

# Hermeneutics

## Session 5

### Biblical Genres: Wisdom Literature

# What Is Wisdom?

- “Wisdom is the application of God’s will, revealed in His word, to the matters of living in God’s world.”
- Wisdom is different than knowledge.
- “Wisdom that comes down from above” versus “wisdom from below.”

# Vocabulary of Proverbs

- Words like “fool,” “wise,” “wisdom,” “prudent.”
- A cast of characters:
  - *The wise*: A mind properly formed by godly wisdom, which guides him in daily living.
  - *The fool*: Exhibits the opposite behavior; little hope for him.
  - *The naive/simple*: Young, easily influenced, but some hope for him—he can be educated.

# Personifications

Personifications as part of the cast of characters in Proverbs:

- Lady Wisdom
- Lady Folly
- The natural bent of sinful humans is toward Lady Folly
- Both personifications call out to the naïve/simple

# Scope of Proverbs

Scope is shown in Proverbs 1:1-7

- The scope/purpose of the book is to instruct in true, godly wisdom
- The naïve/simple can gain prudence, knowledge, and discretion
- The wise will listen and grow wiser
- Little hope for fools

# Proverbs: Foundational Principles

The first foundation: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge

- This is the most important principle—the first and controlling principle
- True wisdom comes down from above
- Two categories of wisdom that God possesses:
  - Hidden wisdom: we are not to presume we can know the secret providence of God
  - Revealed wisdom: Revealed in Scripture; we are to vigorously seek this

# Proverbs: Foundational Principles

The second foundation: The imperative to get wisdom

- The wisdom that comes from above is not automatic
- The default state of the human race tends to foolishness
- It takes effort to gain true wisdom
  - Interpretive work in God's word
  - Meditation on God's word
  - Personal application of God's word
  - Having our minds formed in wisdom

# Proverbs are like goads

- Proverbs are like goads that drive us to a wise mindset or behavior
  - Ecclesiastes 12:11
- Seemingly contradictory proverbs are like two goads on opposite sides keeping us on a correct path
- Normal rules of context need to be modified for much of Proverbs
- Expand the context to the entire book; harvest all of what Proverbs says on a particular subject



# More Interpretive Principles

## Indicative versus Imperative

- Indicative: Tells us the way things are
- Imperative: Goads us to a wise course of action or away from an unwise or sinful course

## Generalized versus Absolute

- Generalized proverbs are generally true—the way things usually happen
- Generalized proverbs are not promises
- Absolute proverbs have no exceptions

# Ecclesiastes

- Seems pessimistic, but is part of God's word and must not be ignored
- The main character is the Preacher
- The Preacher had the resources to fully investigate what is "under the sun"

# Ecclesiastes

## Vocabulary of Ecclesiastes

- “Vanity”: Fleeting mist, vapor, or breath
- “Under the sun”: What is in this present age in this fallen world

Words describing the investigation of the Preacher:

- “I applied,” “I perceived,” “I searched,” “I considered,” “I observed”

# Ecclesiastes

- The Preacher was pessimistic because of the limits of his investigation
- He limited himself to his native resources
- The scope of his investigation was limited to “under the sun”

# Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is actually encouraging to the Christian

- We all have pain and suffering in this fallen world “under the sun”
- Ecclesiastes tells us we are not alone in this
- We are steered toward that which is eternal, and away from what is “under the sun”
- We are steered away from a false “your best life now” philosophy

# Book of Job

- The prose section sets up the book
- Allows us to understand Job's agony
- The poetry draws us into Job's emotions
- Not everything that Job's friends say is false
- Some is true, but unjustly applied to Job
- Interpret Job in the light of the New Testament
- Job teaches us to not speculate on God's secret providence