

Lesson 41 Wisdom Literature Proverbs, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon

If you are studying alone, read sections 1 and 2 below. If studying with a class, by eight individual assignments, the members together will read all four Books of Wisdom for this lesson. The four books together contain 114 chapters. If eight persons read approximately fourteen chapters apiece and report only on important ideas, interesting verses, or questions raised, this material will be covered adequately enough for our purposes. Much in this reading is deep spiritual insight you will want to come back to; some is repetitive which you may scan. Please prepare only a five minute report.

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|--|---|
| 1. Proverbs 1-4
Ecclesiastes 1-2
Sirach 1-6
Wisdom of Solomon 1-2 | 5. Proverbs 17-20
Ecc 9
Sirach 25-31
Wis. of Solomon 9-11 |
| 2. Proverbs 5-8
Ecclesiastes 3-4
Sirach 7-12
Wisdom of Solomon 3-4 | 6. Proverbs 21-24
Ecc 10
Sirach 32-37
Wisdom of Sol 12-14 5 |
| 3. Proverbs 9-12
Ecclesiastes 5-6
Sirach 13-18
Wisdom of Solomon 5-6 | 7. Proverbs 25-28
Ecc 11
Sirach 39-44
Wisdom of Sol. 15-17 |
| 4. Proverbs 13-16
Ecclesiastes 7-8
Sirach 19-24
Wisdom of Solomon 7-8 | 8. , Proverbs 29-31
Ecclesiastes 1 2
Sirach 45-51
Wisdom of Sol. 18-19 |

Psalm 119:9-16 and prayer.

Three of these books bear Solomon's name. Thus a tribute is given to Israel's tradition that their wisest man, King Solomon, inspired their writing. Though not written by Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Wisdom of

Solomon (found in the back of the RSV Bible), credit him with their insights into the wisdom of the Law. Proverbs contains two "books" of wise sayings attributed to King Solomon. Sirach's author (also found at the back of the RSV, also known as Ecclesiasticus) is declared to be Jesus ben Sirach, a teacher of the Law.

Proverbs consists of sayings which instruct in wise ways to live.

This collection of short pithy statements was easy to memorize both because of the cadence of the verses and their length. Wise sayings were of very early origin in the Near East and are found in many cultures. For the Hebrew, however, wisdom begins and ends in God. For the pious man wisdom equals righteousness which equals godliness. Those who trust and love God are also those who are wise, and their wisdom is shown by the way they are generous and kind to others. Such men are blessed by the special favor of God. Two series of these proverbs in the book of Proverbs are attributed to Solomon, traditionally Israel's wisest man. He is named in 1:1 as the main author. 10:1- 22:16 is named directly as his; 22:17-24:22 and perhaps 24:23-34 are at least partially attributed to him.

After the exile this wisdom was addressed to the common man. It was meant to be lived out in his daily life. During the exile, under the influence of the last of those great prophets who spoke for God, especially Ezekiel, a new teaching brought the individual forward. This emphasis on the human person found a kind of corroboration in Greek thought which, however, differed vastly from the Hebrew idea in that the Greek concept was pure humanism, pure elevation of the human being. With the Hebrew, this individual importance of a person was seen only in relationship to his God. Because of his origins in God, only living in accordance with God's ways could bring dignity and goodness to the person. On his own he was not naturally holy, rather he had to learn God's ways and purposely follow them. The practical advice on ways to live found in the New Testament have much the same outlook.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. The book of Proverbs is probably the earliest of the books of wisdom and is the best known. The purpose of Proverbs, stated in its opening, is the purpose of all Wisdom literature: that men may know wisdom and instruction,

understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity. . . etc. And then follows the statement *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*. There is no longer a prophetic voice to be heard in Israel. This fear, then, is not the fear of the punishment of the nation before the approaching wrath of God, or fear of His inscrutable purposes in history, but the natural awe that the individual must feel as he attempts to come before the Lord of all the earth. In the past the prophet rarely singled out a person for praise or condemnation, and then only for a purpose that was national. Now there is very little interest in national purposes. Concentration is on the good of the reader or the student, guiding that person to be a blessing to himself and to others. The approach is fatherly, one to one, no longer the fearsome voice of the Lord of hosts. The authority is not even directly God's. God speaks indirectly now through a teacher who addresses a student. It is the aim to win through persuasion; no longer is it said, "Thus saith the Lord" The lessons now come through experience and not revelation. The teaching appeals to inherited beliefs, common sense, observation and right feeling. This wisdom has a very human quality. After all, the prophetic voice, and especially the later apocalyptic voice is a terribly rich diet, unfit for daily consumption - a dab now and then perhaps, but hardly something to be lived with. Wisdom, on the other hand, is practical, more to be lived than to be thought. It does not take thought to learn a proverb, you need only to believe it and live by it. It is simple, direct, dogmatic and traditional, alien to Greek speculation or philosophy. Wisdom, a direct relative of the Law of Moses, again promises rewards to those who live right. Wisdom of this kind is open to all and is achieved through education. It was taught on street corners and in public squares by scribe teachers. These would gather a group of students, teaching maxims which were learned by rote, even as Hebrew school students still do, often in singsong chant.

