

## Lesson #16 – Proverbs 2019

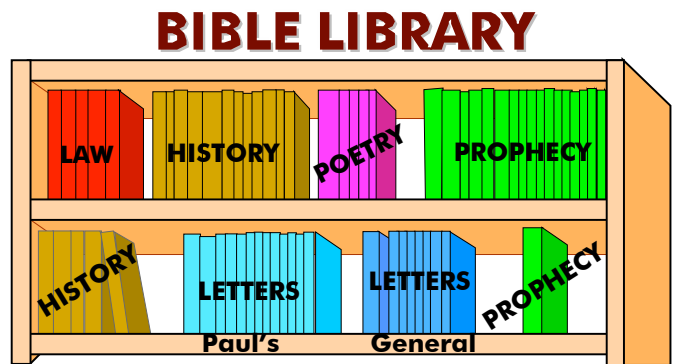
Before starting this lesson, read at least **Proverbs 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 15, 31**. If possible read the whole book. You may find it helpful to read just the minimum chapters, go thru the lesson and then read the whole book. You will discover what works best for you.

The Bible is compared to a library because the books are arranged by topic. In the Old Testament, there are books of **law, history, poetry** and **prophecy**. The poetry books are in the middle of the Bible. But chronologically they fit at various places in Bible history.

**Job** was the first to be written - c. **2000 BC**, at the time of Abraham.

The majority of **Psalms** were written by David or his contemporaries c. **1000 BC**.

The books written by Solomon were in the **900's BC**: **Song of Songs, Proverbs** and **Ecclesiastes**.



The books of poetry are also called **WISDOM BOOKS** because they give wisdom in some area of life.

*Job* wisdom about **suffering**.  
*Psalms* wisdom about **worship**.  
*Song of Songs* wisdom about **marriage and love**.  
*Proverbs* wisdom in how to be **godly**.  
*Ecclesiastes* wisdom about **life**.

Past lessons have mentioned the Jewish writing style and its importance to understanding Scripture.

**WISDOM BOOKS** have a Jewish writing style all their own

They use **picture language** with lots of **repetition**.

Seven or eight similar words are used interchangeably to repeat a basic idea. All are intended to mean exactly the same thing. Never try to get distinctions or shades of meaning between these words.

They use **personification**.

*Trees clap their hands or sing for joy.* Wisdom or temptation speaks as tho they are persons.

They give **instruction** in brief segments.

Sometimes the topic is only 1 or 2 verses; other times it is a chapter.

Sometimes it is in the form of a father or mother giving instruction to their son.

They are written in **poetry form**, but it is nothing like our poetry.

When we think of *poetry*, we think of free verse, or rhyme and meter.

*I shot an arrow into the air - it fell to earth - I know not where.* Rhyme and meter.

Hebrew poetry is based on **parallelism**.

**The main idea is in the first line.** It is reinforced in the next line, in one of 4 ways.

It can be reinforced thru **repetition**.

*Discretion will protect you **and** understanding will guard you.* 2:11

The author is saying the same thing 2 different ways. The second line is merely a repetition of the 1<sup>st</sup> line. It often begins with the word *and*. Psalm 119 is a perfect example of this style - repetition.

It can be reinforced thru **completion**.

*In all your ways acknowledge God **and** He will make your paths straight* 3:6

The second line is completing or giving the result of the first line; it also begins with *and*.

It can be reinforced thru **comparison**.

*Better a meal of vegetables where there is love, **than** a fattened calf with hatred.* 15:17

The second line begins with *than* - better this than that.

It can be reinforced thru **contrast**.

*The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are His delight* 11:1

The second line is opposite of the first. *Delight* is opposite of *abhors*;

*dishonest scales* is contrasted with *accurate weights*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> line often begins with the word *but*.

Hebrew poetry uses four ways to **emphasize the main idea of the first line**:

repetition, completion, comparison or contrast.

Then from this, the author has unlimited possibilities to mix and match them.

So in the poetry or wisdom books, always look for the meaning in the first line.

There is one exception. In Proverbs chapters 25-28, there is a series of proverbs that use the form, *like this is that*.

*Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land* (Prov. 25:25). This is comparison where the meaning is in the second line. These proverbs are the exception. All the rest have their meaning in the first line.

For us, Hebrew poetry is very repetitious. But people of other cultures see it as artistry.

One secular magazine said, *Rhetoric is art to the people of the Middle East...Proverbs...imagery and exaggeration are commonplace. Language is poetry; writing is art...*(Insight, 4 Mar. 1991). The eastern mind sees parallelism as artistry in writing.

