

Proverbs 22-07-13a

Good evening, welcome to the Wednesday night Bible class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are embarking on a new study tonight. It is the book of Proverbs.

This is one that we have sampled in other studies, but we're going to take a detailed look at the entirety of the book and in terms of its structure and its overall content. And out of its 31 chapters, we will foray into the book and endeavor to cover the whole thing with alacrity and yet in depth. It is a wonderful collection as we will see from its introduction.

So that having been said, let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and we will dive in. Father, we are always grateful. We are always thankful when we think about the fellowship that we enjoy, the believers with whom we travel, endeavoring to find that narrow gate that leads to life and to aim for it on a daily basis.

We thank you for the wonderful content from your word that we have learned together in the various studies we've undertaken. The ministry of your Holy Spirit to bring it to our minds and to enable us to understand and to apply the truth is a wonderful privilege that we enjoy because of what we have been given in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him and for his example in living by every word that proceeds from your mouth.

And we pray that as we engage in this study of the wisdom of the Old Testament, that your Holy Spirit will similarly impress it on our hearts and our minds and bless us through it with insight and understanding so that we can make the most of the time that remains to us in this life and live in a way that is pleasing in your sight. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. In any study of the word of God, we have to start with what is the context.

And as we look at the book of Proverbs, it is helpful to have an overall impression of what the book is, a little bit about its structure and its content as it has been analyzed by those who have taken time to look at the information that we have available to us on that score. So when you talk about an introduction, there's a ritual that I have certainly followed and most people do in terms of authorship, date, recipients, and so on. The first thing to note about the book of Proverbs is that it is a collection and not attributable to any single author.

Solomon did not author, originate, or write most of these Proverbs. They are sometimes found in parallel literature from other countries. Portions of it will reflect wisdom that was recognized elsewhere.

And in terms of figuring out, well, who wrote it first? Did the Egyptians borrow from the Hebrews? Did the Hebrews absorb and repurpose wisdom from their Egyptian masters? Is not really important. It is just to understand that the book itself tells us that there are multiple authors. So in terms of authorship, almost by nature, aphorisms and short sayings, many times are attributed to people who didn't originate them.

I've discovered this in annotating sermons where a quote is given and I go look for the source. And sometimes even the person quoting it will say, in the words of Winston Churchill or in the words of Yogi Berra or in the words of fill in the blank. And you go back and find out that the person whose name is in the blank didn't actually say that.

It's just attributed to them because they are a well-known figure. So not only as our first point of introduction, the book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom. Secondly, it is a collection of collections.

There are three broad sections in the book of Proverbs. The first section, and this doubles both as what is the content and what is the form of the book. When you first look at Proverbs, you think, well, it's just a shotgun blast of sayings, but there is an overall structure.

The first section is chapters one through nine. And this serves as an extended introduction, which seems to have been written on purpose as the leading part of this book. The second section is chapters 10 through 24, which is introduced in chapter 10, verse one with its own introduction, the Proverbs of Solomon.

And that is the transition from the initial section, chapters one through nine to chapters 10 through 24. So it is entitled the Proverbs of Solomon at chapter 10, verse one. You have a similar notation at chapter 25, and 25 through the end of the book, which is chapter 31, is chapter 25, verse one says, these also Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah copied.

And so we have alluded to this a few times. We've looked occasionally at this, at some aspects of Proverbs in the past, but those are the three broad divisions, one through nine, 10 through 24, 25 through 31. And 10 through 24 is a collection, 25 through 31 is a collection.

The scholarly thinking, nobody knows for sure, there's not a way to prove it. Intelligent, faithful and informed scholars will draw different conclusions, but it is generally believed that chapters 10 through 31, the two big collections that are introduced by chapters one through nine, those are pre-exilic. This is wisdom that perhaps began to be collected by Solomon and may indeed have been all-encompassing collected in the days of Solomon, possibly added to over subsequent years, but that these resided in Judah, somewhere in the palatial realms, along with Chronicles and some of the other historical records that we have.

But that these collections originated, the collections started or were started by Solomon in Solomon's day and are therefore pre-exilic, meaning in that 500 year period, actually 400 year period, if you started at roughly 1000 BC and go down to 605, the first carrying away to Babylon, you've got about four centuries there. So you could imagine that in the same time that we've had the King James Version, 1611 to 2011, about 400 years to

accumulate scholarly writing and commentary and such on our English, that about that length of time would have passed for the collection, recitation, and use of these proverbial sayings. And then that chapters one through nine were composed post-exile.

