

# Proverbs: *the wisdom of God*

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."*

**Proverbs** is about wisdom from God.

The longer I live the more I want to be around and listen to wise people. The book of Proverbs is about the choices we make in life. The beginning of wisdom is the reverential fear and respect of Yahweh. The fear of the LORD (Yahweh) is the beginning of knowledge [wisdom]; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7). This is not only the key to this book, but also the key to life. Where is God in your picture? He has all the answers to life's greatest questions.

Proverbs teaches us that we become like those with whom we associate. Be careful in the choice of your closest friends for life.

The secret to life's success is found in our choices. The way to success is to trust in the Lord with all your heart (3:6-8). Life can never be understood except in relationship to Yahweh. The basic assumption in Proverbs is the providence of God. God is at the center of life.

Besides Solomon in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher gave the proverbial mode of expression its greatest prominence. Jesus is the incomparable master of the proverb. "

Frank Gaebelien says, Many of Jesus' sayings are so packed with wisdom and pointed in expression that they have entered into common speech. Much of the Sermon on the Mount has become proverbial. In deed, the words of Jesus provide the richest mine of profoundly spiritual proverbs in world literature. "

Much the same can also be said of the often-quoted sayings in the book of Proverbs.

**TITLE:** Proverbs comes from the first word in Hebrew. *Mashal* means a comparison, likeness, or illustration. " The Hebrew word for proverb conveys a wide range of meanings, including the idea of comparison, a code of behavior, and the discovery of hidden truth.

**AUTHORS:** The book probably originated in palace circles in the royal court in Jerusalem with the bulk of the content of the book attributed to Solomon. He wrote most of the book, and the works of others were added to his (1 Kings 3; 4; 2 Chronicles 9:1-24). The authors are Solomon, Agur, Lemuel, and the words of the wise, probably anonymous authors (1 Kings 4:29-34). Solomon was said to have written over 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), and many of these are found in the book of Proverbs. Cohen says, A Rabbinic teaching asserts that the Israelite king wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in middle age, and Ecclesiastes towards the end of his life. Solomon's section is found in 1:1-9:18; 10:1-22:16 along with the committee appointed by king Hezekiah to select more of Solomon's proverbs (25:1-29:27).

Wise men, perhaps who attended Solomon (22:17-24:34; cf. 1 Kings 4:31; 12:6).

Agur son of Jakeh (30:1-33).

King Lemuel lived in the area of Uz (31:1-9) and perhaps (31:10-31).

**DATE:** The present arrangement of the book was probably made near the end of Hezekiah's reign before 700 B.C. (25:1). The main part of the book was probably arranged under Solomon (970-931 B.C.), and the entire book between tenth and sixth centuries B.C. Much of the material in Proverbs was compiled during the time of Solomon. Some of the Proverbs was compiled during the reign of king Hezekiah (727-698 B.C.). It could be that the two sections of anonymous sayings by the wise men came from the period between Solomon's reign and the collection by Hezekiah's

scribes. Proverbs 30-31 could have been added later before the inclusion in the Hebrew Canon of Scripture. The entire contents of the book is pre-Exilic. LaSor, Hubbard and Bush conclude, "The fifth century is a reasonable date for the final editing, although most of the contents are much earlier with most individual proverbs and even longer speeches stemming from long before the Exile. Nothing in the book demands a date later than the early 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C."

**PURPOSE:** The opening verses clearly state the purpose of this book. Proverbs 1:2-6 tells us the proverbs were written so we could know wisdom, and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instructions in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel. "

This book, notes Dereck Kidder, is no anthology, but a course of education in the life of wisdom. The theme of the book is stated in v. 7, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." We gain wisdom when we go to Yahweh with an attitude of reverence, or worship. Solomon then begins to expound his theme in a series of fatherly talks, which illustrate and apply the fateful choices between wisdom and folly. The importance of reverencing and trusting the Lord is stressed though out the book (1:7; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13). The knowledge and fear of Yahweh are the dominant ideas of religion in the Old Testament.

