

LESSON 31
“Happy Is the Man That Findeth Wisdom”
Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

OVERVIEW:

Wisdom. Trust in the Lord. The words we speak. Pride. Friendship. Raising Children. Happiness and good humor.

BIBLE DICTIONARY PROVERBS, BOOK OF

The Heb. word rendered *proverb* is *mashal*, a similitude or parable, but the book contains many maxims and sayings not properly so called, and also connected poems of considerable length. There is much in it that does not rise above the plane of worldly wisdom, but throughout it is taken for granted that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1: 7; Prov. 9: 10). The least spiritual of the Proverbs are valuable as reminding us that the voice of Divine Inspiration does not disdain to utter homely truths. The first section, chs. 1 - 9, is the most poetic and contains an exposition of true wisdom. Chs. 10 - 24 contain a collection of proverbs and sentences about the right and wrong ways of living. Chs. 25 - 29 contain the proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out. Chs. 30 and 31 contain the “burden” of Agur and Lemuel, the latter including a picture of the ideal wife, arranged in acrostic form. The book is frequently quoted in the N.T., the use of ch. 3 being specially noteworthy.

BIBLE DICTIONARY ECCLESIASTES

A Greek translation of the Hebrew *Koheleth*, a word meaning “one who convenes an assembly,” sometimes rendered Preacher. The book of Ecclesiastes consists of reflections on some of the deepest problems of life, as they present themselves to the thoughtful observer. The epilogue (Eccl. 12: 9-14) sets forth the main conclusions at which the writer has arrived. The author describes himself as “son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl. 1: 1). The book of Ecclesiastes seems permeated with a pessimistic flavor, but must be read in the light of one of its key phrases: “under the sun” (Eccl. 1: 9), meaning “from a worldly point of view.” The term *vanity* also needs clarification, since as used in Ecclesiastes it means transitory, or fleeting. Thus the Preacher laments that as things appear from the point of view of the world, everything is temporary and soon gone - nothing is permanent. It is in this light also that the reader must understand Eccl. 9: 5 and Eccl. 9: 10, which declare that the dead “know not any thing,” and there is no knowledge “in the grave.” These should not be construed as theological pronouncements on the condition of the soul after death; rather, they are observations by the Preacher about how things appear to men on the earth “under the sun.” The most spiritual part of the book appears in chapters 11 and 12, where it is concluded that the only activity of lasting and permanent value comes from obedience to God’s commandments, since all things will be examined in the judgment that God will render on man.

SCRIPTURES:

Wisdom:

Proverbs 1:7: ¶ The ^afear (or reverence of the Lord) of the LORD is the beginning of ^bknowledge: (This is the theme of the Book of Proverbs.) but fools despise ^cwisdom and ^dinstruction.

Proverbs 9:9-10: Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be yet wiser: ^ateach a just *man*, and he will ^bincrease in ^clearning. 10 The ^afear of the LORD *is* the beginning of ^bwisdom: and the ^cknowledge of the ^dholy *is* ^eunderstanding.

2 Nephi 9:28-29: 28 O that cunning ^aplan of the evil one! O the ^bvainness, and the frailties, and the ^cfoolishness of men! When they are ^dlearned they think they are ^ewise, and they ^fhearken not unto the ^gcounsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their ^hwisdom *is* foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. 29 But to be ^alearned is good if they ^bhearken unto the ^ccounsels of God.

Proverbs 2:2-6: 2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine ^aheart (or treasure) to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; 5 Then shalt thou understand the ^afear of the LORD, and find the ^bknowledge of God. 6 For the LORD giveth ^awisdom: out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and ^bunderstanding.

Proverbs 3:13-18: 13 ¶ ^aHappy *is* the man *that* findeth ^bwisdom, and the man *that* getteth ^cunderstanding. 14 For the merchandise of it *is* better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. 15 She *is* more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. 16 Length of days *is* in her right hand; *and* in her left hand ^ariches and honour. 17 Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace. 18 She *is* a tree of ^alife to them that lay hold upon her: and happy *is every one* that retaineth her.

Ecclesiastes 7:12: 12 For ^awisdom *is* a ^bdefence, *and* money *is* a defence: but the excellency of knowledge *is, that* wisdom giveth ^clife to them that have it.

Proverbs 15:31-33: 31 The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. 32 He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that ^aheareth reproof getteth ^bunderstanding. (Our life style must make allowance for that need to deal with reality in our own lives. The disciple of Christ needs to expect the reproof of life – and suffering – for suffering is that sweat that comes from working out our salvation. Suffering is on the agenda for each of us. Neal A. Maxwell, Freedom: a Hard Doctrine, BYU Speeches of the Year, Apr 1972, p. 4) 33 The ^afear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; and before ^bhonour *is* ^chumility.

(There is...incumbent upon you, you who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the responsibility to observe the commandments to continue to study and to learn. Said the Lord: Seek you out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. D&C 88:118. Gordon B. Hinckley, Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley, p. 300.)

