

# The Book of Proverbs:

## A Textual & Subject Study

*Material edited from Jerry Fite & Harry Osborne*

### Lesson 1: *An Introduction*

#### I. WISDOM LITERATURE

- A. The Book of Proverbs along with the Books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon form a special section of our Bibles known as *Wisdom Literature*.
- B. While all of God's revelation is wisdom from God, these Books provide wise sayings which offer practical direction in everyday living.
- C. The Hebrew mind was geared to find truth for living, not philosophy to simply wonder and talk about.
- D. Wisdom is more than knowledge. It involves proper "*doing*."
- E. Wisdom recognizes the principle that "*there is a time for every purpose under heaven*." (Eccl. 3:1).
  - 1. **Proverbs 19:17** - Having pity on the poor is encouraged; **Proverbs 11:15** - Becoming surety for neighbor is discouraged.
  - 2. **Proverbs 26:4-5** - Answer not a fool according to his folly... answer a fool according to his folly....

#### II. PROVERBS

- A. The verb form of the Hebrew noun *mishle*, translated "Proverbs," has a root meaning emphasizing "comparison" - "to make like" or "assimilate."
  - 1. **1 Samuel 10:12** - Saul is compared by a proverb to the ecstasy of the band of prophets.
- B. Principle methods of comparison found in the Book:
  - 1. **Antithetical**, Contrast - "*But*" (10:25; 18:14).
  - 2. **Synonymous**, Same - "*And*" (11:25; 16:32).
  - 3. **Compleive**, Conclusion drawn - "*That*," "*And*," "*Therefore*" (13:14; 16:3; 20:4).
  - 4. **Comparative**, Degree - "*Than*" (15:16; 15:17).
  - 5. **Simile**, Imagery - "*So*" (11:22; 25:25).
  - 6. **Numerical**, Measure - "*six things*..." or "*three things*..." (6:16; 30:18).

### III. THE BOOK

- A. TITLE: "The Proverbs of Solomon" (1:1).
1. The Book is a compilation of the many wise sayings of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:31-32).
  2. The main section, 10:1-22:16, are attributed to Solomon. Also, Solomon's proverbs are included in 25:1-29 which the men in King Hezekiah's day compiled, some 200 years after the days of Solomon.
- B. The Book also contains "the words of the wise," (22:17, 24:23); "Words of Agur" (30:1); and "Words of King Lemuel" (31:1).
- C. New Testament writers quote from the Proverbs as Scripture:
1. Hebrews 12:5-6 quotes from 3:11-12
  2. Hebrews 12:13 quotes from 4:26
  3. James 4:6 quotes from 3:34
  4. Romans 12:20 quotes from 25:21
  5. 2 Peter 2:22 quotes from 26:11
- D. The Sections:
1. Fifteen exhortatory discourses featuring talks with "my son" or "my sons" (1:7-9:18).
  2. "The Proverbs of Solomon" - a collection of 375 proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16).
  3. "Words of the Wise" (22:17-24:22).
  4. "Also sayings of the wise" (24:23-34).
  5. "Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out" (25-29).
  6. "The words of Agur" (30).
  7. "The words of king Lemuel" - includes the acrostic ode praising a worthy woman in the last 22 verses corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet (31).

### IV. THE PURPOSE: (1:1-6)

- A. To supply insight and practical guidance for prudent living (v. 2-3).
1. Wisdom - "Power of judgment" or "insight".
  2. Instruction - "Broad discipline" - guidance and chastisement (cf. 3:11).
  3. Understanding - Comprehend wise sayings, ability to distinguish between good and evil (Cf. 1 Kings 3:9).
  4. Doing right, using correct judgment, and manifesting upright demeanor in living with before others.
- B. To give guidance to the inexperienced or youthful (v. 4).
1. Prudence - "smoothness" or the "capacity for escaping from the wiles of others."
  2. Knowledge - "insight" - experimental knowledge.

3. Discretion - "thoughtfulness," "caution," "circumspection."

C. To allow the wise to grow in wisdom as they turn to sound counsel (v. 5-6).

1. Increase in learning - lays oneself open to instruction.

2. Able to understand other proverbs and sayings of the wise with their figures and riddles.

**V. THE ORIGIN AND BASIS OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE (vs. 7, 9:10)**

A. The fear of Jehovah - Reverential respect for God and His law. This source, this attitude, is where all beneficial knowledge lies and commences.

