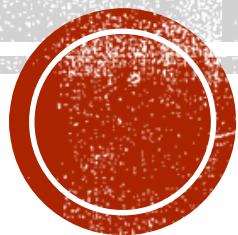


# **THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCRIPTURE: PART IX**

**The Interpretation of God's Word:  
Proverbs, Poetry, and Epistles**



# THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

- The Nature of God's Word (Scripture's Doctrine)
- The Makeup of God's Word (Scripture's Canon)
- The Preservation of God's Word (Scripture's Text)
- The Transmission of God's Word (Scripture's Translation, 3 Parts)
- The Interpretation of God's Word (Scripture's Meaning, 6 Parts)



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

## ■ Proverbs

### What are proverbs?

Proverbs are short, pithy statements meant to characterize a general truth

### What are proverbs not?

Proverbs are not promises or statements of absolute truth. They are statements of wisdom, not of fact



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

## ■ Proverbs

There are two basic concepts to keep in mind when reading any proverb, but especially Proverbs:

1. Proverbs needs to be read inside its covenantal setting
2. Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied

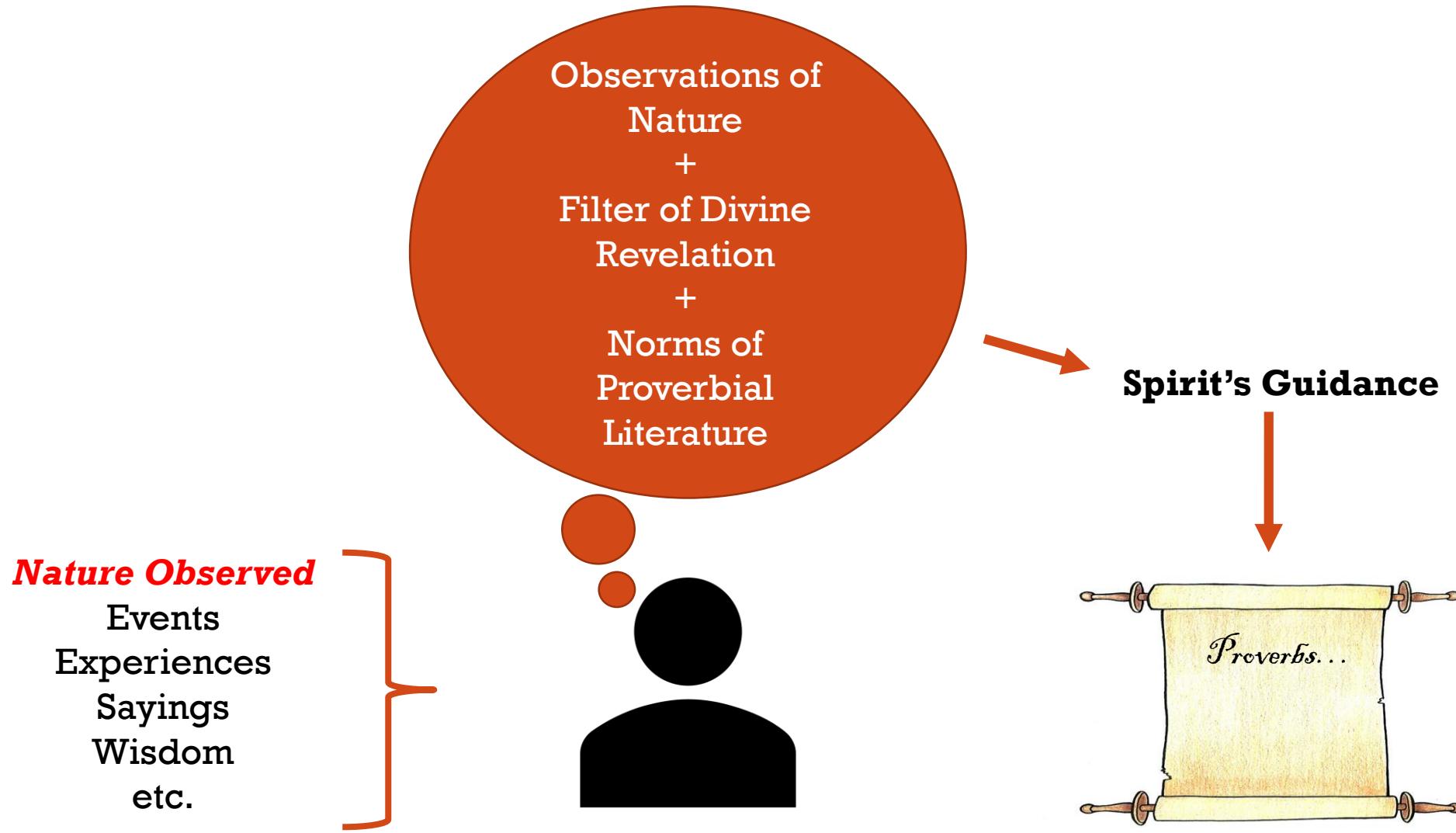


# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Proverbs needs to be read inside its covenantal setting

It is easy to read Proverbs and think that it is just general knowledge, but this is the wrong way to approach the book





# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- **Proverbs needs to be read inside its covenantal setting**

The proverbs of **Solomon, son of David, king of Israel**:

To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, **in righteousness, justice, and equity**; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.