We prefer brevity, because that is our culture. But knowing what the Jewish authors are doing and why they are doing it, can help us appreciate their ability and artistry.

The word *proverb* when used in the Bible, means *wise teaching*. It is a statement that is generally true.

If it is a statement about God, based on His character, it will always be true.

However if it is a statement about us, it is generally true; but it is not an absolute. In other words, it is not a promise.

I have to mention this because people so often use the verse in Proverbs, *Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it*. 22:6. Then they add, *I'm claiming this promise*. But it is not a promise - it is a proverb. It is a wise teaching that is generally true. A child raised in the things of God **is** more likely to follow God in his or her adult life. But all of us know families where adult children have rebelled. In later life, some of them returned to follow God. Others have not. This verse did not fail. God did not fail. Parents did not fail. What it means is adult children used their free will. In spite of godly training, they chose *their* way. They became responsible for their choice. If God guaranteed your adult children would always follow Him, or always return to Him, He would have to override their free will. This is something He will not do. So proverbs about people are wise teachings that are generally true, but they are not absolute guarantees.

In the Old Testament, from the time of Moses up to the time of Malachi, all spiritual instruction was in the home. Synagogues had not yet been developed. When boys and girls were younger, the mother was responsible for teaching them. As they grew older, the father was also involved. But so often Jewish *boys* and young *men* strayed from their faith and training.

When Solomon became king, God gave him **human** wisdom to govern wisely. He also gave him **godly** wisdom. Over the years Solomon saw that godly wisdom was the most important. He also saw that young men needed to know about this kind of wisdom when they were still teachable.

So in 950 BC, when he is 40 years old, Solomon puts this information into writing. He uses the style of a father giving instruction to his son. In Proverbs 1:8 he says, *Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching*. (also 6:20). Thruout the book he says, *my son*. He is not talking to his biological son, but to the sons or young men of Israel. Having been their king for 20 years, he feels responsible to instruct them. From his writings, we can tell that Solomon is still strong in his faith, having full godly wisdom in his own life. He has not yet gotten involved with his pagan wives and their pagan gods.

Solomon writes short sections of proverbs on a variety of topics. It is possible these short segments were passed around so the young people could memorize them. There were also proverbs written by a man named Agur. We do not know anything about him. It is possible he was an advisor in Solomon's government who also had godly wisdom.

When Solomon died in 930 BC, a copy of all his proverbs was stored with the rest of Jewish history. Two hundred years went by. Then the Holy Spirit guided Levite scribes to go thru them. They took 915 from his 3000 proverbs and arranged them by topics into a book of their sacred writings. They made a final edition c. 725 BC. It is our book of *Proverbs*.

**Definitions** are necessary in order to understand this book.

**Wisdom** in **this** book always means **godly wisdom**.

It includes having God's perspective; doing things God's way; wanting what God wants; being in tune with God's desires. This is godly wisdom.

Solomon uses 6 different Hebrew words for *godly wisdom*. (Proverbs notes from *Pulpit Commentary*) In English, they are translated as *wisdom, knowledge, perception, insight, discretion, understanding* and *prudence*. In our language, there is a lot of difference between these words. Even in other books in the Bible, there are differences between them. But Proverbs is Hebrew *poetry*.

The purpose is to say the same thing in as many different ways as possible. So all these words are used interchangeably. They all mean *godly wisdom*.

**Wise** means those who accept the ways of God - those who have godly wisdom.

**Fools** or **foolish** are those who reject God's ways. They do not have godly wisdom and do not want it.

The **simple** are undecided about God's ways. They do not have godly wisdom, but might want to get it.

The Hebrew word is *p<sup>e</sup>ti*. It is used 14 times. It means *easily led; trusts what anyone says* 14:15

**Fear of the Lord** has 2 meanings

First of all it means *awe or reverence of God Himself*. When we understand what He is like and what He can do, it can leave us speechless. All we can say is WOW! Awesome!

The second meaning is *literal fear of His consequences if we disobey*. We should be so afraid of the consequences that it will not be worth it to disobey. That is a healthy fear of God.

## Outline

Because the topics of these proverbs are repeated thruout the book, there is no special form or outline.

However the book does seem to have 2 basic divisions

The explanation of godly wisdom	chapters 1-9
The application of godly wisdom	chapters 10-31

## Purposes or Goals

That *wise young men* will want to know even more of God's ways and wisdom.

That *fools* will see the mistake of rejecting it.

That the *simple* will see its value and desire it.