Having recovered some of the archival material that had been preserved and kept safe during the years in Babylon, coming back to the days of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, down to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and even extending into the period of Esther, that this post-exilic time, circa 500 BC, 475, 450, during that period, these first nine chapters may have been composed as an introduction. This is the time when the canon of the Old Testament was gathered and collected into the Nevi'im and Ketuvim, the law, the Torah, the first five books were always a set from the days of Moses. But the historical books and the wisdom books and the prophetic books were probably collected and gathered as a recognized set of inspired writings after the captivity in the return to Judah.

So that's the thought. It is equally possible that Solomon himself wrote the first nine chapters as an introduction for what he collected and might continue to collect in the subsequent chapters. Nobody knows, nobody can know.

We can find out later. But there is a clear division documented in the book of those three. The reason Solomon has often been thought to be the author, or at least the editor of the entire collection that goes back to the wisdom assigned to Solomon in 1 Kings chapter three and chapter nine, I'm sorry, chapter five, verses nine through 14, 1 Kings 5, and five, you have God giving Solomon wisdom and exceeding great understanding, largeness of heart like the sand on the sea.

Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East, all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than all men. Ethan the Ezraite, Heman, Chalcol, and Dardah the sons of Mahol.

His fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 Proverbs and his songs were 1,005. He also spoke of trees from the cedar tree of Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall.

All of this is in 1 Kings chapter 4, 29 and following tells us about Solomon's wisdom. So that's why these Proverbs have often been ascribed all to Solomon because he is said to have spoken 3,000 Proverbs. Says he spoke them, it doesn't say he authored them.

So this would make sense that he collected them. And those that he retweeted, if you will, are ones that he agreed with and thought were worthy of inclusion for the benefit of his people in Judah. The word Proverbs is the word Mashal, M-A-S-H-A-L.

We saw this some when we looked at Psalms, but by way of review, Mashal is a word that also means to rule as its primary signification. And so it also means to represent. We

saw this in the New Testament with Herod representing the attitudes of all Israel when he imprisons John the Baptist, but he won't kill him.

He can't make up his mind. And when he is forced to make up his mind, he ends up executing John. This foreshadows Israel not being able to make up its mind.

They've got the religious leadership condemning him, but people are compelled. Never man spake like this man. They see his miracles.

And so they're on the fence. And you see Pilate who says, I find no fault in this man. And yet he gives the order to execute him because he can't commit.

Herod can't commit to the words of John the Baptist. Israel cannot commit to the Lord Jesus and failing to commit, failing to place faith in something is all the same as rejecting it. If you can't commit to it, almost by default, you have rejected it.

So Mashal not only means to rule, but to represent and to present yourself, to stand and therefore to be like a thing. You are put for what you are like. So it almost comes to symbolize, to be a symbol for a thing and to rule the domain of something.

So proverbial wisdom is a salient point that can represent many different situations. Many different truths can be subsumed under a proverbial saying. And so if you put the Hebrew preposition all with Mashal, A-L, to rule over, then you have one aspect.

It brings out that aspect of the verb. If something is a Mashal, it is a ruling thing. And this is why our English word rule does double duty.

Someone can rule over us, or we can have a rule. This is the typical way that things work or should work as a rule. So Eliezer in Genesis 24, verse two, the servant of Abraham is said to rule over all that he had, all that Abraham had.

Eliezer Mashals his household and his affairs. So a Mashal then, and this is our definition when you say proverbs, what is this book? These are a collection of figurative sayings that represent that which is real. They are similes.

They are metaphors and therefore parables or proverbs. They primarily express something special. And then as a general symbol, you can apply them to other things of that kind.

We pretty much understand this. There is an example in 1 Samuel 10, verse 11, involving King Saul. And as an example of a proverb, keep your finger in proverbs and turn back to 1 Samuel 10, verse nine.

When Saul turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart and all the signs that had been given came to pass. So when they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him and the spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied

among them. And it happened when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, what is this that has come upon the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? Then a man from there answered and said, but who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, a Mashal.

