

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 11

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session 11, Proverbs of Solomon, Proverbs 10.1-22.16.

Welcome to a Proverbs lecture. We have spent 10 lectures on the book of Proverbs, essentially looking at the introduction, Proverbs chapters 1-9.

This is an instruction section of Proverbs in which the parent is telling the child about the lessons for life that they need to know, essentially the values that they need to hold in order to make right decisions, in order to learn wisdom. Now we come to the section of Proverbs from 10-31 that are actually collections of Proverbs. There are several of these collections and they contain hundreds of Proverbs.

The first collection of these Proverbs is called simply the Proverbs of Solomon and it extends from Proverbs 10.1-22.16. In this section what we have is 375 Proverbs which we are going to talk about in a minute. The entire book of course is actually ascribed to Solomon and probably these collections are the earliest of Proverbs. It seems from the way in which Proverbs is structured that the instruction section which we looked at in Proverbs 1-9 was added to these collections of Proverbs in order to orient the reader and prepare the reader for the many sayings which are to follow and the way in which they are to be understood and the values which are to be learned from them.

Now this long section is generally divided into two. It is divided at the end of the 15th chapter of the book of Proverbs mainly on the basis of proverbial style. Proverbs are poetry.

We are going to talk a little bit more about Hebrew poetry but the proverbial sayings generally are in pairs. They are in two lines sometimes referred to as line A and line B. So, Proverbs 10.1 for example says, A wise son makes a glad father, a foolish son makes a sad mother. So, what you have then is the two lines, one focusing on the father, the other focusing on the mother, and then describing one as glad and then one as sad.

Now these two lines actually complement each other. They more or less say the same thing that a wise son makes happy parents but it's expressed in what we call an antithesis. We'll illustrate this a little bit more later on.

But the distinction of the first chapters of the collection of Solomon is that they are antithetical all the way to the end of chapter 15. Then after that, there are various topics that are discussed in Proverbs. Though kingship does tend to surface in all of

the collections, no doubt because the collections of the Proverbs had something to do with the scribes who were associated with the court of the king.

This is why in Proverbs 25.1 we have the notation that these were the Proverbs that were collected in the court at the time of Hezekiah. So kingship of course is a topic important to everyone both those who are governed by the king as well as the king himself. So, what we have then is sayings as we have discussed them.

Sayings that are not always clear as to what they might intend and sayings that can be applied in different ways. These are always sayings that are from observation. But they aren't the observation that is the kind of thing that we do in science as a sort of an empirical investigation as to what causes cause and what causes the effect.

Rather these sayings are all somewhat more generic than that. They are just observations of human behavior and often observations of human behavior that have analogies to other kinds of consequences that can happen when an action takes place. Now we need to be careful with these analogies because they always draw on one particular aspect of the comparison.

If I may use a very simple kind of metaphor, we often say in the English language, the ship plows through the water. Now a ship does not look like a plow. There's really not much way of thinking of what similarity there is between a ship and a plow.

My father asked about a metaphor one time and so I used that illustration. I said so think about a ship and think about a plow and what would be the one thing that might be similar between the two? Now my father's never seen a ship.

He grew up in the prairies. But what he had seen was motorboats. And when you drive a motorboat through the water you leave a wake behind and it looks like kind of a furrow.

And so, he said, oh, he said, yeah, I guess a plow leaves a furrow behind and a ship leaves a kind of a wake behind it. And so, a ship is plowing through the water. Well, now that's a perfectly sensible analogy.

Except of course, it doesn't quite pertain to a ship because any engineer of a ship who has any sense of pride, whatever, is going to be mighty embarrassed if there's a big hollow wake following his ship. It means that it's got an enormous amount of drag and that it's a very inefficient ship. What it's got to do is cut through the water at the front like the colter on a plow, not leave a big furrow behind.

And so, we say the ship plows through the water normally meaning that the bow of the ship is cutting through the waves the way the coulter does through the ground. But of course, it's not that my father's way of taking the metaphor was actually

wrong. It's just that he drew the point of analogy from a different kind of perspective.

Now, we have to remember that proverbs are like that so that different ways can be taken as to how the analogy fits and they aren't necessarily right or wrong. I do sometimes smile when I find people reading proverbs and kind of trying to exegete them the way we do in a narrative or the way we might do with the teaching of Moses to find out what the grammar is and everything else. Now, of course, you do have to do some of that with proverbs, but the main point is not in the exegeting of the proverb.

It's the thinking about the way in which the analogy was intended by the speaker when they made it. So, to use an example from proverbs, grasshoppers have no king, but they all go out in army-type units. So, it's an analogy that's actually rather fitting because I'm from the prairies and I've seen grasshoppers.

And literally, they can change the color of a field because there are so many of them. And then they all take off, but when they take off, they never bump into each other. They actually go very orderly.

And how they have enough brains to know that all of them are supposed to take this path and not another path and they never crash into each other when they're millimeters apart from each other, I don't know. They're an army without ever having trained as a soldier so far as I know. Now, some proverbs are popular kinds of sayings.

And so, we'll just take a couple of examples here from the book of Proverbs itself. A thorn bush in the hand of a drunk and a proverb in the mouth of a fool. Now, what is that supposed to mean? Well, if a drunk has an implement that could cause damage, the chances are that he's going to use it in a harmful way.

And fools may use analogies, but may not use them to be helpful. They'll use them in a very hurtful way. Sometimes, of course, sayings and slogans are meant to insult or to sneer.

One of the ones that I've observed in Samuel, just because it divides the book of 1 Samuel so sharply around the story of Saul, is found in 1 Samuel 10-12 and is found again in 1 Samuel 19. Is Saul among the prophets? Now, that's a sneer. But it's also so appropriate in the book of Samuel because when Saul is first chosen to be king, he is met by a band of prophets and he seems to share some of the characteristics of these prophets.

