

Proverbs

How does the book of Proverbs fit into the big picture of covenant unfolding in history since the beginning of time? One way to answer this question is in terms of how the short proverbs are generalizations that are stated as absolutes in their literary form. What this fact teaches is that we are to apply the proverbs “at the right time and times change” due to the sovereignty of God. Thus, we must apply the proverbs with recognition of the free actions of God that serve His time table of covenant realization in history (cf. 16.1, 4, 9, 33; 21.1, 30-31; 22.12).

What is a most helpful interpretation grid for reading Proverbs? The short pithy proverbs are to be understood in the context of the analogy of two women and the flow of thought in chapters 1-9. The two women are Wisdom and Folly. The reader is part of the extended metaphor and imagined to be a young man walking along the path of life. As he travels, he hears two voices vying for his attention. Woman Wisdom invites to an education in relationship with God. Woman Folly invites to idol worship, to worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. Thus, the short sayings become theological statements in context of the opening chapters. For example, 10:1 says, "If children bring joy to their parents, then they are wise." In the language of Proverbs 9, they have shown by their behavior that they have embraced wisdom, which means they have committed themselves to Yahweh. On the other hand, if children bring grief to their parents, then by their behavior they have shown their allegiance to Dame Folly (IOT 243- 244). The choice is between life and death (3:18; 9:18), between God and the creature (cf. Romans 1).