

## **Proverbs for Elders**

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Solomon was the author of three books in the Old Testament. His unprecedented fame as the third king of Israel should never be attributed merely to human traits. He was not great simply upon the basis of his heritage, although he was a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Although David was his father, one cannot assume that Solomon's place in history should be attributed to his inheritance, or to his fabulous wealth, or to his renowned regal power, or to any other unusual human characteristic or attainment. The Scriptures assign his fame to his wisdom, but the idea that he was its initial source is denied. The Bible emphasizes that such wisdom inevitably results from one's reverential "fear" of God and humble submission to His commandments.

### **THE KEY TO SOLOMON'S EXPERIMENTS**

Solomon was so prominent that he has been called the "Architect of the Colossal." His book of Ecclesiastes detailed the sad consequences he suffered from his experiments in the laboratory of life as he became a "human guinea pig," testing the devious ways of humanity to search for happiness without God. He tried all the varied attempts to find happiness, including wealth, knowledge, attraction, amusement, popularity, power and poise. The key to understanding his experiments is in his statement that he drank to the depths of each test "till I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they

should do under heaven all the days of their life" (Ecc. 2:3). [All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] While his experiments were successful, they made of him a miserable failure, and his experiments only proved that seeking happiness without God is "vanity and vexation of the spirit." His final conclusion is where every individual should begin if one hopes to understand what is the good that man should do under heaven all the days of their life: "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man, for God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Solomon was inspired by the Holy Spirit in collecting wise sayings called *proverbs*. We read in 1 Kings 4:29-34:

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, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all the nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who heard of his wisdom."

Many of these sayings no doubt became a part of the Wisdom that composes the Book of Proverbs.

vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, And maketh strong her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable: Her lamp goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the distaff, And her hands hold the spindle. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household; For all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, When he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh linen garments and selleth them, And delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing; And she laugheth at the time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; And the law of kindness is on her tongue. She looketh well to the ways of her household, And eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up, and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praiseth her, saying: Many daughters have done worthily, But thou excellest them all. Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; And let her works praise her in the gates (31:10-31).

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## RESPECT THE SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES

“Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (30:5-6).

### A PRAYER FOR TWO THINGS

“Two things have I asked of thee; deny them not before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me: lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is Jehovah? Or, lest I be poor, and steal, and use profanely the name of my God” (30:7-9).

### BE A HELPER TO THE HELPLESS

“Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are left desolate. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and minister justice to the poor and needy” (31:8-9).

### APPRECIATE AND HONOR “A WORTHY WOMAN”

A worthy woman who can find? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband trusteth in her, And he shall have no lack of gain. She doeth him good and not evil All the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, And worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchant-ships; She bringeth her bread from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, And giveth food to her household, And their task to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it; With the fruit of her hands she planteth a

## TWO PREREQUISITES: FEAR AND OBEDIENCE

If Solomon were to be successful, truly successful as God counts success, he had to apply the divine directive to (1) fear God, and (2) keep His commandments. It is to be hoped that “the preacher” who wrote the book bearing the title “Ecclesiastes,” meaning, “The Preacher,” ultimately learned for his own good the concluding lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes that it is impossible for God to make one truly happy without first making him truly good.

The entire Bible concurs that every soul can be successful in life to the extent that he fears God and keeps His commandments. This is also the predominant principle taught in the Book of Proverbs. One cannot survey the Proverbs very long without being struck by the amazing fact that this is not a book of instructions on how to manipulate people. Some have supposed that it is a collection of wisdom that reveals the secret of how to get ahead of others through trickery and chicanery, but it condemns all of those underhanded or clever mechanisms that would deceive, cheat and trick others for the sake of advantage. The more one explores its contents, the more certain he will become that it is a book about God’s sovereign discipline of all humankind through His demands of submission and reverence, believing who He is and what He requires of man.

Proverbs introduces those two prerequisites at the very outset:

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness and justice and equity; to give prudence to the

simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion: that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; and that the man of understanding may attain unto sound counsels: to understand a proverb, and a figure, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction (1:1-7).

### **UNIVERSAL NECESSITY**

Solomon utilized that universal necessity to fear God and to submit to His sovereign will to teach his own child: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck" (1:8-9). These are wonderful instructions to the young, but they also are for the guidance of all, whether young, middle-aged or old. So, let us look at many of these ancient sayings to see how they readily apply to other groups as well.

### **PROVERBS FOR ELDERS**

I have the dual privilege to serve both as a gospel preacher and an elder in the Pleasant Grove church in Dallas, and I am awed by the gravity of the lessons in Proverbs. They certainly have been a constant guide to me as they illuminate the paths of righteousness, and I am convinced they can do the same for others also. In this lesson, let us see some of the jewels of godliness from the Proverbs that can bless us all, and especially those who are charged with the responsibility of overseeing God's flock.

In beginning this examination of some proverbs for elders, let us again emphasize that this book is about these two great principles: (1) The sovereignty of God and (2)

wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. They that go to seek out mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it sparkleth in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly: at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thy heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, thou shalt say, and I was not hurt; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (23:29-35).

### **A GOOD NAME**

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold" (22:1).

### **GET UP AGAIN EACH TIME YOU FALL**

"For a righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity" (24:16).

### **THIS DOESN'T NEED FUEL**

"For lack of wood the fire goeth out; and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth. As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife" (26:20-21).

### **TOMORROW AND TOMORROW ...**

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (27:1).

### WATCH YOUR TEMPER

“A soft answer turneth away wrath; but a grievous word stirreth up anger” (15:1). “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city” (16:32).

### GETTING RID OF YOUR ENEMIES

“When a man’s ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (16:7).

### HARPERS WILL HARP

“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends” (17:9).

