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# What You Need to Know About the Book of Proverbs

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# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

By Harold Willmington

The overriding theme of this book is wisdom, which may be generally defined as seeing ourselves and our world through the eyes of God. This priceless gift thus becomes ours when we acknowledge and act upon the fact of God's presence in our lives and of His desire to exercise priority over our lives. Wisdom then seeks and provides our proper responses in all matters, including the domestic, the business, religious, and social world.

## BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

CONSIDER YOURSELF NOW ENROLLED IN THE S.A.B.I. (THE SOUND ADVICE BIBLE INSTITUTE). YOUR INSTRUCTOR IS SOLOMON AND THE SUBJECT IS WISDOM.

Most of this book was written by King Solomon, the world's wisest man (1 Kings 3:12). In it he condenses the vast reservoir of knowledge and wisdom found within his mind into factual nuggets for his readers. Although he is said to have composed 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), only 800 bearing his name appear in the book of Proverbs. But these are the best. There are other biblical proverbs not found in this book (see 1 Sam. 24:13; Ezek. 18:1-2;

Mt. 23:24; Lk. 4:23; Jn. 16:25; 2 Peter 2:22).

A proverb is a short sentence drawn from long experience. It is a proper mixture of horse sense and holy sense. It is characterized by shortness, sense, and salt. It is the wisdom of many and the wit of one. It is, in essence, the ability to see ourselves and the world as God sees it. Solomon may have headed up a school of wisdom (1 Kings 10:8; Eccles. 1:1; 12:9), as Samuel headed up a school of the prophets (1 Sam. 19:20).

The book mentions the words knowledge and wisdom many times. Knowledge is the ability to acquire facts. Wisdom is the ability to rightfully apply those facts. The book of Proverbs tells a story. It is a picture of a young man starting out in life. Two schools bid for him and both send out their literature. One is the school of wisdom and the other the school of fools.

A. At least four kinds of fools are mentioned in Proverbs:

1. The simple fool (1:4, 22; 7:7; 21:11)
2. The hardened fool (1:7; 10:23; 12:23; 17:10; 20:3; 27:22)
3. The arrogant fool (3:34; 21:24; 22:10; 29:8)
4. The brutish fool (17:21; 26:3; 30:22)

B. But how different are the graduates from the school of wisdom:

1. Wisdom will protect her students (2:8)

2. Wisdom will direct her students (3:5-6)
3. Wisdom will perfect her students (4:18)

C. At least four chapters are noteworthy in Proverbs:

1. The terrible price for rejecting wisdom (1:24-28)
2. The snare of the harlot (7:6-27)
3. The pre-creation activities of Christ (8:22-31)
4. The virtuous woman (31)

## **FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR(S) OF THIS BOOK**

First Author

1. Who? **Solomon**. He was the son of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24), Israel's third king (1 Kings 1:39), and the world's wisest man (1 Kings 3:5-12).

2. What? The books of Proverbs 1-29; Psalms 72, 127, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes.

3. When and where? 935 B.C., from Jerusalem

4. Why?

a. **Prov. 1-29**. To contrast man's foolishness with God's wisdom and to instruct believers concerning this wisdom

b. Psalms 72, 127. The glories of Messiah's kingdom (72) and the importance of proper foundations (127)

c. Song of Solomon

(1) Historical: Solomon's love for his bride

(2) Typical: God's love for Israel, Christ's love for the church, and the love that should exist between a man and his wife

d. Ecclesiastes. The futility of human existence apart from God

5. To whom? To "my son" (Prov. 1:8, 10, 15, etc.). This was Rehoboam who apparently refused most of the wisdom offered by his famous father – see 1 Kings 12:1-16

Second Author

1. Who? **Men of Hezekiah**

2. What? Proverbs 25-29

3. When and where? Date unknown. Probably from Jerusalem

4. Why? To offer general instructions to Israel

5. To whom? All of Israel

Third Author

1. Who? **Agur**. The only known fact about Agur is that he was the son of Jakeh (Prov. 30:1).
2. What? Proverbs 30
3. When and where? Around 935 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? The eternity of Christ, the wickedness of man, plus lessons from nature
5. To whom? Israel

#### Fourth Author

1. Who? **Lemuel**. Some believe this was another name for Solomon. Others refer the epithet to Hezekiah (Prov. 31:1).
2. What? Proverbs 31
3. When and where? Around 935 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? The vices of wine, and the virtuous woman
5. To whom? Rulers and mothers

#### KEY EVENTS

1. The folly of rejecting wisdom's call
2. Rewards of wisdom
3. The epitome of wisdom, God's Son
4. The virtuous woman

#### KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Solomon**: David's son and successor, Israel's wisest king, who wrote

