

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

### PART SIX – CHAPTERS 16-18 – THE PLAN OF GOD OR THE PLAN OF MAN

In the last section we started to explore the way each chapter seemed to have a special emphasis. The same five notes in the melody, listening to God, having him shape our thinking, speaking His message, living His way and doing His work, continue to be played over and over but they are used to play a different theme tune each time.

Chapter 16 asks a simple question, which plan shall we follow in our lives, the plan of God or the plan of man? In the first four verses Solomon sets out the choice. Listen to God or to our own hearts?(v.1) We think our motives are fine but God knows what they really are.(v.2) If we trust our day's work to the Lord, He will give us a plan which succeeds.(v.3) God has a plan behind every event in the day, even the tough ones.(v.4) At intervals through the chapter he returns to the same point. We think we know where we are heading but the Lord is really in charge of the path we follow.(v.9) The secret of knowing the plan of God is to get into His word and trust what we find.(v.20) If we are listening to God's plan we will be like a constantly flowing fountain of life, full of creative ideas.(v.22) We may think events just happen randomly but for those who trust Him it will be all part of His plan.(v.33)

Listening to God's plan will shape our attitudes. We will be slow to anger which will give us a huge advantage under pressure,(v.32) instead of proud which God hates,(v.5) and on a path to self-destruction.(v.18) There will be a light which shines from our faces.(v.15)

The effect on our mouths will be immense. We will express wise decisions in leadership(v.10) and people will love what we say.(v.13) These wise words can settle the anger of unreasonable people in authority.(v.14) The sweetness of our wise words will be persuasive,(v.21) as they come from a wise heart.(v.23) and bring healing to the souls of others.(v.24)

When we listen to His plan our lives will please God and there will be an inner peace.(v.7) We will be content to have little materially,(v.8) but there will be a sense that because we are totally forgiven,(v.6) the whole of our lives will be protected by Him,(v.17) right through to old age.(v.31) When we deal with others, we will do so fairly,(v.11) and we will not be afraid of hard work.(v.26)

So far we have investigated wisdom without giving much heed to the alternative, folly. Many of the proverbs also contain the contrast between the two. It would be profitable at this stage to go back to chapter 10 and collect the downside of all the great ideas Solomon has given us. At intervals through these first seven chapters there is a verse which only describes folly.

Now in chapter 17 we have a whole chapter committed almost entirely to folly. The first three verses set the scene. A home can be a place of quiet and wisdom yet a place of service with modest means. The Lord is the one who sorts out the wise from the foolish.(v.3) A number of words are used for the fool – the evildoer, the liar,(v.4) the rebel, the cruel messenger,(v.11) the wicked,(v.15,23) the man lacking in sense.(v.18) It would be worthwhile to do another mind-mapping exercise to explore the motives and actions of these various kinds of fool. For example the fool listens to wicked lips; and pays attention to a destructive tongue.(v.4) He mocks the poor and rejoices at calamity.(v.5) He uses a bribe to open doors,(v.8) he repeats a matter to separate friends,(v.9) he seeks only evil,(v.11) and returns evil for good.(v.13) He justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous.(v.15) He lacks sense in business matters,(v.18) he loves transgression and opens his door to trouble.(v.19) He has a crooked mind, is perverted in his language,(v.20) and receives a bribe to pervert justice.(v.23) His eyes are on the ends of the earth rather than the one who could teach him.(v.24)

It would equally be helpful to sum up the consequences of folly. They are short term gain to him, at the price of pain to those around, and eventually his own self-destruction. He is more dangerous than a bear robbed of her cubs.(v.12) His own family are heartbroken,(v.25) and wonder how they might have brought him up differently. Much of the damage he causes is with his mouth. Interspersed though the chapter are reminders for the fool that things could be different and it ends with a final plea to the fool to keep his mouth shut because he might learn something, and even if he does not, others might interpret his silence as wisdom!(v.27,28)

Chapter eighteen continues with the bad news of the consequence of choosing folly rather than wisdom. This time the emphasis is on the mouth of the fool and its effect on him and those around. His mouth isolates him from others because he always picks a quarrel,(v.1) which invites a punch in the face.(v.6) His favourite conversation is about himself,(v.2) or else gossip about someone else.(v.8) He always tries to get his side of the story in first,(v.17) and answers others before he has even heard the question.(v.13) He is as satisfied with expressing his opinion as if he had just enjoyed a good meal,(v.20) not recognising that with his mouth he is ruining his life.(v.7) If he is poor he will beg but if he is rich he will be a bully.(v.23) He does not realise that he has the power in his mouth to kill – or to give life.(v.21)

By contrast the words of the wise are like a deep refreshing fountain of great ideas,(v.4) because he has learned to use his ears to learn before he even opens his mouth.(v.15) He can face every situation in the power of the name, and therefore the authority of God.(v.15)

The fool on the other hand thinks he can solve every problem with money.(v.11) He looks down on others with contempt and scorn,(v.3) is easily offended,(v.19) makes judgements in favour of the wicked,(v.5) tries to have too many friends,(v.24) and is lazy.(v.9) He thinks he is above others until his world crashes,(v.12) at which point he feels hopeless.(v.14)

The wise is different because of his humility which leads to him being honoured,(v.12) and confident that in God's strength he can cope.(v.14) He knows that events are in God's hand,(v.18) and that whatever gift the Lord has given him will open doors of opportunity.(v.16) He sees a wife who shares his life as a blessing from God,(v.22) and needs only one good friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.(v.24)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How according to chapter 16 are God's plans different from ours? Why then do we so often choose to go our own way? What are the results? What is so attractive about our plan? How can we be sure we are following His plan? How should we respond when it looks like someone else is not following God's plan?
2. Sum up in a few sentences the characteristics of the fool in chapter 17. How does this description illustrate much of what we see or read in the news media in the modern world each day? And how does it explain why our society's usual ways of dealing with these problems do not work? Which verse particularly speaks to you?
3. How according to chapter 18, does the fool reveal his foolishness whenever he opens his mouth? What damage does he do to himself and those around him? What is the secret of moving from foolish words to wise ones? How can we help someone else who sounds foolish?
4. Again choose a proverb in this section which you believe God would have you remember.