

Proverbs 22-07-13b

We are ready now to resume our study in the book of Proverbs. We have gotten an overall introduction. The collector of these collections was Solomon by explicit statement in not only 1 Kings chapter four, but also in the book itself.

These are Proverbs of Solomon. They are authoritative. He didn't collect these when he was a youth and waiting for his designation as the successor to King David.

He did these as the King, as son of David. And King and son of David are both titles that Solomon initially holds, but ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ holds. And so we have a third adumbration of authority, if you will, in that.

This is the mind of Christ in terms of practical wisdom, seeking to enter into the higher thoughts and ways of God himself. So rather than just some little pithy sayings or aphorisms, these are designed to enable us to enter into God's ways and God's thoughts, which is important because we are going to be entering into God's kingdom. The kingdom of the son followed by the kingdom of the father and to understand what is going on to be an effective, useful and productive part of both of those kingdoms.

This book is going to equip us not only for bearing fruit and every good work in this life, but in the ages to come. So I can't think of a more effective reason to study a book than for the book itself to say, this is my purpose, this is what I can do for you. And to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, these are worthy goals.

We've looked at that in detail. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity. Each of these has great weight and significance.

But before we continue with the introduction to the book, I want to talk a little bit about the approach that we are going to take as we seek to accomplish, fulfill and benefit from the objective of the book as it is stated and is being stated here. This is going to continue through verses three, four, five and six. And then we're going to have a transition in verse seven, because all of these are infinitives.

And then we're going to move to a finite verb in verse seven. So these first six verses really launch us down the path. But I want to talk a little bit about the approach that we are going to take and that you have already seen as we have covered verses one and two.

And that is to get as close to the Hebrew original as we can. I like the approach that Clark takes in his volume on Proverbs and I appreciate his approach because it is very similar to my own. And I want to read you what he said about, and he's got a whole excursus on this in his commentary.

And I'm going to follow this very closely. This is a good approach for almost anything you

do in the word of God in general and Proverbs in particular. Everyone acknowledges that the proverbial sayings are poetic in the sense that when you find parallelism as we have so often seen in the Psalms, you have these disticts where something is stated and then it seems to be restated in a complimentary, supportive or sometimes contrasting way.

So parallelism, if the typical biblical parallelism is a sign of poetry or we call it poetry. Usually a line in Hebrew has an accentual meter of three to four beats. Normally the proverb consists of two lines or at times three.

It is well nigh impossible to capture the accents in translation, but the parallelism seems easy enough to express, or is it? Nominal sentences, which consist of juxtaposed nouns or phrases without any verb and sentences with verbs both occur, but translations do not distinguish between them. This is a fancy way of saying you lose a lot when you get into English, because our translations try to smooth it out, try to link or supply words that are not in the original. For example, turn over to Proverbs 11, verse one.

This is a part of our introduction, but it is also a part of the reason that we appeal to the original language so often in both our old and New Testament studies, but this is a really brilliant illustration of that truth. When you get to Proverbs 11, one, dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. What do you notice about that in your new King James? Do you see that there are two words in italics and they are the verbs? So what he's talking about here, nominal sentences, which consist of juxtaposed nouns or phrases without any verb, that's what this is.

This proverb has no verb. Can you call it, maybe we should call it a pronoun instead of a proverb, because it has no verbs. It has only nouns.

So this is a pronoun. So here's what it literally says in Hebrew, false scales, and I would encourage you to write this down. If you're taking notes, Proverbs 11, one literally translated is false scales, comma, an abomination to the Lord.

False scales, an abomination to the Lord. And a full weight, comma, his pleasure. False scales, an abomination to the Lord.

And a full weight, his pleasure. So you can see where the new King James, and if you go to the new RSV, a false balance is an abomination to the Lord and an accurate weight is his delight. So they supply the verbs.

But his point here is the punch of the juxtaposition in the original disappears with the insertion of the copula, of the linking verb. And it creates the look of a prose sentence. What is lost by such a matter-of-fact approach to the Hebrew idiom? The rhythm and the deliberate density of the Hebrew is flattened out for the sake of clarity.