B. Its Requirements:

1. Humility (15:33)

2. Consistency (23:17; 24:21)

C. Its Product and Rewards:

1. Place of refuge (14:26)

2. Depart from evil (3:7; 16:6)

3. Riches, honor, life (22:4; 19:23; 15:16)

## Lesson 2: *Proverbs 1 & 2*

### INTRODUCTION:

1. In this lesson we see the wise advise coming from a parent to a son or sons. It is most likely that God is the intended advisor-parent and His people are the intended children.
2. We will examine the first three lessons of exhortation that are especially geared for the inexperienced in life.

### I. DO NOT BE ENTICED TO FOLLOW GANGS TO SHED BLOOD OR WRONG A NEIGHBOR (1:8-19).

- A. The commands of father or mother are to be heard and obeyed (v.8)
  1. An attractive characteristic for youth (v.9).
- B. Invitation to murder and rob the innocent (v.10-12).
- C. Enticing reward: precious substance for all to share (v.13-14).
- D. The voice of wisdom: Refrain from walking with them in the path of evil (v.15-16).
- E. Wisdom's insight: The evil doers are actually laying wait for their own destruction (v.17-18).

### II. WISDOM WARNS THOSE WHO DESPISE HER (1:20-33).

- A. Wisdom is available and accessible (v.20-21).
- B. Wisdom cries out to be heard and obeyed (v.22-23).
- C. Wisdom's plea is disregarded (v.24-25).
- D. Calamity comes - those despising wisdom cry out - no answer (v.25-30).
- E. Such people are reaping destruction for their disregard for God's ways (v.31-32).
- F. Wisdom's insight: hearken unto wisdom and you will dwell securely, not fearing evil (v.33).

### III. BENEFITS FROM EARNEST STRIVING AFTER WISDOM (2:1-22).

- A. The earnest seeking after Jehovah's wisdom (v.1-6).
- B. Wisdom that preserves and protects in the right way (v.7-11).
- C. Wisdom delivers one from men of perverse speech and those who love to do evil (v.12-15).
- D. Wisdom delivers the inexperienced from the enticements of the strange woman that leads one away from God unto eternal ruin (v.16-19).
- E. Wisdom's insight: the upright shall dwell in the land, the wicked will be rooted out (v.20-22).

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Is the parents' demand, "obey me" harmful to a child's well-being in society?
2. Is "laying down the law" to our children only the father's responsibility?
3. Explain: "For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird."
4. Is God's wisdom something we can never know in a practical way?
5. Is the fear of Jehovah more properly described as an emotion to be felt, or a choice to be made?
6. What New Testament passage fits the principle found in 1:31?
7. The fear of Jehovah will produce good for us when we do what unto it?
8. How does discretion watch over you and understanding keep you?
9. Who has the strange woman turned away from?
10. Where does the path to the strange woman's house lead?
11. In what sense can the one who succumbs to the enticements of the strange woman never able to return again? How do fornication and adultery often ruin one's life in a way that continues beyond the guilt of that sin?

# Lesson 3: *Proverbs 3*

## INTRODUCTION:

In the last lesson, we began to study the opening sections of exhortation to the book of Proverbs. They portray the part of a wise father who seeks to impart wisdom to his child. As these sections of exhortation unfold, they help the reader of this book to understand how wisdom is acquired and how it is shown. No true wisdom is possible without having a reverence for God, a dependence upon His instruction and a resulting application of such principles to daily life. In this lesson, we continue the same study by examining three more of the fifteen lessons on wisdom given by a wise father to his sons.

### I. REQUIREMENTS AND REWARDS OF OBTAINING TRUE WISDOM (3:1-18)

- A. Obedience leads to length of days (v.1-2).
- B. Keeping kindness and truth will bring favor before God and man (v.3-4).
- C. Rely on God, not self; He will guide you (v.5-6).
- D. Fear Jehovah and depart from evil, it will be healthy for you (v.7-8).
- E. Be generous to God with your substance, you will have plenty (v.9-10).
- F. Don't fail under God's chastisements; it is a manifestation of God's love (v.11-12).
- G. Obtaining wisdom is more valuable than gold (v.13-15).
- H. Wisdom's reward: "life" (v.16-18).

### II. WISDOM'S CREATIVE POWER (3:19-26)

- A. Jehovah's wisdom can be trusted; by it He created the earth with its laws (v.19-22).
- B. Trusting in God's wisdom will make you secure in all circumstances (v.23-26).

