

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Hebrew Bible and Christian Holy Bible are the underpinning foundation of Jewish and Christian faith. These two books serve as the indispensable moral guidance which props up the ethical lives of Judeo-Christian believers. Even outside the religious world, moralities and ethics that are derived from these two books are highly regarded in various modern areas of lives, such as politics and business. Civil laws are established upon the Judeo-Christian values of social justice and common prosperity, and business ethics are built upon the principles of fairness and communal well-being found in the Bible. To put it simply, the comprehensive scope that the Bible comprises is really vast. It reaches virtually all aspects of lives, throughout the ancient time up to now in the 21st century. It erects the foundation of developed nations throughout the world. Arguably, there are considerable overlapping values propping up the advanced Asian societies with the Biblical values that have been continuously shaping the modern Western society. For us living in this era, Biblical values are the integral part of most, if not all, modern societies.

Unfortunately, most people, including Christian believers and Jewish people, often misinterpret the meaning of biblical verses, especially verses on the Book of Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs was written in a straightforward, yet unique pattern that is often subject to different kinds of meaning interpretation. Without guidance, readers unfamiliar with the Bible would be

almost always misled to read the text in his own personal understanding. Unfaithful interpretation often occurs because the readers are not knowledgeable enough in the biblical context and age in which the text was written. This inaccuracy in deciphering biblical injunctions, in many cases, leads to a wrong moral outlook. This misreading often prompts the misguided to take an action they consider moral and noble, but actually he may be doing disservice to his fellow people because of his wrong deeds stemmed from his misunderstanding of the text.

This backfire action that readers take not only is negative to the individual taking action and the recipient of unintended disservice, but also it is detrimental to the society at communal and institutional level. Religious leaders are also susceptible to this misinterpretation. It is not uncommon to find religious leaders who are not knowledgeable in the teaching of the Bible. They could be hired for various reasons or talents, be they are the son of the institution owner, or having an exceptional managerial skill. Misinterpretation is undesirable to the society in general because any religious institutions will always be held responsible both for their teaching and community members and as well as pieces of wisdom they didn't teach to their religious adherents. It is still possible to take this scenario even further. When a community as a whole is being misguided either by false and unintended teachings by the leader or their individual misreading, all of these community members will go out and "proclaim" their moral conviction to their surrounding and bring their conviction into action.

Certainly any reasonable Bible believers and people in their surrounding don't want this unhealthy behavior coming out of innocently misguiding teaching corrupt the lives of the people in within these communal circles. If this misguided belief isn't corrected immediately, the society will be gradually degraded slowly but steadily. It is called the "ripple effect". On the surface, it doesn't seem as if anything changes, let alone be degraded. Over a certain period of time long enough to make this effect felt by the society, it will just then be the unwanted reality for that society. To prove my case that moral degradation is stealthily, notice how the Roman Catholic Church issued the atonement letters for their members who could "afford" to have their sin forgiven by paying some sum of money. It is unimaginable to think that the Roman Catholic Church would lead astray their members by openly letting them to live a licentious life. It's definitely not in the interest of the bishops. Whether this blasphemous teaching came as a result of teaching misinterpretation or the wrong method the congregation took to make a profit, it proves the writer's point that moral degradation happens stealthily. Or consider the case of a rebellious student who is caught up in his new defiant classmate circle. He is occupied by getting admitted as the new member of alpha male group. At first, he only may not be responsible for a single homework. Then, a week of exams. Some classes. Then, he starts to refuse listening to his teacher's rebuke. By the time the parents notice his misguided behavior, he has become a rebellious student. This case is quite stereotypical,

isn't it? Now suffice it is to say, that moral degradation usually doesn't happen that instantaneously.

If this false teaching in any institutional entities doesn't get corrected and nobody is willing to stand up for their community, the moral degradation is certainly due to happen. As a result, the society as a whole will be impacted by a single community whose communal belief is innocently misguided. Therefore, this research is being conducted to provide a faithful and meaningful interpretation so that both public and religious communities have an improved and clearer understanding of the Book of Proverbs 1-2.

In spite of the fact that there are various interpretations and commentaries made by diverse groups of people, such as, scholars, religious leaders and even laypeople, the pressing need for an faithful, contemporary interpretation always surfaces every generation. The writer also doesn't turn a blind eye to the modern interpretations composed by institutions and communities around the world, but what the writer wants to achieve by conducting this study is making a contribution to the world of Biblical study, specifically the Book of Proverbs 1-2. The writer doesn't intend to make a perfect interpretation in our time, rather by contributing a fresh work based on the original meaning during this brand new era with unprecedented problems arising as the time goes, it is deemed good to offer this interpretation. Given the background of the writer who is now taking an undergraduate study, it wouldn't be a sensible task to undertake if the writer were to try to create the most trusted all-time interpretation in the world's history.