He uses the first 9 chapters to **explain** godly wisdom – **WHAT** it is; **WHY** they need it and **HOW** they get it?

He begins with a general statement in 1:7. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge or godly wisdom*.

The Hebrew word for *beginning* in this verse means foundation, core or guiding force. That which guides, shapes and develops our godly wisdom is our awe and reverence for God as well as a healthy fear of His consequences when we disobey. This is the meaning of godly wisdom – **what** it is. It's all about God.

Solomon continues in chapters 2-9 to explain **why** young men need this kind of wisdom.

▶ They need it to make good choices and to know right from wrong 2:10-12.

▶ They need it to enjoy God's blessings and use them wisely. 3:13-18.

▶ They need godly wisdom to have inner peace 3:21-23.

When they see things from God's perspective, they will be sure He knows their situation, that He is in control and that He makes no mistakes. This knowledge will give them inner peace in spite of outer turmoil and trouble.

▶ They need godly wisdom to protect themselves from the enticements and temptations of the world.

To emphasize this point, Solomon uses contrasts and a form of writing called personification. He describes wisdom (1:20; 8:1) and folly (9:13) as if they were two women walking down the street, trying to get the young men to follow them. Then he talks about the adulteress and her influence. Godly wisdom will protect young men from the temptations they face in everyday life.

Godly wisdom - **What** it is and **why** young men need it. After hearing this, some of the simple or undecided, now want this wisdom. So **how** can they get it? Solomon ends as he began.

9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

The word *beginning* in this verse is a different Hebrew word. It means *the first step*. So knowledge of God that produces awe is the first step to getting godly wisdom. <sup>1</sup> The young men need to know and learn what God is like in His holiness, justice, mercy and power. Until they understand God's *character*, they will never have God's *values*. When they do get godly wisdom and develop it, the young men will grow up to be godly fathers and godly leaders in the nation. 3:18; 4:8

We have now seen The **explanation** of godly wisdom. 1-9

**What** it is,

**Why** young men need it

**How** they can get it

The rest of the book is The **application** of godly wisdom. 10-31

Solomon gives wise teachings to help young men develop even more godly wisdom and show them how to use it in everyday life. It is not enough to have godly wisdom in their head. They need to use it in their relationships, how they handle money, their attitudes, how they accept correction or how they do business.

For example, back in chapter 1:11, *The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are His delight*. By remembering the purpose or main idea is in the first line, we discover a business problem of that day. There was dishonesty as the Jews did business with each other. So now, scattered thruout the rest of this book, Solomon will make the application, *Use your godly wisdom in business by being honest*.

Personally, I find it difficult to just sit down and read chapter after chapter, because the advice is constantly jumping from one subject to another. I find it more effective to work with a single topic.

Reading quickly thru several chapters at a time, I look for just the verses that pertain to the topic and write them down. I do not pay attention to any of the other verses. Then I go thru all the verses I wrote down, to see what God says about this subject and how I can follow the advice. I try to organize them in a way that helps me see the overall picture.

Using a computer makes it even easier. Start with a word search of a specific topic and print out all the verses. After studying them, go back and change them on the computer so when you print them out the next time, the verses will be organized in a way you can use them and put them into practice.

Some topics that you might find interesting are:

Discipline	Lying	The tongue (or anything to do with speech)
Fear of God	Humility	Riches or anything about money
Gossip	A wise person	Anything about friends, friendship and relationships
Pride		

One summer I did a study on the characteristics of a wise person – a person with God's values.

After I made my list, it looked very impressive, all written out sitting on my desk. But it still had nothing to do with my life. So I took the characteristics and wrote them on an index card. There were 21 of them.

I took the 1<sup>st</sup> one - trust and reverence for God. I asked God to help me put it into practice during the next 24 hours. I thought about the ways I was already doing it. Then I prayed for insight in how my trust and reverence could increase. The next day I took the next characteristic - uses time wisely.

Each day or so, I chose a new characteristic and spent time considering how it applied to **my** life and situation. For me, this is the most practical and effective way to use the wise teachings of Proverbs.

Now let's go to the last chapter of the book – chapter 31. I want to spend time on it, because it is so well known, but also so misunderstood.

According to verse one, this chapter is what King Lemuel learned from his mother. Various books and footnotes suggest he is an unknown king from an unknown place called *Massa*. *Massa* is the literal Hebrew word that means *oracle or counsel that guides and corrects*. It is not reasonable to say an unknown king writes this from a place that has never been heard of. The literal meaning of the word *Massa* gives clarity and purpose to the chapter. It is motherly advice to counsel and guide King Lemuel. But who is King Lemuel?