Trust in the Lord:

Proverbs 3:5-7: ¶ ^aTrust in the LORD with all thine ^bheart; and lean not unto thine ^cown ^dunderstanding. 6 In all thy ways ^aacknowledge (or seek) him, and he shall ^bdirect thy ^cpaths. 7 ¶ Be not ^awise in thine own eyes: ^bfear the LORD, and depart from evil.

(Absolute trust in the Lord will awaken a desire, at least, to try to live in accordance with Christ's teachings, chief of which is to love, not hate one another. David O. McKay, CR, Oct, 1941, p. 55)

The words we speak:

Proverbs 6:16-19: 16 ¶These six *things* doth the LORD ^ahate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17 A ^aproud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An ^aheart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A ^afalse witness *that* speaketh ^blies, and he that soweth ^cdiscord among brethren.

Proverbs 16:27-28: 27 An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips *there is* as a burning ^afire. 28 A froward man soweth ^astrife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

Proverbs 18:8: 8 The words of a ^atalebearer (or slanderer) *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Proverbs 25:18: 18 A man that ^abeareth ^bfalse witness against his neighbour *is* a ^cmaul, (Heb scatterer; ie some sort of war club) and a ^dsword, and a sharp arrow.

Proverbs 16:24: 24 Pleasant words *are as* an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

Proverbs 12:25: 25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Proverbs 15:1: 1 A ^aSOFT ^banswer turneth away ^cwrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (We seldom get into trouble when we speak softly. It is only when we raise our voices that the sparks fly and tiny molehills become great mountains of contention. President Gordon B. Hinckley, CR, Apr 1971, p. 82. In all our daily pursuits in life, of whatever nature and kind, Latter-day Saints, and especially those who hold important positions in the kingdom of God, should maintain a uniform and even temper, both when at home and when abroad. They should not suffer reverses and unpleasant circumstances to sour their natures and render them fretful and unsocial at home, speaking words full of bitterness and biting acrimony to their wives and children, creating gloom and sorrow in their habitations, making themselves feared rather than beloved by their families. Anger should never be permitted to rise in our bosoms, and words suggested by angry feelings should never be permitted to pass our lips. A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but the discretion of a man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. Brigham Young, JD, 11:136.)

Pride:

Proverbs 8:13: 13 The ^afear of the LORD *is* to ^bhate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Proverbs 13:10: 10 Only by ^apride cometh ^bcontention: but with the well advised *is* wisdom. (When one considers the bad feeling and the unpleasantness caused by contention, it is well to ask, “Why do I participate?” If we are really honest with ourselves, our answers may be something like: “When I argue and am disagreeable, I do not have to change myself. It gives me a chance to get even.” “I am unhappy and I want others to be miserable too.” “I can feel self-righteous. In this way I get my ego built up.” “I don’t want others to forget how much I know!” If Satan can succeed in creating in us habits of arguing, quarrelling, and contention, it is easier then for him to bind us with the heavier sins which can destroy our eternal lives. A contentious spirit can affect almost any phase of our lives. An angry letter written in haste can haunt us – sometimes for years. A few ill-advised words spoken in hate can destroy a marriage or a personal friendship, or impede community progress. Marvin J. Ashton, CR, Apr 1978, p. 11-12)

Proverbs 16:18-19: 18 ^aPride *goeth* before destruction, and an ^bhaughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better *it is to be* of an ^ahumble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

(Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. It looks sideways to man and argues who is right. Pride is manifest in the spirit of contention. Dallin H. Oaks, Pure in Heart, p. 96)

Friendship:

Proverbs 13:20: 20 He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Proverbs 22:24-25: 24 Make no ^afriendship with an ^bangry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: 25 Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

Proverbs 17:17: 17 A ^afriend loveth at all times, and a ^bbrother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 27:9: 9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so *doth* the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

Proverbs 18:24: 24 A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a ^afriend *that* sticketh closer than a ^bbrother.

Raising Children:

Proverbs 22:6: 6 ^aTrain up a ^bchild in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

D&C 68:25-28: 25 And again, inasmuch as ^aparents have children in Zion, or in any of her ^bstakes which are organized, that ^cteach them not to understand the ^ddoctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when ^eeight years old, the ^fsin be upon the heads of the parents. 26 For this shall be a law unto the ^ainhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized. 27 And their children shall be ^abaptized for the ^bremission of their sins when ^ceight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands. 28 And they shall also ^ateach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.

Proverbs 19:18: 18 ^aChasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Proverbs 29:17: 17 Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

Happiness and good humor:

Proverbs 15:13: 13 A ^amerry ^bheart maketh a ^ccheerful countenance: but by ^dsorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Proverbs 17:22: 22 A ^amerry ^bheart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

(A wholesome sense of humor will be a safety valve that will enable you to apply the lighter touch to heavy problems and to learn some lessons in problem solving that sweat and tears often fail to dissolve. High B. Brown, CR, Apr 1968, p. 100)

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