This study will suggest to contemporary readers a meaningful interpretation of the Book of Proverbs 1-2. The writer believes that by reading this interpretation of this part of the Bible, the readers can achieve correct moral outlook which original author intended for the readers at the contemporary age.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

- What are the moral values of the Book of Proverbs 1-2?

1.3 Objective of the Study

- To identify the moral values of the Book of Proverbs 1-2.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Discourse analysis is a field of study, which is concerned with 1) the use of language over the level of a sentence/utterance, 2) the interrelationships between language and society and 3) the interactive properties of daily communication (Stubbs, 1983). Discourse analysis can be used to understand and interpret the meaning from narrative texts, poems and political discourses. Political discourses encompass debates, speeches and hearings. By applying discourse analysis to a Biblical text, interpreters of the text can discover and extract meanings which are

codified in the text. Thus, interpreters, with discourse analysis as a literary device, are able to make an analysis on the moral meaning of a passage. The interpreters are required to study cultural background of the text to be analysed because cultural background of every text is intrinsically related to the language in which the text is written.

1.5 Significance of the Study

- a.) To provide a meaningful moral interpretation of the Book of Proverbs 1-2 based on the original principles as intended by the author for the contemporary readers in our time. These readers can be a Bible reader, a believer of one of Abrahamic faiths (a Christian believer, an Islamic believer and a Jewish observant), a Biblical scholar, a religious leader or a person interested in converting to Christianity.
- b.) To provide a meaningful moral guide to the Christian and Catholic readers from Widya Mandala Catholic University.
- c.) To contribute a meaningful moral interpretation of the Book of Proverbs 1-2 to the contemporary biblical study in our time

1.6 Assumptions

The Book of Proverbs is assumed to be a codified set of moral guidelines with practical applications for people from all groups. Moral values within it could be extracted and learned by interested readers and become useful for

those who wish to gain benefits from this ancient Jewish wisdom. Not only it is assumed as an ethical guideline by a small circle of people, the Book of Proverbs has also been one of the most studied Biblical text throughout the history. People from diverse backgrounds, whether they are a Christian, a Jewish believer, a Muslim scholar and even atheists, recognized the intrinsic moral values of the Book of Proverbs. The prominence of the Book of Proverbs as a wisdom literature is prevalent in the field of ancient literature study.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The research is intended to focus on these specific areas:

a) The Book of Proverbs 1-2

Due to the vastness of the whole Book of Proverbs, it is considered apt for this study to comprise the first two chapters of the book. By explicating on the analysis of these two chapters, readers can achieve a sensible comprehension of the book's major theme and moral values with its significance for them. This study also can be capitalized as the essential introductory guide for readers interested in pursuing a scholarly study in the Book of Proverbs. The compactness of this study can be relied on by those seeking a comprehensive view of the major theme and moral values of the Book of Proverbs.

b.) The moral values in the verse injunctions

As the Book of Proverbs in its nature is a wisdom literature, it contains a substantial amount of ethical advice and moral injunctions pertaining to how one should conduct his own life. The Book of Proverbs is basically guide of conducts to help people achieve success, prosperity and peace in life. The book also contains to references to other cited text. However, those references are not the main subject of this study. This study focuses on the ethical behaviors prescribed in the verse injunctions.

1.8 Definition of Key Term

- a) **Moral values** are principles of intrinsic worth which, from the individual as well as social point of view, predicate a nature of thinking and acting that promotes the highest quality of human life.¹
- b) **The Book of Proverbs** is one of the wisdom literatures in the Hebrew bible and Christian Holy Bible.

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

- a) Chapter I

Chapter I serves as an introduction to the research. It comprises background of the problem, statements of the problem, objective of the study, theoretical framework, hypothesis, significance of the study, assumptions, scope and limitation of the study and definition of the key term.

b) Chapter II

Chapter II defines key terms required for this study of meaning analysis of the Book of Proverbs 1-2 and reviews of related literature conducted previously. Contextual information of the text which consists of time and location setting, author and theme is also provided. This chapter comprises review of the related literature and previous commentaries.

c) Chapter III

Chapter III discusses the elaboration of the research methodology applied to conduct the research. It comprises the nature of the study, research design, data source, the data, data analysis, triangulation and instruments.

d.) Chapter IV

Chapter IV elaborates on the main part of the research. It comprises the elaboration moral values of the text. The contextual information of text comprises time and location setting, author and theme. The interpretation will be provided after readers understand the prerequisite information essential for clear comprehension.

e.) Chapter V

Chapter V serves as conclusion of this research. It discusses the final result of the analysis and concludes the outcome of this study. It also proposes a number of suggestions on how to improve the quality and accuracy of interpretations to be made by scholars interested in the subject.