22:16)
- IV. **Epilogue to Solomon's Proverbs**
 - A. Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17 – 24:22)
 - B. Additional Sayings of the Wise (24:23-34)
- VI. **Hezekiah's Collection of Solomon's Proverbs** (25:1 – 29:27)
- VII. **Epilogue to Solomon's Second Collection of Proverbs**
 - A. The Sayings of Agur (30)
 - B. The Sayings of Lemuel (31:1-9)
- IV. **Epilogue of all Epilogues: The Ideal Woman *** (31:10-31)

* Considering the fact the wisdom and folly are both personified as women, it's interesting to note that the final section focuses on the virtuous woman. For sure, the son being addressed throughout the book would benefit from the guidance on finding his perfect woman. But perhaps there is wisdom intended for all of us guys, too, locked into this clever acrostic matching a verse for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

TWO KEY VERSES:

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

"Above all else, guard the heart, for it is the very spring of life!" 4:23