



**GREAT THEMES OF
PROVERBS 1-9**

A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study by Jeff S. Smith

INTRODUCTION

The thirty-one chapters of the Proverbs provide a cache of invaluable and timeless wisdom from the mind of the Lord. The book identifies itself as being for the young, but the instruction found within its pages is fit for those of any age who desire to follow the paths of righteousness and avoid the pitfalls of foolishness. The Proverbs are intensely pertinent in this age of temptation and declining morality. The young will find answers and the old will find validation provided each hunger and thirst after the right way to go. Volume 1 in this series covers the first nine chapter of the book of Proverbs as a narrative introduction to the pithier statements that follow.

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GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 1

PROLOGUE

Thoughts on Proverbs 1:1-7 by Jeff S. Smith

The Old Testament collection of Hebrew Proverbs is amazingly timeless and always pertinent.

Despite their origin in the middle part of the millennium preceding Christ, the Proverbs have universal appeal and application wherever people have a mind to pursue both wisdom and the God of heaven. Truly, the two cannot be separated—and that is the point of the Proverbs.

Although most of the axioms are attributed to Solomon, other authors are credited for acting as conduits of divine wisdom and each seems to labor in the tradition of that great king of Israel, whose chief request of the Almighty was for greater understanding and wisdom.

Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel, could have asked for riches, power or popularity, but, like the man whose only wish is for unlimited wishes, he saw the redounding value in gaining wisdom. Wisdom is a sound investment that pays repeated dividends, even if it does suffer the occasional downturn. Wisdom and its motivation bring ultimate reward.

Reverence for God is the starting point. Without it, a man is unlikely to seek divine guidance or heavenly wisdom. He will satisfy himself with what the school of hard knocks and the college of life experience can teach him. A little, but not much. And certainly not as much as God can teach. You cannot teach a fool, but one who fears God will sit and watch and wait and listen and learn.

In the end, though he may prove to be less educated and esteemed than his worldly counterpart, the one who fears God and seeks divine guidance will be capable of outwitting his opponent and obtaining the greater victory.

Three divine qualities are at the heart of heavenly wisdom—righteousness, justice and fairness. Without them, the brand of wisdom one boasts is highly suspect. Any lifestyle, mindset or character study will prove rather hollow where these criteria are missing. Their absence introduces a void which carnal appetites quickly fill—selfishness, greed, lust and arrogance.

Most adore the concept of wisdom and fancy themselves to be great students of the genre. Few, however, are prepared to confront the means by which God transfers wisdom into the hearts of men. Certain understanding is to be gained rather harmlessly through simple reading. Wisdom, though, also comes very injuriously—as one observes suffering in others and especially as he personally endures the punishment of poor choices, time and chance. Be careful when you ask for wisdom; you just might get it.

1. Wisdom was a theme of Solomon's life from the very moment that he mounted the throne of his father, David. Summarize David's final charge to his son (First Kings 2:1-4). What was the nature of his conditional blessing?

2. What was the first challenge to Solomon's authority (First Kings 1, 2:5-46)?

3. What is the wisest way to deal with one's enemies—rivals, competitors, bullies, opponents, etc. (Romans 12:17-21, 16:19; Matthew 10:16)?

4. What is the knock on Solomon early in his reign (First Kings 3:3)? Why would such a wise man do this (Galatians 5:11, First Corinthians 10:32)?

5. Why did Solomon ask for wisdom (First Kings 3:5-9)? What had Moses been advised to do under similar circumstances (Exodus 18:13-27)?

6. What was the wisdom in his pronouncement before the two mothers (First Kings 3:16-28)?

7. Why is godly fear the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:1-7, Hebrews 12:28)?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 2

OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN THE LORD

Thoughts on Proverbs 1:8-9 by Jeff S. Smith

The Hebrew Proverbs are primarily addressed to young men—they are, in effect, the words of a father, speaking to his son about the things he has learned by observation and experience.

Every good father has such conversations with his child, especially his son, because it is so easy to relate to the challenges and opportunities of his own offspring. That is not to say that the Proverbs have no value for girls, or for older people, for that matter. It's just to forewarn the reader that there is a specific original audience and this portion of Scripture has to be read with that in mind.

“Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck” (1:8-9).

Often, there is a considerable amount of tension in this domestic relationship between parents and children, especially as the young one approaches the point at which he expects to take flight from the home and bask in the ability to make his own decisions and live his own life. Many young people assume that the proof of their maturity is how thoroughly they can reject the advice and convictions of their parents. They seek out extremes and experiment with behavior that scandalizes their parents. They end up looking like fools and living with regret. Some recover but many do not.