And so, you might wonder, well, who is this guy, Saul? And then he becomes king and then he goes somewhat mad. He gets incensed at David and he does the most

irrational things, including the disparaging of his own son, simply because his son won't betray David to him. And in the end, he is met by this band of prophets and he ends up with their characteristic ecstatic kind of behavior, disrobed and stripped.

And it's clear that this is just a shame. It's a sham. So, Saul, at the end of his legitimate reign, is showing who he really is.

He's just a fraud. He doesn't follow God at all. Is Saul among the prophets? That's a sneer.

Let not him who girds the sword boast like him who takes it off. That's a provocation. Now, here is a story from Kings in which the belligerent king of the South was challenging the king of the North.

And there, of course, was no contest between these two kings. And it was absolutely absurd that this southern king should be boasting about his army powers. And the answer to his challenge is, let not him who takes up the sword boast like him who takes it off.

The end result is not going to be good for you. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are blurred, blunted. We've already discussed that one.

To Jesus, physician, heal thyself. It's ridiculous. You aren't really whom you say you are.

There are reports of what you did over there in Capernaum, but you aren't doing anything here. Well, some of the more recent modern ones that sometimes annoyed me and sometimes I found kind of humorous was the notion defund the police. Of course, if we're in our country, we know what that refers to.

It was a certain minority of people of a certain color who were always being unfairly treated by the police. And what needed to happen was that funding was taken away from the police and money given for other causes. But of course, we all know that we need policemen.

And here in Canada, where I live, when the truck convoy reached Ottawa, nobody was saying defund the police. In fact, they couldn't find enough police all of a sudden because they needed more of them. So we're going to look at the Proverbs of Solomon and at the 375 Proverbs of Solomon, which begin here in the chapter Let me just say a word, though, about why there are 375.

The number 375 has to do with Solomon's name. The Hebrew numerical system is a decimal system just like ours is, but they use their letters to indicate numbers. And

so, the first letter of the alphabet indicates one, and then you go up to 10, which is the 10th letter of the alphabet, and that means 10.

And then, of course, the next letter in the alphabet means 20. And the next means 30. So, when you have the name of Solomon, you can give it a numerical number.

And in Hebrew, this is a shinsha-la-ma-a. This number, this letter value is 300. This one is 30.

This one is 40. And this one is 5. And so, your total is 375. Now, this kind of association between numbers and words is not uncommon, but it's very clear that here in the book of Proverbs, somebody very deliberately was making an association between the authorship of Solomon and the collection of the Proverbs by bringing together a collection of exactly 375 Proverbs.

We're going to look at the first of these in Proverbs 10, where we have Proverbs on wealth. So, we'll take the time to just read a translation of these. Wise a child makes proud parents, but a foolish child brings grief.

A character delivers from trouble rather than wealth. God satisfies desires, but frustrates greed. I'm giving paraphrases of the meaning of the proverb here.

Deceit leads to poverty, but diligence leads to wealth. Diligence brings success, but sloth brings shame. Righteousness brings blessing, but wickedness conceals violence.

Now, in the Hebrew expression of these Proverbs, this first set of six Proverbs here form a kind of a unit. And then the second unit is formed by Proverbs on moral integrity. Righteousness leaves a legacy of blessing, but the name of the wicked stinks.

Wise listen and learn, but foolish talk is dismissed. Integrity brings safety, but deceit brings discovery. Now, this one in verse 10 is an example where sometimes we do text criticism in Proverbs because the last half of verse 10 is identical to the last half of verse 8. And so it seems kind of odd that these should have absolutely identical wordings.

And the other odd thing is that these Proverbs, as we shall note further, are antithetical and this one is not in the Hebrew text. Now, we have another version of Proverbs that was preserved in a Greek translation. That Greek translation was not made from the same kind of Hebrew text as the one that has been preserved and has become official in the times after Christ, the one that we use regularly in our time.

But it can be valuable for seeing that there is a progression and it is valuable in seeing that sometimes there were mistakes. And one of those mistakes is the

dittography, which is copying an earlier line in a later line just because your eye fell to the wrong place. And that probably is what happened here.

So, if we look at the Greek translation of this particular proverb, one who corrects makes peace. So, perfidy or the winking eye brings peace while the one who corrects brings pain while the one who corrects makes peace. Perfidy, pain, correction, peace.

Righteous words are life but speech of the wicked brings violence. So, when we look at the structure here, we see certain patterns that we have already pointed out. The lines are complementary but often expressed in opposite terms.

But we also see patterns of association. So, Proverbs 2 and 3 deal with divine justice. Proverbs 4 to 6 show the reward of diligence and the loss if you cheat.

And Proverbs 10, 1, and 6 each have the subject of righteousness versus foolishness. Now, I need to point out here that some of these observations are not at all my own. The man who is recording this session, he knows much more about Proverbs, at least in some parts of it than I do.

And he is the one who made a study of the kind of patterns that one may find in Proverbs. And frankly, this has been stolen from Ted Hildebrand. And I thought I better acknowledge that here. [Thanks Gus, you are so very kind -- Ted]

Just so that it is clear that I don't think that I'm fooling him. He's very well aware of these kinds of things. But we do need to be careful about looking for these kinds of patterns in Proverbs.

We don't know all of the ways in which these patterns were formulated. Sometimes they're more evident and we can see them as we did here. But sometimes it's not that clear and we just need to take them as individual sayings.

But that's a little bit of an introduction as to how these collections of Proverbs function.

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