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ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



THE MIND OF GOD

PROVERBS

The name Proverbs comes from two words: 'Pro' meaning, 'Instead of...' and 'Verb' meaning, 'a word'. If you put the two together you have a definition "Instead of words." That's what it means to read a proverb. It is an abbreviated saying, instead of using an abundance of words. If you were trying to write a proverb, you would write it in a way that was the most direct and understandable way that you could. A Proverb is direct and to the point. It was the "Twitter" of the ancient world!

The primary reason for this is fairly obvious. There were not hard drives, zip drives, external hard drives, or virtual drives to store and maintain God's Word and important teachings as we have now. During this time, in large part, God's people relied on their memory in order to keep God's Word with them. That said, it is much easier to memorize a small truth that can be expounded upon, rather than large volumes of truth that are harder to recite.

Also, in introducing this work, it would serve us well to take note of the author before going any further. The author of this book, along with Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, is believed to be none other than King Solomon himself, the third king of Israel. In several portions of Proverbs you will find Solomon's name looming about that give evidence for this. If you remember the wealth of the wisdom continued in these works came directly from God Himself after God came to him in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted. As we had previously discussed, Solomon asked for wisdom and this overjoyed God's heart and God told Solomon that he would be unmatched for wisdom. In **1 Kings 4:29-32** we read, "*And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...*" "... *and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.*"

It is believed that Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs while a middle-aged man trying to encapsulate important lessons that his sons would need to know once they were ruling after his reign had come to an end. You can see evidence of this by the continual use of "My Son..." written all throughout the book. For instance, in **chapter 1:8** we see, "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*"

However, it is important to pay attention to other names you will encounter as you make your journey through Proverbs. For example, in **Proverbs 25:1** we find, "*These are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.*" Evidently, there were other writings found that were added later to this work. And then, if you look at **Proverbs 31:1**, "*The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.*" You might look at that and think, "Well who in the world is Lemuel?" Well, many believe that it is another name for Solomon and that it was a tribute to his mother, Bathsheba, for a life

of godliness after she turned back to God in repentance after her sin with king David.

Lastly, by way of introduction, it is incredibly important that we remember that the book of Proverbs is exactly that—Proverbs. And it is crucial not to make the mistake of confusing a ‘proverb’ with a ‘promise.’ If you try to make proverbs into a bunch of promises, you’ll grow crazy wondering what is happening and why certain ‘promises’ were not being realized in your life. Well, it’s because they are not promises, they are proverbs. Adrian Rogers said it best when he described a Proverb as, “A general principle that when generally applied will bring a general result.” A promise is a promise. A parable is a parable. A prophecy is a prophecy. And a proverb is a proverb.

How to Think About Proverbs

This is a little unfair for the reader. The book of Proverbs, being written like it is, is really not intended to be restricted to an outline. It doesn’t really cooperate with an outline format, and any chosen method to divide the book really has to be imposed. However, for the sake of what we are trying to accomplish, an attempt will be made to provide a clear way to navigate through this book.

The Prominence of Wisdom (Proverbs 1-9): In these chapters what you’re reading is Solomon making the case for wisdom. He is telling you how important it is and why you should seek for it and have it. Wisdom is God’s treasure chest of riches. You’ll find a call to salvation. You’ll find that you can actually have happiness by staying away from sin. You’ll find out that there is a correct way to think about the goal of your life. And then in chapter 8 you actually get to hear wisdom for yourself. You get to have a little sit-down talk with wisdom, and it’s almost like you asked wisdom, “Wisdom, tell me a little bit about yourself... why should I choose you over me?” And then Wisdom answers with things like, *“The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water”* (8:22-4). And as you continue reading, you find that “Wisdom” specifically outlines why she is better than any other form of knowledge.