### WHAT’S A BROTHER FOR?

“A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity” (17:17).

### USE FEW WORDS

“He that spareth his words hath knowledge; and he that is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise; When he shutteth his lips, he is esteemed as prudent” (17:27-28).

### GO SLOW

“He that giveth answer before he heareth, it is folly and shame unto him” (18:13).

### WINE IS A MOCKER

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise” (20:1).

Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath complaining? Who hath

His eternal wisdom. This was what Solomon meant when he said, “Fear God and keep his commandments.” The word “fear” is not to be defined as “terror” but as “*reverential awe*.” And when one begins to grasp the meaning of the sovereignty of God and His wisdom, it should convince each one of us why we ought to submit to His plan for our lives.

Let us remember what the book of Proverbs reveals about God’s plan in the Creation of the Universe and the part that wisdom had in those awesome acts. “Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew” (3:19-20). Time will not permit in this lesson for us to explore how all nature abounds in wisdom, but suffice it to say that wisdom is displayed throughout God’s wondrous works. Under the symbol of a beautiful woman, Wisdom is personified in the following passage:

Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: when he set a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong, when he gave to the sea its bound, that the waters should not transgress his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was by him, as a master workman; and I was daily his delight,

rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his habitable earth; and my delight was with the sons of men. Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me; for blessed are they that keep my ways; Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of Jehovah. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: All they that hate me love death (8:22-36).

### **MAN IS FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE**

God did not make man in an impulsive act of the moment, but David said in Psalm 139:14, "I will give thanks unto thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." "Wonderfully made" in all the wisdom of the Almighty, and "fearfully made" in that a man can make a choice to obey or disobey his Maker. Remember the words of Joshua: "Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve him in sincerity and in truth...And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:14-15). We should pause here and be warned that while man can choose whom he will serve, he cannot choose the consequences of his choices.

The New Testament also teaches this divine principle and it should strike awe into us. The apostle Paul implored, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). It is true, though it is not the wording of Scripture, "Man proposes, but God disposes." In forming man in His own image, God gave him the power of will so he could choose between righteousness and disobedience. This

### **BE A SOUL-WINNER**

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that is wise winneth souls" (11:30).

### **GOOD WORDS CHEER**

"Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad" (12:25; also see 15:13). "A cheerful heart is a good medicine; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones" (17:22). "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in network of silver" (25:11).

### **WATCH YOUR COMPANY**

"Walk with wise men and thou shalt be wise; but the companion of fools shall smart for it" (13:20).

### **AVOID TORN-OUT "SEEMS"**

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death" (14:12 and 16:25). "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the spirits" (16:2; also 21:2).

### **DON'T BE GULLIBLE**

"The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going" (14:15).

### **TAKE CARE OF THE NEEDY**

"He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that hath mercy on the needy honoreth him" (14:31). "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard" (21:13).

his fingers; in whose heart is perverseness, who deviseth evil continually, who soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; on a sudden shall he be broken, and that without remedy" (6:12-15).

### **SEVEN ABOMINATIONS**

"There are six things that Jehovah hateth; Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that deviseth evil purposes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that uttereth lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (6:16-19).

### **LOVE COVERS WRONGS**

"Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgressions" (10:12).

### **IF ONE WILL NOT LISTEN TO CORRECTION**

"He is in the way of life that heedeth correction; but he that forsaketh reproof erreth" (10:17).

### **WHO IS A GOSSIP?**

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth a matter" (11:13).

### **SEARCH FOR ADVICE**

"Where no wise guidance is, the people falleth; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (11:14). "Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed; but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (15:22).

proves that we are not the creation of an Augustinian predestination which said that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain men and angels to be saved and all others to be lost, and that the number is so fixed and certain that it neither can be added to nor diminished. Peter preached, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). God offers a conditional salvation to all men alike, but it is enjoyed only by those who accept his invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28-30). Those who come to Him have rest, but those who choose to refuse must suffer the consequences of their choice. Jesus said to those who spurned His invitation, "Ye will not come unto me, that you may have life" (John 5:40).

### **WHERE WISDOM BEGINS**

Elders should mark well this fact from Solomon's proverbs: "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scoffest, thou alone shalt bear it" (9:10-12). Solomon placed great emphasis upon the fact that a wicked life has its own seeds of destruction built into it by the sovereign God, and that is true, even in this life. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner!" (11:31).

These built-in consequences of right and wrong are impressed by other Proverbs, and each should encourage us to make the right choices through our own self-discipline and self-control. Another encouraging promise is given in Proverbs 3:1-8,

My son, forget not my law; but let thy heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and years of life, and peace, will they add to thee. Let not kindness and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the tablet of thy heart: So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; Fear Jehovah, and depart from evil: It will be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

### **HOPE IS CONDITIONAL**

Elders also should remember that there is reason for hope and optimism in their work, for another proverb teaches:

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the gaining of it is better than the gaining of silver, and the profit thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and none of the things that thou canst desire are to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is everyone that retaineth her. ... My son, let them not depart from thine eyes; Keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace unto thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid

of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh: For Jehovah will be thy confidence, and will keep thy foot from being taken (3:13-26).

The blessed man in the first Psalm is also promised, "He shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also doth not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (1:3-4).

Elders should believe in the certainty of purpose: "And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). We know the end will be bright, for another proverb said, "The path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (4:18).

### **WARNING AGAINST PRIDE**

"Be not wise in thine own eyes" (3:7). "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18).

### **HOW TO BE RICH**

"Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear Jehovah, and depart from evil: It will be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats will overflow with new wine" (3:7-10).

### **HOW TO SPOT A SCOUNDREL**

"A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he that walketh with a perverse mouth; that winketh with his eyes, that speaketh with his feet, that maketh signs with