

Overview of Proverbs 1-9

I. Theme and structure

- A. The major theme of Proverbs 1-9 is the choice of two ways. One way follows woman wisdom, the other follows the woman of folly.
- B. A Suggested Outline of Proverbs 1-9¹
 - 1. 1:1-7: The Purpose of the Book
 - 2. 1:8-19: Avoid Evil Associations
 - 3. 1:20-33: Don't Resist Woman Wisdom
 - 4. 2:1-22: The Benefits of the Way of Wisdom
 - 5. 3:1-12: Trust in the Lord
 - 6. 3:13-20: Praising Wisdom
 - 7. 3:21-35: The Integrity of Wisdom
 - 8. 4:1-9: Embrace Wisdom!
 - 9. 4:10-19: Stay on the Right Path
 - 10. 4:20-27: Guard Your Heart
 - 11. 5:1-23: Avoid Promiscuous Women; Love Your Wife
 - 12. 6:1-19: Wisdom Admonitions: Loans, Laziness, Lying, and Other Topics
 - 13. 6:20-35: The Danger of Adultery
 - 14. 7:1-27: Avoid Promiscuous Women: Part II
 - 15. 8:1-36: Wisdom's Autobiography
 - 16. 9:1-6, 13-18: The Ultimate Encounter: Wisdom or Folly
 - 17. 9:7-12: Miscellaneous Wisdom Sayings

II. While there are many ways to outline Proverbs 1-9, nearly all scholars agree that chapters 1 through 9 form a distinct unit.

- A. Unlike chapters 10 through 31 which are made up of staccato like proverbial sayings, 1-9 form an extended discourse.
- B. There are proverbs interspersed throughout chapters 1-9 that bear stopping and reflecting of

¹ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 23.

Proverbs 1:8-19 - Avoiding Evil Associations

I. Introductory phrases v.8-9

A. Translation:

“Listen/hear (שָׁמַע *šema*) my son, the instruction/discipline (מוֹסֵר *mûsar*) of your father and do not forsake the instruction/law (תּוֹרָה *tôrâ*) of your mother. For a garland/wreath of grace are they to your head, and chains (necklaces) to your necks.”

B. Observations

1. Note the parental motif
 - a. The reference to the mother in a wisdom teaching role is unusual in Ancient Near Eastern culture. No parallel to this exists in Babylonian or Egyptian wisdom literature
 - b. This attests to the prominent place and value of the teaching of both parents for wisdom
2. Idea of “torah” is instruction, discipline, direction
 - a. This is not “Torat Yahweh” but the torah of the parents
 - b. The idea behind “torah” is direction or instruction
 - c. Other words derived from the same root:
 - 1) מוֹרֶה *môreh* - Teacher
Prov. 5:13; Job 36:22; Isa 30:20
 - 2) יָרָה *yārāh* - To throw, point out, direct, teach, instruct
Exo 35:34, Prov. 4:4; Job 27:11; Isa 28:9
3. Metaphor of ornaments for instruction and discipline
 - a. Fools despise what is elegant for the learner
 - b. There is no hint of a coerced obedience here
 - c. Obedience makes a person delightful, graceful, and appealing

II. Associations

A. If sinners persuade you, do not consent

1. Very clear on who they are - sinners
2. Do not consent
3. Do not walk in the way/path with them
4. Keep your feet from their path

B. The appeal, what they will offer

1. Belonging - “Come with us” (v.11a); Throw in your lot with us (v.14a)
2. Wealth - “We will find all kinds of precious wealth (v.13)”
3. Security - “We shall have one purse (v.14b).”

C. Their activity

1. Ambush the innocent and steal their wealth
2. Feet run to do evil, and hasten to shed blood

III. Canonical Context

- A. Other pictures of the violence of the wicked
 1. Psalm 35:5-8; 140:4-5; 64:4-7 - The image of evil men setting a trap is not unique to Proverbs
 2. Gen 37:19-28 - Similar vocabulary - "blood, pit, profit, life"
 3. Mic 7:2 - Similar vocabulary, but directed at the nation
 4. Isa 59:7 - Same wording as Prov. 1:16
 - a. Jer 6:13 - Israel's history includes violence and greed
 - b. Isa 59:14 - Justice was perverted
 5. Gen 4:10; 9:6; Num 35:33; Isa 5:7-9; Rev. 19:2 - Innocent blood cries out to God
- B. The picture of sinners here calls to mind Israel at her worst

IV. Why begin instructions with evil associations?

- A. Is this a temptation to most people?
- B. Does anyone aspire to join a street gang, or the mob?
- C. Would most people think of this as applying to them?
- D. The answer to this question can be found in the first proverb.