### III. WISDOM'S DEMANDS CONCERNING US AND OUR FELLOW MAN, INCLUDING THE UNGODLY (3:27-35)

- A. Do good to your neighbor in need (v.27-28).
- B. Do not devise evil against those who are trusting you (v.29-30).
- C. Do not harm those who have not harmed you (v.30).
- D. Choosing the ways of the perverse and wicked separates us from the friendship and blessings of God (v.31-35).

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Why is it smart to lean on God's understanding rather than our own?
2. What two things must we never allow to get away from us? Why?
3. In 3:7, what two things must occur before one is truly wise?
4. Do we really lose our substance when we give generously unto God?
5. How does one keep from despising chastening?
6. What does God's wisdom offer that money cannot buy?
7. Describe the security that God's wisdom offers.
8. Are there conditions involved in our benevolence towards our neighbor? Explain.
9. What is it about the man of violence that one would envy?
10. Who today do you think has the greater influence on our youth: (1) the man of violence or (2) the scoffer. Explain.
11. In the end, what is the wicked's reward?
12. From chapters 1-3, give one example of the following structures of proverbs:
  - a. Antithetical:
  - b. Synonymous:
  - c. Completive:

# Lesson 4: *Proverbs 4 & 5*

## INTRODUCTION:

In this lesson, we examine two discourses of a father exalting life-giving wisdom (4:1-27) and the sanctity of marriage (5:1-23). The order of these two sections is significant. Without the life-giving wisdom urged in chapter 4, one could fail to see the dangers of adultery in chapter 5.

### **I. LIFE-GIVING WISDOM OFFERS TIMELESS INSTRUCTION & WARNINGS (4:1-27).**

- A. A father exhorts his sons to listen to the good teaching that his wise father taught him and live (4:1-4a). The father's wise instruction is summarized as follows:
  - 1. Remember and keep my commandments and you will live (4:4b)
  - 2. Get wisdom because it is the principal possession (4:5-7).
  - 3. Exalt wisdom and she will bring honor and blessings to you (4:8-9).
- B. Exhortation to receive father's teaching and enjoy its good effects (4:10-13).
- C. Warning: Avoid the influence of evil and do not walk with the wicked (4:14-17).
- D. The paths of righteousness and evil are contrasted (4:18-19).
  - 1. The way of righteousness grows increasingly brighter (v.18).
  - 2. The way of the wicked is darkness that leads to stumbling (v.19).
- E. Living the right way demands all our being and benefits us with total well-being (4:20-27). The way of truth and wisdom is always best for man.

### **II. WISDOM WARNS AGAINST ADULTERY WITH THE STRANGE WOMAN AND COMMENDS THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP (5:1-23).**

- A. The father warns his son of the seductive speech of the strange woman whose ways lead to ruin (5:1-6).
  - 1. Note that the father's exhortation is based on wisdom, understanding, discretion and knowledge — an appeal to reason (5:1-2).
  - 2. Strange woman's appeal is to the flesh (5:3).
  - 3. Strange woman's end is destructive (5:4-6).
- B. The father's warning against sexual immorality and its consequences (5:7-14).
  - 1. Listen to the father's instruction and stay away from the strange woman (5:7-8).
  - 2. The consequences of sexual immorality — lamentation over the latter end of those who engage in it (5:9-14).
- C. The father extols the marriage relationship as the place for satisfying the sexual desires (5:15-19).
  - 1. Wrong to have sexual activity with one other than a spouse (5:15-17).
  - 2. Right to enjoy sexual activity as expression of love in marriage (5:18-19).
- D. The father reminds the son that divine judgment and shame both come to the adulterer (5:20-23).



**QUESTIONS:**

1. Is true wisdom only applicable to one generation or should it be passed down as timeless?
2. What should head our priority list of possessions in life? Why?
3. Why are our steps not "straightened" (4:12) in walking the "straightened way" (Mt.7:14)?
4. What characteristics of the wicked make it imperative for us to avoid their path?
5. What characteristic of light is compared to the effect of walking in righteousness?
6. What will cause us to commit our whole being to a pursuit of true wisdom?
7. Contrast the appeal in a message of wisdom, understanding, discretion and knowledge as opposed to the sweet words of a seducer or seductress.
8. Who is the "strange woman" and where did we see her discussed previously in Proverbs?
9. Give at least two phrases that describe where the strange woman leads.
10. How can one resist the seduction of the strange woman?
11. What is consumed by the adulteress making her partner in sin mourn his end?
12. Wise instruction and association with the godly is ineffective if the student does not \_\_\_\_\_
13. What two characteristics of the marriage relationship are extolled in 5:15-19?
14. What godly characteristics serve as a deterrent to committing adultery?

