

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

PART FOUR – CHAPTERS 10-12 – FINDING A STARTING POINT – MIND MAPPING

Finally after a nine chapter introduction in which he pleads for his son to listen Solomon presents his first set of short pithy sayings which he hopes will stick in his son's mind and be remembered at the right moment. In his introduction Solomon moved systematically through a number of concerns. The most important of which was to whom his son would listen. He pictures wisdom as a woman – sometimes a mother, a wife or a sister. Wisdom would teach him like a loving mother, would be absolutely faithful and fulfilling to him like a wife, or looking out for him like a big sister responsible for younger siblings. Folly, wrong teaching, on the other hand would lure him like an outwardly attractive harlot only to destroy him and his family. A wise choice would have consequences right throughout his life for him, his business, his neighbourhood and his contribution to his society.

In the main section of the book which now follows, Solomon moves back and forth between many ideas in each chapter. At first it seems a jumble without order but the more familiar we become with his message the more we realize that the book is not just a series of clever 'one-liners'. It could be compared with a piece of music whose many notes are connected into a beautiful tune.

In the next chapter here are some of the musical notes which Solomon plays often:

1. Right living, righteousness, blessing in 10:2,3,6,7,9,16,22,24,25,28,29,30
2. Hard work in 10:4,5,15,26
3. The wise listen to God in 10:8,14,17,23,27
4. Right talking in 10:10,11,13,19,20,21,31,32
5. Loving heart in 10:12,18

And in chapter 11:

6. Honest trading in 11:1,15,24,26
7. Humility, integrity, graciousness, mercy, generosity, strength in 11:2,3,7,16,17,25
8. Righteousness again in 11:4,5,6,8,9,10,11,18,19,20,21,23,27,28,29,30,31
9. Right talking again in 11:12,13,14,22

Chapter 12 continues:

10. How we learn in 12:1
11. More on righteousness in 12:2,3,5,7,10,12,13,21,26,28
12. Marriage in 12:4
13. More right talking in 12:6,14,16,17,18,19,20,22,23,25
14. Insight, humility in 12:8,9
15. Hard work again in 12:11,24,27
16. Listening again in 12:15

Just as a song may run over and over in our heads during the day as we move through a whole variety of activities, problems and opportunities, so this heavenly melody can inspire us to respond differently to the situations in our lives, families and communities. Jesus promised in John 14:26 to teach us all things and to bring to our remembrance what He has said to us.

Although the same ideas recur over and over, Solomon never repeats himself. Every time a theme comes up again there is a different perspective, something new to learn. We have been given sixty-six books in the Bible. They all have the same message but each one is unique.

One of the ways to draw together a whole group of statements around the same theme is to mind map. This involves writing down the key idea and then surrounding it with the thoughts about it in bubbles, after which we can link similar concepts together by lines. A pattern of thought will begin to immerge from which we can make a summary statement. If there is too much information on one topic it may help to take an important part of the topic and repeat the mind mapping until we are down to a manageable size. Always it is necessary then to ask the question, 'Lord, so what in my life?'

Most verses contain a contrast between good and evil. A light seems to shine brighter on a dark night. Truth is more powerful when we realize the alternative. The light of Christ in our Christian lives will draw people to Him often without a word being spoken but the darker the world we live in the more compelling our example will be.(Eph.5:6-14)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The commonest theme is righteousness. On a large piece of paper make a mind map of the ideas on righteousness through these three chapters. What idea comes most frequently? Now make a mind map of the contrasting ideas on unrighteousness in the same verses.
2. The next commonest theme is the use of the mouth. Again mind map first the positive ideas and then the negative ones. What is the strongest emphasis?
3. What can we learn about hard work and honest dealing from these chapters?
4. If wisdom is the main subject of Proverbs, how does listening to God or to wise men help us to become wise?
5. What personal qualities begin to develop as we become wise?
6. On each of the main topics in these three chapters, which proverb speaks particularly to you? Consider memorising it! Then look for an opportunity to share it with someone else.