

Get Smarter - Study 6

Married to Wisdom

Proverbs 1-9 and 31

Have you noticed? Almost all the way through Proverbs, Wisdom is pictured (or 'personified') as a woman. (Insert your own male or female joke here if you have the courage!) Before we get too carried away, though, it's worth noting that "Folly" is a woman too – in fact, a death dealing prostitute. These are vivid pictures that beautifully integrate the whole book... so to conclude our series on Proverbs, let's take a look.

a) The Woman Wisdom first appears in Proverbs 1:20-33. What is she doing, and what options does she present?

Removing the imagery, how would you explain the 'take home value' of these statements?

b) Prov 2:16 presents another woman. Who is she? Might she represent something more than a 'face value' reading first suggests?

c) Most of Proverbs 1-9 is framed as instructions from 'a father' to 'a son.' From Prov 4:5-9, who should 'the son' fall in love with?

The Old Testament constantly ties together the ideas of Israel's faithfulness to God and their integrity in marriage. To worship at the shrines of the fertility goddess Asherah was a constant temptation... and in fact, destroyed both faithfulness to God and your marriage at the same time! In Proverbs 5 to 7, two sections about adultery (5:1-23 and 6:20-7:27) sandwich a section about foolishness (6:1-19). It's sometimes hard to work out whether we're being told that 'foolishness is like adultery' or 'adultery is the ultimate act of foolishness' or even both at the same time.

d) What do you see as the overall message of Proverbs 7:6-27?

Lady Wisdom speaks in detail through Chapter 8: her mouth speaks what is true and just (v7,8), and her words are worth more than silver or gold. Wisdom was there before the oceans were made; she was there when God made the boundaries of the sea; Wisdom was with God right from the very beginning. (8:22-31).

Now, in chapter 9, Lady Wisdom is throwing a party – and you're invited. On the table is a feast of insight into how to live life to the full. You'd have to be crazy to turn down an invitation like that...

The Voice of Wisdom

Read Proverbs 9 v 1-12.

e) How is 'Wisdom' personified here? (ie what imagery is used to picture wisdom?)

f) What is on offer here – in terms of the imagery?

g) According to verses 4, 6-9 and 11-12, what does this banquet represent in real-life terms?

h) Remember this one? According to verse 10, where does true wisdom begin?

The Woman Folly...

i) Read verses 13 to 18. There's another woman in town. Who is she?

j) What parallels are drawn between the two women? (Look for the identical verses!)

k) What's the i) appeal and ii) outcome of eating with this woman?

Ultimately, it's a life and death decision. Sit down at the banquet of Lady Wisdom, and live... or accept the invitation of seductive Lady Folly, and die. The invitations sound so much the same, and the forbidden fruit seems so sweet... yet real wisdom is grounded and founded on the Fear of the Lord.

l) Folly often tempts us with short term worldly gains and experiences, but at the expense of long term spiritual blessings. How can we keep our focus as Christians? What do you find hardest?

Wisdom for the Gentile World

The speech of Lady Wisdom leads in to the long collection of Proverbs from Solomon, with contributions from the gentile Agur (ch 30), and King Lemuel (31:1-9). Before we meet Lady Wisdom again at the close of the book, let's pause for a moment on the sayings of Agur in chapter 30. It's a fascinating section.

If you read the footnote for Prov 30:1, you'll see an interesting alternative translation for the verse. The Hebrew translated as "Agur son of Jakeh – an oracle" can equally well be translated as "Agur, son of Jakeh of Massa." Significantly, Massa was one of the sons of Ishmael ... a non-Israelite.

m) How does this make sense of Agur's complaint in verse 2-3?

n) What kind of revelation from God does he cry out for in verses 4 and 5? Can you think of an answer to his question?

Lady Wisdom has the Last Word (Prov 31:10-31)

Proverbs closes with a poem written in the form of an acrostic – each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. These final verses provide a summary of everything that has gone before them. It's literally an 'A to Z of Proverbs,' cast as a description of 'an excellent wife.'

Read Proverbs 31:10-31.

o) In study 1, we saw that Proverbs would help us live a wise, righteous and prudent life. How does the excellent wife exemplify each of these qualities?

wise

righteous

prudent

p) In study 2, we saw that 'the fear of the Lord' is the beginning of wisdom. How does the excellent wife demonstrate this?

q) We've already seen in this study that wisdom is regularly described as a woman. What similarities are there between the description of wisdom in 9:1-12 and here in 31:10-31?

r) Many of the Proverbs warn against being a sluggard, (for example 26:13-16). How does the 'good wife' personify this?

s) In Study 3 a number of Proverbs reminded us that true wisdom led to compassion for others. How does the 'good wife' demonstrate this?

Summing Up...

From the start, Proverbs has been set in the context of a father instructing his son... and any dad would be delighted for a son to find a wife like this! There is another voice, offering the quick fix and the forbidden fruit... but life with a wife like this is far richer and more satisfying.

On one level, you can read back through these verses and replace the 'good wife' with 'wisdom.' When you do that, it's not just a chapter for Christian wives... but for everyone. Whatever you do, MARRY WISDOM. Hold it near and dear. Let it shape your life. Fear the Lord. Hold on to righteousness and kindness and truth.

From our perspective as gentiles, thousands of years later, we can be thankful for the fact that Agur's plea has been answered... that the one who gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands, whose wisdom and knowledge was given to Israel, has now revealed himself through his Son. And because of that, his wisdom can now be ours... as we live in the Fear of the Lord.

To finish...

Look back through the previous studies. Have you been challenged or encouraged to change in any particular areas of life?

Pray

Give thanks that God has promised that if anyone 'lacks wisdom, let him ask... and it will be given.'" (James 5)

For the coming week...

Remember...

**Bible Teaching Weekend
1 - 2 September**

Read...

Proverbs 30-31