

Chapter 5 - Avoid promiscuous women, love your wife

I. Chapter Overview

- A. This is not really a new section, but an expansion of what has come before
 - 1. Remaining faithful to your wife is wisdom
 - 2. Avoiding the promiscuous woman is wisdom
- B. There is no mention of Yahweh until the end of the chapter
 - 1. The Chapter begins by dwelling on the contrast between the strange woman and the wife of one's youth
 - 2. It is easy to forget that God's eyes are everywhere
- C. There are several major sections
 - 1. v.1-6 - Discernment concerning the strange woman
 - 2. v.7-14 - Taking what is not yours will cause you to lose what is yours
 - 3. v.15-19 - Rejoice in the wife of your youth
 - 4. v.20-23 - Captivated, or "captive" of the strange woman

II. v.1-6 - Discernment concerning the strange woman

A. Translation:

- 1. My son, to my wisdom give attention
To my understanding incline your ear
- 2. To preserve¹ discretion²
And knowledge your lips will guard³
- 3. For flowing honey drips (from) the lips of the strange woman⁴
And smoother than oil⁵ is her mouth⁶
- 4. After her is bitter like the wormwood⁷
Sharp like the two-edged sword is her mouths⁸

¹ שָׁמַר *šamar* - To keep, preserve, watch over, guard.

² John Hartley, "זָמָה" In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, 1:1112-1113 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997). מְזֻמָּה *m'zummāh* 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.

³ נָצַר *nāṣar* - To watch or guard from dangers.

⁴ זָרָה *zārāh* - Feminine adjective meaning, "Strange woman," or possibly, "foreign woman."

⁵ שֶׁמֶן *šemen* - Fat, or oil. This word is used of: 1) Common olive oil, 2) a condiment oil 3) scented oil 4) of medication, 5) and anointing oil. Certain oils were seen as a sign of luxury.

⁶ חֵךְ *hēk* - Palate, the roof of the mouth

⁷ לְעֵנָה *la'ēnāh* - Wormwood, sometimes called gall, the bitter juice from a plant sometimes used in the treatment of worms.

⁸ פֶּה *peh* - Mouth

5. Her feet go down to death
Sheol Her steps take hold of⁹
6. The path of life lest she weighs¹⁰
Her entrenchments¹¹ stagger,¹² she does not know

B. The strange woman

1. Many Bible's translate "adulteress," which is not very precise
 - a. The same word is used for foreigners, and is usually translated sojourner, foreigner, or alien
 - b. Some examples of this use
 - 1) 2 Sam 1:13 - A "foreigner" and Amelekite
 - 2) Exo 18:3 - A "stranger" in a foreign land
2. "Alien" woman conveys several characteristics about her
 - a. The discription conjures images of the "stranger" or "alien"
 - 1) Exo 23:30-33
 - 2) Num 33:55
 - 3) Israel was to drive out the Cannanite "stranger" or they would become a snare and entice the hearts of the people away from God
 - b. Like the "alien" Cannanites in the land, the strange woman does not walk with God
 - c. Like the alien Cannanites in the land, she seduces unsuspecting people away from God
 - d. Like the alien Cannanites, she contributes to the ruin of unsuspecting victims
3. It is not implied at the first part of the chapter whether this is directed to married men or single men
 - a. If married men, then the "alien" woman imagery is clear
 - The woman is "alien" in that she is not the man's wife
 - b. If single, then the "alien" woman imagery needs a little more elaboration
 - 1) A man's lips are to preserve knowledge
 - 2) Any woman who entices with lips devoid of godly wisdom, but only drip with honey and fine oil should send off red flags

B. Contrast in mouths and lips

1. At issue is the nature of the young person's lips. Two choices
 - a. Receive the knowledge from the father's mouth (v.7)
 - b. Receive what comes from the lips of the strange woman
2. The nature of the mouth of the strange woman
 - a. Like dripping honey and smoother than oil

⁹ תָּמַךְ *tāmak* - To grasp, lay hold of, support, attain

¹⁰ פָּלַס *pālas* - To make level, to prepare (a path), to weigh or balance.