Proverbs 1:1-22:16

2. **Some of Solomon's wise men**: a group who may have written

Proverbs 22:17-24:34

3. **Some of Hezekiah's men**: a group who may have written or collected

Proverbs 25-29

4. **Agur**: man who wrote Proverbs 30

5. **Lemuel and his mother**: couple who wrote Proverbs 31

#### UNIQUE FEATURES

1. Proverbs may be considered the James of the Old Testament. In essence, it is an extended commentary on Mt. 7:24-27: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

2. The book of Proverbs is like medicine. You cannot live on medicine alone, but few of us go through life without some medicine now and then. At least we take a vitamin. Likewise, a spiritual diet of Proverbs alone would be most unbalanced, but how sick a person might be that didn't occasionally ingest some of these potions and antidotes for the sake of his mental, spiritual, and even financial well-being. The book of Proverbs is the kind of Biblical fare you should indulge in often, but not in large doses. The "stuff" of Proverbs has already been distilled so that its advice comes to us in

highly concentrated form. These sage tidbits have been boiled down, trimmed, honed, polished, and sharpened to where a little goes a long way. (Proverbs. Robert Alden. Baker Book House, p. 9)

3. For a time Jewish scholars questioned the canonicity of Proverbs, partly because of the apparent contradiction of 26:4 and 5, and partly due to the explicitness of anti-adultery passages. (Ibid., p. 13)

4. Proverbs contains a number of words which appear only once in the Bible and it is these words which usually cause problems in translation, especially if the word is integral to the meaning of the text. On the other hand, we are helped by the widely used semitic device of parallelism in Proverbs. When two halves of a verse are parallel (either synonymous or antithetical), we can usually guess the meaning of an unknown word by its counterpart which is known. (Ibid., p. 14)

5. One of the ancient rabbis, Rabbi Bar Kappara, once said the following two verses summarize the entire Old Testament! "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6).

6. Many of our modern day sayings have their root in the book of Proverbs. Some of these "paraphrased proverbs" are as follows:

- A bad penny always turns up (27:22)
- A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush (27:10)
- A fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his throat (12:16)
- A word once uttered is beyond the reach of four galloping horses (18:21)
- As you sow, so you reap (10:6)
- Victory has many fathers, defeat is an orphan (14:20)
- Bite your tongue (23:2)
- Blowing one's horn (25:27)
- Don't throw good money after bad (30:32)
- Don't wear out your welcome (25:17)
- God protect me from such friends (27:14)
- Haste makes waste (19:2)
- He asked for it (18:6)
- He who laughs last, laughs best (24:17)
- Jealousy—the green-eyed monster (6:34)
- Knowing the ropes (1:4)
- Let off steam (29:11)
- Man proposes, God disposes (16:1)
- Out on a limb (30:32)
- Quick as a wink (12:19)
- Rejoice not when your enemy falleth—but you don't have to pick him up either! (24:17)
- If that man kisses you, count your teeth! (27:14)
- Shrouds have no pockets (27:20)

- The child is father to the man (20:11)
- The hand that gives, gathers (11:24)
- Too many cooks spoil the broth (11:14)
- Truth will out (12:19)
- What is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine (1:14)

(Compiled from the Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers. W. Gunther Plant. Union of America Hebrew Congregation. New York, N.Y.)

7. Finally, Chester McCalley suggests the following character insights in his book, Portraits in Proverbs :

- The sluggard (6:6)
- The ideal woman (31:10, 30)
- The true friend (17:17)
- The wise counsel (or) counselor (1:5)
- The fool (1:22)
- The wise handler of money (23:4-8)
- The naïve (7)
- The ideal son (1:8)
- The scoffer (13:1)
- The man of quick temper (14:29, 30)
- The man of strife (26:20, 21)

## **COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS**

### **Job:**

- Both praise wisdom (1:1-9; Job 28:12-28)
- Both show that wise and righteous people are not always rewarded with health and wealth (see 15:6, 16-17; Job 1-2)

### **Psalms:**

- Both contrast the righteous with the wicked (numerous Proverbs; Psa. 1; 37)
- Both emphasize the "fear of the Lord" (1:7; 9:10; 16:6; Ps. 111:10; 112:1; 128)

### **Ecclesiastes:**

- Both praise wisdom (1:1-9; Eccles. 9:14-18)
- Both despise the "fool" (numerous proverbs; Eccles. 10)
- Both emphasize the "fear of the Lord" (1:7; 9:10; 16:6; Eccles. 12:13)

- Both contain practical instructions (see 27:23-27; parts of Eccles. 5; 7)
- Both affirm that all people are sinners (20:9; Eccles. 7:20)

### **TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS**

1. The Wisdom of God (8:22-31)
2. The Omnipresent and Omniscient God (15:3)
3. The God of the Strong Tower (18:10)
4. The Divine Brother (18:24)
5. The Son of God (30:4)
6. God of the Virtuous Woman (31:10-31)