

Proverbs Week #142 (13:17)

"A wicked messenger falls into adversity, but a faithful envoy brings healing." (Proverbs 13.17 NAS95)

In the Ancient Near East messengers were used to send a variety of messages between clans and nations. During times of war, kings and battlefield commanders used messengers to report the status of battlefields activities, losses, victories, and to manage troop movements. A request for supplies or reinforcements required faithful messengers or lives might be lost. In his commentary on Proverbs Bruce Waltke describes their role, function, and training.

"The function and status of a messenger (mal'āk), the term most frequently used for a courier, was nearly constant for many centuries and common throughout the Ancient Near East. Messengers were professionally trained to high standards with some facility in writing and in languages in view of the number of roles they filled, such as diplomats, soldiers, royal agents, military governors, intelligence agents, postmen, chaperones, and agents provocateurs. "The professional courier had to be courageous and bold and his training must have included the study of military strategy and tactics." They also enjoyed an extraordinary status that entitled them to privileged treatment: "Their names are amongst those of the very few names of officials which have come down to us in the literature."¹

I am amazed when I consider all the activity that it requires to keep our modern society functioning and operating. We take many things for granted in the United States. Consider a grocery store as just one example. How many people does it take to get a single box of cereal or a frozen pizza on a grocery shelf? It would take people to grow all of the ingredients, harvest, process, package, deliver and store in warehouses, redistribute, receive in a store, and finally unbox and shelve. In addition to all these activities there are also numerous support personnel that keep all of these activities going. Without fuel production, delivery, and dispensing none of the vehicles used in the operation would go anywhere. Without mechanics to maintain these fleets of vehicles and vehicle manufacturers and sales people, no one who have a tractor to help grow the food or a truck to deliver or transport the raw materials or finished products.

I provided this example because I want to connect it to our lesson today about messengers. A messenger is someone who is sent to deliver a message (that seems simple to understand). The message may be a request for something or, for example, instructions that a parent wants others to follow. A son sent by his father to deliver the message "Dinner is ready" to a family is a simple example. In the business world messages are constantly being sent that keep business running. A grocery store that places an order for 100 frozen pizzas sends their request to a local grocery warehouse according to the procedures set up by the store and warehouse managers. The people placing the order and those who receive the order are functioning as messengers. If these messengers are not faithful the business and the customers will suffer (albeit in this case having a shortage of frozen pizza might not warrant being called suffering).

I want to highlight two important facts. First, our choices in life affect not only us but also those around us. Second, our ability to bring healing in this sinful and broken world requires us to be faithful. As messengers, our faithfulness includes having a good knowledge of the messages that we are to deliver to others. The messages that we need to send are not just a matter of words. Letting your children or parents know that you love them or saying you are sorry to someone whom you have hurt, requires that you have a good understanding of what love is and what it means to be sorry. Our ability to communicate these messages goes being saying the words "I love you" or "I am sorry." When we send these messages or receive them we are looking for the kind of love that is faithful. If your brother or sister says they are sorry for hitting you and then two minutes later hits you again, it is hard to accept the early message after the second "message" (in the form of the fist) was sent. This is a lesson we as adults need to learn as well. In our zeal do we remember mercy? Prov 3:3 אֵל-יְעֻזְבֵד וְאֶמֶת אֱלֹהִים לֹא יַעֲזֹבֶנּוּ Do not let kindness or truth leave you.

¹ Waltke, Bruce K. The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15. *New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Accordance electronic edition, version 1.2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.*