While it might be natural for the fledgling to test his wings by jumping from the nest and challenging the winds, it is wiser for him to acknowledge the weakness and inexperience of his wings and to rely upon the direction of his parents. Mark Twain famously acknowledged that, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

To the extent that his humility will allow him, the young man must ponder and heed the instruction of his father and mother, who, frankly, have walked the same unpaved road before. They have seen the detours, the misleading advertisements, the aborted shortcuts home. While one's peers are rushing headlong into every generation's repeated nightmare, the child of God who heeds his parents' warning can avoid a few of the potholes and take the right exit ramps. He can wear a graceful ornament upon his head and the expensive chain of inherited experience about his neck, insulating him from at least a few of the horrors that befall his fellow traveler.

1. Consider Proverbs 1:8-9. What is the one-word command? What is the simple prohibition? How might one obey the former while disobeying the latter (James 1:21-25)?

2. Explain what the writer means by “a graceful garland” (ornament) and “pendants” (chains) for your neck.

3. The proverb presupposes the godliness and wisdom of one’s parents. What is good evidence of parental wisdom (Second Timothy 1:3-5)?

4. What is the value in a parent being honest with his children about his own experiences? What is the danger?

5. When should a parent permit a child to make his own mistakes (Luke 15:11-32)? When should a parent stop bailing his child out of his errors? Explain.

6. Is there an expiration date on the message of Proverbs 1:8-9? Explain.

7. Consider Colossians 3:20-21. How can a father provoke his child to discouragement?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 3

BAD COMPANY

Thoughts on Proverbs 1:10-19 by Jeff S. Smith

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.”

The simplest advice is usually the best, but the hardest to take seriously. We live in an age when there is a therapist behind every wall and psychobabble under every rock. We expect people to care about how we feel and to sympathize with our explanations, no matter how self-pitying and fantastic they are.

The Proverbs father just tells his son not to go along with buddies who suggest something sinful to him. The example that he gives is the opportunity to become a highway robber, and although other temptations seem more pressing today, good fathers could certainly do something to bring about a decline in juvenile crime. The trouble is that there are so few godly, active fathers where they are most sorely needed. Too many boys are strangers to the men who sired them and a single mother is simply not a perfect substitute for the steady hand of a godly father.

The Holy Spirit issued a similar warning in the New Testament, although it had nothing to do with highwaymen. He was concerned about the unchecked influence of false teachers on the subject of Christ’s resurrection. His warning, however, resonates across every association. “Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals” (First Corinthians 15:33).

Here is the process: The sinful friends are enticing—“Come on, be a man! Are you afraid your Mommy’s going to find out? You won’t get caught! You sissy!” All the while, the young man’s resistance is melting—not because he wants to do it, but because he doesn’t want to be mocked—and he is beginning to deceive himself into thinking and doing what he knows to be untrue.

What he cannot see is that “these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives” (Proverbs 1:18). Their behavior—whether it is petty theft, mugging an old lady or experimenting with sex, drugs, nicotine or alcohol—is self-destructive. Their greed—for money or thrills or a sense of maturity—will destroy them unless they repent and learn to control themselves. The streets are littered with the carcasses of young men—and women—who submitted to the enticements of bad company and did not live to regret it. Those who survived are addicts, inmates and other assorted losers. “Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors” (19).

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (Second Timothy 2:22, NKJV).

1. How do sinners attempt to entice someone into joining them (Proverbs 1:10-19)? Why do sinners seem so intent upon enticing others?

2. Critics argue that the “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign in the 1980s and today’s sexual abstinence programs in high schools are doomed to fail. With this passage in mind, how would you respond to such criticism?

3. How do modern technologies like cell phones, email, and social networking web sites make parental oversight more difficult?

4. How can a young person respond to a sinful friend’s enticement without confirming the notion that he is a nerd or (gasp!) religious (First Peter 4:1-5)?

5. Paul says that bad company ruins good morals. Besides, blatant enticement, how (First Corinthians 5:6-9)?

6. How do we apply the axiom that, “in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird” (Second Corinthians 2:11, 11:14; James 1:12-16, John 8:44)?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 4

WISDOM'S PLEA

Thoughts on Proverbs 1:20-33 by Jeff S. Smith

Wisdom is a concept, an intangible collection of practical knowledge, until it appears in the first chapter of the Hebrew Proverbs.

Suddenly, wisdom is personified as an outspoken woman of great understanding, begging to be heeded by the masses, and especially by that young man who is so uncertain of her worth.

