

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

LESSON SERIES

Old Testament Survey - Unit IX
The Books of the Wise Men of Israel
THE BOOKS OF PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF
SOLOMON

for

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
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BOOKS BY THE WISE MEN OF ISRAEL**THE BOOK OF PROVERBS**

The book of Proverbs, like the book of Psalms, is a collection of collections. Evidently Solomon gathered together many of the proverbs from other sources. He was the editor of all the proverbs, and the author of many of them.

A proverb is a saying that conveys a specific truth in a pointed, pithy (meaningful) way. Proverbs are short sentences, drawn from long experience. A truth couched in a form that is easy to remember, a philosophy based on experience, and a rule for conduct. A proverb is a sententious sentence, a maxim, and old saying, and old saw, a bromide, and an epigram.

There is a difference between the book of Proverbs and proverbs in other writings (the Greeks were great at making proverbs, especially the gnostic poets):

- **Proverbs bear no unscientific statement nor inaccurate observation**, e.g. "Out of the heart proceed the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). About 2700 years later it was discovered that the blood circulates. In contrast, in an apocryphal book, the Epistle of Barnabas, mention is made of the mythical phoenix, a bird that consumes itself by fire and rises in resurrection. Fables such as this do not appear in the book of Proverbs, nor anywhere in the Bible.
- **The Proverbs are on a high moral plane**. The immoral sayings which occur in other writings are not present. Justin Martyr said that Socrates was a Christian before Christ. Although he portrays a high conception of morals, according to his admirers, Socrates also gives instructions to harlots on how to conduct themselves. The best that can be said of him is that he is amoral.
- **The Proverbs do not contradict**, while man's proverbs are often in opposition to each other, e.g. "Look before you leap" vs. "He who hesitates is lost." "A man gets no more than he pays for" vs. "The best things in life are free." "Leave well enough alone" vs. "Progress never stands still." "A rolling stone gathers no moss" vs. "A setting hen does not get fat."

Although the Book of Proverbs seem to be a collection of sayings without any particular regard for orderly arrangement, the contrary is true. **The book tells a story, it is a picture of a young man starting out in life.**

The young man's first lesson is given in 1:7. Two schools bid for him and both send their literature. One is the school of Wisdom, the other the school of fools.

In chapter 8 the young man goes to the academy of Wisdom where he is taught in proverbs. From chapters 10 through 24 the young man is in the classroom of Wisdom.

This book is especially helpful to young men. The advice herein transcends all dispensations. The One who is Wisdom in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 1:30). The book of proverbs is not a hodgepodge of unrelated statements, nor is it a discourse of cabbages and kings (Ecclesiastes 12:9).

There is a proverb that is a thumbnail sketch of every character in the Bible. Likewise there is a proverb that will fit all your friends and acquaintances, which adds interest to the reading of the book (but may not increase your popularity if you identify them publicly).

Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs (I Kings 4:32). We have less than 1000 in this book.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROVERBS

The literary form of these Proverbs is mostly in the form of couplets. The two clauses of the couplets are generally related to each other by what has been termed parallelism, according to Hebrew poetry. Three kinds of parallelism are used in the Proverbs:

1. Synonymous Parallelism. Here the second clause restates what is given in the first clause.

**"Judgments are prepared for scorners,
And stripes for the back of fools" (Proverbs 19:29)**

2. Antithetic (contrast) Parallelism. Here a truth, which is stated in the first clause, is made stronger in the second clause by contrast with an opposite truth.

**"The light of the righteous rejoiceth,
But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out" (Proverbs 13:9)**

3. Synthetic Parallelism. The second clause develops the thought of the first.

**"The terror of a king is as the roaring of a lion;
He that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own will. (Proverbs 20:2)**

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

I. Wisdom and Folly Contrasted, chapters 1-9

II. Proverbs of Solomon, Written and Set in Order by Himself, chapters 10-24

III. Proverbs of Solomon, Set in Order by Men of Hezekiah, chapters 25-29

IV. Oracle of Agur., Unknown Sage, chapter 30

V. Proverbs of a Mother to Lemuel, chapter 31

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes is a dramatic autobiography of Solomon's life when he got away from God. The title of the book means preacher or philosopher.