The economy of these is what you're after. And in Hebrew, putting two snapshots side-by-side. I was telling my sister today on the way to the airport, she gave me my first, she

gave Patty my first CD.

I co-opted it of music by the pianist Yanni. And I heard him doing one of those songs on that CD live in my Pandora thing. And so I was looking up pictures of Yanni.

I thought, I wonder what he looks like today. Seems like he's been around a long time. Well, like all of us, he looks different.

But juxtaposed on the image search in DuckDuckGo was a picture of Yanni, and it's still probably a 10 or 15 year old picture, but he doesn't have the dark signature mustache and the full mane of hair that he used to have. His hair has gotten thin as all of us get thinner hair as we get older. And so he had the sort of the five day whisker look instead of this dark mustache.

But good looking man, you know, he looks fine. He looks really good as a middle-aged guy, but he doesn't look like his young, 20 something year old self. But then there was, right next to that, there was a picture that had been put on one of his CDs in Egypt.

And they used this picture for the cover of the CD. And it's identical, the same little strand of hair, same expression, same angle, same shirt. Everything is the same, except they Photoshopped his dark mustache onto him.

Identical pictures. I would not have noticed, except that they were juxtaposed. And the contrast of middle-aged Yanni with his five o'clock shadow times five days versus his young mustache on his middle-aged face was thought provoking, to say the least.

Juxtaposition is a useful way to provoke thought. You wouldn't even have that illustration, except that I saw a juxtaposition of like and yet unlike things. Similar, but not the same, right? So the rhythm and the deliberate density of the Hebrew in 11.1 here is flattened out for the sake of clarity.

And Clark says here, that is too high a price to pay. The Hebrew style is far from impenetrable, he says. The Hebrew style is fine.

You don't lose anything by subtracting those verses out, those verbs out. And its flavor is desirable in a culture that has been permeated by the English Bible tradition. You get a fresh look if you'll translate these literally and let the structure be the structure.

Let the words be the words. And you know from long experience that this has been our approach in many cases is let's just peel back the layer from English translation and let God's word speak in the language that he originally expressed it as best we can access it, not being native speakers. Moreover, the relationship of the subject and predicate, which may have been ambiguous in the original is now determined by the insertion of this linking verb.

You inevitably alter the meaning when you insert a word. You limit the meaning in some way. So the objection is that translations designed to be proclaimed in public need a prose style that is clear.

You can read it from the pulpit and you don't have to worry about emphasis or ellipsis or the rest of it. One who is bombarded with one succinct proverb after another will feel overwhelmed and be unable to catch such proverbs on the wing. The message will suffer at the expense of poetic effect.

Recently, there has been a rash of more and more paraphrastic versions of the Bible, paraphrases that try to be very smooth and very clear, but you lose something. The clearer you try to make it, the more interpretive you have to be and you're not letting the word speak. When we do proverbs here, I am going to give you literal translation in every case.

I'm gonna give you the Hebrew, I'm gonna give you what it says and let the Hebrew speak, let these juxtapositions have their effect and not dumb it down. So literally in 11.1, you can get a flavor of it if you say even more literally, scales of lying, abomination of the Lord. That's as close as we can get in English to the Hebrew.

Scales of lying, abomination of the Lord and a full weight, his pleasure. Literal rendering does justice to ambiguity sometimes. There is purposeful ambiguity in some of the proverbs.

They are purposefully not really clear because they want you to slow down and think. This is why you don't wanna take a chapter of proverbs and just read all the way through. This is a collection of proverbs and each aphorism should be savored.

People talk about vintage wine. Frank Sinatra famously sang, I think it was a Paul Anka song, maybe not Paul Anka, but it was a very good year. I think Paul Anka wrote my way.

Anyway, it was a very good year. Toward the close, it talks about vintage wine from fine old kegs. I think of my life in that way.

