

Proverbs 2:1-22 - The Benefits of Wisdom

I. Introduction - בְּנִי *bēnî* "My son..." - A continuation of the father-son motif.

II. Translation

A. א Aleph section - Conditional sentences

1. אם *ʾim* "If..." - The Condition

- a. (v.1-2) "If" you take up/carry my words
and my commandments you treasure up with you,
to incline your ear to wisdom,
turn your heart to understanding
- b. (v.3) Indeed, "if" you cry/call out for understanding,
(and) for understanding you raise your voice
- c. (v.4) "If" you seek her like silver
and like hidden treasure you will search for her

2. אז *ʾāz* "Then..." - The result

- a. (v.5-8) "Then" you will discern the fear of Yahweh
and the knowledge of God you will find.
For Yahweh gives wisdom,
From his mouth are knowledge and understanding.
He treasures up for the upright sound judgment,
a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Watching over/guarding the paths of justice,
and the way of the pious he guards/preserves.
- b. (v. 9-11) "Then" you will discern righteousness and justice and
equities, the whole course¹ of good.
For wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge to your soul will be delightful².
Resourcefulness³ will guard you,
and understanding will watch over you.

¹ מַעְגָּל *maʿgāl* is usually rendered, "track, course, entrenchment, course, or path," emphasizing the well-worn path that comes as a result of the impression or "ruts" left behind by the wheels of a cart. Used figuratively, it emphasizes a certain pattern of life. A few other passages using this word are Isa 59:8; Psalm 17:5; 23:3; 65:11;

² נָעִם *nāʿem* Also used in Song of Songs 7:6, and the noun form in Song of Songs 1:16 to describe beauty, and is also the root for the name "Naomi" in the book of Ruth.

³ John Hartley, "זִמְמָה" In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, 1:1112-1113 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997). מְזִמְמָה *mʿzimmāh* is usually rendered, "plan, device, scheme, or discretion." The idea behind this word is the ability to put together a plan, or "resourcefulness." The verb form is used in Prov. 31:16 where the excellent wife "considers" a field and buys it.

B. ל Lamed section "to"

1. (v. 12-15) לְהַצִּילָךְ *l'haṣṣîlka* "To" deliver/snatch you from the way of the wicked,
from the man who speaks perversities,
those who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
Ones glad/joyful to do evil, (ie: celebrators of evil),
they rejoice in perversities of evil,
They whose paths are twisted,
turners aside (ie: devious) in their tracks.⁴
2. (v.16-19) לְהַצִּילָךְ *l'haṣṣîlka* "To" deliver/snatch you from the strange⁵ woman,
from the alien woman, her words she makes smooth,
The one who leaves the companion of her youth,
and the covenant of her God she forgets.
For bowed down/reduced to death is her house,
and to the departed spirits⁶ are her tracks.⁷
All who go in to her do not return
and they do not reach the paths of life.
3. (v.20-22) - לְמַעַן *l'ma'an* - So that you may walk in the way of good ones
and the paths of the righteous you may keep.
For the upright will dwell in the land
and men of integrity will remain in it
But the wicked from the land will be cut off
and the treacherous will be torn away from it.

III. Connections with Chapter 1

A. Gaining wisdom

1. (1:1-2) - Purpose of Proverbs to gain wisdom
2. (2:1-8) - Cry out for wisdom

B. Doing what is right

⁴ See footnote from v.9-11 on מַעַל *ma'gāl*

⁵ זָר *zār* Same word is used in Leviticus 10:1 - "strange" fire, ie: prohibited.

⁶ רְפָאִים *r'pā'im* could be rendered, "Shades, ghosts, name of the dead in Sheol, departed spirits."

Identifying the semantic field for this word is difficult, Possibilities - רָפָא *heal*, רָפָה *sink, relax, weak*, רְפָאִים *old race of giants* eg. Gen 15:20; Dt 3:10, or רְפָאִים *shades, ghosts*. Various Septuagint translations: Job 26:5; Prov. 21:16; Isa 14:9: γίγαντες *giants*; Ps 88:10; Isa 26:14: ἰατροὶ *healers*; Prov. 2:18; 9:18: ᾗδης *Hades*.

⁷ See footnote from v.9-11 on מַעַל *ma'gāl*

1. (1:3) - To gain righteousness, justice, and equity
 2. (2:9) - Pursuing wisdom results in righteousness, justice, and equity
- C. The lure of sinners and wicked people
1. (1:10-19) - Staying away from the path of the inviting wicked
 2. (2:12-15) - Protection from the paths of the wicked
- D. Wisdom's involvement
1. (1:20-31) - Wisdom ignores the call of the fool
 2. (2:16-20) - Wisdom rescues from the strange woman
- E. Matter of life and death
1. (1:32-33) - Death of the naïve, life for those who listen to wisdom
 2. (2:21-22) - Upright will remain in the land, the wicked will be cut off.
- F. What the two chapters have in common
1. Promise of protection for those who heed wisdom's call
 2. Threat of trouble for those who ignore wisdom's call
 3. Why the repetition in themes? Is it superfluous?