In 2 Samuel 12:25, God told Bathsheba He was giving Solomon another name - the name *Jedidiah*. It meant, *loved by God*. Jewish tradition says Bathsheba believed if *God* named him, then he *belonged* to God. So she gave Solomon, another, special name used only between them. She called him *Lemuel*, which means *belonging to God* or *dedicated to God*.

When Solomon is considered the author of chapter 31, the book fits together in a Jewish style based on circular writing. He **begins** chapter 4, with the teaching of his **father** - how to be a godly **man**. (4:3-4).

He **ends** in chapter 31 with the teaching of his **mother** - how to be a godly **king**.

He **begins** the book telling young men to seek godly **wisdom**. He uses the picture of Lady wisdom.

He **ends** the book telling them to seek a godly **wife**. He uses the picture of Lady valor – a woman of valor.

He also **begins** and **ends** the book with the topic, the *fear of the Lord*.

On the basis of the name Lemuel and what it means, plus the circular writing style, I believe Solomon is the author. Since he is telling what his mother taught him, he is using his mother's name for him.

**Verses 1-9 are his mother's teachings of how to be a godly king.**  
**Verses 10-31 are teaching in how to find a godly wife.**

He had put the advice into practice when he found and married Shulamit. He now wants to share this wisdom with the young men of Israel. He is writing not just from the actual *words* his mother told him, but also about the *qualities* he saw in her life. Bathsheba was a very godly woman.

To make this advice more interesting and artistic, he puts verses 10-31 into a special form of poetry known as an acrostic. In the original Hebrew, the 22 verses correspond to the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse begins with a consecutive letter. While the Hebrew alphabet is very different from ours, their first 4 letters are something like our *a, b, g* and *d*. This means that in the original, verse 10 would **begin** with the letter *a*, verse 11 with *b*, verse 12 with *g*, verse 13 with *d* and so on, thru the Hebrew alphabet.

The first 4 verses can be rewritten in English to show the acrostic. Notice each verse will start with a consecutive letter - *a, b, g, d*, starting with verse 10.

**A** wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

**Behold**, her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

**Good** she brings him, not harm, all the days of her life.

**Diligently** selecting wool and flax, she works with eager hands.

Proverbs 31 is probably one of the most misunderstood chapters in the Old Testament. Solomon is not telling the young men to find a wife based on how much she can **do**. He is saying, *When looking for a godly wife, focus on what qualities she has*. He then gives them a list of **8 qualities to look for**.

❖ Look for a **woman of valor**.

Verse 10 in our Bibles refers to her as a wife of noble character, virtuous. But the Hebrew word means *valor*, *strength* or *power*. The word was usually used to describe a warrior hero after some great battle - a man of valor. Solomon uses this word for women. The young men of Israel, when looking for a wife, should look for a woman of valor.

This means she is strong in character and a leader in some area of life.

Today, in Jewish homes that celebrate Shabbat - the Sabbath, the husband recites these 22 verses from memory to declare admiration and love for his wife. It is called *the woman of valor blessing*.

From *What you should know about Jews* by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, p. 84.

Ruth 3:11 and Proverbs 12:4 are the only other places that use this word *valor* for women.

❖ Look for a woman who is the **other half of a team**.

In this team, she has input and her opinion is respected. Her husband, in turn, praises her and provides for her.

As she encourages him, he responds and develops himself. This is found in verses 11, 12 and 20.

- ❖ Look for a woman who is **gifted** and has **developed her gifts**.  
Solomon is not saying she is supposed to do everything mentioned in the chapter. This is a composite of all the possibilities, to assure young men that women are gifted in many different areas. Yes, she may be gifted in things of the home. But then again, her gifts may be in a completely different area such as business, agriculture, administration, engineering or architecture. A godly man should look for a woman who is gifted and who has developed her abilities so she is good at what she does.
- ❖ Look for a woman who is **creative**.  
Again this is not saying she is to do all these things. It is combining all the ways in which women are creative, so men can see there are unlimited possibilities. This creativity may show up in her sewing; the way she develops the home or provides for her family. But it also might show up in how she manages finances or develops a business venture. Creativity can be seen in any area of life.
- ❖ Look for a woman who **has initiative**.  
She can see what needs to be done and then gets it done, either by herself or others. She knows how to delegate.
- ❖ Look for a woman who **speaks with wisdom**.  
She knows when to speak and when not to speak. She knows how to validate and encourage others, especially in the home with other family members. Today, if there was more encouragement and validation instead of put-downs, how different *our* homes could be.
- ❖ Look for a woman of **character**.  
She has inner beauty even when her outward beauty begins to change. She takes care of herself and has self-esteem. She has strength and dignity

With these 7 qualities in our mind, let's look at one verse to see how the Jewish meaning is developed 31:18  
*She sees that her trading is profitable and her lamp does not go out at night.*

Most people think it means she stays up half the night trying to get everything done. Some people even think it is commendable because she is sacrificing for her family. This is totally, 100% wrong.

