

PROVERBS (Teacher's Edition)

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AUTHOR-

The name of **Solomon** as author is associated with the Book of Proverbs from the very beginning. Verse 1 of chapter 1 states: "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David." We also know that Solomon was noted

throughout the ancient world for his superior wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34). Additional evidence of his authorship is found within the book itself, where Solomon is identified as author of the section from 10:1-22:16 as well as writer of chapters 25-29.

Although Solomon wrote a major portion of Proverbs, he did not write the entire book. Many scholars believe he wrote the basic core of Proverbs but added some writings from other sources, giving proper credit to their writers. Of Agur and King Lemuel (Proverbs 30:1; 31:1) we know nothing except that, by their names, they were **not Israelites**. Also of note: there are thirty-five direct quotations or allusions to Proverbs in the New Testament.

It is worthy to note here that Solomon has left us more books than any other author in the OT except Moses. Some feel that he wrote Song of Songs when he was a **young romantic**, Proverbs when he **was mature** and at the height of his powers and Ecclesiastes when he was aged and more philosophical and perhaps cynical.

WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-

The book of Proverbs is a **compilation** and its writing was spread over many years. In this it is unique. In its original version the book must have been written and compiled by Solomon some time during his reign from **971 B.C. to 931 B.C.** However, the second collection of proverbs attributed to Solomon (**chaps. 25-29**) was not added to the book until more than **200 years** after his death. The heading over this material reads: "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (25:1). Hence, since we know approximately when Hezekiah reigned, we believe that the material now contained in chapters 25-29 was added to the book around **720 B.C.** This span of almost 250 years of composition is unique. Though other books in the Bible cover **historical** periods that were longer, no other book spans the time Proverbs does **in composition**.

ABOUT THE BOOK-

Proverbs is one of the few biblical books that clearly spells out its purpose: **to impart moral and spiritual discernment** (1:3-5), and to develop mental clarity and perception (1:2,6). The "wisdom" of which Proverbs speaks is the Hebrew "(C)Hokhmah" which appears over **140 times** in the OT and literally means "skill"- **skill in living**, not shrewdness or intelligence. There are many people who may be shrewd or intelligent but that are not wise at all. It speaks of the knowledge and the ability to make "God" or "righteous" choices at all times. The skill of making "God" choices is an indication of

maturity and development. This speaks to us of the most fundamental truth of all: practical righteousness before God in every area of our lives. And we learn that the prerequisite for this kind of "wisdom" is the fear of the Lord, one of the unifying themes of the book.

I could never stress enough how the wisdom spoken of in Proverbs is as meaningful to us today as it was back when it was written- indeed the Word is in totality! This awesome book tells us how to order our values which leads to character, which leads to wholeness which leads to satisfaction.

Also, did you notice how many references to family and "home" issues are in the book? This is typical to many of the proverbs of the ancient Near East. The term "son" occurs some 41 times, "father" 15, "mother" 11. Husband and wife are cautioned to be united joyfully in a clearly monogamous union (this despite the polygamy of the times and the author!) Both parents are directed to share in the training of the children and nurturing them in faith. Sins that attack the order of the home, like adultery, are straightforwardly exposed.

In chapters such as chapter 8, wisdom is personified and seen in its perfection. The book portrays wisdom as:

- i. The most valuable of all assets
- ii. Not human, but divine in origin and coming by attention to instruction
- iii. Available to everyone, but coming at a high price
- iv. The source of biological and spiritual life
- v. Going hand in hand with righteousness: "it is good to be wise and it is wise to be good"
- vi. Telling each of us that evil men suffer the consequences of their evil
- vii. Showing us that the fool, the lazy, the unteachable, the ignorant, the proud, the reckless and decadent, and the sinful are NEVER to be admired.

The following table (from Nelson) from what Proverbs 8, one of this book's key chapters, says of wisdom; it can be effective in personal study:

Origin of wisdom	What wisdom teaches	The value of wisdom
In God (v. 22)	Prudence (vv.5, 12)	Yields riches & honor (v.18)
From everlasting (v.23)	Understanding (v.5)	Greater than gold or silver (v.19)
Before all things (vv.23-30)	Excellent things (v.6)	The wise are blessed (vv.32, 34)
	Truth (v.7)	
	Hatred of wickedness (v.7)	
	Righteousness (v.8)	
	Knowledge (v.12)	
	Discretion (v.12)	
	Fear of the Lord (v.13)	

Interesting Fact: Without any heading the last 22 verses of the book constitute a single poem in praise of a worthy woman, extolling especially her household virtues. In form these verses begin in the original with the successive 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet- just like Ps 119.