Can God be reduced to short sayings? God when approached through maxim or proverb seems to be a God less transcendent than the God who spoke through the prophets. Though wisdom was for

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personal use, in itself it was impersonal. The difficulty is that God is too big and life itself is too varied, too passionate and unpredictable, to be confined by short formulas in an everyday routine. The Book of Job addresses this fault with the "wise" man as we will see in the next lesson. And the writer of Ecclesiastes vigorously contests the conclusion that the wise are always blessed. The strength of wisdom is the truth that God created the world with a plan - it is wise to know something of the plan and to cooperate with it; such action will bring the best life has to offer to the individual who willingly does it. See Proverbs 8:22-30, Wisdom 6:7 Sirach 1:14.

Ecclesiastes is written by a questioning philosopher. The Preacher (Qoholeth) in verse 1:12 claims to have been a King of Israel in Jerusalem possibly hinting at Solomon. This writer is a philosopher very influenced by the Greek skeptics, and certainly is not Solomon. Pondering about the meaning and goal of life, his verdict is "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." In 12:8 the preacher seems to be a scribe teacher of proverbs. Reading Ecclesiastes one sometimes wonders if the writer has sought God, or if he merely has been swept by Greek skepticism. However, as a book of Holy Scripture this writing is declared to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. It teaches the truth that apart from God, life is full of weariness and disappointment. Seek happiness in philosophy, pleasure, mirth, drinking, building, possession, wealth, music, whatever - it is all emptiness. Seek it in materialism, fatalism or deism, it is all vain. Natural religion, wealth and morality are all fruitless. Is life worth living? Many passages seem to contradict other scriptural values: for instance, 1:15, 2:24, 3:3, 4:8, 11,19, 20, 8:15, it is argued that this book rejects the value of wisdom and knowledge so plied by the scribes, and that it encourages libertinism. However, in its defense 5:18 ff says God at the center of things makes life worthwhile! A student especially appreciated this book because it spoke to her of moderation in all things as being the only real virtue - a nice balance to all of life, including religion. In other words, don't take yourself so seriously, even spiritually. Relax.

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) was valued by the first century Christians as introduction to the moral life. It was written about 180 B.C., and was translated into Greek in 132 B.C. In the early church it was used as a

primer of what the godly life is and for instruction in Christian living. The original writer was a Palestinian Jew, one of the wisdom scribes. His lecture room is referred to in 51:23, and other personal information is in 39:1-11, 33:16. A man who has traveled, he is aware of the Greek idea that virtue and knowledge are one and the same thing. 39:4 To the Greeks wisdom was synonymous with godliness. However, to the Hebrew, wisdom had a quite different meaning; it was strict obedience to the revealed will of God as contained in the Law. The wise man, and therefore the good man, was the man who feared the Lord and obeyed His commandments.

There is an absence of apocalyptic or messianic expectation. The writer, Ben Sira, is an example of an early Sadducee before they were named such. He had a love of the Temple and great respect for the High Priest. To him the proverb, so carefully thought out, was a literary form of great beauty. Polished, not spontaneous, he made the proverb a very specialized literary form. His book, therefore, has no purpose or plan that unifies the collection of general proverbs. At the heart of wisdom is ethical monotheism, the same insight and belief of Moses and the prophets. The writers of Wisdom believe righteousness is the greatest act of worship, Sirach 21:3, but they are also concerned with the social side of ethics, 22:22. As with all Hebrews, Ben Sira is convinced that the way of man is not in himself, 18:10. However, in contrast to the words of the prophets, gone is the national purpose, the belief in God's power over the nation, or the strong expectation that God will interfere in history and vindicate the Jews through an all powerful Messiah. The strong word of Yahweh is heard no more. God has been made smaller and no longer is His lion's voice heard from Mt. Zion. It is a comfortable small world that wisdom rules. (It is instructive to see Plato's Republic, Book II par 361.)

The Wisdom of Solomon corrects the cynical writer of Ecclesiastes. This book seems to have been written to correct those who followed the philosophic ways of Skepticism. Written just fifty years before Christ by an Alexandrian Jew, it was much quoted in the early Church. The

author of the New Testament book of Hebrews, possibly Apollos, also Alexandrian, was much influenced by this book. Thoroughly a Jew, the

writer is well acquainted with Greek thinking, and in the first part of the book he attempts to incorporate that thinking into the Hebrew ideology. Not trying to concoct a new religion that is a synthesis of Hebrew and Greek, he simply recognizes that in a different way God has also spoken to the pagans and that they have been given some valid insights into truth. However without the framework of the *revealed* religion - the Hebrew faith - these insights are not a full exposition of truth, nor can they lead people to real Truth. Therefore his task is to harmonize them with the revealed religion of Moses and the prophets. Anything of the Greek philosophers not consistent with the revealed faith is rejected. After all, revealed wisdom is a way of thinking that patterns God's own thinking; therefore it is to be honored as the highest activity of the human spirit. Wisdom, that is, living out the Law in the smallest concerns of daily life, actually brings to the man who follows it something of God, making him immortal. Such was the righteous man. Here we have a writer who affirms that, in an eternal sense, the righteous are in the hand of God. The second part, chapters 10-19, unlike the first, is historical, mostly a tedious refutation of false gods.