The Prudence of Wisdom (Proverbs 10-15): This section of chapters really focuses on comparisons. You see, what God’s wisdom does is it helps you to clear up choices and paths that would otherwise be compromised. For example, in **Proverbs 10:32** we read, *“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.”* Or **11:29-30**, *“He that troublcth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”*

Do you see how these proverbs give prudence in the kinds of situations and inward struggles that we all have trying to live this life? What this section allows you to do is peer inside yourself a little bit and make corrections to line yourself up with God’s perspective instead of your own. Further, you will also be able to identify the kinds of individuals to stay away from as you walk through this life.

The Practicality of Wisdom (Chapters 16-31): These chapters really put feet to your learning. It places little doses of practical knowledge that you can begin using immediately. For instance, **Proverbs 18:13** says, *“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”* Here we have some very practical instruction from God. Make sure that you don’t just react when you hear something or see something, or are relayed information. You need to investigate first and find out as much as you can so that you can make the right decision. It sounds very obvious after hearing this verse, but it is something that many of us struggle with inside our own lives.

What to Look for in Proverbs

Once again the book of Proverbs was made to be consumed in small doses and so to sift through these pages to find some pattern or thought that will unlock this book is not the intent. Most of the information contained in Proverbs really stands alone in a sense. However, if you are looking for a way to give a little more clarity to what is being consumed, you can look for the following:

Character Descriptions: What is meant by 'looking for character descriptions' is that if you are reading through the Proverbs, look for descriptions of the types of individuals. For example, the writer tells you about the character of the talebearer, the fool, the prating fool, the lazy, the joker, and the strange woman as individuals to be weary of and from whom to keep your distance. What the writer is doing is giving you a character portfolio for you to store in your mind so that you can identify who these people are and what they do.

You see the same thing with the just, the righteous, the wise, and the good. You can match these up with individuals in your life that will be beneficial to you. And then, you should use these character descriptions like a mirror of the soul for your own life.

It is also fun and profitable while reading through the Proverbs to match these charter descriptions up with Biblical characters. Ask yourself, "Who could be described as foolish?" or, "What Bible character could be viewed as lazy?" This type of exercise will reinforce your learning and provide depth to your understanding.

Physical Descriptions: This means that you need to be looking for all the different kinds of pictures that God has for you in the Proverbs. There are several good examples of this. In **Proverbs 17:22**, for example says, "*A merry heart doth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*" That's a powerful picture. It is a physical description of what a person's personal emotions can do. Or what about this one: **Proverbs 15:25**, "*The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.*" Another powerful picture. You most likely know what a destroyed house looks like just from different construction sites you have passed, and you also know what a great and established fenced property looks like from perhaps passing a ranch as you were traveling down the road. Every time you see these things now, you can think of Scripture! And the Proverbs is replete with images just like this for you to be constantly reminded of God's ways.

Thematic Descriptions: This is where the power in the Proverbs exists. Throughout your reading of Proverbs you'll find reoccurring themes. You'll think to yourself, "I've read that before..." and you'll be right... you did. But a point is being driven home that you don't want to miss. Themes such as hard work, wisdom, the importance of sexual purity, finance, honesty, finding good counsel, and many others are continually repeated all throughout the book of Proverbs. Don't let this weary you; learn from it. Remember: There is a reason God repeats Himself.

What to Gain from Proverbs

Perfecting Your Life: If you look at **Proverbs 4:18**, you'll read these words, "*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*" These words give a great synopsis to the book of Proverbs. The fact that you don't have to live your day from moment to moment and from day to day without any real goal except for an ultimate end to draw your last breath is a glorious truth! No, your life is like a juggernaut of glory provided by God that is supposed to grow continually brighter and brighter, moving to that ultimate glorious end when Christ returns and brings all unto His subjugation!

Well to that end, you have the book of Proverbs showing you how to practically live God's way to do exactly that.

Arguably there is more than one division to speak of in learning what to gain from this book, but its ultimate purpose rests right here. The intended purpose of this book is for you to know the mind of God and by knowing this, you'll also know how to continue growing in this Christian life.