

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 25 – November 21st, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalms 73-75

Proverbs 9-12

Readings in Class:

1 Kings 19-22

2 Kings 1-10

Introduction to Proverbs

What is Wisdom? Or better yet, who is Wisdom? Proverbs is the story of a Father sitting down with his Son to tell him the meaning of life and how to live life. To do that well, one needs wisdom. Now, Wisdom is not some force or skill that one has to try and build in their life. Proverbs teaches us that wisdom is a gift that God gives. Wisdom lies at the heart of who God is. And as you read through Proverbs, it is interesting to note that wisdom is often personified. The theme for the book could be stated as the opening verses note: “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. Those who practice it have a good understanding.”

Proverbs is then more than just pithy sayings, or even advice for how to live life. Proverbs is how a Father tries to teach his Son how God sustains and keeps a life that flows through Him. Wisdom causes life to become orderly, successful, and well lived. As you read proverbs, the sayings of the wise, the discourse on lady wisdom, and even the description of the wise wife in chapter 31 is geared to you desiring God to give his gift of wisdom. That wisdom which comes down from above and was made man in our Savior Jesus Christ.

A Brief Overview of Proverbs

1. Introduction 1:1-7
2. Lady Wisdom's Ways 1:8-9:18
3. Solomon's Proverbs Part I 10:1-22:16
4. The Words of Wise People 22:17-24:34
5. Solomon's Proverbs Part II 25:1-29:27
6. Agur's Proverbs 30:1-33
7. King Lemuel's Proverbs 31:1-9
8. Lady Wisdom Personified 31:10-31

Wisdom is Jesus

Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is personified. The Hebrew word for wisdom takes the female gender in its grammatical construction, so Solomon uses this to personify Wisdom as a woman. And so, wisdom is given what are often seen as feminine traits: alluring, attractive, satisfying, etc. And this causes the father of the book, Solomon, the chance to instruct his Son to follow after wisdom, to pursue, chase, and to desire Wisdom. These same traits are used of disciples to follow after Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

And even more, Wisdom is described as being used by God in the creation of the Universe. Proverbs 8 is wisdom talking. She describes how God possessed her at the beginning and used her to create the heavens and the earth. Early Church Fathers quickly grabbed onto these statements and noted how Jesus is described in the same way as the one through Whom God made the heavens and the earth.

Of course, these observations can cause some discord and misunderstanding. Proverbs 8 was used by the Arians to say that Jesus was not fully divine and not of the same substance as His Father. Arius argued that wisdom was a creature of God and not God Himself. The early church argued back by saying that when God possessed wisdom at the beginning of his work is not talking about the origins of the Son of God, but on how he relates to the Beginning of the Heavens and the Earth.

Finally, a modern stretch is to use the description of Wisdom as a woman to fit Jesus into a modern sexual identity. It goes something like this, if Jesus is wisdom and wisdom is described as a woman, then Jesus, and by extension, God, is not a man. But this is rank and crude. God in His Godness is neither male nor female. Rather the word wisdom conveniently fits as a word that in the Hebrew language is female by gender. Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary is indeed a Man. We must be careful to not take something that Proverbs uses as a tool in describing Wisdom into a fact of biology. That is not the goal.

How to be Wise

The bulk of Proverbs 10-30 are what we traditionally think of as Proverbs. Quick one liners that seem to have no rhyme or reason. But more than just pieces of advice, these quotations are the book of Proverbs' way of getting us to try and understand how wisdom is used in our life. Wisdom is hard to describe and hard to get across for someone who doesn't have it. So these seemingly countless sayings is the author's way of trying to describe what cannot be described. Wisdom is not taught, it is learned. These statements are ways of trying to get us to see. By seeing and reading countless examples and statements, we are called to see how the fruits of wisdom appear in our life and how it makes life good. This causes us to seek wisdom and to ask for God to grant us wisdom in our lives as well.

Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly

What follows in chapters 1-10 is a contest between lady wisdom and lady folly. Wisdom and folly both cry out in the streets. Both offer sweet rewards. And both sound the same. It is hard to distinguish between wisdom and folly. The speech that follows shows us that we must learn the difference by the fruits that wisdom and folly produce. Wisdom encultures peace, order, and life. Folly produces enmity, strife, and death. We learn to hear by the fruits that we see present in each.

Chapters 11-30 are then ways in which we learn to distinguish between wisdom and folly. Once we come to understand wisdom impacts life, we are then given chapter 31 which often is used to describe a wife that is wise. But this is a clever climax to the book thus far that has been describing wisdom from the start as a woman. Searching for wisdom and pursuing it has been achieved and now that wisdom is in the house those who live in it are not found lacking. One can hear Jesus' words when he says that those who treasure God's Word will cause Jesus and his Father to come and make their home with them. Jesus is using the description of a woman in Proverbs 31 to state that he is the fulfillment of Proverbs 31.