A BASIC ASSESSMENT OF PROVERBS (BASIC THEMES)-

As we have learned in our study thus far through the Bible, we were put on this earth to **rule and reign** on behalf of God as we **submit to Him** and His sovereignty. God's sovereignty is absolute and undeniable. Yet **human responsibility** in all his own affairs, as well as his determinative role in the affairs of the earth is also undeniable. The book of Proverbs accentuates our position as rulers in this earth and the decisive role our decisions make in the issues of life. No one can hide from **personal responsibility** by suggesting that any failure is God's doing and therefore beyond human accountability.

As I have stated, we were destined to rule and reign with Christ. Did you notice all the references to "kings" in the book (over **25 times**)? This is more than just thoughts on how monarchs are to behave. It speaks to our role as "rulers in life" (see Rev. 1:5,6; 5:10). What Proverbs emphasizes is that our **speech and conduct** will affect our "rule" more than we realize. **Our words** require close scrutiny and practical caution- hence our need for wisdom and the **destructive price** of foolishness (Proverbs 18:21-The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.)

One of the things that is most confusing to people is the use of the words knowledge, instruction (or understanding or discipline-the Hebrew word can be translated as all three), and wisdom. They are not synonymous! Each is part of a **process toward living the life of God**, realizing our kingdom potential as believers and being Godly in our relationships. The process is two-fold:

- 1) Knowledge (**information acquired**) and instruction ("understanding" or "discipline"-**the explanation or meaning of acquired information**) must be received in a teachable, child-like fashion from a tender heart (Proverbs 2:1-5; 4:1-4).
- 2) From knowledge and instruction we then act with wisdom. Wisdom, therefore, is neither **information** (knowledge) nor **explanation** (understanding or instruction). Wisdom is **the proper application in life of what has been received** in knowledge and instruction. Wisdom is therefore manifested not just in what is done, but also in **the way things are done**; wisdom acts in humility and righteousness, sensitivity and discretion.

As you study this book, you may notice that there are two **opposite couplets** of men and women mentioned, illustrating some great lessons we are to learn.

The two opposing women are **Wisdom versus Folly**. The adulteress mentioned in 6:20-7:27 & 9:13-18 is given as warning to more than the horrors of adultery. She is mentioned as a type of the folly of spending **the seed of life** God has given us in **unfaithfulness** or in **destructive ways**. Don't squander away the life of God in you, but turn to wisdom (personified as a woman)- embrace her and **commit to her**, the fountain of happiness, joy and righteous fruitfulness (8 & 9:1-6).

The two opposing men are **The Righteous Man versus the Wicked Man**. Over a dozen traits of the "righteous man" are declared in Proverbs (interestingly, they are paired with certain blessings attending them each- see 10:11,24,28; 11:21, etc.) The righteous man is **wise** but the wicked man is **a fool**. By fool, Proverbs does not mean a man **without knowledge** necessarily, so this term is not intended as an insult. A fool is **without reverence for God or His ways** and thus demonstrates his lack of wisdom.

DON'T MISS THE WORLDVIEW IN PROVERBS!

Proverbs displays a unified, richly complex worldview. Proverbs 1-9 introduces this worldview and lays out its main themes. The short sayings of Proverbs 10-31 are to be understood in light of the first nine chapters. I don't mean to be repetitious, but you must see a key, biblical truth here! From a Biblical worldview, the beginning and end of wisdom is to **fear God** and **avoid evil**. The world is a battleground between wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness, good and evil. This conflict is personified in Lady Wisdom (1:20-33; 4:5-9; 8; 9:1-6) and Harlot Folly (5:1-6; 6:24-35; 7; 9:13-18). Both "women" **offer love** and invite simple young to their homes to sample their wares. Wisdom's invitation is to life; the seduction of Folly leads to death. Lady Wisdom speaks in public places, offering wisdom to everyone who will listen (1:20-22; 8:1-5; 9:3). Wisdom does not hide, but stands there for all who seek her. In a very real sense, Wisdom is found in creation. That is, God has placed **in creation** a **wise order** that speaks to humankind of good and evil, urging humans toward good and away from evil. The world is not silent, but speaks of the Creator and His will (Ps. 19:1-2; 97:6; 145:10;148; Job 12:7-9; Acts 14:15-17; Rom. 1:18-23; 2:14-15).