Vintage wine from fine old kegs. Well, anyone who is some sort of a wine aficionado, I don't know anything about that, but I do know that fine beverages of that nature are to be sipped and savored, not gulped. It's not like drinking a Coke.

The idea is you get the bouquet, you swish it around a little bit and savor the smell, I am told, and then you take a sip. And if you watch wine tasters, they swish it around in their mouth and try to get the, how does it initially attack your taste buds? What is the middle? And then how does it finish? And there is a range of flavors from the beginning to the end, I am told. I'm not that guy.

I'm not even a coffee, I love coffee, but I'm not a coffee connoisseur. If it's hot and black

and I can't see through it, that's coffee. But there are people, I am told that there's an initial flavor, there's kind of a middle, and then there's a finish.

And so when you see somebody describing a wine, a fine wine, they'll say it's got a fruity finish or it's got notes of berries and chocolate or it has, you know, they describe it like it's got a full personality and this is the approach in the middle and so on. Well, this is what we're after in these aphorisms. They're not just little quick toss-offs.

They are supposed to be considered. They're supposed to be savored and they are constructed specifically for this purpose. There's a reason the verbs are left out.

There's a reason two nouns will be juxtaposed. And there's a reason that sometimes initially that juxtaposition is ambiguous because like prophecy, there are sometimes more than one idea present. It's ambiguous because you are supposed to catch more than one way to take it.

If you stop and think, the richness and the three-dimensionality of that proverb will come to bear. So they should be sipped slowly. They should be savored.

They should be contemplated, not just ripped through like you would perhaps in a narrative. So an example of ambiguity and the challenge of understanding what is initially ambiguous is Proverbs 10, verse 15. Flip to 10, 15.

In your English, it says, the rich man's wealth is, notice is as in italics, his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty. So more literally the wealth of the rich, a strong city.

All this proverb is doing is juxtaposing two dissimilar things. The wealth of the rich, okay? Put next to that, a strong city. In the next line, the ruin of the poor, and you get the idea that this is the ruin of a city because this is sort of a ABBA type of structure.

So juxtapose the picture of a ruined city and the poor with their poverty. And you think about those ideas. When you live in a strong city, what are the features of a strong city? Not only is it secure and well defended, but it has a thriving economy.

It has a lot of opportunity. It has a lot of prosperity and prosperous citizens. So the wealth of the rich for them is like the environment that you enjoy in a strong city.

A ruin is the poor in their poverty. The Bible speaks in that proverb about limited opportunity, about the lack of potential, lack of circumstances that would support and enable individuals. And the proverb says, there's a reason why the rich seem to be happy.

And there's a reason why the poor seem to be depressed and oppressed. And those conditions are associated with the same kinds of things that differentiate. The wealthy

are differentiated from the poor in their poverty in the same way that a strong city is differentiated from a ruin.

There's a lot you can think about in that regard. What if the strong city gets ruined? Jericho was a strong city and God demolished it. Remember in Malachi chapter one, when God said, they will build up, I will tear down the Edomites.

If God is not going to support your strong city, that strong city can be destroyed. Think about Tyre and the siege of Tyre. There've been many wonderfully great walled cities.

Think about Jerusalem in 70 AD. Think about the prophecy in Matthew 24 about what's gonna happen to Jerusalem. And all of these ideas in that little simple juxtaposition, there is great depth if you stop and think, if you don't just blow by it.

Well, of course the rich are prosperous and safe and the poor are in ruin. Their poverty is, they got nothing. But the more you think about it, what if the wealthy put their faith in their wealth in the way that people that dwell in a strong city put their faith in its defenses and in its economy and in its government? And then those fail.

And there's a great meditation there just in that Proverb 10.15. So Clark says, the abruptness of these four phrases challenges a reader to sift through the implications. To what extent can the rich rely upon their wealth? Is it a quote, strong city that can withstand any adversity? Is poverty ruination? Is there no hope for the poor? Remember all of the provisions in the law for the poor? Leave the corners of the field uncleaned, look out for them. This will call for an examination of other pertinent proverbial sayings.