As in any book of the Bible correct understanding of its purpose is important to a correct understanding of the book itself - this truth is no more evident than in the book of Ecclesiastes. **The purpose of this book is to show that human philosophy, apart from God, must inevitably reach the conclusions reached in this book (1:2,3).**

We need this understanding because there are many statements in the book which seem to contradict the remainder of the Scriptures. It is almost frightening to know

that this book has been the favorite of atheists, and they (e.g. Volney and Voltaire) have quoted from it profusely. Man has tried to be happy without God, and this book shows the absurdity of the attempt. Solomon, the wisest of men, tried every field of endeavor and pleasure known to men; his conclusion is, "All is vanity."

God showed Job, a righteous man, that there was sin in his life in God's sight. In Ecclesiastes God showed Solomon, the wisest man, that he was a fool in God's sight.

Solomon in this book will pursue every avenue, experience, and interest of man in this life to find satisfaction and fulfillment. Solomon as the King of Israel had full freedom to carry on this experiment, and he was not hindered by financial or power limitations. He could go the limit in every direction.

The result is "vanity" - emptiness. Frustration and dissatisfaction met him in every experiment. The conclusions are human, apart from the divine, made by man under the sun. This is the ultimate end of man's efforts apart from God.

As we read and study this book we must keep in mind what is meant by "inspiration" when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. **Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the words of Scripture, not always the thought expressed. The context should be considered and attention paid to the person who made the statement, and under what circumstances the statement is made** (e.g., in the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the record of the event is inspired, but the act of Judas was not God inspired, but was satanic).

Keep in mind that the conclusions in each experiment are human, not God's truth. This is man under the sun, entirely separated from the "Sun of righteousness" who is the Son of God.

Thus we learn in the book of Ecclesiastes that without Christ we cannot be satisfied, even if we possess the whole world.

Another word of caution - There is a danger in pressing the words in the Bible into a positive announcement of scientific fact, even though **there** are some marvelous statements. But it is certainly a curious fact that Solomon should use language entirely consistent with discoveries as evaporation and storm currents (1:6,7). Some have boldly said that Redfield's theory of storms is here explicitly stated. Without taking such a stand, we ask, who taught Solomon to use terms that readily accommodate facts? Who taught him that the movement of the winds which seem to be so lawless and uncertain, are ruled by the laws as positive as those which rule the growth of the plant. And that by evaporation, the waters that fall on the earth are continually rising again, so that the sea never overflows? Ecclesiastes 12:6 is a poetic description of death.

The "silver cord" describes the spinal marrow, the "golden bowl" the basin which holds the brain. the "pitcher" the lungs, and the "wheel" the heart.

Without claiming that Solomon was inspired to foretell the circulation of the blood, 26 centuries before Harvey announced it, is it not remarkable that the language he uses exactly suits the facts - a wheel pumping up through one pipe to discharge through another?