Lesson 41 Wisdom Literature
Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, Wisdom

PROVERBS spans most of Israel's history right into the first century B.C.

four series, two attributed to Solomon (I KGS. 10:24, 4:32-34)

1. General 1-10:20
2. Solomonic 10:21-22:16
3. Egyptian 22:17-24:22
4. Solomonic 25:1-29:27

five appendices - see outline

The polished, well-turned proverb covered every aspect of life and relationship.

ECCLESIASTES 250 B.C.

(After Alexander; before the desecration of the Temple)

Qoheleth - one who conducts an assembly
 AUTHOR - 12:8 - not Solomon

Influenced by Greek Scepticism

ARE THE WISE ALWAYS BLESSED? REALLY?

WHO CAN KNOW THE TRUTH ANYWAY?

ISN'T TRUTH RELATIVE?

WHY SEEK HAPPINESS?

IT WILL ALL LET YOU DOWN!
 VANITY, VANITY!

5:18 Only God makes things worthwhile and enjoyable.

God of the prophets

THUS SAYS THE LORD TO THE NATION!

GOD

Apocalyptic Eschatology

COSMIC WARS WITH ANGELS
 IMAGES, NUMBERS, MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS

BOTH ARE DIFFICULT TO LIVE WITH

GOD OF WISDOM LITERATURE
 is reduced

practical personal fatherly less vivid common sensical comfortable

the Law is learned indirectly through a teacher by learning maxims applied to daily life a dogmatic education

POSTIVE

freed from hesitancy and confusion solidarity in life

no need to figure anything out

a love of God's word that gave inner joy

NEGATIVE

rigidity intolerance dogmatic insufficiency

God is too big to be reduced to maxims

life too varied motive can be selfishness

SPRIT OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY TO LEARN TO THINK TO QUESTION AND SPECULATE SCEPTICISM

ECCLESIASTICUS - SIRACH 180 B.C.

Used as a catechumen resource for early Christians.
 Author Ben Sira 51:23, 39:1-11, 33:16

PROVERBS GIVEN LITERARY POLISH: A FORM OF GREAT BEAUTY

FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 50B.C.

Also used to instruct catechumens

Author - an Alexandrian Jew attempting to correct the scepticism of Ecclesiastes

Incorporating Greek thinking into Hebrew theology

Wisdom is a way of thinking like God's and brings to man something of God's immortality

1-9 Wisdom Writings
 10-19 History and refutation of false gods.

THE WAY OF MAN IS NOT IN HIMSELF Sirach 18:10

Independent reflection is anathema to wisdom teachers

**Lesson 41 Proverbs,
Sirach
(Ecclesiasticus),
Ecclesiastes
Wisdom of Solomon
Synopsis**

PROVERBS

1. the proverbs of Solomon
the purpose of wisdom
the fear of the Lord
is the beginning of knowledge
son, hear your father and mother
do not be enticed by sin
do not walk with them
they are an ambush for their own lives 5.
wisdom cries out to you
don't be simple and foolish
wisdom offers herself; if ignored
when trouble comes, she won't reply
then the foolish will eat their own fruit
those who listened will be secure
2. son, if you heed wisdom and seek it
you will understand fear of the Lord
and you will have knowledge
The Lord will give you wisdom
it will be pleasant to your soul
you will delivered from evil
you will be saved from loose women
her paths lead to death
the upright inherit the land
the wicked are cut off, rooted out
3. son, keep my commandments
you will have abundant welfare
trust in the Lord with all your heart
do not be wise in your own eyes
honor the Lord with your substance
do not despise discipline
happy the man who finds wisdom

4. wisdom is the most attractive thing
the earth is founded through
wisdom son, wisdom is life for your
soul how to treat your neighbor do
not envy the evil ones the wise
inherit honor, fools disgrace sons,
be attentive to your fathers
I was taught by my father
wisdom will honor and reward you
listen to your father
who has taught you wisdom
avoid path of evil, ways of the wicked
be attentive, discard crooked speech
be direct in your gaze
do not swerve from wisdom
be attentive, keep discretion
beware of loose women
do not go to her house
at the end your flesh and body
will be consumed
be faithful to your own wife
he who does not will die
for lack of discipline
6. straighten out a pledge binding you
be provident and disciplined
not a sluggard
poverty comes with laziness
a worthless person will be broken
seven bad character defects are
pride, lies, murder, evil schemes
rebelliousness, false witness,
being discordant
7. son, keep father, mother's commands
keep away from adulteresses
you will not go unpunished
nothing will appease this sin
son, keep the commandments
wisdom safeguards against adultery
how the harlot seduces and snares