For example, Proverbs 18, 10 and 11. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, right? The righteous run into it and are safe. The rich man's wealth, verse 11, Proverbs 18, is his strong city and like a high wall in his own esteem.

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous are going to run into it and be safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city.

Instead of God and the strong tower where you can run in and be safe, his wealth is his strong city and high wall, in his estimation. But there is a sort of foreboding note in that. Every strong city has eventually fallen in history sooner or later.

You have an example of a paradox in Proverbs 11, 24. There is one scattering and still the richer and one too sparing, only the poorer. Once again, this is 11, 24.

You just flip the page there. In your English it says, there is one who scatters yet increases more and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. But the impact of it is far stronger in Hebrew.

There is one scattering and still richer, one too sparing and only poorer. Trying to

conserve, you know, to him who has, more will be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? Wonderful, deep truth in these Proverbs, but to get at it, you really have to start with the original and let it speak. Don't just smooth it out so that it's easy to say. What's the difference in, and I'll give you one of my own examples.

We've got Proverbs. A stitch in time saves nine. It's very memorable, right? A stitch in time saves nine.

Very memorable because it's short, somewhat rhyming. What does it mean? If your hem is starting to unravel or your strap is about to come loose, as soon as you notice the first stitch has come apart, repair it then, because if you don't, it's going to take nine stitches. It's going to unravel before you know it.

Well, if you explain it, it loses its impact. Repair your garment when the first stitch comes loose. Otherwise you may have to put nine stitches in it to get it fully functional again.

Nobody's going to remember that, but a stitch in time saves nine. Six words, very memorable. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

As opposed to, if you organize your day so that you go to bed at a prudent time and you get up early in the morning, you will have a better, fresher mind and be more... Nobody's going to remember that. It's memorable and impactful, as they like to say, because of its economy and its structure. That's the idea in Proverbs.

So Proverbs 11.24, one scattering, still the richer. One, two sparing, still the poorer. The very succinctness warns the reader to think this through.

Do we have an ethical command implied or is this simply a paradoxical observation about how misleading appearances can be? Are we being encouraged to not draw superficial conclusions when we see someone giving away and we say, well, they're soon going to have nothing, or is there something more being implied? We ought to be ready and willing to give away that which we cannot keep in order to gain that which we can never lose. Another aphorism or proverbial saying. He goes on to say, this approach to the Hebrew text is not new.

The most effective description of the aphoristic quality of the biblical proverb has been done briefly by such scholars as Robert Alter. Matthew and I both have several translations by Robert Alter. They are really good for attempting to recover the communication quality of Hebrew in English.

Most translators feel bound to a smooth and perfectly clear rendering. And that can make it difficult to recover the pungency and often the mystery of a proverb, the

pungency and the mystery. So there's a reason God had these proverbs recorded in Hebrew, not in Greek, certainly not in English.

There's a reason for it. There's a reason the Old Testament is in Hebrew. And there's a reason the New Testament is in Greek.

No accident. And so we want to try to recover that. I will quickly note that this mode of translation of being as literal and as faithful to the original as possible cannot escape the problem of gender inclusivity slash exclusivity that affects any attempt to translate the Bible.

The fact is that biblical writers do refer to God as male. This attribution appears in many grammatical indications, he, his, et cetera. God's preferred pronouns are he and his and him.

The fact is the biblical writers do refer to God as male. We're also constrained by the limitations of the patriarchalism that has molded our own English language. There are no satisfactory means as yet by which we can extricate ourselves from this bind.

There can be no denial that Israelite culture among others was patriarchal. And he says, I thoroughly respect the demand that inclusivity be a mark of public and liturgical presentation of the biblical word. In the case of Proverbs, there is more than the difficulty inherent in translation.

As R.J. Clifford has put it, quote, "The world of Proverbs, its world is male." These aphorisms partake of, bespeak, illustrate from, draw similes and metaphors from a male world. He also points out that while the assumptions are patriarchal, the intentions obvious in Proverbs 1, 1 through 7 are not. And the intention overrides the implicit assumptions.