In the markets, at the gates and throughout the noisy street, Madam Wisdom calls out in a loud voice to speak over the din of doubt and temptation. While wisdom speaks with a clarion voice, the devil is capable of a great cacophony of conflicting messages and convenient justifications.

People—especially young ones—prefer to test the mettle and reliability of Madam Wisdom. They think her to be excessively cautious and pessimistic, out of touch and out of date. They dismiss her politely and condescendingly, or they mock her to her face, but they crave an opportunity to try things their way first. Only then and as a last resort does a retreat to the apron of wisdom seem acceptable. And even then it is probably but temporary. We treat wisdom like a momentary port in a storm, sure to be abandoned for risk and recklessness when the weather inevitably clears again.

Wisdom, however, does not accept rejection idly. “Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me” (24-28).

The truth is that one can resist sound reasoning and wisdom for only so long before the rejection takes on a certain probable permanence. He forgets the value and source of wisdom, how to approach and acquire it. The trail of bread crumbs that once led him back home has been devoured by scavengers and now he is lost and he knows it.

One who casts off the fear of God and turns a deaf ear to words of rebuke will simply be left to drink the bitter waters of his own bad choices. Perhaps that will finally teach him what he needs to learn.

Wisdom is also threatened by one other attitude, which often finds its way into the hearts of believers. Complacency is destructive foolishness, just as much as resisting the fear of God or the work of reproof.

1. How would you define *wisdom* (Proverbs 1:20-33)? Is there a difference between knowledge and wisdom? If so, what is it?

2. How does wisdom speak to a person? How does the devil compete with his own message?

3. How did Solomon's heir, King Rehoboam, cast aside wisdom (First Kings 12:1-15)? What was the result? Are age or gray hair always evidence of wisdom?

4. Contrast earthly wisdom with the heavenly kind (James 3:13-18).

HEAVENLY

EARTHLY

5. What happens if one rejects the invitation of wisdom long enough (Ephesians 4:17-19)? How is this illustrated in the experience of Esau (Hebrews 12:12-17)? Is it ever too late to repent (Hebrews 9:27-28)?

6. How does complacency show a rejection of wisdom?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 5
WHEN WISDOM ENTERS YOUR HEART
Thoughts on Proverbs 2:1-22 by Jeff S. Smith

The writer envisions the acquisition of wisdom as one of life's primary goals. Truly, every other worthwhile goal is dependent upon the presence and utility of wisdom—even eternal life is reserved for those who cast off the folly of atheism and complacency to pursue righteousness.

Four organs are summoned to help—the ears which must prove to attentive to hearing words of wisdom, the heart which must be inclined to understanding, and the mouth which must call out for it. Some people are halfhearted in their commitment or apathetic about real growth, being dull of hearing and stubborn in their ways. Wisdom is not for them. It passes them by. It mocks them.

Like a pearl of great price, wisdom is a hidden treasure that does not present itself to just anyone. Only those who excavate the soil of Scripture and the human experience will discover wisdom. It is not a matter of blind serendipity, but of purpose and will.

The chief function of wisdom in this passage is in protection—shielding “those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints” (verses 7-8). Both evil men of perverted speech and forbidden women with smooth words are presented as threats to the holy heart of an inexperienced disciple, but discretion and understanding are a tidy defense.

If these Proverbs can be ascribed to Solomon, and the same can be said of the Song that bears his name, it begins to appear that the wise father in this book is speaking not only from theoretical study, but also from practical trial and error. Wisdom can sometimes be gained simply by observation, but so often it teaches deeper lessons through very unwise participation and experimentation. One errs, sometimes sins, and lives to assess the causes and consequences of his behavior. If he is in pursuit of a life defined by wisdom, he learns to avoid the things that make for discord, guilt and regret, instead choosing to suffer and wait patiently, if necessary, for godly results.

Elsewhere, we learn that the meek will inherit the earth. In the Old Testament, this prospect was attached to the Promised Land of Canaan, but in the prophecy of Christ, it has more to do with new heavens and a new earth beyond this one. The timeless wisdom of the Hebrew proverbs helps the reader to “walk in the way of good and keep to the paths of the righteous” who “will inhabit the land ... and remain in it” (verses 20-21).

The unwise will choose transgression and error, feeling little remorse and exhibiting less restoration, and “will be cut off from the land” (22).

1. Why do we all find it difficult at times to listen to reason (Proverbs 2:1-22)? Why do young people especially seem to be often disinclined to listen to their parents?

2. What was the problem with the Hebrews' hearing (5:9-6:2)? What was wrong with the hearing of some near Christ (Matthew 13:10-17)?

3. What did the man and the merchant do in search of their treasures (Matthew 13:44-46)? What is the lesson to be learned from these parables?