8. don't stray into her paths; it is death
Wisdom speaks, learn of me all
my words are righteous my
knowledge is better than gold the
Lord hates evil
I endow with riches those who love me
i was brought forth as God's first act
wisdom is for all the rest of creation
daily I am God's delight
happy those who listen to me
and find life from me
all who hate me love death
9. wisdom offers her choice feast come
to feast and leave simpleness who
will take reproof and instruction
wisdom will add years to your life
while the harlot leads to death
- 10.- 22:16. Book II
the proverbs of Solomon a collection
of wise sayings on every facet of life
- 22:17. 24:22 Book III
the Egyptian "Instruction of Amen-
em-ope." ten of its thirty sections
are paralleled here
listen to wisdom, trust the Lord
a series of wise sayings
- 24:23 - 34 the First Appendix - added to
Book III sayings, some (v.33)
repeated from earlier (6:10)
- 25.- 29. Book IV
second collection of Solomon
copied by Hezekiah's scribes
a collection of wise sayings
- 30.1-9 Appendix II. a dialogue
between a believer and unbeliever
- 30:11-33 Appendix III.
numerical proverbs
31. Appendix IV. Queen mother's
counsel (Bathsheba at the wedding

of Solomon).
31:10 Appendix V. Bathsheba's poem
an acrostic, on the godly woman.

SIRACH (ECCLESIASTICUS)

Prologue -

1. the diligent translation of a grandson
wisdom comes from the Lord fear of
the Lord leads to obeying Law
wisdom, fear of the Lord, is humility
guards from deceit
2. if you want to serve God
prepare for temptation you
will be tested and tried
trust Him and He will help you
who trusting God is disappointed
don't be timid or duplicit, endure
3. honoring your father and mother
is important for your own family
help your father in his old age
don't anger your mother
humble yourself, do tasks meekly
don't stretch beyond your ability
the wise man listens attentively
4. do not deprive the poor be
beloved in the congregation be
a deliverer of the poor in
praise of wisdom
wisdom will test, but reveal secrets
don't hide wisdom, known by
speech strive to the death for the
truth many proverbial sayings
5. warnings against wealth and power
strength and the desires of your heart
be careful not to presume on God nor
sin purposefully
be careful of your speech
6. warnings against pride
self control against lust

- true and false friendships
nothing worse than a false friend
nothing better than a true one fear of
Lord brings true friendships wisdom
is to be sought patiently and will
reward in time
come under wisdom's demands
grasp her and do not let her go
7. avoidance of sin and evil
avoidance of the top place do
not be fainthearted in prayer
nor neglect alms, do not lie
care of wife and servant
care of child and cattle
honor wife and parents
fear the Lord, honor priests
care for the poor, mourners, the sick
 8. keep away from rich, powerful, talkers
others to keep away from
respect the aged
against certain kinds of relationships
prudence in companions
 9. warnings concerning women
do not forsake a friend
precepts about various persons
and relationships
 10. concerning rulers
arrogance and pride
true honor, wrong and right
estimation of self
wealth and poverty
 11. wisdom enriches the humble man
warnings - judgments based on looks
do not find fault without investigation
discretion in work ethic
everything comes from God
(Luke 12:19) enjoy goods
be careful to whom you are hospitable
beware of the evil man
 12. do good to godly, you'll be rewarded
do not help the sinner
the Most High hates sinners
(contrast to Luke 6:27-31, Gal 6:10)
false friends - never trust an enemy
don't associate with sinners
don't trust an enemy
 13. warnings concerning associates
be careful with the powerful
watch your words
between evil and good
no deference in regard of people
 14. blessed the man who in speech
has not sinned
his soul does not accuse him
the stingy man deprives himself
with envy and avarice
blessed he who meditates on wisdom
 15. the joys of wisdom
the Lord prospers a hymn of praise
written *in* wisdom
the choices God gives to free will
the responsibility for sin
fire and water represent opposites
 16. to die childless is better
than to have ungodly children
certain punishment of sin
is the order of creation
 17. God's creation of man
His expectations, commandments
Israel is His own portion
encourages repentance and kindness
plea to return to the Lord.
 18. the majesty of God, littleness of man
God's mercy, good words and gifts
the gracious man gives alms and
has the right spirit in hour of visitation
think ahead to opposite conditions
restrain base appetites
 19. a warning against wine and women
trusting too quickly, talking too much
administering direct reproof
 20. use of right speech in right amount
sin unintentionally avoided
and intentionally committed, lying
 21. various sins, the wise man and fool
 22. don't be idle
badly brought up children
are a grief to their parents
the fool never learns
intelligent reflection doesn't flinch
don't stab your friend in the back
with falsehood
 23. put a guard on my tongue
watch my ways that arrogance
doesn't cause me to stumble
watch out for lust, foul talk is death
incest, adultery are blazing furnaces
adulteresses have shame
that will never be wiped out
 24. discourses on wisdom and the Law
 25. wisdom and wives
 26. wives
 27. wrongdoing in business
will bring the business down
defects of a man appear in his talk
don't betray secrets
 28. don't harbor ill-will to neighbors
avoid quarrels
and keep your tongue under control
 29. be careful about loaning, be generous
come to your neighbors help
and have your home open
 30. bringing up children
 31. gladness of heart the right attitude
toward wealth
 32. temperance in food and drink
good deeds are repaid by justice
 33. to the deed doer
verses 16 through 18 author's
qualifications as a teacher
 34. vanity and dreams and omens
 35. the Law and sacrifices
the Lord as judge
 36. may God restore Israel
a good woman is a pillar to a man
 37. false friends are a sorrow
carefully seek an adviser
 38. physicians, pharmacy, healing
 39. the scholar ponders wisdom and
praises God for everything
 40. men are tormented with worries
many proverbial sayings
 41. true and false shame
 42. do not refrain from sin because
of what others think but because
it offends God
a father looks after his daughter
men better than women in attitudes
 43. splendor of firmament, sun, moon,
stars, marvels of nature
 - 44.-50. in praise of famous men
 51. a hymn of praise
a song about wisdom
- ECCLESIASTES**
- 1 the Preacher - identified as Solomon?
all is vanity, toil is vanity
generations pass, things the same
everything is weariness
there is nothing new under the sun
nothing is remembered
things just go around and around
without meaning
Solomon has sought wisdom
all striving for wisdom is for the wind
wisdom, knowledge increase sorrow