# Lesson 5: *Proverbs 6*

## INTRODUCTION:

Chapter 6 presents four more discourses of wisdom to the inexperienced son. Though written almost 3000 years ago to address the needs for wisdom seen by Solomon, the lessons are just as relevant and needed today as they were at that time. True wisdom is appropriate for application in any age. Times, fashions and customs change, but principles for wise living are always relevant.

### I. WARNINGS AGAINST BEING SURETY FOR ANOTHER (6:1-5)

- A. Wisdom's insight: Inconsiderate and hasty promises will ensnare you (v.1-2).
- B. Wisdom's advice: Earnestly strive to deliver yourself from being a surety for your neighbor (v.3-5).

### II. THE WAYS OF THE SLUGGARD ARE CONDEMNED (6:6-11)

- A. The diligence in work of the ant are commended to the sluggard (v.6-8).
- B. The laziness of the sluggard is habitual and destructive (v.9-11).

### III. WARNINGS AGAINST THOSE GIVEN TO INIQUITY (6:12-19)

- A. A worthless person is given to iniquity and sows discord thereby (v.12-14).
- B. Calamity and destruction is the retribution for workers of iniquity (v.15).
- C. Pride, lying, murder, devising wickedness, malicious deeds, bearing false witness and sowing discord among brethren are seven things God hates (v.16-19).

### IV. REMEMBERING INSTRUCTION OF PARENTS KEEP ONE SAFE FROM DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF SIN - ESPECIALLY ADULTERY (6:20-35)

- A. The parents' teaching should be the son's constant companion and source of life (v.20-23).
- B. Following his parents' wise instruction keeps the son from the seductive speech and lustful beauty of the adulteress (v.24-25).
- C. Consequences that face the adulterer:
  - 1. Ruin of precious life (v.26).
  - 2. Inescapable punishment (v.27-33).
  - 3. Unreasonable passion of a jealous husband (v.34-35).

## QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to become surety for one's neighbor?

2. What **three** things characterize the earnestness necessary in freeing oneself from suretyship?
3. Who is the sluggard?
4. How is the ant a good example for the sluggard to observe?
5. What is meant by, "poverty comes as a robber and want is an armed man" upon the sluggard?
6. What do winking the eye, shuffling the feet, and making signs with the fingers have in common?
7. In God's eyes, is sowing discord among brethren hated less than murder? Explain why.
8. What **three** needs of life will the company of wisdom satisfy?
9. How should one view the commandments from true wisdom?
10. Beware: Flattery may come from an \_\_\_\_\_ woman.
11. What is lost that is "precious" when one commits adultery?
12. Why is the consequence of adultery more demanding in its punishment than that of theft?
13. Give an example of the following structures of proverbs found in chapters 4-6:
  - a. Completive:
  - b. Synonymous:
  - c. Simile:
  - d. Numerical:

# Lesson 6: *Proverbs 7*

## INTRODUCTION:

Chapter 7 presents wisdom's discourse concerning the ruinous nature of adultery in order to help the inexperienced son to withstand sexual temptation. In doing so, the writer paints a picture of the path towards this sin and the devastation from it. The observations and warnings about the sin of adultery are as true today as they were in that time. In any age filled with sensualism, such as our modern one, this lesson needs to be taught to the young and the old alike.

### I. AN EXAMPLE ILLUSTRATING THE TEMPTATIONS AND RUINOUS NATURE OF ADULTERY (7:1-23)

- A. Exhortation to keep and cherish wisdom (v.1-5).
- B. A young man enticed and ruined by the wiles of the strange woman (v.6-23).
- C. *The Opportunity*: The youth passes by her house (v.6-9).
  - 1. The "simple" are the ones open to be allured.
  - 2. Young are especially vulnerable given lack of understanding and wisdom.
  - 3. They try to make it look like they are headed elsewhere.
  - 4. The cover of darkness is most often used to cloak adulterous actions.
- D. *The Enticements*:
  - 1. The seductress dresses and acts with boldness to catch the man (v.10-15).
  - 2. Bed of adultery is made to seem appealing and provocative (v.16-17).
  - 3. A convenient time: the husband gone and will not find out (v.18-20).
- E. *The Yielding*:
  - 1. Resistance is broken down with the flattering words (v.21).
  - 2. Adultery leads one to disaster as an animal is led to slaughter (v. 22-23).