Is Saul also among the prophets? This is similar to is the Pope a Catholic, but it would be a negative because Saul was manifestly not among the prophets, but he appeared to be on that day and for that short time. This is more along the lines of does a chicken have lips in a negative sense. So when somebody wanted to affirm that while appearances may make you think one thing, it's actually something quite different, they would say, you'd say, well, are you gonna throw that away? And somebody would say, is Saul among the prophets? No, I'm not throwing it away.

Anyway, that's a little derivation story of how some of the Proverbs came into being. So these memorial sayings or Proverbs don't always contain a comparison, but they usually have an idea that is representative. So Mashal stands with something, it's associated with something, and it then subsumes many other somethings under it.

That's fairly clear. So once we have the statement that these are the Mashals of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, the authority for these to not just say, here are some Proverbs that you can find books of proverbial sayings and pithy aphorisms and witty things in your local bookstore, but because these come from Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, this is a threefold assurance of their authority. You go back to 429 of 1 Kings, when Solomon brought these together, Solomon spoke them, Solomon collected them.

They now have a new authority, wherever else you may have heard them, whatever their original source. It reminds me of the quotation of the book of Enoch in Jude. Enoch seven from Adam prophesied saying, all of these ungodly men and their ungodly ways, they're ungodly this, ungodly that.

It acquires an authority that it doesn't have standing alone in the book of Enoch because it is quoted by Jude. That particular saying, it doesn't matter that it comes from an apocryphal book, it is in your inspired New Testament book of Jude. So now it has authority.

Well, in case there's any doubt about the authority, you have this threefold authority bell that gets wrong. These are from Solomon, the son of David, and this has extra baggage when you think about the greatest person to be in authority. Hold that title.

King of Israel, son of David, king in Israel. All of these are designed to remind the hearer or the reader of the weight of these. Take these seriously.

That's verse one. Verse two, the purpose of the book. And the book pretty well

introduces itself on this score.

So the object that these proverbs accomplish, first of all, it says, to know wisdom and instruction. To know wisdom and instruction. To know is the Hebrew verb yada, Y-A-D-A.

The form here is da'at, which is the infinitive, to know, just like you see it in English. This is translated in the JPS for learning. In other words, if you're gonna read these proverbs to know something, how is it that it becomes knowledge? Well, you learn it.

And so I'm happy with the JPS. It's a bit of an interpretive translation, but these proverbs are presented for learning wisdom and instruction. What is it we wanna learn? The first one is chakma, C-H-A-K-M-A-H, chakma.

This is translated as wisdom quite often. This is wisdom in the sense of skill, to be wise, to make wise, but chakam is an adjective. A chakam man is a wise man, someone possessed of this, but this is what it is.

This is the purpose of this book, so that we can learn chakma, which is thinking and attitude concerning experiential life, i.e. practical wisdom. This is not abstract philosophy. It isn't emotion or attitude per se.

This is your approach to practical living, experiential wisdom, practical living, to learn and to know principles for practical living. Well, this is great. This is what we want, right? That's why we come to the word of God in the first place is not enough to know a thing, but to do a thing.

James famously reminds us that it is not enough to look into the perfect law of liberty like a mirror and see how we are, but if we walk away and forget it and don't apply, don't put it into practice, we've wasted our time. Well, this is rubber meets the road, practical wisdom. This is also called prudence, skill, moral sensitivity, the outworking in our life should reflect a biblical ethic, a biblical morality, what is right in the eyes of God and avoiding what is wrong, and also entering into, and this is a bit more advanced of an understanding of chakma, but to experientially begin to understand the ways of the Lord.

He says, my ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts, but as we explore practical wisdom, our goal in acquiring and exercising this prudence is not just to successfully negotiate the rocks and shoals of everyday life, it is to enter into the thinking and the ways of the Lord. Make sense? We want to understand how his mind works, why he does what he does, which is often counterintuitive. Initially at first blush from our human viewpoint, we think, why is God doing this and why is he not doing that? I have prayed this prayer, it's right nine different ways in my mind, why is not God immediately answering this prayer? These aphorisms, these sayings, this chakma initiates us teaches us, helps us to know experiential wisdom with a view toward

understanding God's actions, God's ways as they are reflected in human life.