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| <p>2. pleasure? what use is it?
wine, great works, gardens, parks
or slaves, possessions of herds
silver and gold, singers, concubines
all this pleasure was mere vanity a
striving after wind
wisdom is better than folly but
both men, wise and foolish, die so
why be wise? it's vanity
I hated life for its meaninglessness
what is achieved will go
to someone else, whether fool or wise
I despaired over the toil of labor
days are full of pain, work is
vexation even night brings no rest
God is the only reason for joy
apart from God all is vanity</p> | <p>pay your vows
oppression is part of life
money is vanity, loss is possible
all is vanity
days dark, grievous, full of vexation.
sickness and resentment
if there is enjoyment in possessions
it is a gift of God, joy in God puts
everything else into forgetfulness</p> | <p>wicked men are hurt by the righteous
all is vanity
enjoyment is commended
nothing better - enjoy eating, drinking
no one, not even the wise, can know
all that is done on the earth
everyone and his deeds
are in the hand of God
that one fate comes to all is an evil
to be dead is to be dead, nothingness
it is better to be alive than dead
enjoy yourself
God knows and approves you already
wear cheerful clothes, anoint yourself
enjoy your wife, do things heartily
Sheol is nothingness
logical ends do not happen
everything is chance
fate just suddenly falls on everything
wisdom is seldom recognized
yet it is still better than might
a little folly sours wisdom
and there is always a little folly
deference may save your neck
some miscellaneous sayings
even though you don't know
how things will happen, go ahead, live
no matter how things come out
it will be all right
rejoice even in the dark days
don't look for meaning
you will be judged for everything
but live anyway, enjoy youth and life
even if they are vanity</p> | <p>the Preacher spoke words of truth
wise saying given by one Shepherd
beware of anything more than these
study and books are a weariness all
has been heard already fear God,
keep His commandments this is all,
everything, good and evil will be
judged by God</p> |
| <p>3. there is a time for everything all
contrary modes have their time
beauty and eternity speak of God
only what God does endures
forever even place of justice
plagued with wickedness
God allows evil for a test all,
beasts and men, die man has no
advantage, it is vanity who knows
if the spirit goes to God? nothing
is better than enjoying work</p> | <p>6 . a man with everything
but no gift of enjoyment - vanity
what good is it to be wise - vanity
fools have the same end
words don't change things
what will come after a man
things go around and around</p> | <p>9 . everyone and his deeds
are in the hand of God
that one fate comes to all is an evil
to be dead is to be dead, nothingness
it is better to be alive than dead
enjoy yourself
God knows and approves you already
wear cheerful clothes, anoint yourself
enjoy your wife, do things heartily
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rejoice even in the dark days
don't look for meaning
you will be judged for everything
but live anyway, enjoy youth and life
even if they are vanity</p> | <p>WISDOM OF SOLOMON
1. trust God, do not test Him
be holy and disciplined
wisdom is a friend to man
the spirit of the Lord holds all together
we are responsible for our words
a lying mouth destroys the soul
God did not make death
ungodly men by their words
and deeds summon death</p> |
| <p>4. oppressions make life miserable
dead more fortunate than the living
toil and skill is merely from envy
toil and riches never satisfy
why work then?
better to be with someone than alone
a wise youth is the better
but he will grow old and die</p> | <p>7. have a good name
a number of proverbs
don't be anything too much
don't be overly righteous or wise
important to fear God - that man
will stand out from everybody
everybody sins
I wanted to be wise, too much for me
the snaring woman is bitter as death
wisdom is too much for us
to find the sum, completeness of it
there is no wise woman
man was meant to be upright
but has become devious</p> | <p>10. a little folly sours wisdom
and there is always a little folly
deference may save your neck
some miscellaneous sayings
even though you don't know
how things will happen, go ahead, live
no matter how things come out
it will be all right
rejoice even in the dark days
don't look for meaning
you will be judged for everything
but live anyway, enjoy youth and life
even if they are vanity</p> | <p>2. the negative beliefs of ungodly
men their fallacious reasoning eat,
drink, be merry, sensuous
persecuting the helpless
Christlike passage of evil men
against the innocent the
devil's envoy brought death
into the world (note 2:12-20)</p> |
| <p>5. be quiet and reflective at worship
busyness and wordiness is vanity
be suspicious of them</p> | <p>8 . wisdom changes the countenance
be careful of the King
he does what pleases him
there is little a man can control
man lords it over man to his hurt
death underlines the vanity of lives
it will be well with those who fear God
not so the wicked
righteous men are hurt by the wicked</p> | <p>11. how things will happen, go ahead, live
no matter how things come out
it will be all right
rejoice even in the dark days
don't look for meaning
you will be judged for everything
but live anyway, enjoy youth and life
even if they are vanity</p> | <p>3. the blessed estate of the righteous
immortality, peace and reward they
will reign, ungodly punished
foolish, accursed, useless works
blessed is a faithful barren woman
or a faithful eunuch
curse of unlawful union without honor
end of unrighteousness is grievous
(note 3:1-9)</p> |
| | | <p>12. remember your Creator when young
before you grow old, darkness comes
darkness may come
everything is blighted, death comes
and the spirit returns to God</p> | <p>4. childlessness with virtue is better
because virtue is immortal
useless "fruits" witnesses of evil</p> |