V. The First Proverb: A trap

- A. v.17 is the first real proverb in the book of Proverbs.
Translation: "For nothing is the net spread out in the eyes of all the lord of the wing"
 - a. כִּי־חִנָּם *kî ḥinnām* - The first phrase can mean, "gratuitously," "for nothing," "For in vain," "For without cause" or "for no reason." *ḥinnām* is also the last word in verse 11 - without cause.
 - b. בַּעַל כַּנָּף *ba'al kānāp* - "Lord of the wing" usually rendered "bird" in English translations. Normal word for bird is either עוֹף *ôp* (used 71 times) or צִפּוֹר *sippôr* (used 71 times). This phrase is used only once in the Hebrew Bible. Any reason for this unusual phrase?
- B. What does this Proverb communicate?
 1. A bird will not fall into a trap if it sees you set it.
 - a. Is this true to life?
 - b. Will birds fall into the trap even if they see you set it?
 - c. Do birds understand the difference between food and bait?

2. Why tell a Proverb that does not seem to be true to life?
 - a. Why would birds fall into a trap they see you set? The reason is they do not *understand* what is happening
 - b. This proverb suggests that birds will not fall into the trap, but in fact this typically is not the case. Birds usually lack understanding of what is going on. All they see is food, not bait
 - c. This proverb teases the imagination and evokes critical thinking
3. If this proverb is directed at the wicked, then the point is this - A bird will fall into a trap if they are unaware of it. They lack the wisdom and understanding to discern the trap. They simply go after what they want, and the trap springs on them.
4. If this proverb is directed toward the learner, then the point is this - A bird can become wise and discerning, it will avoid the trap. The bird, though it desires the bait, will see it as bait and avoid it. In this way it is useless for one to set a trap for a smart bird.

C. Application to the sinners

1. The proverb is framed by blood (v. 16, 18)
2. Sinners set a trap, unaware that they are trapping themselves

D. Most readers' first reaction would be that this does not apply to them

1. As a general rule, most do not believe that they are attracted to join a gang of outlaws.
2. The trap is set, then sprung in the last verse of the section
3. (v.19) So are the ways² of all the greedy for gain³ the life/soul/self of its masters/owners it will take away.
 - a. Greed is not beyond any person!
 - b. The end of those greedy for gain is loss of their life/soul/self.
 - c. This proverb is designed to make us aware of the trap of greed.
4. We need to be careful not to brush this proverb aside. Like the bird that is easily deceived into falling into a trap, it is easy for us to fall into the trap of greed.
5. Don't be a typical stupid bird, but a smart, wise and discerning bird.

VI. Practical Applications

- A. Consider not only the outcome, but the character of your friends
- B. Be aware of the subtlety of greed

² Some translations render this "end." The Hebrew text uses ways/paths אֶרְחֹת 'arhot, as does the Septuagint, the Greek translation ὁδοί *hodoi*. The word, "end" is אֶחָרִית 'aharīt which could have come about as a result of accidentally reversing the resh and the het and mistaking the waw for a yod.

³ Greedy for Gain is בָּצֵעַ בָּצֵעַ - *boṣēa' bāṣa'*. The same phrase is used in Jer 6:13; 8:10 where it is usually rendered, "greedy for gain." In Hab 2:9 the phrase appears as בָּצֵעַ בָּצֵעַ - *boṣēa' beṣa'* the second word is the noun בָּצֵעַ *beṣa'* meaning "unjust gain" rather than the verb, בָּצַע *bāṣa'* meaning "to make unjust gain, to be greedy, or to cut off."

Discussion Questions, Prov. 1:8-19

1. What relationship does this section have to verse seven?
2. As a parent, how would you communicate the message of this passage to your kids?
3. As a son or daughter, what is typically your attitude toward parental guidance?
4. How would you describe the message or point of verse 17?
5. What are some of the hidden, subtle forms that greed and self-centeredness takes in today's day-to-day living? What are the sources of this enticement?
6. What are some of the things you should consider in friendship choices? Do you need to have conscious and definite criteria? Why?
7. How can you avoid falling prey to friends that are on the wrong path?