4. How does God give wisdom (James 1:2-8, Hebrews 12:3-13)?

5. What does the New Testament describe as the Christian's shield (Ephesians 6:16)? What is it for?

6. What kind of men are identified as a danger (Proverbs 2:9-15)? What kind of women are identified as a danger (16-19)?

7. Define integrity (20-22; cf. First Kings 9:4, Job 2:3, Psalm 26:1, Titus 2:7).

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 6

TRUST IN THE LORD

Thoughts on Proverbs 3:1-35 by Jeff S. Smith

Salvation by faith only is a popular doctrine, but popularity has never been a guarantee of reliability.

When faith is defined as mental assent or mere agreement with certain proffered facts, the concept has been clearly reduced to the point of suspect effectiveness. Faith has to be more than mental assent; it has to contain a celebrated element of trust and obedience, or it really isn't faith.

The writer of the introductory section of the Hebrew Proverbs makes such a case for faith in God, urging his reader to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean upon your own understanding" (3:5). The person of faith will wear divine teaching and law around his neck like an ornament and upon his heart as an indelible inscription. True success in life will be defined by how thoroughly the will of God blankets the believer's heart, but if his faith is mere mental assent, his immersion in the way of Christ is likely to be rather shallow.

We are often asked to compartmentalize our faith—to stow it away except when at home or at worship. When in public, especially a place of business or government, we must not rely on our convictions or use them to make ethical or moral judgments, lest we be found to offend and infringe upon the sensitivities of others. The result is that one's faith is outwardly ineffective and becomes diluted and discreet where it yearns to be shared. "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" is the admonition of the Bible (3:6).

Faith in God encompasses the humility of all these instructions as the believer abandons the feeble theories of his own wisdom and grows to rely more upon the insight of his creator. His trust is complete when he chooses to honor God with his choices and investments of wealth and time, even when it might seem to others that the costs will prove too great.

In the interim -- say, between conversion and Judgement Day -- the worldly scoffer might appear to have a very strong argument against faith and Christianity. God has not promised to rescue his people from every instance of difficulty, and for a while it may seem that the worldly person has the upper hand. Some believers will lose their fragile faith in the process of waiting on the Lord, but perseverance is a necessary attribute of spiritual security. One should not expect a smooth path to eternity, but that challenges and hardships might just come along, leaving the saint humbled in the presence of the persecutor, but he who laughs last laughs best.

"The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace" (3:35).

1. What does the father promise his obedient son (Proverbs 3:1-2)? What are the conditions, if any (3-4)?

2. How is something written on the tablet of the heart (Hebrews 8:10-12)?

3. What kind of person trusts in the Lord, but with only part of his heart (James 1:2-8)? What are his prospects for faithfulness and eternity (Second Timothy 4:10, Matthew 14:25-33)?

4. Would you prefer that governmental leaders and judges discharge their official duties without regard to their religious convictions (Proverbs 3:5-6)?

5. How can we honor God by investing in him (3:7-12; Matthew 6:19-21, First Peter 1:3-5, Second Timothy 2:15, Ephesians 5:15-16, Second Timothy 1:12)?

6. What does the tree of life represent to the Christian (Proverbs 3:13-18; Genesis 3:9, 24 and Revelation 22:2)?

7. Why do so many Christians suffer from a loss of peace and sweet sleep (Proverbs 3:19-26; Philippians 4:4-7, James 4:1-4, Romans 14:19)?

8. Why would a disciple envy a lost sinner (Proverbs 3:27-35)?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 7

PONDERING YOUR PATH

Thoughts on Proverbs 4:1-27 by Jeff S. Smith

As the father continues to speak to his son in these Hebrew Proverbs, he now makes reference to his own childhood, when his father endowed him with the same wisdom and instruction, when he was tender and singular in the doting sight of his mother.

For some reason, the inspired writer always personifies wisdom as a female, although the Bible exclusively portrays the Godhead as male. Wisdom is a sister, a spouse, a mother. If a young man embraces her, she will exalt him and place a crown upon his head. If he rejects her, she will have no choice but to let him walk away into desolation.

The father presents life as a long walk and wisdom as a potential traveling companion—a guide more sure than today’s global positioning devices, for her insight is more spiritual than geographic. “When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble” (4:12). Wisdom suggests a righteous route even as the path of the wicked beckons with promises of shortcuts, unlimited speed and smooth travel. As Lot learned about the plains of Sodom, it is impossible to judge a destination from the entrance ramp. Jesus would later warn about the deceptiveness of wide gates and broad avenues, which ultimately lead only to destruction. The difference is as stark as night and day, but to a person who wants to be deceived, it becomes harder to discern.