The proverbs also had a teaching function by providing a useful sourcebook for public and private study. They help to communicate wisdom of the years and are a source of practical, moral and spiritual guidance. Proverbs have an effective means of driving home the message. They make effective impact to statements. It arouses the listener's mind, creates curiosity calls for action and helps him remember.

**STYLE:** Essentially the book of Proverbs is a collection of comparisons based on observation and reflection that seeks to instruct people in right behavior (Hill and Watson). Proverbs presents one major class of Hebrew wisdom literature what includes individual proverbs that are sharp, practical applications of wisdom concerning many areas of life. The two most prevalent literary forms in Proverbs are the short, pithy sayings used to impart wisdom, and the long didactic sections.

Hebrew philosophy, writes Gleason Archer, Jr., was more intuitive and analogical, endeavoring to interpret the moral order in the light of a personal, omniscient, and omnipotent God, who had revealed His will for ethical living. "

Hebrew proverbs are compact wording of skillful expression. The statements are placed opposite to each other in balanced parallels such as in contrastive couplets that are connected with *but* or *nevertheless*. The connective couplets bring similar or parallel thoughts together with *and* or *so*. Comparative couplets link two ideas with *better*/*than* or *like*/*so*. "

Five types of proverbs have been observed in the book of Proverbs:

1. Synonymous parallelism as in 18:7 where the same thought is placed in parallel.
2. Antithetic proverb (13:9) where one parallel is set in contrast to the other.
3. Synthetic proverb (10:26) where the second line completes the thought of the first.
4. Emblematic proverb (3:12) in which the symbol is created through a word picture.
5. Introverted proverb where there is parallelism between the lines (1 and 4, 2 and 3).

Solomon is probably most responsible for giving definitive shape to Hebrew proverbs. The book is written in clear, classical Hebrew.

**THEME:** is found in 1:7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction (NASB). The word wisdom occurs 37 times in Proverbs, and indicates an informed, skillful use of knowledge, hence the use of the word knowledge in the NASB translation. It is only as a person takes the first step of trust in and reverence for Yahweh that a person can enter into wisdom.

**WISDOM PERSONIFIED:** Wisdom is sometimes personified in wisdom literature as in the powerful picture in

Proverbs 8:1-9:6. Only in Jesus Christ, the Word, do we have these personifications fulfilled. This is not abstract personification, but Hebrew concrete terms. In the incarnation of the Son of God, we have the Word made flesh (Prov. 8; Luke 11:49; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Prov. 8:22-23; John 17:5). How else could He be called Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6)?

The New Testament sees Jesus Christ as the answer to the two most important questions in life. How does a holy God approach sinful mankind? How did He create the universe? The answer in Proverbs is Wisdom. Wisdom like the Word, Jesus Christ, is the one absolutely essential and desirable thing.

A. K. Helmbold states, Proverbs 8:22f is a bold restating of the doctrines of Genesis 1; 2. God's creation is not a chaos (cf. Gen. 1 and 2), but a cosmos. Wisdom is the essence of the being of God. The universe does not just happen, nor does it stand-alone. The world has a teleology because there is a theology (Prov. 3:19; 20:12) (*ZPBE*, vol. 4, p. 918).

**THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS:** Helmbold notes, The sovereignty of God is stressed (16:4, 9; 19:21; 22:2). God's omniscience is set forth (15:31; 11; 21:2). God is seen as the Creator (14:31; 17:5; 20:12). He rules over the moral order (10:27, 29; 12:2). Man's actions are judged by God (15:11; 16:2; 17:3; 20:27). Even in this life virtue is rewarded (11:4; 12:11; 14:23; 17:13; 22:4). Moral judgment is more important than prudence (17:23) (*Ibid.* pp. 919-920).

### [A Look at the Book](#)

### [Christ in the Old Testament](#)

Title: Introduction to the Proverbs

Series: A Look at the Book

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