

Old Testament Survey

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon – Introduction

- Background
 - These books are considered the poetic writings
 - These are also the last three of the Wisdom Books in the Old Testament (after Job and Psalms)
 - These books are not part of redemptive history
 - However they do highlight attributes of God and Christ (i.e. Wisdom, Sovereignty, and Love)
 - These books are generally used for pithy quotes, but not usually understood as a whole

Proverbs – An Overview

- Authorship
 - King Solomon is attributed to have written a majority of the book
 - Others such as Agur (Chapter 30), Lemeul (Chapter 31) have contributed
 - It is thought that the book of Proverbs was not assembled until Hezekiah`s day or later (686 B.C. or later)

Proverbs – An Overview

- Central Theme
 - *“Wisdom is fearing the LORD, being teachable, and having skill in godly living; and the LORD is the source, the means, and the goal of wisdom”*
 - Fearing the LORD
 - Living life in relation to who he really is
 - Being teachable
 - Wisdom isn’t so much about what you already know as is your humility in continuing to learn

Proverbs – An Overview

- Theme for the book
 - Having skill in godly living
 - Wisdom is knowledge in action
 - Knowing what to do with the knowledge you've received in order to live a more godly life

Proverbs – An Overview

- Overview/Outline of Proverbs
 - **Proverbs 1-9** – Solomon's Wisdom for the Young Man
 - **Proverbs 10-29** – Solomon's Collection of Independent Proverbs
 - Chapters 10-24: The proverbs of Solomon
 - Chapters 25-29: The proverbs of Solomon, collected by Hezekiah
 - **Proverbs 30-31** – Non-Solomonic Proverbs
 - Chapter 30: The words of Agur
 - Chapter 31: The words of Lemuel which his mother taught him

Proverbs – An Overview

- Background
 - What are the proverbs?
 - General principles and observations that can be drawn from the created order by those who fear the LORD
 - The implied audience for wisdom literature in ancient times were for young people, however it can be used by anyone wanting to live the good life as defined in religious, moral, and practical terms

Proverbs – An Overview

- Background
 - The Proverbs are full of the wisdom of a man who has lived life and seen much of the world and wants to pass on what he has learned
 - Typifies the wisdom that the king needs to rule over God's people
 - It points to Christ, who possesses the greatest wisdom and will rule over God's people forever

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - Hebrew poetry tends to use “parallelisms”
 - This is when one line expands upon and amplifies the line before
 - Here, they are shown generally as contrasts
 - Here are some steps:
 - Determine the parallelisms
 - Identify any figures of speech
 - Summarize
 - Apply this to your own life

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - The preceding steps helps you to slow down and meditate what the Proverb says
 - It maybe helpful to look at other translations of the same verse to understand the Proverb
 - Example: Proverbs 29:18
 - “Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, he is happy” (KJV)
 - “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; blessed is he who keeps the law” (NIV)

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - A danger is misinterpreting or misunderstanding the proverbs
 - The passages should be read as a whole and not in isolation

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - The following are some guidelines in helping you to understand Proverbs:
 - Common Sense is required
 - You can look at Proverbs 16:3, 5, 18, 20 for proverbs that common sense tells us are true
 - Individual proverbs are ultimately true
 - May not be immediately true, but will ultimately be true
 - “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” Proverbs 16:7

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - Individual proverbs are normally true now
 - The purpose of the proverb is not to exhaust a topic but to teach a lesson in a way that is memorable
 - Individual proverbs employ poetic imagery
 - “The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life” Proverbs 16:17
 - Use of illustration to show how the righteous live their lives

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - Individual proverbs are partial in themselves
 - Each one typically attempts to capture one basic idea
 - Using the following verses as examples
 - » “A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns he succeeds.” Proverbs 17:8
 - » “A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice.” Proverbs 17:23
 - The verses must be read as a whole and in context

Proverbs – An Overview

- How are the Proverbs interpreted
 - Individual proverbs are sometimes obscure
 - It maybe difficult to understand as you do not have the cultural context of the writing
 - “He who winks with his eye is plotting perversity; he who purses his lips is bent on evil.” Proverbs 16:30
 - The culture of the day, winking would have been associated with evil scheming
 - As a whole, the proverbs are religious
 - It is not a book of secular proverbs, but rather about our lives before God
 - The good life can be found only in wisdom about God and us

