

## Proverbs 9 – Wisdom’s Feast

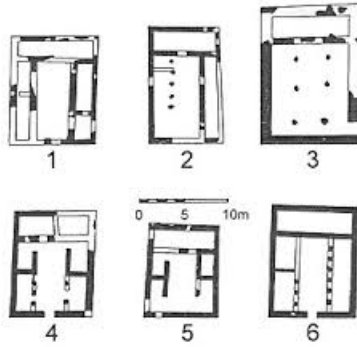
June 28, 2020

Today, if today is Sunday, June 28, we are back in church! At I write this, it is a joy to be anticipated. I have heard nothing about Bible Study. However that may unfold, I do want to pass on the meditations about our scripture lesson in these few pages so that, one way or another, we continue as community to study God’s word.

Chapter 9 of Proverbs continues the personification of Wisdom. In Chapter 8 Wisdom is personified as being part of God, present even in the Beginning. In contrast, Chapter 9 personifies Wisdom as a gracious hostess of a great feast. This is a more practical, less abstract presentation. Chapter 9 is not incompatible with Chapter 8, just a bit of difference in emphasis.

Wisdom is portrayed as having built a house. A “house” can mean different things, but here it is a material dwelling, with an implication of generous size. The “seven pillars” has been given allegorical interpretations which are numberless. The simplest explanation derives from the Israelite “four room” house of antiquity. The distinctively Israelite house had four “rooms” consisting of a central courtyard, a room to the left of the courtyard, a room the right, and a back room across the width of the house. The walls would be of stone, about three feet thick, but the pillars were often wood. Pillars were commonly used to separate these rooms, so that as one looked in the front door of the house, one might see three columns to the left, three to the right, and one in the center straight ahead, that marked the bound of the courtyard and the back room. The typical house was deeper than it was wide, so the courtyard and the “rooms” to either side were relatively narrow, and the back room was as well. The courtyard was commonly open to the sky. Often walls substituted for the pillars, and some of the rooms were subdivided. There were many variations on the basic plan. There was often a second floor made of wood (rather than stone). When that was the case, the family usually lived on that second floor, and used the ground floor for animals, storage, workshops or such. The mention of seven pillars suggests that the ground floor is unusually large and open – there is plenty of space for guests!

(I offer the pictures below without endorsing anything at the sites from which I obtained them. None of these illustrations really show a truly expansive house of this sort, as Wisdom would be speaking of. Such a house was a considerable investment of effort and wealth.)



<http://biblicalisraelstours.com/2016/03/the-four-room-house/>  
<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/patriarchal-era/3317-the-sons-of-jacob-new-evidence-for-the-presence-of-the-israelites-in-egypt>  
<https://davidporush.com/2019/03/05/the-four-room-house-another-bit-of-evidence-for-the-torahs-accuracy-as-history/>

Verses 2-3 detail the preparations for the feast. The table is sent. Wisdom sends her servants to issue the invitations. The invitation the messengers give is in verses 4-6. The invitation is explicitly for “the simple.” The word is derived from Hebrew “to open.” So literally, “the simple” meant one who is open, that is, to any influence. The implication is a lack of maturity and experience needed, and the “young man” or “youth” is the particular audience for these teachings, so it’s not a bad characterization. So, “the simple” is not meant as an insult, as it might be taken in English today. It’s just, you might say, “in need of further education,” when it comes to the young. But “being simple” is possibly willful in someone older. It’s worth reflecting on Jesus’s words to those who asked why he dined with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17). Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Jesus’s parable of the Great Dinner is remarkably parallel to this passage, but he illustrates his story with more concrete specifics. I like the version in Luke 14:15-24, but a similar parable is found in Matthew 22:2-10. A great dinner is being given, and at the time for the dinner a servant is sent to summon those who have been invited. Each of the three has some excuse offered at the last minute not to attend and begs off. The host is furious and commands, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” Later, “For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.”

Verses 7-10 give us a sample of the dinner being served in Proverbs 9. I don't know why the lesson writer skipped verse 7; it certainly rings true!