The **fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge**; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

*Proverbs 1:1-7 (ESV)*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- **Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied**

It is equally easy to think that any proverb is equally applicable to all of life's situations. Because they contain wisdom, and promote right behavior, shouldn't they be of use all the time?

**NO.**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.  
Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Proverbs 26:4-5 (ESV)

**So, which one is it? How am I to know what to do?**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied

[Wisdom calls out]: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Proverbs 9:5-6; ESV

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise

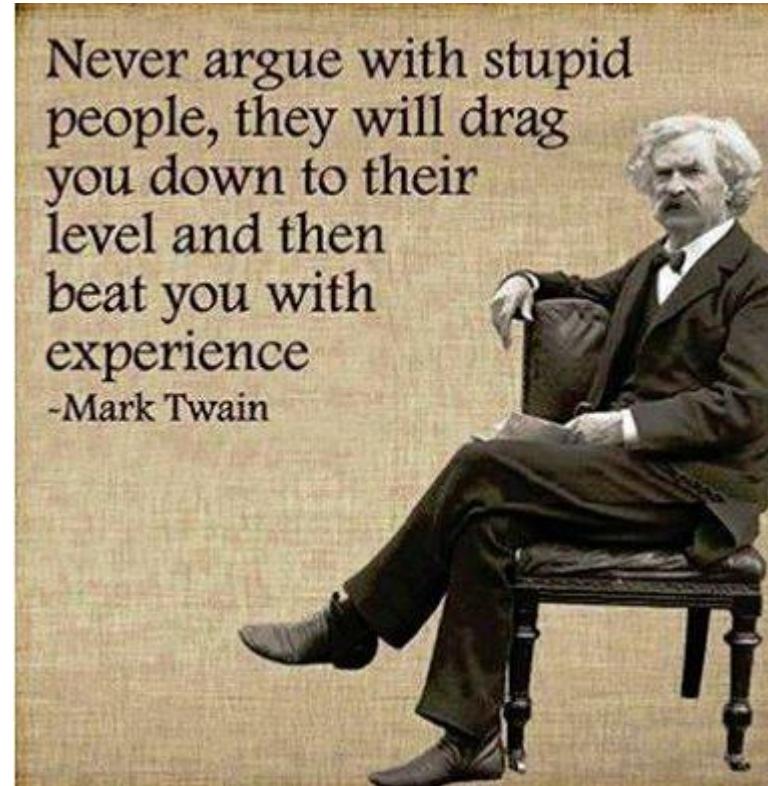
Proverbs 20:1; ESV

**So, which one is it? Is alcohol ok or not?**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied



Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience

-Mark Twain



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Any proverb needs to be contextualized, not strictly applied

Sometimes, answering a fool according to his folly makes you seem foolish as well.

At other times, answering him in his foolishness is the best way to humble him.

Likewise, while wine is a symbol of celebration in the Lord, it can also be ensnaring to those who let it master them.

**Proverbs can help make one wise, but they need wisdom themselves!**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- **The book of Job will help us see both these truths**

**Eliphaz:** Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. (Job 4:7-8, ESV)

**Bildad:** How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? (Job 5:2-3, ESV)

**Zophar:** If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. You will forget your misery (Job 11:14-16, ESV).

**These sayings are all correct, and yet all wrong...**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- The book of Job will help us see both these truths

**The LORD:** My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

Job 42:7-8

**Speaking truth at the wrong time and with the wrong motives means that you are not speaking right about God. Proverbs are not promises, and must always be contextualized.**



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

Hebrew poetry is not like ours

Hebrew poetry depends much less on sound and rhyme and much more on form and function

Why use poetry?

Poetry is meant to elicit emotions, not provide a sense of historical fact. It is highly metaphorical, meant to inspire emotional and imaginative truth



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

**Hebrew poetry works off of parallelism**

Parallelism means that lines of poetry have a similar rhythm or cadence, and have meanings that play off of one another in a specific way

**What are the types of parallelism?**

Typically 4 types are discussed. These are: synonymous, antithetical, synthetic (step), chiastic.