Proverbs – An Overview

- Framework for understanding Proverbs:
 - Contrasts to Wise Living
 - One of the main characters is the Fool
 - He is not known simply for what he does or does not do, but what he says and what happens to him
 - The Sluggard is also another identified character
 - Christians must resist the culture claim that the only point of working is for recreation and leisure
 - Opportunity for imaging our God through productive and meaningful work

Proverbs – An Overview

- Framework for understanding Proverbs:
 - Context for Wise Living
 - The wise and godly life pays particular heed to the family
 - The illustration of marriage is also used to demonstrate our relationship with God
 - Proverbs speaks heavily on relationship of parents with children
 - That parents are to address the spiritual needs of the children as well as the practical needs

Proverbs – An Overview

- Framework for understanding Proverbs:
 - Communication of Wise Living
 - “The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways.” Proverbs 14:8
 - The use of your words is very important
 - This goes beyond gossip, slander, or lying
 - This talks about hasty words or aptly given responses
 - The idea of “hearing” in the Bible does not only mean listening, but listening and follow up with right action
 - We should be teaching AND learning

Proverbs – An Overview

- Framework for understanding Proverbs:
 - The Outcome of Wisdom
 - Proverbs tells us we are accountable to God for our sin, that God will judge us for our wrong actions, and that we must confess our sins if we are to receive mercy

Proverbs – An Overview

- Christ in the Proverbs:
 - Christ is the embodiment of wisdom
 - Matthew 12:42 – His wisdom supersedes that of Solomon
 - We should be reminded, when we read Proverbs, that Christ is the only person who has lived it
 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-24 – Perceived foolishness and true wisdom that Proverbs foreshadows

Proverbs – An Overview

- Conclusion
 - Proverbs are rich and full of wisdom
 - Read it slowly and contemplatively
 - Want wisdom, desire knowledge!
 - “He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good “ Proverbs 19:8

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Authorship and Date
 - It is ‘traditionally’ attributed to Solomon
 - The titles in 1:1 and 1:12 of the book
 - The author’s moral odyssey chronicles Solomon’s life
 - If we attribute the author to be Solomon, the date would be no later than 931 B.C.
 - However, it is thought that another “son of David” may have written the book
 - The use of “Teacher” and the third person language brings doubt that Solomon is the author

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Background and Purpose
 - The book can be viewed as to how to live in a fallen world
 - To make readers feel the futility of life lived by purely earthly values and to lead them to seek satisfaction in God and spiritual values
 - A misconception of the book is that it is “negative” in nature and only “positive” at the end
 - There are positive notes interspersed in the book

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Central Theme:
 - *Meaningful! Meaningful! All is meaningful because all is ordered by an eternal, sovereign, and purposeful God. Therefore, we should fear God and rejoice in what He has given us to do and to have.*

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Outline
 - Chapter 1:1-3 – Introduction: Life is a Vapor
 - Chapter 1:4-2:23 – Life Under the Sun: Cycles, Knowledge, Pleasure, Wealth, Work
 - Chapter 2:24-26 – Life Above the Sun: The God-Centered Life
 - Chapter 3 – Two Views of Time: Human and Divine Perspectives

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Outline
 - Chapter 4:1-5:17 – Life Under the Sun: How Life Fails to Satisfy
 - Chapter 5:18-20 – Life Above the Sun: The God-Centered Life
 - Chapter 6:1-9:6 – Life Under the Sun: Observations about Life's Disappointments
 - Chapter 9:7-10 – Living with Zest: An Alternative to the Problems Just Posed

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Outline
 - Chapter 9:11-10:20 – Life Under the Sun: Observations about Human Folly
 - Chapter 11:1-12:7 – Life Above the Sun: Enjoying Life with God at the Center
 - Chapter 12:9-14 – Conclusion: The Speaker's Quest satisfied

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- General Theme
 - Ecclesiastes confronts man's attempt to find meaning in the creation apart from the Creator
 - If the universe is created and is governed by an eternal, sovereign, and purposeful God, then there is great meaning and value to life
 - The God of Ecclesiastes is a sovereign God, and so everything is filled with significance because God does nothing in vain or without reason