¹¹ מַעְגָּל *ma^cgāl* - "track, course, entrenchment, course, or path," emphasizing the ruts of the path

¹² נָרַע *nūa^c* - to quiver, tremble, wave, waver, totter, stagger

- b. This is an image of eating and drinking
 - 1) It is sweet and pleasing
- c. There is the connotation of kissing
 - 1) The adulteress lures with more than words, but with kissing
 - 2) This paragraph says nothing of her speaking
 - a) Unlike wisdom, she does not lure with words
 - b) She lures with empty sensuality
 - 3) Other passages using same imagery
 - a) Songs 4:11
 - b) Songs 7:9

C. The Aftermath

- 1. The sweetness turns to vile bitterness
 - a. The passion of the moment is the only sweetness
 - b. Afterward comes the bitterness
 - 1) The possibilities for the source of the bitterness is endless
 - 2) Lying, dishonor, broken family, stuck with family responsibility before your time, blackmail, etc.
- 2. Her smooth mouth cuts like the two edged sword
 - a. Two edged sword - twice as dangerous, cuts both ways
 - b. After the sweet luxuriousness comes the unsuspecting attack
- 3. Her feet goes down to death
 - a. This fits both figuratively and literally
 - b. She will kill life as you know it
- 4. She doesn't know her path
 - a. Godly wisdom is foreign to her
 - b. She doesn't weigh or ponder where she is headed
 - c. Don't assume others know where they are going
- 5. Instability
 - a. Her paths are unstable
 - b. Unstability can be disguised as something refreshing
 - 1) Naïve interpretations of instability include things such as "spontaneous, free spirit, expressive, lively, etc."
 - 2) It can seem freeing and exciting at the first

D. Lessons

- 1. Reflect on the vivid description of the "alien" for the strange woman
 - a. She doesn't belong, she is "alien"
 - b. As a Christian, we should consider what an "alien" would be
 - 1) Jud 14, 16 - Example of one who loved Alien women
 - 2) 1 Cor 7:39 - Marrying in the Lord
- 2. Reflect on the contrast between honey/oil and discretion/ knowledge
 - a. Honey and oil appeals to the senses
 - b. Discretion and knowledge appeals to the heart and mind
 - c. There is a need for discipline and self control

- d. We do not want to be controlled by our fleshly desire
- e. Gal 5:16-25 - Battle between Flesh and Spirit
 - 1) We need to be aware of who is leading us
 - 2) We are to be led by the Spirit, and not the flesh
- 3. V.2 - We are to preserve discretion
 - a. The word "discretion" can also mean plan
 - b. Having a "plan" for how to death with the temptation of the "alien" or any other temptation is desirable
 - Don't want to wait till temptation then try to decide what to do
- 4. Consider the outcome
 - a. The alien woman does not consider her path. She doesn't think about the results, and she may not even care.
 - b. In contrast, the young wise person should consider what direction their path is leading at all times.
 - c. A path only goes two directions
 - 1) Towards God
 - 2) Away from God

III. v.7-14 - Taking what is *not* yours will cause you to lose what *is* yours

A. Translation:

- 7. And now my sons, listen to me
And do not depart from the words of my mouth
- 8. Far away from her put your way
And do not approach the opening of her house
- 9. Or you will give to others your dignity¹³
And your years to a cruel one
- 10. Or aliens¹⁴ will be satisfied with your strength¹⁵
And your toil¹⁶ in the house of a foreigner¹⁷
- 11. And you growl in the latter end
of your flesh¹⁸ and your strength¹⁹
- 12. And you say, How I hated discipline
And reproof my heart spurned²⁰
- 13. And I did not listen to the sound of my teacher
And to my instructor I did not incline my ear

¹³ הֹדָּה *hōd* - splendour, majesty, vigour, dignity

¹⁴ זָרָה *zār* - strange, different, prohibited, alien. Same word used for the "alien" or "strange" woman

¹⁵ כֹּחַ *koah* - strength, power, sometimes wealth

¹⁶ עֵצֶב *ēṣēb* - pain, hurt, toil

¹⁷ נָכְרִי *nākri* - foreigner, alien, stranger

¹⁸ בָּשָׂר *bāsār* - flesh, used of the body, of blood relatives, and sometimes as a euphemism for the male organ of generation

¹⁹ שָׁרֵץ *š'ēr* - flesh, sometimes a reference to self, or figurative of power

²⁰ נָאָץ *nā'as* - contempt, spurn

14. Almost²¹ I was²² in the whole of evil²³
in the midst of the assembly and congregation²⁴

B. Stay away

1. The teacher exhorts to keep your path from her
2. Don't even go near her door

C. An expansion of the misery of death

1. In the previous section, the teacher says poetically that her feet go down to "death,"
2. Death involves "losing"
 - a. Dignity
 - b. Strength
 - c. Years
 - d. Prosperity