- against their parents
age not important but
righteousness premature death is
all right it preserves from sin the
ungodly at the judgment
5. after judgment the sons of God
will be seen by the unrighteous
the gain of the unrighteous vanishes
but the righteous live forever
the full armor of the Lord
to repel His enemies
lawlessness will lay waste the earth
(Note 5:1-16) Ro 8:19, Eph 6:11-17
 6. authority given by God to rulers they
will be called to account to those
whom much has been given much
wit be required.
wisdom can be found by seekers
wisdom is in keeping of her laws
which leads to immortality
 7. one entrance into life by all
commoner, king in swaddling clothes
prayed for wisdom and her value
what wisdom taught
what wisdom's spirit is like
her pureness, how she pervades
and penetrates all things 7:22
 8. she is God's associate
He made all things through her
(I Car 1:34, John 1)
how wisdom wit help Solomon
the preexistence of the soul 8:7
 9. Solomon's prayer for wisdom word
and wisdom are synonymous the
earthly body burdens the soul. men
are saved by wisdom Jr) 1:1-3
 10. Historical studies of wisdom's power
Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Lot
Jacob, Joseph, Moses
 11. water: a curse to enemies
blessing to the righteous
merciful God gives time to repent
and loathes nothing He has made
He loves the living
God's universal love 11:21-26
 12. He corrects trespasser little by little
so repent and trust God
God detested idolatrous practices
God rules everything righteously
a sovereign in strength
who judges with mildness
 13. ignorant men are unable to know Him
how powerful is the Lord
an honest search for God
may result in idolatry
the making of an idol
(Letter of Jeremiah)
 14. Idolatry on the seas will be punished
foolishness and vanity
origins of idolatrous worship
evil results of idolatrous worship
 15. God, on the other hand
is patient and true and merciful
clay used for objects of use
and for useless gods
a man is better than gods he makes
he has life, they do not
 16. torment by animals they worshipped
no punishment but kindness
people troubled a while as a warning
delivered, saved not by serpent pole
but by thee, the Savior of all
contrast what happened to Israelites
escaping thy hand is impossible
manna tasted however the partaker
wanted it to taste, thus creation,
serves those who love God
but punishes those who do not
 17. the hope of the ungrateful
contrasting Egyptians and Israelites
during the plague of darkness the
terror of the unrighteous captives of
darkness, wickedness distressed by
conscience exaggerates difficulties,
darkness
 18. but for the holy ones - light
more contrast with Egypt
the word carries out judgment
18:15 Rev. 19:13
death of the first born
their dreams forewarned them
so they would not perish
without knowing why
death in the desert among the people
stopped by a blameless man
 19. but the ungodly assailed
to save His people
God changed creation
to keep His children unharmed
His cloud hung over the camp
in everything God glorifies His people

403 Lesson 41 Proverbs, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon Synopsis

Lesson 41 Proverbs, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon Outline

I. The Background of Wisdom Literature

- A. Exile times changed things for the Israelites
 - 1. destruction of Jerusalem saw need to reaffirm Hebrews as God's people
 - 2. the establishment of the synagogue and rabbi helped meet this need
 - a. gathering around the writings of Moses, The Law, and the prophets
 - b. the common man becomes "educated" in the Law
 - c. the common family (Tobit) becomes pious, Law-abiding
 - 3. the Law is wisdom - see 19th and 119th Psalm
 - a. it had obvious intellectual and moral superiority to Babylonian ways
 - b. no other nation has been given revealed wisdom Dt 4:6
 - c. not following the Law is foolishness, as they have experienced
- B. The Return to Jerusalem brought new resolve to be a holy people
 - 1. the Temple is rebuilt
 - a. purified worship and sacrifice are begun
 - b. the priesthood is elevated
 - 2. a God-centric community is formed
 - a. the walls rise to shut out "the world" and "worldliness"
 - b. the Jews aspire to live pure lives
 - c. Ezra and Nehemiah demand racial purity
 - d. a theocracy develops that is ruled by a High Priest
 - 3. the synagogue and rabbi (teacher) continue to have an important place