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Synonymous

Synonymous parallelism have lines of poetry express similar thoughts in slightly different ways. Often they present the same idea, only through a different metaphorical lens

*What is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?*

Psalm 8:4



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Antithetical

Antithetical parallelism is the opposite of synonymous, the lines of poetry often have opposite meanings, meant for comparison and contrast. This is especially used in what might be called “proverbial” poetry

*One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil,  
but a fool is reckless and careless*

Proverbs 14:16



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Synthetic (Step)

Synthetic, step, or climactic parallelism takes a previous thought and advances it. It can often be mistaken for synonymous – and truth be told, is not that different

*Truly you set them in slippery places;  
you make them fall to ruin*

Psalm 73:18



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Synthetic (Step)

Synthetic, step, or climatic parallelism takes a previous thought and advances it. It can often be mistaken for synonymous – and truth be told, is not that different

*Whoever receives you receives me,  
and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*

Matthew 10:40



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Chiastic

Chiastic parallelism provides a specific pattern to multiple lines of poetry.  
This can be found in other types of literature as well.

a – b // B – A

*Whoever exalts himself  
will be humbled,  
and whoever humbles himself  
will be exalted.*

a  
b  
B  
A

*Matthew 23:12*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Combinations

Sometimes, authors will use a combination of types of parallelism to help draw out their idea:

*As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away;  
as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God!*

*But the righteous shall be glad;  
they shall exult before God;  
they shall be jubilant with joy!*

Psalm 68:2-3



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Types of Psalms

Psalms can often be typified by their content:

Thanksgiving

Royal (kingship)

Complaint

Wisdom

Lament



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Imprecatory Psalms:

These psalms are often difficult to handle, because of their seeming hatred for others, as they call down the wrath of God on their heads:

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there we hung up our lyres.*

*For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth,  
saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Imprecatory Psalms:

These psalms are often difficult to handle, because of their seeming hatred for others, as they call down the wrath of God on their heads:

*How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!  
Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

## ■ Poetry

### Imprecatory Psalms:

These psalms are often difficult to handle, because of their seeming hatred for others, as they call down the wrath of God on their heads:

*Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem,  
how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!"*

*O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,  
blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us!  
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!*

Psalm 137



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poetry

## Imprecatory Psalms:

These psalms are often difficult to handle, because of their seeming hatred for others, as they call down the wrath of God on their heads.

*These are not meant to be statements of how we should act or feel, but rather as indicators of the great frustration and oppression that reigned over God's people, and the great injustice that was done to them by their enemies*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poems vs. Epistles



*Poems have a “wider” meaning with less focus*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Poems vs. Epistles



*Epistles have a “narrower” meaning with more focus*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

Epistles are just occasional letters

This means that they have a definite audience, a reason for being written, and are typically trying to communicate information, not just elicit emotion

What must we look out for?

Because epistles are communicating specifics, we must be much more careful to inspect the narrow, explicit meaning of what is being conveyed.



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

## ■ Epistles

Epistles have a typical layout:

Salutation

Thanksgiving

Body

Exhortation

Conclusion



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

Epistles have a typical layout: Colossians

Salutation (1:1-2)

Thanksgiving (1:3-14)

Body (1:14-2:23)

Exhortation (3:1-4:6)

Conclusion (4:6-18)



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

## Word Meaning: Semantic Range

Semantic range means the possible typical meanings of a word:

Angel: powerful, non-human being; or a human messenger from God

Heb 1; Rev 1:20

*πίστις*: faith; or faithfulness, having trust

Gal 2:15; 3:11



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

## Word Meaning: Etymology

Etymology is finding the meaning of a word from its history:

**δύναμις:** able, competent; NOT God's dynamite power!

When is this useful?

Names (Matt 1:21)

Infrequently used words



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

## Occasional Meaning

The epistles were not written as comprehensive monographs on particular theological subjects!

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart*

Ephesians 5:18-19

Paul is not providing a manual on how to handle the music ministry in your church! If you think that drums are not appropriate, or keyboards, build your case, but don't do so from here



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

## Systematic Meaning

The epistles (especially Paul's) were not the only parts of Scripture written on subjects. Balance is needed!

Compare Galatians 2:16-21 with James 2:14-26...



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

- Epistles

## Sentence Meaning

Epistles communicate thoughts through sentences. Knowing how these sentences work together will provide you with a better understanding of how the logic of the letters works

*Let us use the epistle to the Philippians as an example:*



# THE INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S WORD: PROVERBS, POETRY, AND EPISTLES

## ■ Epistles

### Sentence Meaning

Epistles communicate thoughts through sentences. Knowing how these sentences work together will provide you with a better understanding of how the logic of the letters works

Cause:

*Philippians 1:3-4*

Concession:

*Philippians 1:22*

Purpose:

*Philippians 1:9-11*

Means:

*Philippians 2:1-2*

Result:

*Philippians 1:12-13*

Manner:

*Philippians 2:14*