Why would anyone want to be deceived? Sometimes, we feel driven to do something we understand to be at least suspect, if not obviously wrong. We see others enjoying the behavior without instant consequences and we yearn to enjoy their company and pleasure. We hope for some suggestion that we can get away with it or that it might not be totally sinful after all. We allow ourselves to be deceived because we desperately want to do it and so we do. In the process, we open the door slightly to the devil, who only needs a little invitation, and we blacken and scar a part of our hearts.

Sinners eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. They employ crooked speech and devious talk. If the Christian is not careful, he can fall prey to the allure of iniquity. He has to keep his eyes trained on the prize—the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Detours, off ramps and rest stops will beckon, but he has to maintain the route that wisdom mapped for him, without swerving right or left into evil. “Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.”

1. How might biblical wisdom practically extend one's life (Proverbs 4:1-9; First Corinthians 6:12-13)?

2. What did Jesus say would happen if the blind lead the blind (Proverbs 4:10-19; Matthew 15:10-14)? What people have the most influence over you or your children?

3. Where did Jesus trace the origin of so many sinful actions (Proverbs 4:20-23; Matthew 15:1-2, 15-20)? How does that place get corrupted? How does it get uncorrupted?

4. What should spring from our hearts (John 7:37-38, James 3:8-12)?

5. What should be a hallmark of our speech (Proverbs 4:24; Ephesians 4:29-32)? What kind of speech must we eliminate?

6. What is the danger in casting a look from side to side (Proverbs 4:25-27, Luke 9:61-62 and Hebrews 11:13-16)?

7. How can the past be such an obstacle (Philippians 3:7-16)?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 8

DRINK FROM YOUR OWN CISTERN

Thoughts on Proverbs 5:1-23 by Jeff S. Smith

The chief apparent threat to the young man's happiness and morality is introduced in the fifth chapter of the Hebrew Proverbs. While wisdom has been personified already as a sage woman, the sultry adulteress is all too real.

We tend to worry more these days about young women being sweet-talked by manipulative, single-minded young men, but this passage reminds us that the process works in both directions. Sadly, that is becoming more accurate every year as respect for biblical morality among women rapidly declines. "You've come along way, baby" has graduated from tobacco consumption to sexual conquest and few things are uglier than proud fornication.

As the son listens to his father warn about the immoral woman who might try to entice him with smooth words, a peek at her figure or a flutter of her eyelashes, one wonders at his response. Most young men live—absolutely live—for such an invitation. Why would one look away? Remember, the father implores, that, "in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." While she sounds good, looks good and might even feel good, the morning after is little more than guilt, regret and consequences.

Later, the proverbs will warn against wine with an admonition not even to look upon it when it sparkles in the cup. The warning is similar here—"Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house" (5:8). Both the wine and woman have power to strike like a viper and before the young man knows it, he is bitten, intoxicated and enslaved.

Both men and women need to be aware of the power of sexual and romantic enticement—that yearning for a physical and sometimes emotional connection to another person that God has reserved to marriage. God did not prohibit fornication and adultery because he was opposed to sexual and emotional gratification—after all, he invented them. Rather he saw the pain and anguish and disorder that come from sexual immorality and tried to teach man to reserve sex to a truly committed, permanent relationship.

The passage speaks especially to the married man, whose eye may begin to wander after a few years of looking at the same woman and becoming bored with her. "Drink water from your own cistern ... Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love" (15, 19).

There must be some way to maintain the spark in marriage, without allowing it to become so stale that either partner is tempted to shop around.

1. Keeping discretion is stated as the overall goal in dealing with the immoral seductress (Proverbs 5:1-6). Define discretion, especially as it occurs in the axiom, “Discretion is the better part of valor.”

2. How do the lips of the seducer drip honey?

3. What losses might result from fornication or adultery (Proverbs 5:7-14)?

4. What place does sexual morality occupy in discipleship (First Thessalonians 4:3-8)? How does our society make allowance for fornication?

5. What does a girl or woman need to do to practice chastity and discretion (Titus 2:4-5, First Timothy 2:8-10)?

6. What does Paul recommend in the interest of being satisfied with one’s own cistern (Proverbs 5:15-20; First Corinthians 7:1-5)? How can old married people keep or rekindle the romantic spark that once united them?

7. Who is ultimately to blame for one’s sexual sins (Proverbs 5:21-23)?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 9

SEVEN ABOMINATIONS

Thoughts on Proverbs 6:1-35 by Jeff S. Smith

Proving that modern young men aren't the only ones who must struggle against sexual temptation, the father of the Proverbs returns quickly to that theme in the sixth chapter of introductory material.

