



READING RESPONSIBLY

Correctly Handling the Word of Truth

LESSON 02: WISDOM LITERATURE

How Predictable is the World?

I. Introduction

Is Proverbs 26:4-5 true?

→ Read Prov 26:4-5

*⁴ Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.*

*⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.*

→ Similar to modern sayings

*Too many cooks in the kitchen spoil the broth.
Many hands make light work.*

II. Overview of Genre and Context: Wisdom Literature

- Not unique to the Bible
- Commonsense advice for moving ahead
- Mainly taught to boys to prepare them for royal service and administration (see Prov 1-9 for father to son instructions).
- Goal: "the formation of character and to make sense of life's anomalies" (James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 4).
- Biblical books:
 - Proverbs: collections of short sayings that encompass life's truths
 - Ecclesiastes: a sort of autobiography reflecting on the meaning (or lack thereof) of everything that happens
 - Job: an epic story of a faithful man who loses everything and must make sense of it

III. Big Issues

A. Retribution Theology (You Reap What You Sow)

→ Read Deuteronomy 28:1-2

¹ If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.

→ [Read Ecclesiastes 8:12-13](#)

¹² Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. ¹³ Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

B. The Real World (Stuff Happens)

→ [Read Ecclesiastes 8:14](#)

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

C. Job: Caught in the Middle

→ [Read Job 1:1](#)

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

→ [Read Proverbs 13:21](#)

Trouble pursues the sinner, but the righteous are rewarded with good things.

→ [Read Ecclesiastes 9:11](#)

The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

IV. Specific Examples

A. Poverty

→ [Read Proverbs 24:30-34](#)

³⁰ I went past the field of a sluggard,
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;

³¹ thorns had come up everywhere,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone wall was in ruins.

³² I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw:

³³ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—

³⁴ and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.

→ Read Proverbs 10:4

*Lazy hands make for poverty,
but diligent hands bring wealth.*

B. Parenting

→ Read Proverbs 22:6 KJV

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

V. Reading Wisdom Responsibly: Strategies/Encouragement

A. Preface a proverb with “All other things being equal...” or “Generally speaking...”

B. Look for the principle, not a promise.

C. Accept exceptions.

D. Do the right thing no matter what.

→ Read Luke 13:1-5

¹ Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

→ Harold Shank, Listen and Make Room, 162.

Will you give your all for people who don't give back at all? Are you willing to be poured out into a bucket that leaks? What if all you pour out amounts to just a drop in the bucket? Will you be poured out when your service is so utterly insignificant that nobody will remember that you served? Will you serve when there is no thank you, no progress, no gratitude, no plaque, no recognition?

E. Cut yourself and others some slack.

VI. Next Lesson: Prophecy

Question: Read Ezekiel 4:9-17. What do you think of that sermon illustration?