II. Greek humanism arrives on the scene

- A. The Greeks are the thinkers of the world
 - 1. the Philosophers of Greece have universal influence
 - a. Socrates 469-379 B.C.
 - 1) knowledge is salvation
 - 2) virtue is the rational conduct of life
 - 3) the result is happiness
 - b. Plato 427-347 B.C., Socrates' student
 - 1) the idealist: earth's realities are shadows of heavenly things
 - 2) what is the highest good?
 - 3) what do we mean by justice? Republic II para.. 361
 - c. Aristotle 386-322 B.C., Plato's student
 - 1) the most articulate genius of them all, and of all time

- 2) a beginning science that lasted till this century
- 3) a comprehensive philosophy, upon it Catholic philosophy is based
- d. the Sceptics 365-275 B.C.
- 2. they are concerned with the great questions of life
 - a. what is virtue, truth, goodness?
 - b. who is the individual?
 - c. what is freedom?
 - d. what is its relationship to authority?
- 3. for the Jews there is a threat in their man-centered philosophy
 - a. Jerusalem becomes Hellenized under the Seleucids
 - b. many Jews accommodate to these ways, the High Priesthood is controlled by the Greeks
 - d. the Temple is desecrated, but rededicated under Judas Maccabeus
- 4. Greek "wisdom" scorns Hebrew "wisdom" as unenlightened
 - a. Greek philosophy is truth seeking
 - b. Hebrew wisdom is dogmatic - "truth is truth" there is nothing to seek
 - c. Truth is revealed by God, not discovered by man
- B. The Hebrews discover the individual is important
 - 1. The rise of individual worth with Ezekiel (Ez. 18)
 - a. the tribe, or nation, no longer more important than the individual
 - b. each individual will answer for his own good and evil
 - 2. God loves the individual Daniel 9: 22-23
 - 3. man's worth is not in himself, however, but in his relationship to God

III. The Hebrews Look to Their Wisdom literature

- A. The roots go far back in traditions of Israel
 - 1. God speaks to the patriarchs and prophets
 - a. God reveals Himself and His plan to Israel alone
 - b. God's plan and word are wisdom
 - 2. Moses receives the Law
 - a. the Law is wisdom Psalm 119
 - b. the Law makes Israel the wisest nation on earth Dt 4:6
 - 3. Solomon, Israel's wisest man, left a legacy of wisdom
 - a. he received wisdom from God because he asked I Kings 3:9
 - b. he exercised supernatural wisdom I Kings 3:28
 - c. he wrote many wise sayings I Kings 4:29-34
 - d. books of Wisdom attributed to Solomon
 - 1) Proverbs, Book it (10:1-22:16) and IV (25:1-29:27)

- 2) Ecclesiastes 1:1, 1:12
- 31 Wisdom of Solomon 7:1-12, 8:17-9:18
- B. God's Word came to Israel differently at the end of the Prophetic Times
 - 1. there is no more direct word of God through the prophets I Mac 4:46
 - 2. apocalyptic eschatology, visions and bizarre symbols are not personal
 - 3. "Wisdom" becomes God's word in Israel
 - a. a human quality, but of a high origin - God
 - b. understandable and liveable
 - c. God is a Person who approaches persons
 - 1) possessing intelligence, character, purpose
 - 2) a creator with a Plan
 - 3) man's wisdom is to follow this plan
 - a) find out what it is
 - b) conform his life to it
 - c) wisdom is another way of saying "doing the will of God"
 - d) God becomes more personal, but smaller
 - 1) no longer transcendent and concerned only with nations
 - 2) but can He be contained in polished "sayings?"
 - 3) will such faith withstand severe testing?
- C. The Rise of the Wisdom School for making wise men
 - 1. the rabbis (teachers) recruit students, Proverbs 1:20 Sirach 33: 16-18
 - 2. teaching consists of rote memorization of pithy sayings about every aspect of life (Reptiva in Fiddler on the Roof)
 - 3. based on the Law, on common sense
 - 4. in the form of riddle or quixotic saying, or traditional maxim (II Sam 20:18)
- D. Wisdom's maxims call for a godly society
 - 1. people work hard
 - 2. observe each other's rights
 - 3. respect each other
 - 4. treat the less fortunate kindly
 - 5. maintain general friendliness (the exception - fools)
 - 6. enjoy the pleasures of moderation Sirach 31:27
 - 7. love their families and homes
 - 8. people are sincere, modest, self-controlled, reliable, chaste, willing to listen and learn, forgiving, considerate, discreet, kind to animals, sweet tempered, liberal, prudent
- E. Wisdom holds to the Dogma of Retribution
 - 1. strong echoes of Moses and the Law - do right and live, do wrong and die

- 2. depends on and defends an ordered world
- 3. exact reward meted out before death
- 4. sin equals doom
- 5. repentance will deliver from death
- 6. God is just and the universe fundamentally ethical
- 7. there is no life after death - all is on this side of the grave - an existence in Sheol is not life, but waiting
- 8. everything is explained by cause and effect