**7 Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;  
whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.**

Especially in today's hate-filled world, the last thing you'd want to do is suggest even a gentle correction to someone who is bent on violence and retribution. The word "scoff" is derived from a Hebrew word for "fool," so a "scoffer" is a fool, and to scoff is to be act foolishly, that is, to act completely out of accord with wisdom. The word doesn't necessarily mean loud and outspoken as it comes across in English, but the general sense seems pretty much the same.

The lesson writer addresses the term "the fear of the Lord", and this is important to understand. The root word is better understood as "awe" than "fear." In modern English, the word "awesome" has been trivialized, and the word "awful" (also derived from "awe") has been flipped to have a negative connotation. So we really can't do much better than, "In awe of the Lord" without extended discussion. Some analogies come to mind. Are you "fearful" of your boss in an employment context? If you are, it's time to start looking for a different job! Not that your boss doesn't have the power to get you fired. But if you have a good employment situation, you don't need to worry about it. Are you fearful when you see a policeman on the street? These days, that's a charged question! But, you shouldn't need to be, unless you have done something wrong. Even in that case, you should be able to confidently address the situation rather than feel like you have to run for your life. That's how it should be. We need to learn to see in God a loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's love can drive out fear.

Verses 11 and 12 were left out by the lesson writer, but I think there's something important here. Wisdom is speaking:

**11 For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.  
12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.**

Verse 11 is straightforward, the idea that righteousness is rewarded, in this case, by long life. Elsewhere we have seen that the righteous can expect wealth and for things to go well, or in some places in Proverbs that the righteousness alone is a

sufficient reward. This is basically a Deuteronomic view: obedience to God's will brings good things and disobedience brings curses.

I'd like to focus on verse 12. This says that wisdom is rewarded or punished individually. This is the only place in Proverbs that point is made. This is somewhat a contradiction of popular folklore as well as some explicit earlier passages. For example, in the Ten Commandments, we read (Exodus 20: 4-6):

**You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

There is truth to this idea that sinfulness is, or can be, passed down to succeeding generations. So can blessedness and righteousness. Does this mean that the grandchild of a sinful person is condemned with no recourse? No! But, the common view, even to the time of the exile, was that the Jews (in exile) were being punished for the sins of their fathers. The prophet Ezekiel was given a message by God that pronounced that individuals are responsible for the consequences of their own behavior, as seen in Proverbs 9:12. All of Ezekiel 18 is dedicated to this message. It's something that is seldom preached on; I can't recall this scripture (Ezekiel 18) being used by anybody.

God's message through the prophet Ezekiel is summed up in Ezekiel 18:4:

**Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.**

The whole of Ezekiel 18 is an extended discourse on this. Ezekiel next describes what it means to be righteous, and "he shall surely live..." Then Ezekiel describes the unrighteous, and "he dies for his iniquity." "The wickedness of the wicked shall be his own." Ezekiel then describes that, if the wicked turn away from all their sins.... (and act in righteousness), "None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live." Finally, if someone who was righteous turns to

wickedness, they will be held accountable for that. Ezekiel anticipates this will call for complaints that God is unfair. But it is they, the complainers, who are unfair – their wickedness shows that. This idea, that we are each individually accountable to God, is not popular in our day. It is seen as much better to blame somebody else! Anyone else. Ezekiel 18 ends with God saying, “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn, then, and live.”

Verses 13 to 18 paint a picture of the “anti-wisdom” likewise calling to the “simple” to come in and enjoy her ways. She appeals to self-indulgence. Notice the emphasis on secrecy. Even the “simple” might not be pleased if such a thing were known. The idea that such behavior can remain hidden for long is a cruel deception. It’s going to be ugly in the end, and the participant will end up as a victim, perhaps one of many.

(By the way, the preciousness of “stolen water” is given an interesting illustration in II Samuel 23: 13-17. This was one of my mother’s favorite Bible stories. She wanted to name me David, and might have had not my father had a prejudice against that name.)

These are days when we need Wisdom. More specifically, we should take a look at the list Paul gives in Philippians 4: 8-9. This is one of Rev. Zanicky’s favorite passages.

**Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

Let us strive to live our lives so that we, like Paul, can be examples for others.

Prayer: *Holy One, when we set our hearts on learning from you, give us the perseverance we need to reach the end. Amen.*