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

I. Problem Stated. "All is Vanity," Chapter 1:1-3

II. Experiments Made, Chapters 1:4-12:2 - Seeking satisfaction in the following:

1. Study of Science or the Laws of Nature, 1:4-11 - A computer brain and electronic nervous system can bring no man deep and abiding satisfaction. Man cannot exhaust the exploration of the universe. The more he learns reveals there is still more to learn. This is frustration. The physical world is too big for little man.
2. Wisdom and Philosophy, 1:12-18 - Philosophy and psychology cannot change human nature, not can they even correct the old nature of Adam. Joy and satisfaction do not increase in ratio to the increase of knowledge.
3. In Pleasure, 2:1-11 - This is the philosophy of hedonism, teaching that pleasure is the chief goal of life and that gratification of all the appetites of the body is the fulfillment of moral obligation.
4. In Materialism, 2:12-26 - Living for now. The best thing to do is to eat and drink, concentrate on the here and now, and get all he can out of this life. Live for the now and forget tomorrow. However, even this does not satisfy, although it is better than LSD.
5. In Fatalism, 3:1-15 - Too often men attempt to draw some Christian truth from these verses. However, this is the rawest kind of pagan fatalism. If this were true, man would be no better than a robot, zombie, computer, machine, or any other push-button gadget. This kind of thinking allows no room for the free will of man and the operation of the grace and mercy of God. Even the time of death can be changed (see Exodus 32:10 and Isa.38).
6. In Egoism, 3:16-4:16 - Excessive love of self. Individual self-interest is the summum bonum (sum total) of life. The only thing worthwhile is for man to identify himself with his own works. This is the ancient version of the hippy and yippy philosophy. This philosophy leads to a meaningless existence.
7. In Religion, 5:1-8 - Religion has damned the world more than any other thing. Look what the pagan religions did for peoples in the past. Look at India, China, and the Moslem world. Look at the Roman Catholic world. Look at liberal Protestantism. Multitudes have joined churches since World War II to get away from God and from establishing a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. In the Pursuit and Enjoyment of Wealth, 5:9-6:12 - Wealth is not wrong in itself. It is the love of money that is the root of all evil (I Tim.6:10). To accumulate wealth just for the sake of wealth is wrong. The miser thinks dollars are flat so they can be stacked; the spendthrift thinks they are round so they can be rolled.

9. In Morality - the Good Life, 7:1-12:12 - A good reputation and a long eulogy at the funeral is the summum bonum of life. Take it easy; walk softly; don't rock the boat; don't be extreme (a fanatic); avoid the left and the right; go down the middle; compromise; don't fight - switch. The do-gooder, going down the middle of the road on the freeway of life.

III. Results of Experiments, Chapters 12:13,14

- All things under the sun are vanity.
- A right relationship with God, in any age, through the way He has made, brings abiding satisfaction.
 - for Cain it meant bring a lamb;
 - for Abraham it meant believing God's promises;
 - for the people of Israel it meant approaching God through sacrifice in the Tabernacle and Temple;
 - for us it is to "believe on Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) whom He hath sent" (John 6:29).
- What a difference between the man "under the sun" and the man "in Christ" seated in the heavenlies far above all suns!

SONG OF SOLOMON

The book of the Song of Solomon is a beautiful love story of an Oriental bridegroom and his bride. Solomon was the author of 1,005 songs (I Kings 4:32), but we have only one (The Song of Songs). As the name would indicate, it is the most beautiful of all the songs. It is the only book in the Scriptures which has love for its sole theme.

The two main characters are King Solomon and the country maiden of Shulam (Shunem), who becomes his bride.

The Song of Solomon is a parabolic poem (a simple short story which has moral or religious truth).

The story is presented by means of a series of seven scenes or lyric idyls, each connected with and related to the whole. Each closes with a refrain.

The story progresses by means of dramatic dialogue from scene to scene, in which the king and his bride are assisted by a Chorus of palace ladies called the "Daughters of Jerusalem," which echoes from the background, after the manner of the chorus in an ancient Greek play. The brides' brothers, and a court crier, are also in the background.

Originally an idyl dealt with shepherd and pastoral life, in a rustic setting, and treated themes of love and domestic relations. Frequently the shepherd or shepherdess was related in some way to the court life, as in the Song of Solomon.

In the Old Testament, we have other narrative and romantic idyls such as the Wooing of Rebekah, Samson and Delilah, and the story of Ruth, the latter being an excellent type of the narrative idyl.

The Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) is a poetic masterpiece in the lyric mood of spring and love. It takes the reader out into the open air, to the hills and mountains of Lebanon, the gardens and orchards as well as the wilderness, as it to contrast with the Court the pleasures of nature. The poem, too, is noted for its rich, oriental imagery and symbolism. In the words of one reader, "It would be a dull eye that missed the beauty of the poem."