IV. The Books of Wisdom

- A. Proverbs, the oldest collection of wise sayings dates from 8th C and earlier
 - 1. Book I 1:1-9:18
 - a. ten sections of admonition and warning
 - b. two poems of wisdom personified
 - c. a poetic allegory of wisdom and folly
 - d. other admonitions and poems
 - 2. Book II 10:1-22:16
 - a. Solomonic origins
 - b. polished sayings in poetic parallel lines
 - c. dealing with virtues and vices and their consequences
 - 3. Book III
 - a. modeled on Egyptian book of Wisdom- perhaps older than 1000 B.C.
 - b. another series of exhortations
 - 4. Book IV Solomonic origins, similar to book II
 - 5. five appendices - see synopsis of Proverbs
- B. Ecclesiastes dates from 250 B.C.
 - 1. an answer from Skepticism to the Wisdom cult
 - a. pleads for some acceptance of luck and chance
 - b. believes in the finality of death
 - c. rejects the overall, uncritical, value of wisdom and knowledge
 - d. encourages libertinism? probably not
 - 2. not Solomonic, the author is a philosopher rather than a theologian
 - 3. the theological content is lightweight
 - a. find God when you are young
 - b. God will make everything enjoyable
 - c. God gives meaning to otherwise meaningless things and pursuits
 - 4. its place in Holy Scripture
 - a. it provides balance, and a certain relaxed humanity

- b. moderation in all things is a wise course after all
- c. don't take yourself so seriously
- C. Sirach - Ecclesiasticus dates from 180 B.C.
 1. it is found only in the Catholic canon
 2. the author is named in 50:27, Joshua ben Sira
 - a. he is a professional teacher of the O.T. Law 33:16-18, 34:9-12
 - b. he wrote two volumes 1-23 and 24-51
 3. his grandson translated the Hebrew into Greek in 132 B.C.
 4. this book was used in the early Christian church.
 - a. became known as "the Church book"
 - b. it instructed converts and catechumens in the holy life
 5. this type of writing was typical of the rabbinical schools
 6. for content see synopsis of Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach)
- D. Wisdom of Solomon dates from 50 B.C.
 1. it, too, was used in instruction of converts in early Christian Church
 - a. it was known by the author of Hebrews - the Alexandrian, Apollos
 - b. it promotes wisdom as the highest activity of the human spirit, sublime
 2. it is found only in the Catholic canon
 3. it was written in Greek in Alexandria
 - a. by a Hellenistic Jew - not Solomon
 - b. perhaps it had some older sources in Hebrew
 - c. it was written to refute the Skepticism of Ecclesiastes
 - d. it was the first exponent of the thesis that the best of the Greek world of ideas could be woven into Israel's heritage
 - 1) not, however, to concoct a new religion
 - 2) he recognizes that God has inspired the pagans
 - a) they have valid ideas about truth,
 - b) he harmonizes them with the revealed religion
 - c) result - a fuller exposition of the faith of Israel
 - 3) he rejects anything contrary or incongruous to revealed faith
 4. two sections of the book
 - a. 1-9 wisdom writings in general - superior in thought and writing
 - b. 10-19 - mainly historical, tedious refutation of false gods

V. The Educational Method of the Wise Men

- A. Wisdom was acquired through education by qualified teachers
 1. they carry on and polish the tradition
 2. there are no new paths

- 3. the proverb is a product of conscious laborious art
 - a. it is a literary form, having beauty, incisiveness, and power
 - b. because of rhythm and brevity it is easy to memorize Sirach 39:1-11
- B. Pupils are sought from the general public to learn wisdom Sirach 51:23.
 1. practical, it is a teaching tied to life
 2. there is genuine interest in the individual. Note the use of "my son"
 3. no argument, no proof - just assertion which pointed to the authority of tradition and dogmatic affirmation
 4. an attitude of receptivity, attention, memory is required of the student Sirach 8:1-9, Proverbs 8:1-9, 9:1-6
- C. Nothing further from their desire than "to teach their students to think" (Socrates). Proverbs 3:1
 1. independent reflection was anathema. Proverbs 26:12
 2. truth is truth - just learn it
- D. Problems with the teaching of Wisdom
 1. a certain rigidity and intolerance. Wisdom 3:10-13
 2. if dogma proved insufficient to life experience, faith might collapse
 3. Wisdom taught, "Woe to the fool." Jesus said, "Call no man 'fool.'"
- E. Assets of a faith based on Wisdom
 1. it freed man from hesitancy
 2. no bewilderment of conflicting ideas
 3. it engendered solidarity in society where truth was agreed upon
 4. it gave enthusiasm and power to life
 5. the home and school fully cooperated
 6. life was consistent in value everywhere
- F. Motives and motivation of Wisdom had different levels
 1. sometimes shallow motivation could be questioned
 2. selfish reward and happiness Sirach 22:23, 29:11. egotistical 3:16-18
 3. motive of interest in others was mixed
 - a. sometimes for self, as for the natural good feelings
 - b. other times to gladden others 23:25, one's husband 12:4, to promote peace, to pour forth forgiveness 10:12.
 4. love of wisdom for its own sake motivates the affection 3:13ff
 - a. a possession to feed the mind with inner joy
 - b. not the love of knowledge - more like a religious passion
 5. highest motivation is love of God - an atmosphere
 - a. desire to please Him and to be loved by Him
 - b. to feel Him there
 - c. to trust Him and to be glad

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