Proverbs 1:20-33 - Don't Resist Woman Wisdom

I. Wisdom is personified

A. Feminine. This is very unusual

1. Nowhere else is Wisdom personified in this way except for the apocryphal book of Sirach 24:1-22.
2. Several features of this literary device are shocking because women were typically not authoritative figures in Ancient Near Eastern culture.
 - a. She calls out in the public square - Not a usual practice for women. The square was a place for men.
 - b. She speaks with authority, in much the same way Yahweh does
 - 1) An appeal
 - a) Jer 7:13; Isa 65:2 - Yahweh is making the appeal
 - b) Prov 1:24 - Wisdom makes the appeal to come to her
 - 2) Laughing at the calamity of the wicked
 - a) Ps. 2:5; 37:13 - Yahweh laughs at the calamity of the wicked
 - b) Prov. 1:26 - Wisdom laughs at the calamity of the wicked
 - 3) Rejecting hiding from the wicked when they call
 - a) Isa 1:15; Mic 3:4; Hos. 5:6 - God
 - b) Prov. 1:28 - Wisdom
 - 4) Pouring out the רוּחַ *rûah* spirit/breath/wind
 - a) Neh. 9:20; Isa 11:2; 59:21 - The *rûah* of God
 - b) Prov 1:23 - The *rûah* of wisdom
 - 5) So Wisdom is closely identified with Yahweh, but not completely (v.29)
 - c. She speaks like a sage (v.25)
 - 1) She offers counsel
 - 2) She offers reproof
 - d. She speaks like a prophet
 - 1) She calls the people to שׁוּב *šûb* a typical prophetic word meaning to turn, repent, change one's mind. The word is used in both v.23 and 32.
 - 2) She warns them of disaster if they do not heed v.26ff.
 - 3) The words, "how long" are similar to other prophetic sayings.

B. Plural

1. The word for wisdom, חֲכָמָה *hokmôt* in v.23 is plural
2. Possible explanation - Plurality of majesty
 - a. In Ancient Near Eastern culture, a plural nouns and pronouns would at times be used for a great king or deity.
 - b. This may be an explanation for the typical plural form of the

common word for God - אֱלֹהִים *ʿēlōhîm*

c. A plural is also used in Job 40:15ff בְּהֵמוֹת *bēhēmōt*

d. Plural used in Song of Songs 1:4; 2:15⁴

3. Another possible explanation is simply from Hebrew Syntax.

Abstract nouns are at times expressed by a plural, "*which may have originally signified the diverse concrete manifestations of a quality or state.*"⁵

4. Which ever explanation, the point is that wisdom is a multi-faceted, or larger than life figure

a. Wisdom is majestic

b. Wisdom is infinite

c. Wisdom is closely associated with Yahweh

II. Similarities to the previous section show that this section is an extension of the parent's speech and of the introduction.

A. v.8, 33 - The admonition to listen

B. v.9, 13-14, 33 - The theme of rewards

C. v.19, 32 - The end result of the path chosen

D. v.17, 31 - An illustrative proverb

III. Her call

A. Structure

1. Chiastic⁶

A Introduction: an appeal for listeners (vv.20-21)

B Address to the untutored, scoffers, and fools (v.22)

C Declaration of disclosure (v.23)

D Reason for the announcement (vv.24-25)

E Announcement of derisive judgment (vv. 26-27)

D' Result of the Announcement, with interruption (vv.28-30)

C' Declaration of Retribution (v.31)

B' Address about the untutored and fools (v.32)

A' Conclusion: an appeal for a hearer (v.33)

⁴ Shalom M. Paul, "The Plural of Ecstasy" in Mesopotamian and Biblical Love Poetry," In *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots*, ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 585-597. This is more properly called the "Plurality of Ecstasy" which was common in Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry to communicate a heightened sense.

⁵ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 120.

⁶ Phyllis Tribble, "Wisdom Builds a Poem: The Architecture of Proverbs 1:20-33," In *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 181.