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Specific Themes
 - Life apart from God and spiritual values is empty and meaningless
 - Many things in life promise satisfaction, but they never quite keep their promise
 - Despite that, people naturally pursue happiness in places and ways that cannot meet their deepest human needs

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Specific Themes
 - The inevitable result of trying to get more out of life than it has to offer is disillusionment
 - The corrective to such disillusionment is to look for one's satisfaction in God and heavenly values
 - Paradoxically, once a person relegates earthly values to the periphery and places ultimate allegiance in God and spiritual values, earthly pursuits turn out to offer meaning and joy after all

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Applying the Book
 - First, people still search for meaning in the same places as the writer of Ecclesiastes
 - What are some of the places we try to find happiness?
 - Second, we should ponder what our own experiences and attitudes toward such issues as work, enjoyment, death, unsatisfied longing, and the cycles of life and nature

Ecclesiastes – An Overview

- Applying the Book
 - Third, the God-Centered passages constitute an accurate picture of the good life as God meant it
 - We can keep a list of ways in which God intends for us to live
- Other applications
 - Use it as an evangelism tool to show the meaninglessness in their pursuits without God
 - When feeling cynical, use it as an honest path back to faith

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Authorship and Date
 - Written by Solomon (1:1)
 - In the original Hebrew and Greek, it is known also as “Song of Songs”
 - Though some scholars regard the author as anonymous or even written by a scribe in Solomon’s court
 - No date is given although it is thought that Solomon is the author, it is around the 10th century B.C.

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Background and context
 - This book is about marriage
 - This is a commentary for what it looks like for the man and woman to be “naked and not ashamed”
 - It is also a celebration of God’s love for us

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Central Theme:
 - *The Song of Solomon sings of the son of David, who is the ideal king of Israel, who is the seed of the woman, seed of the Abraham, seed of Judah, seed of David, who enjoys uninhibited, unashamed intimacy with his beloved, in a garden that belongs to him.*

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Outline

- **I. The Courtship: “Leaving” (1:2–3:5)**

- A. The Lovers’ Remembrances (1:2–2:7)
 - B. The Lovers’ Expression of Reciprocal Love (2:8–3:5)

- **II. The Wedding: “Cleaving” (3:6–5:1)**

- A. The Kingly Bridegroom (3:6–11)
 - B. The Wedding and First Night Together (4:1–5:1a)
 - C. God’s Approval (5:1b)

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Outline
 - **III. The Marriage: “Weaving” (5:2–8:14)**
 - A. The First Major Disagreement (5:2–6:3)
 - B. The Restoration (6:4–8:4)
 - C. Growing in Grace (8:5–14)

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Sub Themes:
 - God wants his creatures to enjoy and celebrate life in this world
 - Romantic love and human sexuality are good when people pursue them as God intended
 - Even though the relationship between husband and wife is private in many of its dimensions, marriage occurs in a communal context
 - The physical world, including nature and human appetites, is good in principle

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Key Thoughts

- The importance of keeping a pure relationship

- The use of the term “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” is repeated three times (2:7, 3:5, 8:4)
 - The young lady is imploring other young women to wait until marriage before engaging in a sexual relationship
 - There are consequences if a couple doesn't wait
 - As God's creation, we are called to monogamy and sexual purity

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Key Thoughts

- God’s blessing on marriage and sex

- Chapter 5:1 – “ ... Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!”
 - Some have thought this is the voice of God and He putting His blessing upon their sexual relationship
 - Therefore God is not only saying that sex is okay, but actually right and good and to be enjoyed to the fullest
 - Sex, like marriage, was created by God for His glory and for His creatures’ good health

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Concluding Thoughts
 - We learn that marriage and sex occupy a very high place with God
 - Therefore, it is an imperative duty and a high privilege to keep the marriage bed pure
 - For unmarried persons, we are to abstain from sex
 - For married persons, we are to love each other with it
 - If we abuse these gifts, disaster and frustration will be the only result

Song of Solomon – An Overview

- Concluding Thoughts
 - We also see a beautiful description of God's love for us
 - This can help us understand what Christ's love is like for the church

Next class

- 1 and 2 Kings

References

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