IV. Themes and Observations

- A. Moral order - "if then"
1. God has created an orderly universe with both a natural and moral order
 2. This is an exposition on some of the moral order. "If" you do this, "then" you can expect that result.
- B. God Centered
1. v.5 - Discerning the fear of Yahweh
 2. v.6 - Yahweh gives wisdom
 3. There can be no true wisdom without God
- C. Passionate Desire
1. Desire was a theme in 1:8-19, desire for wealth, belonging
 2. Out overwhelming desire should be for wisdom (v.1-4)
 - a. Treasure
 - 1) Treasure wisdom
 - 2) Seek her as gold or silver - implies security, and a deeper wealth that only wisdom can offer
 - b. Call/cry out for wisdom
 - c. Search for wisdom as hidden treasure
 - d. "Take up", or "Carry" words of wisdom
 3. Unless you have the desire for wisdom, you will not attain it

D. Personal protection and security that comes from wisdom

1. (v.7) - God grants a "shield" for the upright
2. (v.11) - The resourcefulness of God's wisdom will "guard" you
3. (v.12, 16) - God's wisdom will "deliver/save" you from the wicked and the "strange" woman. She will appear again and again in Proverbs.
4. (v.20-21) - Security for those who live according to God's instruction
5. Jesus also used an image of security for heeding his instruction
- (Matt 7:24-27)

E. Path - There are many various words for "path"

1. אֶרֶץ ^{ʾorah} - Path, hiway (v.8, 13, 15, 19, 20)
 - a. v.8 - Paths of justice
 - b. v. 13 - Paths of uprightness, straightness, equity
 - c. v. 15 - Whose paths are crooked
 - d. v. 20 - The paths of righteousness
2. דֶּרֶךְ ^{derek} - Path, way (v.8, 12, 13, 20)
 - a. v. 8 - The way of his godly ones
 - b. v. 12 - The way of evil
 - c. v. 13 - The ways of darkness
 - d. v. 20 - The way of good men
3. מַעְגָּל ^{ma^cgal} - Track, course, entrenchment, well worn path (v.9,15,18)
 - a. v.9 Calls it the "good" well worn path. This suggests what is tested, true, and dependable, where others have walked.
 - b. v.15 The crooked, devious well worn path. This suggests what is tested and predictable. It is in the very nature of the wicked.
 - c. v.18 The well worn path of the "strange woman." Suggests that it is a regular practice of hers to lead men to "death."
4. There are two types of paths
 - a. The crooked, evil, dark, path that leads to death
 - b. The just, upright, straight, good way that good men travel that leads to security and life.
5. Jesus used a similar image in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:13-14)

F. Strong warnings

1. (v.19) - Going to the "strange" woman
 - a. None ever return⁸
 - b. There is a point of no return
2. (v.22) - Imagery of the end of the wicked
 - a. They will be cut off from the land
 - b. They will be torn away or uprooted
3. Similar warnings in the New Testament
 - a. Rom 1:24-28 - God "gave them over"
 - b. 1 Tim 4:2 - Seared conscience
 - c. James 1:13-15 - "Carried" away to death

⁸ From שׁוּב ^{šûb}, a very common word used figuratively for repentance. Jer 3:22; Isa 44:22; Hos 14:1.

Discussion Questions

1. The game show, "Who wants to be a millionaire?" draws a large audience. Would a show called, "Who wants to be wise?" or "Who wants to be godly?" be as popular? Why or why not?
2. Is it enough to listen to and heed wise instruction? Why or why not? If there is more, what more is there?
3. How does this passage attempt to instill a desire to learn wisdom? In what way can you try to instill desire in yourself? In someone else?
4. How does the "fear of Yahweh" affect how you pursue wisdom?
5. What does the image of the "path" communicate to you? Do you usually think of your decisions in terms of choosing a path? Why? or why not?
6. What is the advantage of thinking of your decisions as choosing a "path?"
7. What does the pursuit of godly wisdom save you from (v.12, 16)? How do these show up in your own life and challenge you?
8. What kind of paths does verse 20 tell you to walk in? Where and how do you find these paths?
9. In verse 9, the word "discretion" can also mean, "plan" or "resourcefulness." How does resourcefulness or a "plan" keep you away from the wrong path?
10. What "plan" can you make today to help you stay on the right path?