First, however, he peppers his attentive son with a series of wise admonitions concerning security, industry and things that irritate God.

While it might seem like a terrific Christian virtue to cosign another's car or home loan, or to put someone on your cell phone account or credit card, the Proverbs state very frankly that such a move is fraught with pitfalls (Proverbs 6:1-5). When you put up security for a neighbor or make a pledge on his behalf, you are instantly just as liable as he is. While he might be a fine friend and have the best of intentions to pay, there is a reason he needs help in the first place, and that reason might be what prevents him from covering his debt and releasing you from it.

In fact, the will of God throughout the New Testament seems to be that if we choose to lend money, we should be prepared for it not to be repaid, never lending more than we can afford to lose, rather than losing the friend or brother who cannot repay (Luke 6:34-35).

Secondly, wisdom dictates that one be hardworking and industrious, rather than slothful and dependent upon others (Proverbs 6:6-11). He points to the ant as a tiny example of a mighty virtue—preparation for harder times. It is imperative that one educate and train himself to make a living and then use the years of his youth to prepare for the future when he might be old and unable to work anymore.

A worthless person, however, does things that are abominable to God (Proverbs 6:12-19). He works great damage upon other people, but for a while seems to escape hardship himself until calamity finally befalls him and he is "broken beyond healing." God eventually must handle the worthless person who commits such destructive abominations as sowing discord among brethren and shedding innocent blood.

Of as much concern again is the subject of sexual immorality. That evil, smooth-talking woman with the beautiful body and enticing eyes comes back to seduce our hero (Proverbs 6:20-35). "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? O can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?"

The specific warning is against committing adultery with another man's wife, acknowledging that his anger will burn hot and vengeful and might cost the young man more than he bargained for.

1. Under what conditions would you agree to become surety for someone else—cosigning a loan or adding them to your account (Proverbs 6:1-5)?

2. What are some things we need to think about before we lend money (Exodus 22:25-27, Leviticus 25:36, Luke 6:34-35)?

3. Is it ever okay to refuse someone who requests a loan (Matthew 5:42, Second Corinthians 8:12-14, Second Thessalonians 3:10)?

4. What does the ant have to teach us (Proverbs 6:6-11; cf. Ephesians 4:28)? What warning did Jesus and his apostles illustrate with the coming of a robber (Luke 12:22-40, First Thessalonians 5:1-5, Second Peter 3:9-10)?

5. What seven things are abominable to God (Proverbs 6:12-19)?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.

6. How do people justify adultery today (Proverbs 6:20-35)? What “sense” do such people lack?

7. Is the wronged man justified in his vengeance? What is the point?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 10

EYES FULL OF ADULTERY

Thoughts on Proverbs 7:1-27 by Jeff S. Smith

It might seem excessive or obsessive to some readers unafraid of blasphemy, but the writer of these Proverbs immediately turns his son's attention back to that immoral woman and the subject of sexual immorality.

We are accustomed to hearing parents speak of a certain child as "the apple of my eye," but this section of God's word reserves that designation for wisdom itself. The fatherly penman implores his young student to accept his instruction and not to reject it because it sounds stifling or restrictive. Frankly, it is every bit the latter, if not a little of the former as well, at least in the minds of those who are bent on experimenting with sinful things.

The forbidden woman is contrasted with the purity of one's sister or the helpful intimacy of a close friend, both of whom prove helpful and encouraging. The adulteress resorts instead to her smooth words and leads the inexperienced young man along for just a little while until he is ruined.

So many times today, the roles are reversed and it is the young woman who abandons the hopes of her father and falls under the persuasion of a boy with more concern for his own satisfaction than her chastity. Regardless of the roles and genders, sexual immorality is a much more serious issue than it is perceived today. Modern people have stripped away most of its moral texture, reducing it to the call of the wild within a framework of medical and reproductive consequences. Sexual immorality is a soul-damning decision and that is why it matters most.

The writer builds upon this introduction with a story gleaned from watching from his window as another naive young man happened by the house of one immoral woman. He describes in her great detail, including her appearance (wearing the attire of a harlot, NKJV) and her demeanor (bold, impudent). Although she is married, she feels no guilt about enticing another man to join her in taking their fill of love till morning. "With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him" (7:21). Certainly, he feels compelled by his own instincts and yearnings, but had he made better, safer choices when he first saw her standing there, the compulsion might have been muted.