3. Sirach 23:17-27 - Gives a picture of how this might have played out
17 To a fornicator all bread is sweet; he will never weary until he dies. 18 The one who sins against his marriage bed says to himself, "Who can see me? Darkness surrounds me, the walls hide me, and no one sees me. Why should I worry? The Most High will not remember sins." 19 His fear is confined to human eyes and he does not realize that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun; they look upon every aspect of human behavior and see into hidden corners. 20 Before the universe was created, it was known to him, and so it is since its completion. 21 This man will be punished in the streets of the city, and where he least suspects it, he will be seized. 22 So it is with a woman who leaves her husband and presents him with an heir by another man. 23 For first of all, she has disobeyed the law of the Most High; second, she has committed an offense against her husband; and third, through her fornication she has committed adultery and brought forth children by another man. 24 She herself will be brought before the assembly, and her punishment will extend to her children. 25 Her children will not take root, and her branches will not bear fruit. 26 She will leave behind an accursed memory and her disgrace will never be blotted out. 27 Those who survive her will recognize that nothing is better than the fear of the Lord, and nothing sweeter than to heed the commandments of the Lord. {Other ancient authorities add as verse 28, [It is a great honor to follow God, and to be received by him is long life.] }

²¹ כְּמֵעַט *kum^eat* - literally – “like/as a small thing,” sometime a way of expressing, “almost”

²² הָיָה *hāyāh* - "to be" - translated as "I am" or "I was"

²³ רָע *ra^c* - "bad, evil, disagreeable, malignant, harmful, misery." Doesn't always refer to moral evil, but can also refer to calamity, or something harmful, such as a poisonous plant.

²⁴ An alternate translations for this verse: "Like a little/diminished thing I am in all misery in the midst of the assembly and the congregation." or "Almost I am in total misery in the midst of the assembly and the congregation."

3. A skeptic would ask, "That was then, this is now. How could you lose all these things today?"
 - a. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it is not true
 - b. Modern Examples:
 - 1) Getting blackmailed
 - 2) Losing your job due to indiscretion
 - 3) Alimony, Child Support
 - 4) Loss of respect of your children, family and friends
 - 5) Shall I go on?
 - c. Above all, it is sin against God

D. Fast forward to the sounds of regret

1. "Growl"
 - a. Psa 38:3-9 - Like the growl of the one in anguish
 - b. Matt 24:51 - Jesus speaks of Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth
 - c. These are emotional, gut wrenching sounds of regret
2. I am nearly in complete misery
3. In your regret you will wish you had listened to instruction
4. Example: David
 - a. Committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11)
 - b. Nathan rebuked him (2 Sam 12:1-9)
 - c. 2 Sam 12:10-14 - The natural consequence
 - 1) 2 Sam 12:18 - The child dies
 - 2) 2 Sam 13:14 - Amnon rapes his sister Tamar
 - 3) 2 Sam 13:28-29 - Absalom kills Amnon
 - 4) 2 Sam 15-17 - Absalom revolts and tries to kill David
 - 5) 2 Sam 16:20-23 - Absalom publicly takes David's concubines
 - 6) 2 Sam 18:14 - Joab kills Absalom
 - 7) 2 Sam 18:33 - David weeps
5. After his adultery, David's life changed. His later years were full of war, bloodshed, and heartache. Why did David's son rebel? Did he lose his son's respect? We can only guess, but here we have a good example of what adultery can do.

E. If you take what is not yours, you will lost what is yours

IV. v. 15-19 - Rejoice in the wife of your youth

A. Translation:

15. Drink waters from your cistern²⁵
and that which flows²⁶ in the midst of your well²⁷

²⁵ בֹּרַח *bôr* - cistern, well, pit (made by digging)

16. Should your springs²⁸ be scattered outside²⁹
in the open places³⁰ channels of waters?
17. Let them be for you, for you alone
and not for strangers³¹ with you
18. Let your fountain³² be blessed
and take pleasure in³³ the wife of your youth
19. A doe of loves, a female mountain goat/chamois of grace
let her breasts intoxicate³⁴ you in all time
In her love go astray³⁵ continually.

B. Image of waters are used repeatedly

1. Cistern, well, springs, channels, and fountains are all talking about the same thing
2. They are to be for you and you only
 - a. There needs to be bounds set for your waters
 - b. Do not let them flow into the streets
 - 1) Water in a well is pure, delightful and refreshing
 - 2) Water thrown in the streets is filthy
3. 5:18 - Fountain and wife are in parallel lines
 - a. How is the wife of your youth a fountain
 - b. The idea is that faithful marriage is to be delightful
4. Songs 4:12-15 - Expresses similar ideas
 - a. The bride is "locked" and "sealed" up
 - b. She is a garden and spring for her husband only

C. Description of the wife

1. Images of loveliness:
 - a. A doe of loves, or lovely doe
 - b. A female mountain goat of grace, or graceful chamois
2. Songs 2:7 and 3:5 use similar imagery in association with love

D. The good type of intoxication

1. "Intoxicated" or "drunk" with her breasts
2. Go astray, or stagger in a good drunkenness, a drunkenness of love
The idea is being lost in her love

²⁶ נָזַל *nāzāl* - To flow, drip, trickle,

²⁷ בְּאֵר *b'ēr* - Well, pit (made by digging)

²⁸ מַעְיָן *ma'yān* - spring; used figuratively of a source of happiness, enjoyment.