THE MEANING OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The interpretation not the inspiration causes the difficulty with this book - although there are some who actually feel it should not be in the Bible. Since, however, it is in the canon of Scripture, it is the great neglected book of the Bible. Often young preacher are counseled not to use it until they become old men. The Jews called it the Holy of Holies of Scripture. Origen and Jerome tell us that the Jews would not permit their young men to read it until they were thirty years old. Surely any fragile flower requires delicate handling.

There have been four different and important meanings found in this book:

- Taking the Song of Solomon at face value (literally), it is a beautiful romantic story of a bride and bridegroom in the days of their courtship and marriage. It sets forth the "glory of wedded love"; declaring the sacredness of marital relationship, and that marriage is a divine institution. The Jews taught that it sets forth the heart of a satisfied husband and a devoted wife.
- Devout Jews almost from the time of its first appearance saw the Song of Solomon as portraying the relationship of Jehovah and Israel. It was read at the Passover as referring to the Exodus from Egypt, where God espoused Israel as His Bride. Thus it sets forth the love of Jehovah for Israel, His earthly wife.

These two interpretations have been set forth by the scribes and rabbis of Israel, and have been accepted by the church. However there are two other interpretations.

- It is a picture of Christ and the Church. The Church being the bride of Christ, a familiar figure of Scripture (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 21).
- It depicts the communion of Christ and the individual believer. The soul's communion with Christ is here set forth.

STORY OUTLINE

Since the book is a series of scenes, in a drama that is not told in chronological sequence, we shall make no attempt to outline the book.

THE PLOT: The story is of a fair maiden named Shulam of a poor family of Ephraim, who is sort of Cinderella. The poverty of the family forces her into the vineyards which belong to King Solomon (8:11).

King Solomon visiting his royal vineyards upon Mount Lebanon on the northwest boundary of Palestine, suddenly by surprise comes upon the fair maiden Shulam. Startled, she runs away from the royal company, but not before her rustic charms have

won the favor of the king. So, at a later date, Solomon returns and visits her in the disguise of a shepherd, and woos and wins her love. Then he leaves her with the promise that he will return.

He is absent for a long time, and she despairs of his return. One day the electrifying word is shouted along the way that King Solomon is coming by. She is not interested, and takes no further notice until word is brought her that King Solomon wants to see her. She is puzzled until she is brought into his presence where she recognizes him as her shepherd lover. Solomon takes her to his palace in Jerusalem where most of the song takes place.

Scene 1. The Wedding Day, Chapters 1-2:7

- The bridal procession approaches the Palace: Solomon leads the bride, the court ladies following. The bride is speaking; verse 4 refers to the ancient ceremony of lifting the bride across the threshold.

Scene 2. The Bride's Reminiscences of the Courtship, Chapters 2:8-3:5

- The bride delights to remember how in the springtime her lover (Solomon disguised as a shepherd) came to her mountain home to woo her. (In point of time, this scene takes us back to events earlier than the events in scene 1.)

Scene 3. The Day of the Betrothal, Chapters 3:6-5:1

- This scene is a sequel to scene 2, in which Solomon is disguise as a shepherd, wooed and won the mountain maid. In this scene we see Solomon in all his glory coming across the wilderness to the mountain home of his love, prepared to bring her to his palace in Jerusalem.

Scene 4. The Bride's Troubled Dream, Chapters 5:2-6:3**Scene 5. The Kings Soliloquy on the Beauty of His Bride, Chapters 6:4-7:10****Scene 6. The Bride's wish to Visit Her Home on Mount Lebanon Chapters 7:11-8:4**

- This scene follows in sequence the events of scene 1 and 5, and may be said to mark the end of the first honeymoon. However, in her plea that they visit together, she promises to renew her love there.

Scene 7. The Renewal of Love in the Vineyard of Lebanon, Chapter 8:5-14

- This scene carries out the purpose wished for in scene 6. That is, that the lovers may go together to the bride's home on Mount Lebanon. ;

The play closes with a human touch, the bride having the last word, and urging her husband to hurry, "Make haste, my beloved..."

END of Lesson

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