Like so many young men, however, he submits to the force of his desires and complies with her seduction. He is like an ox marching off to the slaughter or a bird rushing to investigate what turns out to be a snare. "He does not know that it will cost him his life" (23).

Maybe her husband or father will kill the young man. Maybe he'll just lose his life by knotting it to someone he does not really love, or by creating a child with her. Maybe all he loses is eternal life. But is there anything else?

1. How does one go about keeping wisdom as “the apple of his eye” (Proverbs 7:1-5, James 1:2-8, Second Timothy 2:15, 4:1-5)?

2. What makes her “forbidden” nature even more enticing (Genesis 2-3)?

3. What is deficient about the boy that the writer sees out his window (Proverbs 7:6-9)? What percentage of young boys and men does this describe today?

4. What is the attire of a harlot (Proverbs 7:10, NKJV)? Is it only worn by actual prostitutes? Explain.

5. Why is she dangerous, just because of her attire (Matthew 5:27-30, 18:7-9; First John 2:16-17)?

6. What is bold about her conversation with him (Proverbs 7:11-21)?

7. How can one tell the difference between lust and love?

8. What happens to our hero when she is done with him (Proverbs 7:22-27)?

FAVOR FROM THE LORD

Thoughts on Proverbs 8:1-36 by Jeff S. Smith

It would almost seem from man's misbehavior and folly that wisdom, if she exists at all, is cowering the corner, whispering a feckless invitation to be considered. Wisdom would seem to be as difficult to discover and apprehend as a clear photo of the Loch Ness monster.

This might be so except that the Bible asserts that wisdom is calling aloud from the heights of turmoil beside the way and raising her voice at the crossroads of human indecision. Where men and women enter the crucible of choice, wisdom appears and offers to intervene. Mankind, however, often chooses to ignore her and seek alternate routes, fraught with danger, but promising thrills and carnal rewards.

Wisdom speaks what is right, but frankly, we don't always want to hear what is right. Sometimes we want to flaunt authority and proof and try it another way. Perhaps we can be the first to serve God and mammon successfully, or to take fire to our bosoms and not be burned, or to take a dog by the ears and not be bitten. It is only when we are bandaging our noses, smearing our burns with balm and lamenting our spiritual loneliness that we begin to wonder what ever happened to wisdom.

Twice, we will be told that, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). How many times must we hear it to believe it. After all, "I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). But we'll try anyway.

If fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, then she dictates that true reverence demands a committed hatred of all that is evil, including pride, arrogance and perverted speech. Wisdom loves her suitors and rewards her mates, but when we abandon her to chase after the passing pleasures of folly, it should come as little surprise that she is not waiting for us when we return home, bloodied, guilty and reeking of iniquity.

Hatred of evil prevents transgression by making a person more disgusted by sin than curious about it. Hatred of evil cures transgression by producing guilt and a sense of urgency about repentance. Hatred of evil is empowering, enriching and enlivening, but it can also bring one into conflict with the approximately 99.9 percent of people who love evil—most in small doses and secret spots, but still it is evil.

Truly, the evidence of wisdom's potential is all around us. God spun the universe into existence according to his own wisdom that has allowed it to function properly for thousands of years. Get that wisdom and live.

1. When you are contemplating doing something you know to be wrong or something you're not sure about, how is wisdom shouting at you (Proverbs 8:1-5; cf. Acts 24:6, Romans 2:15, John 8:9)?

2. What is the danger in ignoring wisdom and one's conscience (Ephesians 4:17-19, First Timothy 4:1-2, Matthew 13:14-15)?

3. What should be our attitude toward evil (Proverbs 8:6-13; Psalm 119:104, 128)? How do we determine what is evil and what is not (John 17:17)?

4. Why don't we hate evil like we should (Hebrews 11:24-26, Ephesians 5:11-13)? How do we go about confusing ourselves enough that we can experiment with evil and foolishness?

5. What does wisdom tell us to do during temptation (Ephesians 5:15-17, First Corinthians 10:12-15, James 4:13-17)?

6. What kind of reward does wisdom promise (Proverbs 8:14-21, First Peter 1:4)?

7. How does creation testify to the wisdom of God (Proverbs 8:22-31)? How does that apply to our building efforts (Psalm 127:1)?

8. What must the wise man do after he obtains wisdom (Proverbs 8:32-36; Hebrews 2:1-3)?

WISDOM BUILDS HER HOUSE

Thoughts on Proverbs 9:1-18 by Jeff S. Smith

In the picturesque language of the writer, Wisdom is personified as a hostess who has constructed a safe residence and invited the world to come in and dwell with her in knowledge and security.