2. There is a switch from speaking in the 2nd person to the 3rd person.
This forms basically two speeches.
 - a. Speech to the naïve (v.22-27)
 - 1) A - E (see above) are all in the 2nd person, "you"
 - 2) They are direct appeals to the naïve
 - b. Speech to those who are listening (v.28-33)
 - 1) D' to A' are in the 3rd person, "they"
 - 2) No longer are they direct appeals to the naïve, they have not listened or heeded woman wisdom
 - 3) They are directed to a larger audience, using those that refused wisdom as an object lesson
3. Jesus does a similar thing in which he speaks directly to Pharisees or his disciples, then addresses a larger crowd, using what happened as a lesson. Example: Mark 8:32-33, 34-37.

B. Content of her call

1. Wisdom Calls (v.22-23)
 - a. Wisdom is available
 - She stands at a prominent place
 - b. (v.23) The call to "turn" to wisdom's reproof
 - 1) Suggests a change of mind
 - 2) Suggests a change of lifestyle
 - c. Turning to her results in gaining knowledge
 - 1) She will pour out her spirit/breath
 - a) Probably breath
 - b) Breath carries the idea of words
 - c) 1 Cor 2:10-12 - The Spirit revealed things of God
 - d) 2 Tim 3:16 - Scripture is θεόπνευστος
theopneustos "God breathed"
 - 2) Parallel statement - She will make known her words
2. Fools reject wisdom's call (v.24-25)
 - a. They neglected her counsel (v.25, 30)
 - b. They did not want her reproof (v.25, 30)
 - c. They hated knowledge (v.29)
 - d. They did not choose the fear of Yahweh (v.29)
3. Wisdom rejects the fool's call (v.26-28)
 - a. She will reject the fool when they call
 - 1) When fools call, wisdom will mock them (v.26)
 - 2) When fools call, wisdom will not answer (v.28)
 - 3) When fools seek her, she will not be found (v.28)
 - b. The result of not heeding wisdom (v.27)
 - 1) Calamity like a whirlwind

- 2). Dread like a storm
 - 3) Distress and anguish
- c. Rom 1:18-32 - Has the same idea
 - 1) The ungodly refused to honor God (v. 21)
 - 2) Their "foolish" heart was darkened (v.21)
 - 3) Rejected God's wisdom (which could be seen from creation) and turned to their own, becoming fools (v.22)
 - 4) Gave "gave them over" (v.24, 26, 28)
- 3. A proverb v.31 - "So they shall eat from the fruit of their way, and from their counsels/plans/devices they shall be satisfied/satiated."
 - a. Image of sowing and reaping fruit
 - b. The time will come when the fruit is ripe, and they will eat
 - 1) They will eat of the fruit of their own "way"
 - 2) Whether it is the "way" of the wicked (v.15)
 - 3) Whether it is the "way" of wisdom
 - c. Other passages with this same idea
 - 1) Hosea 8:7; 10:12-14
 - 2) Gal 6:7-9
- 4. Warnings in this sections
 - a. Heed wisdom's instructions (v.23)
 - b. Choose knowledge and the fear of Yahweh (v.29)
 - c. Avoid waywardness or turning away from wisdom (v.32)
 - d. Avoid complacency or careless ease (v.32)
- 5. Results of heeding wisdom
 - a. Dwell securely
 - b. At ease from the dread of evil

IV. Observations

- A. Time is running out
 - 1. Wisdom calls, "how long?"
 - 2. Calamity will come, and it will be too late
- B. Yahweh, the Parents, and Woman Wisdom are allies
 - 1. In chapter one, they all have the same sort of message
 - a. The parents exhort the son to heed wisdom
 - b. Knowledge comes from the fear of Yahweh (v.7, 29)
 - 2. Wisdom comes not only from God, but from parents as well
 - 3. "Turning" to wisdom (v.23) means heeding parents and other wisdom figures in your life
- C. How we react to the sources of wisdom in our lives are like "seeds" that will bear some sort of fruit in our lives

Discussion Questions:

1. Why personify wisdom as a woman, given the prevailing attitude toward women in the Ancient Near East? Can we learn anything from this?
2. The word for wisdom in verse 20 is plural. What thing(s) do you think this is meant to communicate?
3. Can wisdom be utilized in panic mode (when a problem arises)? Why or why not? What does it take for wisdom to be beneficial to a naïve person?
4. What are the sources of "woman wisdom" in your life?
5. How can you ensure that your attitude toward the sources of wisdom in your life will produce desirable "fruit" for you