DISCIPLE

THE BIBLE TEACHING

This lesson teaches two things. *First,* the ways of God are good for us, and following them leads to a healthy, harmonious life. Evil ways cause great unhappiness, often resulting in sickness, poverty, broken relationships, injury, incapacity, and early death. Because we live in families and in community, individual sins and wickedness are often compounded into social catastrophe and institutionalized corruption. Also, sin weaves its way through the generations, causing the sins of the parents to be visited upon the children into the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:5).

Proverbs concentrates on God's order repeated in human experience. How can we try to walk the godly path? The Bible gives us guidelines.

Consider integrity. As you read Proverbs, make note of references that deal with truthtelling:

_____

with honest measurement

_____

with stealing

_____

Consider sexual chastity and faithfulness. Give brief guidance with references.

_____

_____

What happens to the adulterer?

_____

_____

How should spouses treat each other?

_____

_____

Consider anger, violence, family hostility, and lashing out. Comment and give references.

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NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Consider concern for the poor.

generosity

hospitality to strangers

care for widows and orphans

Consider greed.

connivance for money

extravagant "show"

Consider care for one's own family.

concern for teaching children

discipline of children

respect for elders and for spouse

inheritance

Consider honest hard work.

thrift

help of neighbor

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Consider faithfulness to God. Reflect on prayer.

on worship

on sabbath rest

on first fruits as gifts

Consider food and drink. Exercise in those hard, agricultural times was practically assured; yet the rich were sometimes chastised for obesity. Do you find guidance about food?

about alcoholic drink?

Consider justice and mercy. What specific mention do you find?

In Proverbs 1, what happens to people who rob and murder?

Read again about wisdom crying out in the street (Proverbs 1:20-33). What will wisdom do to those who ignore her teachings?

Wisdom makes a promise in Proverbs 3:1-2. Copy that promise here for future reference.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

What does "Do not be wise in your own eyes" (3:7) mean?

Wisdom is praised over and over. How would you describe wisdom?

What is "the beginning of wisdom" (9:10)?

Second, this lesson teaches that the idea that right living would bring divine approval became an obsession among some religious people. The Jews had experienced the ravages of war, captivity, and exile and were going home to begin again. As some of the Jewish leaders returned to Jerusalem, they wanted to avoid the sins of the past. They wanted to obey perfectly.

They believed

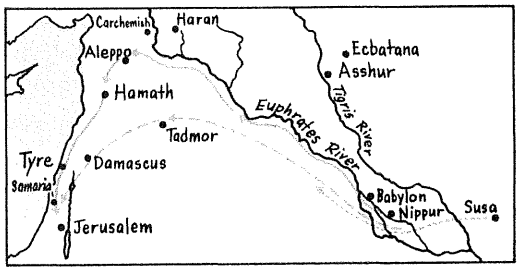
- that God would punish sin and reward righteousness;
- that keeping the law offered great reward;
- that the covenant people must be pure, not intermarrying with foreign people who worshiped other gods and ate unclean foods;
- that the Temple and the holy offerings were a major part of faithfulness;
- that sabbath laws were essential to righteousness;
- that everything they did must be built on reestablishment of the laws of the Torah;
- that sickness came from sin and that prosperity and health came from living in justice and righteousness.

Psalm 112 became not a generalized poem but a firm theology in the fifth century B.C.

> "Happy are those who fear the LORD,
> who greatly delight in his commandments.
> Their descendants will be mighty in the land. . . .
> Wealth and riches are in their houses. . . .
> They have distributed freely, they have given
> to the poor. . . .
> The wicked see it and are angry;
> they gnash their teeth and melt away"
> (Psalm 112:1-3, 9-10).

God is just. Right living has great rewards. But as we will see in our next lesson, this is not always the case. Sometimes sickness is not caused by sin. Sometimes the good are cut down. Sometimes the wicked prosper. Job and Ecclesiastes raise those issues. So, later, does Jesus. But among the Jews a

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS



Ezra and Nehemiah may describe at least four groups of exiles that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. This map shows three possible routes: the first group under Sheshbazzar from Babylon to Jerusalem, the second group under Zerubbabel, and another group including Nehemiah from Susa to Jerusalem.

theology emerged that focused on the Temple, the Temple sacrifices, personal piety, the keeping of the Torah with great care, the separation of Jews (particularly in Jerusalem) from non-Jews, and the observance of holy days—the theology that religious people could live a pure and prosperous life.

Therefore Zerubbabel, governor of Judah and descendant of David, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, rebuilt the Temple. (This was the Second Temple, as Solomon's Temple had been destroyed.) It was completed between 520 and 515 B.C.

Two expressions of Judaism developed—the Temple, emphasizing sacrifice, and the synagogue, emphasizing study. Synagogues were scattered throughout the world, wherever Jews lived. Jerusalem and other large cities had several synagogues. Jews all over the world, though separated from the Temple, continued to be attached to it, and the people longed for the time when they could again worship there.

So the chastisement of Israel at the hands of Assyria and the exile of Judah by the Babylonians now turned the faith of the Jewish people toward a radical obedience. Their experience fortified their belief that the righteous will prosper but the wicked will perish. But even in this era of radical faith and careful obedience, righteousness also embraced the doing of justice.

MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Disciples strive to live in harmony with God's laws even though obedience is costly.

A disciple strives to live in harmony with God's laws even though such obedience is costly.

Is it realistic today to expect Christian disciples to abstain from sex in singleness and to be faithful in marriage? What helps persons make such decisions? What guidance do you find in Proverbs?

With our society built on profit motives and personal initiative, how can Christians avoid greed, overspending, and undergiving?

Health is important. Yet we spend billions of dollars medically treating the results of tobacco smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, and overeating. What can we do within the

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

community of faith to strengthen "right living"? What would help you?

In the Bible, God is concerned with the well-being of widows and orphans, the poor, and the dispossessed. What can we do in our church, our community, and our nation to show greater concern, and therefore greater righteousness, toward the poor?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

Ezra 5:1 mentions two prophets who encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem—Haggai and Zechariah. They saw the rebuilding of the Temple as the beginning of a return to right living and covenant. Read a portion of their visions and discourses, especially Haggai 1 and Zechariah 1–2.

Most of the Jews could not and did not return to Israel but remained scattered. From time to time, great prejudice erupted in cities where they lived. The Book of Esther, set in Persia, is a fascinating account of a brave woman who was used by God to save her people. Her action became the basis for the Jewish celebration of the festival of *Purim*. Look up information about the festival of *Purim*.

The Apocrypha includes The Wisdom of Solomon. Like the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, it promises reward for righteousness and punishment for wickedness. You might enjoy reading Chapter 7, which personalizes wisdom, and one or two others to get the flavor of this book that was not included in the Hebrew canon.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Remember that the Hebrew words for *righteous* and *righteousness* frequently appear in parallelism with the word for *justice*.

Chart of Biblical History

2000 B.C.	**Period of the ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph**
1700 B.C.	**Jacob's family enters Egypt**
1260 B.C.	**Moses leads the escape from Egypt**
1220 B.C.	**Joshua leads the people into Canaan**
	Period of the judges
1020 B.C.	**Beginning of the monarchy Saul, David, Solomon**
922 B.C.	**Division into Northern and Southern Kingdoms after death of Solomon**
722/721 B.C.	**Fall of Samaria to Assyria**
587/586 B.C.	**Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon**
	Temple destroyed
	Exile into Babylon
539 B.C.	**Persian Period**
	Edict of Cyrus
538 B.C.	**Return of exiles**
515 B.C.	**Temple rebuilt**