Remember the basics of Hebrew poetry. The main thought is in the first line. It is reinforced in the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Line one of verse 18 says, *her trading is profitable*. That is the point of this verse.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> line completes it with an example, *her lamp does not go out at night*. Because her trading was profitable, she was able to buy a large supply of oil. She can now leave the lamp burning all night, to give security and safety in the home. She does not have to worry about pinching pennies by putting it out to conserve oil.

According to verse 24, her trading is probably *making linen garments, selling them and supplying or delivering sashes to the merchants*.

This is the **literal** meaning.

Because this is Jewish, there is also a **spiritual** picture and meaning.

For the Jews, a burning lamp or candle is a picture of God's presence. To say she keeps the lamp burning is picture language to say she sets the spiritual tone in the family. Thru **her** influence, the presence of God is sensed and felt in the home and by those around her. Among Jews today, the wife is called the *centerpiece of the home*. They consider the home as her domain.

On Friday night, in the Jewish home, it is the **wife** who lights the candles to begin the celebration of Shabbat. Again it is saying the wife is the one who sets the spiritual tone in the family. A current Jewish book, in referring to the spiritual life of a Jewish woman says <sup>2</sup>...*her presence makes a difference to the environment around her...At home she provides that unique quality of soul that lays the all-important foundation for everyone who comes into her world.*

*Friday night and beyond-Shabbat experience step by step*, Lori Palatnik, Jason Aronson, Inc.

The 7 qualities of this woman are wonderful. But there is one final quality that explains their effectiveness – it gives the key to this woman's influence, especially in the home.



❖ Look for a woman who **fears the Lord**.

Verse 30. *Many women do noble things, things of valor, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*

It is her deep knowledge and reverence of God that has developed her into a woman of valor. Solomon says, *Young men, this is the kind of godly wife you should look for.*

With this advice, Solomon's instruction to the young men of Israel is finished.

Obviously, we are not young men of Israel, but there is certainly much that Solomon and this chapter can teach us.

First of all, chapter 31 is one of the greatest chapters to give us **God's concept of women and His role for them**.

Whether married or not, God wants women to be women of valor, strong in character and leadership. Leadership does not just mean being up in front of people. Leadership is needed behind the scenes as well. It is the ability to help people organize or know what to do. In addition, He has given women the privilege of setting the spiritual tone in the family. Thru their influence, the presence of God is sensed and felt in the home or by those around them in other places. So the question is, *Women, are we as living up to our potential? Can people describe us as godly women?*

And whether we be men or women, Solomon teaches us the **importance of godly wisdom**.

He has explained it all begins with our knowledge of God. This means we need to learn, study and understand what God is like. We will learn this from the Bible itself, from classes or from study books. The more we learn, the more amazed – in awe - we will be at His character and qualities. Things in Scripture will begin to fit together.

This knowledge of God will give us God's perspective.

We will have clarity as to what is right and what is wrong based on His standards.

The world and its enticements will not be as attractive.

We will have inner peace even with uncertainty and chaos in the world around us.

We can be sure God knows our situation, that He is in control and that He makes no mistakes.

To put it simply, **When we have godly wisdom, we can be godly even in the midst of an ungodly world!**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> From page 4, Prov. 9:10

Remember Hebrew poetry in the repetition form?

The first line is the meaning - the main idea.

The 2nd line repeats it with other words.

In line 1 we have the phrase - *fear of the Lord*.

In line 2 *knowledge of the Holy One* means the same thing.

Knowledge of God that produces awe is the first step to getting godly wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> From page 6, Spiritual meaning

The full quote (*The power of the Jewish woman, for it is the woman who sanctifies space. Even if outside at the office, her presence makes a difference to the environment around her. There and at home, she provides that unique quality of soul that lays the all-important foundation for everyone who comes into her world.*

*Friday night and beyond-Shabbat experience step by step*, Lori Palatnik, Jason Aronson, Inc.