### II. A FINAL ADMONITION (7:24-27)

- A. Exhortation to hear the words of wisdom (v.24).
- B. Recounting of the effects of the strange woman upon the lives of those who refused the admonition of wisdom (v.25-27).

## QUESTIONS:

1. How do you treat Wisdom's Law when you consider it as "the apple of your eye" (cf. Zech.2:8; Psalm 17:8)?
2. Why is youth, and not age, the example of the simple in chapter 7?
3. What was the first mistake made by the youth that led to his ruin?

4. What identified the woman as a harlot?
  
5. Using verses 11-13, give a brief character sketch of this woman.
  
6. Why would the woman have the sacrifices of the peace offering with her?
  
7. In verses 14-20, the woman appeals to the youth in the following ways:
  - a. To his conscience with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. To his vanity with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. To his senses with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. To his fear of danger with \_\_\_\_\_.
  
8. In verses 21-22a, what has happened in the heart of the youth?
  
9. In verses 22b-23, the ox and the bird comparisons illustrate what about the young man's fate when he yields to temptation and commits adultery?
  
10. In verses 26 and 27, the multitude who have committed adultery are viewed as being led to death. Are “many” still led to death today by adultery? Explain your answer.

# Lesson 7: Proverbs 8 & 9

## INTRODUCTION:

Wisdom is personified in these chapters in all her glory. *Who she is* and *what she offers* should attract our attention, causing us to follow her always. These exhortations serve as the conclusion to the first section of the book of Proverbs. For the sundry proverbs which follow to have value, one must first see the value in the counsel of wisdom. Thus, wisdom is presented as a person (“she”) who speaks, shows and instructs those who seek to have her valuable gift to listen to her, follow her ways and love her. So we must be if we are to gain wisdom’s blessings in our life.

### I. THE EXALTATION OF WISDOM (8:1-36)

- A. The introduction and beginning appeal of wisdom is heard (8:1-11).
  - 1. Wisdom is introduced to the readers (8:1-3).
  - 2. Wisdom speaks saying she is open to all, even the simple (8:4-5).
  - 3. Wisdom’s character of being righteous makes her trustworthy (8:6-9).
  - 4. Her instruction is of great value (8:10-11).
- B. The use of wisdom in various cases argues for her value (8:12-21).
  - 1. Her sound attributes exalt the fear of Jehovah with its demands (8:12-14).
  - 2. Her ways are used by righteous leaders (8:15-16).
  - 3. Her gifts are better than choice things and are given to them that seek her (8:17-21).
- C. Wisdom’s qualities are eternal and were manifested in creation (8:22-31).
- D. Hear her and be truly blessed - reject her and die (8:32-36).
  - 1. Note the manner in which wisdom is to be sought -- diligently.
  - 2. Those who refuse to seek wisdom in this way are actually seeking death.

### II. WISDOM'S AND FOLLY'S INVITATIONS - THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH (9:1-18)

- A. Wisdom's feast produces life for the wise (9:1-6).
- B. One must desire to learn and receive correction, rather than vindicating self, if he will learn from wisdom (9:7-12).
  - 1. The reactions of the scoffer and the wise toward reproof and instruction are contrasted (9:7-9).
  - 2. The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom and the basis for understanding (9:10).
  - 3. Longer life and increase are gained through wisdom (9:11).
  - 4. Personal retribution is the "payout" unto the wise and scoffer (9:12).
- C. Folly's feast produces unsuspecting death for the simple (9:13-18).

## **QUESTIONS:**

1. While we must seek wisdom (8:17), is she hard to find? Explain.
2. What does it mean to understand prudence in (8:5)?
3. One's arrogance shows that he does not have \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What kind of riches does wisdom provide for her hearers?
5. In 8:22-31, what *two* things concerning wisdom cause you to want to listen to her commands?
6. What blessing is connected with finding life?
7. To hate wisdom is to \_\_\_\_\_ death.
8. What kind of "mixed drink" was "mingled wine" (cf.9:2, 9:5)?
9. In 9:1-6, to what degree has wisdom prepared so that she might help the simple?
10. The principle found in 9:7 underlies what New Testament passage?
11. What is the key to wisdom and understanding?
12. What is the meaning of: If you are wise, you are "wise for thyself" (9:12)?
13. How does the foolish woman make her feast appealing?
14. Looking back, what things stand out concerning wisdom in chapters 1-9?