²⁹ חוּץ *hūṣ* - outside of the city or camp, sometimes to express "abroad" away in another place

³⁰ רְחֹב *r'hôḇ* - Broad open place, plaza, public place, usually near the gate

³¹ זָר *zār* - stranger, alien. Same word used for the "strange" woman of verse 3 and alien of verse 10

³² מְקוֹר *māqôr* - spring, fountain, used figuratively for life, vigor, or source of joy

³³ שָׂמַח *śamah* - rejoice, be glad, take pleasure in. This is saying be happy with your wife

³⁴ רָוַח *rāwāh* - To be saturated, drink ones fill. In this verse it is in the piel form making it intensive, hence: to be drunk, intoxicated, saturated

³⁵ שָׁגָה *šāgāh* - To wander, go astray, or swerve, or meander in drunkenness

- E. These images are meant to be erotic
 - 1. In the right bounds, or "cistern" eros is wholesome and good
 - 2. Examples from Biblical love poetry
 - a. Songs 2:1-6
 - b. Songs 4:1-6
- F. Take pleasure in the wife of your youth
 - 1. Some translations say to "rejoice" in the wife of your youth
 - 2. This involves appreciation, value, honor
 - 3. Eph 5:25-29 - Love, nourish, and cherish
 - 4. 1 Cor 7:4 - Spouses bodies belong to each other
 - 5. Matt 5:27-30 - Spouses hearts belong to each other
- G. A good reflection would be to contrast the worldly images and messages concerning marriage and the biblical one.

V. v. 20-23 - Choose your captor

- A. Translation:
 - 20. And why should you go astray³⁶ my son, in a strange woman³⁷, and embrace the bosom of an alien³⁸?
 - 21. For before the eyes of Yahweh are the ways³⁹ of man and all his tracks⁴⁰ he weighs⁴¹
 - 22. His own iniquity will seize the wicked
And with the cords of sin he will be grasped
 - 23. He will die in no discipline⁴²
And in the abundance of folly he will go astray⁴³
- B. Image of drunkenness frames this section
 - 1. Verse 20 & 23 - Going astray is often used of going astray in a drunken stupor
 - 2. The previous section exhorted to be intoxicated by the wife and no other
- C. Image of captivity in verse 22
 - 1. To be captivate by a strange woman is to be captive to sin
 - a. To be captive to sin is to die without discipline

³⁶ שָׁגָה *šāgāh* - To wander, go astray, or swerve, or meander in drunkenness

³⁷ זָרָה *zārāh* - Feminine adjective meaning, "Strange woman," or possibly, "foreign woman."

³⁸ נֹכְרִי *nōkrî* - alien, foreigner

³⁹ דֶּרֶךְ *derek* - way, road, distance, journey, manner

⁴⁰ מַעַגָּל *ma'gāl* - "track, course, entrenchment, course, or path," emphasizing the well-worn path, ruts

⁴¹ פָּלַס *pālas* - To make level, to prepare (a path), to weigh or balance.

⁴² מוֹסָר *mūsār* - Discipline, instruction, correction, chastening. In context, it is probably instruction

⁴³ שָׁגָה *šāgāh* - To wander, go astray, or swerve, or meander in drunkenness

- b. James 1:14-16 - Continuing in sin will bring death
 - c. 2 Cor 10:5 - Every thought should be captive to Christ
 - 2. We should only be captivated by our spouse
- D. Yahweh sees our every move
 - 1. He "weighs" or judges our path
 - 2. It appears that God is passive here, but his passivity is sometimes a demonstration of his wrath
 - a. Rom 1:18, 24, 26, 28 - God's wrath demonstrated in that he "gave them over..."
 - b. It is sheer foolishness to think that just because God doesn't strike you down with lightning that you will not experience his wrath as a result of your sin.

VI. Some Overarching lessons from this chapter

- A. Do not be deceived by sweet talk, fluttering eyes, etc.
- B. Be satisfied with the love of your spouse
- C. Keep your body, heart and mind exclusively for your spouse
- D. To not be captivated by other women, only by your wife
- F. Faithful love of a wife is life and delightful, the love of a strange woman is bitterness and death

Discussion Questions for Proverbs 5

1. What are some of the lies concerning marriage and male/female relationships we see in the world today? How does this contrast to the Biblical portrayal of marriage?
2. Why does the image of waters, springs, wells, and such communicate to you about marriage? How does this compare to the image of the strange woman's mouth that drips with honey?
3. What are some possible consequences of an adulterous relationship in today's times?
4. What does the image of being intoxicated, or "drunk" on your wife communicate to you about marriage?
5. Several of these images are intended to be erotic. Does that surprise you? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Why?