Many would tell us that ignorance is bliss, but plainly the wisdom of God promises far greater joy and contentment than immersion in either sin or ignorance. Wisdom might not be accompanied by the same thrills as carnality or folly, but wisdom carries incomparable stability and vision.

Her invitation is not unlike that of Christ, except that he punctuates his offer with a promise of grace and salvation. It becomes clear, however, that one can hardly respond to his offer without acknowledging hers. Wisdom and salvation are inextricably linked so that Christ is not merely a great philosopher or secular theorist, but the Messiah of God and the wisdom of the spirit.

The will of Christ for man and the church is simple, but the ways of the world and of evil are for simpletons. The path of the world is to satisfy one's basest desires, regardless of the consequences, personally or societally. Life tends to be abbreviated when sexual immorality, substance abuse, violence and other risky behaviors are cherished and one refuses to embrace the certainty, both of judgment and eternity. Wisdom invites her guests to leave their "simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

It so happens that one declares what kind of spiritual person he is by the way that he responds to reproof. The scoffer who is intent on evil, even if it does occasionally mix with a little dose of religion or church membership, will abuse the one who dares to correct him. A man operating according to wisdom and judgment will submit to such inspection and reproof because he cares more about going to heaven than maintaining pride or status.

Folly, however, is also personified as hostess, inviting the simple to dine with her, yet she is loud, seductive and ignorant. Her invitation is much more thrilling and gratifying, but "her guests are in the depths of Sheol"—bound for hell, that is. She is a deadly siren, whose call is nearly irresistible to many men and women alike, for it seems so harmless and painless. Today, rejecting God does not even carry the threat of social ostracism, but will make one appear aloof and sophisticated. Madame Folly has done well in decorating her house and polishing her invitation so that most of the world has taken up residence in her deadly estate.

Wisdom yet calls however, if anyone will listen and accept her.

1. What are the seven pillars of wisdom (Proverbs 9:1; cf. Revelation 1:4)?

2. Whom do both Wisdom and Folly invite (Proverbs 9:2-4, 13-16)?

3. What is the essential difference in their offers (Proverbs 9:5-6, 17-18)? Explain.

4. Consider the Lord's parable of the wedding dinner (Matthew 22:1-14). Why did the invited guests refuse to attend?

5. What prevents people today from accepting Christ's invitations to wisdom and eternal life (Matthew 11:28-30, Luke 9:57-62)?

6. What often happens to a Christian who dares to object to the sin of another, even when that other one is also a Christian (Proverbs 9:7-12; cf. Amos 5:10 and Genesis 19:9)?

7. What are they scoffing at (Second Peter 3:1-10, Jude 16-18)?

8. What is it about stolen water and secret bread that is so pleasant and seductive and shortsighted? What can such elements stand for?

GREAT THEMES OF THE PROVERBS: LESSON 13

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

1. Why did Solomon ask for wisdom (First Kings 3:5-9)? Why is godly fear the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:1-7, Hebrews 12:28)?
2. Consider Proverbs 1:8-9. What is the one-word command? What is the simple prohibition? What is the value in a parent being honest with his children about his own experiences? What is the danger?
3. How do sinners attempt to entice someone into joining them? Why do sinners seem so intent upon enticing others? Paul says that bad company ruins good morals. Besides, blatant enticement, how (First Corinthians 5:6-9)?
4. How does wisdom speak to a person? How does the devil compete with his own message?
5. What did the man and the merchant do in search of their treasures (Matthew 13:44-46)? What is the lesson to be learned from these parables? How does God give wisdom (James 1:2-8, Hebrews 12:3-13)?

6. Why do so many Christians suffer from a loss of peace and sweet sleep (Proverbs 3:19-26; Philippians 4:4-7, James 4:1-4, Romans 14:19)? Why would a disciple envy a lost sinner (Proverbs 3:27-35)?

7. How might biblical wisdom practically extend one's life (Proverbs 4:1-9; First Corinthians 6:12-13)? How can the past be such an obstacle (Philippians 3:7-16)?

8. What does Paul recommend in the interest of being satisfied with one's own cistern (Proverbs 5:15-20; First Corinthians 7:1-5)? How can old married people keep or rekindle the romantic spark that once united them?

9. What are some things we need to think about before we lend money (Exodus 22:25-27, Leviticus 25:36, Luke 6:34-35)?

10. What is deficient about the boy that the writer sees out his window (Proverbs 7:6-9)? What percentage of young boys and men does this describe today?

11. What must the wise man do after he obtains wisdom (Proverbs 8:32-36; Hebrews 2:1-3)?

12. What are scoffers scoffing at (Second Peter 3:1-10, Jude 16-18)?

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