This perspective eliminates any split between faith **and reason**, between **sacred and secular**. The person who knows God also knows that every inch of life is created by God and belongs to Him. Experiences of God come only from experiences in God's world. Experiences in the world point the person of faith to God.

Thus, the wise person “ fears God” and also lives in harmony with God’s order for creation . The sluggard must learn from the ant because the ant’s work is in tune with the order of the seasons.

A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-

There are always many key words that we can choose from every book in the Bible. But this is one book that is very clear in its purpose, as is spelled out in its beginning verses, Proverbs 1:1-3. That is why I chose: **WISDOM**. And think about this: “wisdom and instruction” literally mean, in Hebrew, “**skill and discipline**”. No skill is perfected **without discipline!**

KEY VERSE(S) AND CHAPTER(S)-

My key verse deals with the key word but I think my key chapter will surprise many. When it comes to the key word, considering all we have discussed above, I chose: **Proverbs 3:5,6**. As to the key chapter, I chose one that is unique to all ancient literature and runs in the face of what many say today about the Bible. I chose: **Proverbs 31**. Why? Because it lifts up the **status of women** and puts them into a **high a noble category**. If wisdom is the proper application in life of what we know and understand relating to God, then no one has **an inferior status**- even as the NT says in Gal 3:28- There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

Some struggle equating wisdom with Jesus because the presentation of wisdom in the book is **feminine throughout**. But remembering Jesus’ words in Matthew **23:37**, I believe we can make undisputable connections to Jesus in Proverbs.

- Jesus, like wisdom (Prov 8:23-31), was in the beginning with God
- Jesus Himself is the “wisdom of God”- 1 Corinthians 1:24
- All the right behaviors in the book (patience, faithfulness, humility, diligence, reliability and love- are all perfectly seen in Jesus
- In Prov 17:17 & 18:24 Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother and who loves at all times
- The office of king mentioned speaks to Jesus’ office of King of all
- Jesus is the one who came down and went up in Prov 30:4

THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

- When we speak of wisdom and understanding we also speak of the Spirit who is called “The Spirit of wisdom and Understanding” in Isaiah 11:12

- Wisdom is communicated by the revelation of the Holy Spirit- that is the voice of Prov 1:20
- Prov 30:16 speaks of the heart always needing more rain- this speaks to the baptism in the Spirit that leads to a river of water flowing out of us
- Prov 30:16 also speaks of fire, a type of the Spirit, always wanting more to consume
- Prov 24:5 describes a wise man's power. This is the power of the Spirit mentioned in Acts 1:8

SOME TRUTHS AND APPLICATIONS-

Prov 1:23; 12:1

Apply your heart to reproof, instruction advice and humility and you will know God's heart! Stupid: senseless or like a fire that destroys everything.

Prov 3:27,28; 10:2

You will never prosper through cheating or withholding what others deserve to get. Always give and do not hold back!

Prov 11:30; 24:11,12

We must win souls! It is the wise thing to do and we have no excuse for not doing it. God takes this seriously!

Prov 13:24; 22:6; 19:18; 23:13,14

Train children to obey, honor authority and follow instruction. Discourage rebellion, stubbornness and disobedience. Practice consistent discipline and corporal correction.

Prov 5:15-23; 6:20-7:27

Avoid adultery! True love requires faithfulness and is hard work. Be captivated by your spouse and work hard at enjoying each other. The price of adultery: punishment, flames, blows, disgrace, vengeance and the inability to take a stand for right.

The anatomy of the adulterer(ess): focus on outward looks (6:25); eyes used to capture by inducing flattery and lust (6:25); attire designed to inspire lust; loud, defiant and rebellious; double standards and compromised faith (7:13-15); persuasive talker that gets person to justify feelings that are sinful and talks down feelings of conviction (i.e. tries to get emotions and lust to overcome Spirit in you).