In other words, Proverbs is intentionally aimed at everyone, male and female, even though its aphorisms are drawn from the patriarchal male world. We used to understand this without having to explain it, but I felt it was important to note that now you have to explain that so that people don't get offended because of the world in which we now live. Not all, I like this statement, not all biblical Proverbs can be released from the apparently stodgy style of the English language in which they are currently imprisoned.

Moreover, some of them are not all that gripping and may even be classified as banal. But this is no reason to treat them all alike or to fail to reflect the often staccato style they favor. If one were to write a commentary on the aphorisms of Montaigne or of an ancient classical writer such as Ovid, one would keep the literal wording and refuse to bolderize for the sake of clarity.

The biblical proverb deserves no less respect. For those who are not convinced of the need of this manner of translation of sayings, it may be helpful to recall the succinctness

of English proverbial sayings, which also are not to be rendered into a prose paraphrase. One may cite a penny saved, a penny earned.

Usage and various associations have made the meaning clear to us spontaneously, almost without thinking. We would not want to make a neat prose sentence as the equivalent, lest we close off the open-endedness of the saying. Here are a selection of proverbs that illustrate the need for readers to get accustomed to elliptical phraseology.

So 1114, this is a literal translation, and you'll recognize this when you hear it. No guidance, a people falls, but in many counselors, safety. No guidance, a people falls, but in many counselors, safety.

The wicked, making empty profits. One sowing justice, sure wages. Hear how that strikes your ear? It's fresh, it's thought-provoking.

The wicked, making empty profits, but one sowing justice, sure wages. That was 1118, by the way. 1123, the desire of the just, only good.

The hope of the wicked, wrath. 1129, whoever disturbs his household will inherit the wind. And a fool, servant to the wise of heart.

121, a lover of instruction, a lover of knowledge. But a hater of reproof, stupid. You just can't get that out of the English.

A lover of instruction, a lover of knowledge, but a hater of reproof, stupid. That's a good refrigerator magnet. 2514, clouds and wind, but no rain.

One who boasts of a gift, never given. Clouds and wind, but no rain. One who boasts of a gift, never given.

2519, this is one for Dan. A bad tooth and an unsteady foot, trusting a faithless person in time of trouble. You don't need the words, is like.

A bad tooth and an unsteady foot, trusting a faithless person in time of trouble. That's memorable. 2521, a trampled spring or a polluted fountain.

This is 2526. A trampled spring or a polluted fountain, a just person who gives way before the wicked. A trampled spring or a polluted fountain, a just person who gives way before the wicked.

283, a man poor, but oppressing the lowly. A torrential rain and no food. You have to stop and chew on these, digest them to get their benefit.

A man poor, but oppressing the lowly, torrential rain, no food. 2827, whoever gives to the poor, nothing lacking. Whoever closes his eyes, many a curse.

299, a wise person disputing with a fool, anger or laughter, but no peace. A wise person disputing with a fool, anger or laughter, but no peace. Finally, 30 verse 5, tested every word of Eloah, every word of God.

Tested every word of Eloah, a shield to those who trust in him. So the discrete sayings, especially in Proverbs 10 through 29, are not prose and are better appreciated if the prosaic features are not inserted into them. So that's the approach that we're gonna take.

Wonderful, nourishing, enabling, empowering, correcting, rebuking, and instructing wisdom in the book of Proverbs. I'm looking forward to studying it together. We will pick up here in Proverbs 1, verse 3 next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the wonderful provision that you have made for us in your word to give us practical wisdom, to enable us to begin to enter into your thinking and your ways. We pray that as we review and meditate on this, on the truths of your word that we have learned and that we are going to learn in this book, that your Holy Spirit will give us insight and that supernatural ability to see the pertinence in the application that is our unique privilege as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, members of his body, and inhabitants of this church age. As it draws to a close, maybe we those who are salt and light, those who, by reflecting your glory, draw others to you, and that we will find ourselves productive and pleasing in your sight now and in the ages to come.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name, amen.