

The Old Testament For Grown Ups

Lesson 73 – Proverbs and Psalms

Introduction

Proverbs and Psalms are two of the most beloved books in the Bible; Psalms for its beauty and Proverbs for its wisdom. In today's lesson we will overview Proverbs, as the last wisdom book that we will look at, as well as Psalms as Hebrew Poetry.

The Book of Proverbs

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to collect the wisdom of ancient Israel and offer both instruction and example in godly living. The text identifies the contents as the teaching of a father to his son. The wisdom compiled in the book functioned to shape character and promote virtue in keeping with the commandments of Moses. More specifically, the purpose of the book is stated in the prologue to the wisdom collections and may be summarized as a lifestyle of knowing wisdom and instruction and learning the fear of the Lord (1:2–7).

Outline of Proverbs

- I. Title and Purpose (1:1–7)
- II. A Father's Reflections on the Way of Wisdom
 - A. Discourses on Wisdom (1:8–4:27)
 - B. Instructions on Marriage and Warnings Against Adultery (5–7)
 - C. Wisdom Personified (8–9)
- III. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)
- IV. Anonymous Wise Sayings, "The Words of the Wise" (22:17–24:22)
- V. More Anonymous Wise Sayings, "These are Also the Sayings of the Wise" (24:23–34)
- VI. More Proverbs of Solomon (25–29)
- VII. Appendices
 - A. The Sayings of Agur (30)
 - B. The Sayings of King Lemuel (31:1–9)
 - C. Anonymous Acrostic Poem on the Ideal Wife (31:10–31)

How to Read Proverbs

A proverb is a brief, particular expression of a truth, often seen as short observations, encouragements, or prohibitions that share simple, practical advice. The proverbs are phrased in a catchy way, so as to be memorable. Indeed, in Hebrew many of the proverbs have some sort of rhythm, sound repetition, or vocabulary qualities that make them particularly easy to learn. Consider the English proverb "Look before you leap" now one could say, "In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances and options"; The latter formulation is more precise but lacks the punch and effectiveness of the well-known wording, not to mention the fact that it is much harder to remember. "

There are some guidelines that will help us read Proverbs better:

1. Proverbs are often parabolic (i.e., figurative, pointing beyond themselves).
2. Proverbs are intensely practical, not theoretically theological.
3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.
4. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior — just the opposite!
5. Proverbs strongly reflecting ancient culture may need sensible "translation" so as not to lose their meaning.
6. Proverbs are not legal guarantees from God but poetic guidelines for with favorable outcomes

7. Proverbs may use highly specific language, exaggeration, or any of a variety of literary techniques to make their point.
8. Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life but they do not state everything about a truth however they point to it.
9. Wrongly used, proverbs may justify a crass, materialistic lifestyle. Rightly used, proverbs will provide practical advice for daily living.

The Book of Psalms

Psalms are a collection of inspired Hebrew prayers and poems. The psalms contain words spoken to God and about God. So how do these words to God function as a word from God for us? They help us express ourselves to God and to consider His ways. They were used liturgically in ancient Israel and used in Judaism and Christianity in a variety of ways. They are an extensive and diverse group of writings which cover an array of styles, topics, authors, purposes, and feelings.

Psalms as Poetry

The psalms as poetry

Things to remember:

- The language of Hebrew poetry is intentionally emotive, therefore one needs to be careful not to over-exegete what is said.
- The psalms are musical poems. They are intended to evoke feelings rather than teach doctrine (though they do contain and reflect doctrine).
- The vocabulary of poetry is purposefully metaphorical. It is therefore important to look for the intent of the metaphor, and not to take the metaphor too literally.

Collections of Psalms

There are collections of Davidic psalms (3–41; 51–70; 138–145),

There are also two collections of “Asaph/sons of Korah” psalms (42–50; 73–88),

There are also topical collections

God’s kingship, 93– 100;

Psalms of praise, 103–107;

Songs of ascent [pilgrimage songs], 120–134;

Hallelujah psalms, 111–113 and 146–150).

Types of Psalms

1. Laments

These form the largest group in the psalter. They express struggle and suffering or disappointment to the Lord. They may be individual (Psalms 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 12, 139, 142, etc.) or corporate (Psalms 12, 44, 80, 94, 137, etc.).

2. Thanksgiving psalms

These express joy to the Lord. They may also be individual (Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138) or corporate (Psalms 65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 136).

3. Hymns of praise

These center on praise to God without particular reference to previous miseries. God is praised as Creator in Psalms 8, 19, 104 and 148. He is praised as protector and benefactor of Israel in Psalms 66, 100, 111, 114 and 149. He is praised as Lord of history in Psalms 33, 103, 117, 145-147.

4. Salvation history psalms

They review a history of God's saving works among the people of Israel (Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136, etc.)

5. Royal psalms

These include:

- Covenant renewal liturgies such as Psalms 50 and 81;
- Royal psalms, which deal specifically with the kingship (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110 and 144). Psalm 18 is a royal thanksgiving psalm while Psalm 144 is a royal lament.
- Enthronement psalms – Psalms 24, 29, 47, 93, 95-99.
- Songs of Zion/songs of the City of Jerusalem (Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87 and 122)

6. Wisdom psalms

We can place Psalms 36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128 and 133 in this category

7. Songs of trust

These center their attention on the trustworthiness of God, even in times of despair (Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125 and 131).

8. Imprecatory psalms

These are Psalms that call for calamity, destruction, or judgment on one's enemies. Elements of imprecation may be found in parts of Psalms 3, 12, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 83, 109, 137 and 140. They use hyperbolic language to honestly express anger. The challenge is applying these Psalms in light of Jesus and His teaching of 'loving our enemies.'

The Division of the Psalms

The collection in its present form was brought together as five books, probably with the Pentateuch in view (thus "David" corresponds to "Moses").

Book 1: Psalms 1–41: mostly titled "of David" (Psalm 1-2 serve as introduction)

Book 2: Psalms 42–72

Book 3: Psalms 73–89

Book 4: Psalms 90–106: Mostly untitled

Book 5: Psalms 107–150: concludes with five "Hallelujah" psalms (146–150)

These books tell Israel's story: Book 1-2 David, Book 3 Exile, Book 4 Hope For Redemption

Three Uses of the Psalms

Teach the Psalms, Pray the Psalms, and Sing the Psalms

1. Psalms can serve as a guide to worship and prayer
2. Psalms can demonstrate how to relate honestly to God
3. Psalms shows the importance of reflection and meditation on God's faithfulness.

The psalms (at least the ones that were written) were important for Israel in exile for they became an important source of strength and renewal during this time the Jews were out of their homeland.