We want to learn how God thinks and what God requires of us in that sense. That's chakma. The second one is instruction.

So that we can know instruction. This is Musar, M-U-S-A-R. This has the idea of instruction.

You go to our well-known verse in Timothy, the word of God is profitable for doctrine. For reproof, for correction, for instruction. Musar has the idea of being educated to be instructed and the cognate language, you may know that Ugaritic, U-G-A-R-I-T-I-C, Ugaritic is a cousin language to ancient near Eastern Hebrew.

And Y-S-R from which Musar comes is also means to chasten. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, He disciplines. And so this is not only wisdom and skill for practical living, but it is warning.

It is correction. This is the correction side to correct and ultimately prevent bad living, bad ideas. So the Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel, so that we will know practical wisdom with a view toward understanding God's ways and instruction, correction.

Being chastened and warned away from that, which is not skill, not God's ways, not useful, not profitable. Secondly, verse two says to perceive the words of understanding. We're taking our time on these because these descriptions and this purpose statement governs everything that follows.

If we come to a proverb and we don't end up with practical wisdom, warning against something to be avoided and the perception here, which is to consider and understand. This is the word bin, B-I-Y-N. This is seeing through to the truth.

It's perception, understanding. And in order to perceive and understand, you've got to spend a little time looking at a thing. So it means to consider.

The society that we have today is so bent on flooding us in rapid succession with images, with ideas, with quotations, with notions. And before you have a chance to say, well, you know, the thing about that is they're pushing the next idea and the next saying. And they succeed in leading people down a path because they, I think with malice of forethought, purposely don't give people time to consider.

They won't lay an idea out there and say, let's discuss this. Do you ever get frustrated listening to interviews and somebody starts to make a point? And I mean, even conservative interviewers will cut someone off and push another idea or push their own idea onto the interviewee. And this was the nice thing about earlier endeavors in this regard, such as Firing Line, where you had Buckley, William F. Buckley would take people

and let them talk.

Even Charlie Rose, he was way on the left, but Charlie Rose would ask somebody a question and sit back and let them talk. There are some efforts to do that now, where if you have an hour-long format, you can let someone express their idea and you can moussar, you can consider, you can weigh, you can perceive and take your time and explore something with your intellect and with your experience and with your knowledge and understanding. That is the purpose of the Proverbs, to give us that ability to perceive.

Moussar, to perceive the words. And this is not davar, this is amar, A-M-A-R, and this is speeches. These are sayings.

The great thing about a saying is, instead of wrapping something up with an adjective or a label, sayings express a thought. I've mentioned in the past that when we come to the Word of God, we are looking for propositional truth. A proposition, a claim or an idea typically will have a prothesis and an apothesis.

It will have an introduction and it will have a conclusion. It will say, if A, then B. If God is all-powerful, I am in good hands. If God loves me, why should I fear? Prothesis, apothesis, proposition.

Sayings contain this kind of structure where the ideation is not just one word floating in a vacuum. It is strung together with syntax and with context so that you can make sense of something and understand propositional truth. That's the purpose of this book, to know practical wisdom, and be warned, chastened, instructed thereby to be guided so that we don't veer to the right hand or to the left so that we can enter into, perceive, consider, spend time thinking about sayings that reflect understanding.

You have here in your closing portion of verse two and this is binah. So you have to bin the binah. Makes sense? This is a noun that derives from the verb.

To perceive sayings of perception. Someone else had the chance to sit and think. The thing about Bible class is everybody's got busy lives, not necessarily equipped with advanced tools and a lot of resources and so on.

So you have someone else who goes in and prepares and studies, and then you can enter into those sayings, the presentation of a class, let's say a Bible class, where someone can draw out the ideas that are within a verse, such as we are doing right now. Studying the Proverbs enables the evaluation of the sayings that someone says, the perceptions that they offer. Someone says the planet is warming up.

I think this is anthropogenic global warming, therefore this is what people should do. Green New Deal and carbon footprint and all the rest of it. Well, how do you evaluate that argument as over against someone else? And you say, I can see valid points on this

side, but I also see valid points on this side.

How can you enter into and evaluate and draw conclusions about the perceptions of others? That's what the book of Proverbs will enable us to do. Well, that's our first session. That's our introduction.

We're going to move forward and pick up in verse three when we come back from the break.