

Proverbs

Value and Path of Wisdom							
Solomon			Wise Men (Anonymous)	Solomon	Wise Men (Agur, Lemuel, Anonymous)		
1:1–22:16			22:17–24:34	Chapters 25–29	Chapters 30–31		
13 sayings (1:1–9:18) 375 two-line (10:1–22:16)			36 sayings	±100 two-line	3 sayings		
Aims 1:1-7	Value of Wisdom 1:8–9:18	Contrasts & Godliness 10:1–22:16	Social & Miscellaneous	Social & Miscellaneous	Social & Nature Ch. 30	Ruling 31:1-9	Godly Wife 31:10-31
Prologue	Principles of Wisdom					Epilogue	
ca. 950-700 BC							

Key Word: Wisdom

Key Verse: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Summary Statement:

The proverbs of Solomon and various sages teach youth the value of wisdom over folly so they will obey God in every area of life.

Application:

Memorize proverbs to promote wise living.

Proverbs

Introduction

- I. **Title** The word "proverb" (משל *masal*) is apparently derived from a root meaning "to be like" or "compared with" (LaSor, 547; cf. "represent, be like" BDB 605a; Archer, 465); therefore, a proverb is a statement which makes a comparison or describes a common experience. The Hebrew and Greek titles for the book read "Proverbs of Solomon" (משלי שלמה 1:1) so the English title "Proverbs" shortens it to include other authors of the collection as well. The Latin title *Liber Proverbiorum*, "Book of Proverbs," combines the words *pro* "for" and *verba* "words" to affirm how a proverb is a "word (verb) that stands for" many words, i.e., combined into one short saying (*TTTB*, 162).
- II. **Authorship**
 - A. External Evidence: Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), and hundreds of them lie within this collection bearing his name. However, the Book of Proverbs is a collection compiled by authors other than Solomon, as evidenced by the fact that Hezekiah's men copied his proverbs and presumably added them to the existing collection (25:1). Some believe that Isaiah and Micah contributed to the collection process, given that they lived during Hezekiah's time (*TTTB*, 162).
 - B. Internal Evidence: The heading "The Proverbs of Solomon" (1:1) identifies the first section (Prov 1–9) as his work, as does the same title repeated in 10:1 (introducing 10:1–22:16 as Solomonic) and a similar title in 25:1 (introducing chapters 25–29). The remainder of the book is written by Jewish wise men (22:17–24:34), Agur (ch. 30), and Lemuel (ch. 31), of whom nothing is known outside the Book of Proverbs. Stylistic differences in 31:10–31 may indicate another unknown author other than Lemuel (31:1–9), especially since it is an acrostic poem separate from Lemuel's work (Buzzell, *BKC*, 1:901). Some (e.g., LaSor, 551) feel that the repetition of the Solomonic title in 10:1 indicates that chapters 1–9 are also the product of anonymous sages, but 1:1 probably argues against this.
- III. **Circumstances**
 - A. Date: Most of the proverbs date from Solomon's era (before his death in 931 BC), probably during his middle years (as contrasted with Song of Songs, probably penned in his early adult years, and Ecclesiastes at the end of his life). The entire collection could not have been completed before Hezekiah's time, 250 years later (ca. 715–686 BC), since his men were compilers (25:1; cf. LaSor, 558). The latest date is revealed in the last two chapters written by the otherwise unknown Agur and Lemuel, which "may well have been added during or shortly after the Exile (ca. 500)" (LaSor, 558; cf. Kidner, *Proverbs*, 26); however, "the final date of compilation is generally considered to be around 700 BC, assuming Agur and Lemuel wrote before then" (Buzzell, *BKC*, 1:901).
 - B. Recipients: The frequent use of the phrases "my son" and "my sons" may indicate either a home setting or a school environment where students were referred to as "sons" of their teachers. Since the sayings are collections, both views may be correct, as proverbs were collected from various situations and audiences.
 - C. Occasion: King Hezekiah sought the Lord fully during his life, so he likely saw the existing collection of proverbs of Solomon (Prov 1–24) and authorized other proverbs of Solomon to be added to the book under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Prov 25–29). Many Ancient Near East cultures shared similar wisdom writings (cf. the Egyptian proverbs of Amenemope, circa 1000 BC). The book actually compiles eight separate collections, distinguishable by either an introductory subtitle or a sudden change in literary style (cf. LaSor, 548), which makes it difficult to speak with certainty about how the book obtained its present form, except that the Holy Spirit guided the process.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Proverbs say little about the afterlife as the emphasis is on life now (Buzzell, *BKC*, 1:904).
- B. Proverbs is one of the few books in Scripture written by multiple authors (cf. Psalms, 1 Samuel, portions of Deuteronomy and Joshua, etc.).
- C. Humor is important to many of the proverbs (11:22; 19:24; 23:13, 35; 24:33; 25:24; 26:13-16; 27:15-16; 30:15, 21-23; cf. *TTTB*, 164).
- D. Proverbs are unique in at least five ways (Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 237-39):
 1. Proverbs meet the *human urge for order*. They systematize our understanding of life.
 2. Proverbs are *striking and memorable*. This prompts us to take notice, as opposed to the clichés of certain statements or ideas. For example, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money” (Eccles. 5:10).
 3. Proverbs are simultaneously *simple and profound*. The proverb is a meditative form, inviting us to pause and consider it carefully.
 4. Proverbs are often *poetic in form*. The use of concrete images heightens the effect: “Through sloth the roof sinks in” (Eccles. 10:18).
 5. Proverbs are often *specific and universal at the same time*. “Through sloth the roof sinks in” talks about more than houses—it comments about laziness in *any* area of life.
- E. Types of proverbs fall into three different categories (Wilhoit and Ryken, 240, adapted):
 1. *Descriptive*: Some proverbs describe *how things are*...

“Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil” (Eccles. 8:11)

“One sinner destroys much good” (Eccles. 9:18)

“Money is the answer for everything” (Eccles. 10:19 NIV) actually expresses an immoral viewpoint, but not with approval—it just states what many people think.
 2. *Prescriptive*: Other proverbs prescribe *how we should live*, such as “Do not wear yourself out to get rich” (Prov. 23:4 NIV).
 3. *Combination*: Still other proverbs both describe and prescribe by expressing observations that exhort a mode of behavior. Proverbs 27 has such examples...

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (v. 6)

“He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice,
rising early in the morning,
will be counted as cursing” (v. 14)

“A continual dripping on a rainy day
and a contentious woman are alike” (v. 15)

- F. This literary type (*genre*) requires greater discernment in interpretation. In particular, too often people understand a proverb as an absolute promise or principle that has no exceptions. For example, consider the proverb about child rearing:

“Train a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old, he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6)

This has often been interpreted as an unconditional promise. The problem comes when godly parents raise a child in a godly manner, but the child later rejects these values. Questions like “Did they really do a good job in raising the child?” and “How can they say they raised the child properly?” arise based on this verse.

- G. In response, some guidelines for interpretation may help to interpret Proverbs properly:

1. *Do not consider the proverbs as promises from God* but rather as general observations and principles that are usually valid but not always (cf. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the OT*, 234). Thus, in the case above, as a rule godly parents generally do raise godly children, but exceptions occur—even biblical ones such as Samuel whose sons were dishonest (1 Sam. 8:1-5) and Hezekiah, one of the godliest Judean kings, whose son Manasseh was one of Judah’s most evil kings (2 Kings 21–22). Solomon also had David as his godly father, yet Solomon later became an idolater. Other proverbs also are not promises (e.g., 10:4; 12:11, 24).
2. *Understand Old Testament teaching in line with revelation for the church (Acts and Epistles)*. At least three types of statements apply (Homer Heater, DTS class notes, 210-11):
 - a. Reiterated statements: These appear in the NT epistles in the same or similar form. “Do not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16) is reiterated in “Stop lying to one another” (Eph. 4:25).
 - b. Quoted statements: When the NT quotes an OT passage to apply truth, it applies to the Church. “If your enemy is hungry, feed him” (Prov. 25:21) reappears in Paul’s instructions (Rom. 12:20; cf. Matt. 5:44).
 - c. Parallel statements: While similar to the reiterated statements above, these are more general. Wise words which “keep you from the adulteress” (Prov. 7:24) find a parallel *idea* in the NT: “It is God’s will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3).
3. Proverbs with no repetition, quote, or parallel in the NT should not be treated as commands. However, if they do not contradict NT teaching, they may be applied as principles. Tithing serves as an example. It is not taught in the New Testament and therefore is not binding on the church. Although many Christians observe tithing, they should not impose it on others.

Argument

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of eight sections designed to impart wisdom, especially to young people. The collection begins with its purpose (1:1-7), though this probably only originally introduced the first section by Solomon (1:8–9:18). Another Solomonic section follows, using antithetical and indicative two-line proverbs (10:1–22:16), followed by longer sayings of the wise men (22:17–24:34) and the final section of Solomon’s proverbs—this section collected by Hezekiah’s men 250 years after Solomon (Prov 25–29). The book concludes with three short sections by Agur (Prov 30), Lemuel (31:1-9), and an anonymous acrostic poem depicting the noble wife (31:10-31). The purpose of all of these sections in 1:1-7 is to give the value and path of wisdom so readers will obey God in every area of life.

Synthesis

Value and path of wisdom

	<u>Author</u>	<u>Theme</u>
1:1-7	Solomon's Purpose	Wisdom for obedience
1:8-9:18	Solomon's miscellaneous	Value of wisdom
10:1-22:16	Solomon's two-line	Contrasts for godliness
22:17-24:34	Wise men's sayings	Various situations
25-29	Solomonic via Hezekiah's scribes	Social
30	Agur	Nature/social
31:1-9	Lemuel	Leadership
31:10-31	Anonymous	Noble wife

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The proverbs of Solomon and various sages teach young people the value of wisdom over folly so that they will obey God in every area of life.

- I. The introduction to the first collection cites Solomon's purpose as giving wisdom so that readers will obey God in every area of life (1:1-7).
 - A. The title introduces Solomon as the author of the proverbs in chapters 1-9 (1:1).
 - B. Proverbs teach discipline and discernment (1:2-6).
 - C. Knowledge begins with fearing the LORD (1:7).
- II. Solomon's proverbs show the value of wisdom because it leads to a prosperous life while foolishness leads to a despicable life (1:8-9:18).
 - A. Wisdom is valuable because it gives honor to keep youth from the shame of foolishness (1:8-9).
 - B. Wisdom is valuable because it preserves youth from disaster (1:10-33).
 - C. Wisdom is valuable because it helps maintain moral behavior (Prov 2).
 - D. Wisdom is valuable because it helps us relate to God and man (Prov 3).
 - E. Wisdom is valuable because it provides a gracious life (4:1-9).
 - F. Wisdom is valuable because it preserves youth from trouble (4:10-19).
 - G. Wisdom is valuable because it produces healthy young people (4:20-27).

- H. Wisdom is valuable because it helps avoid sexual sin (Prov 5).
1. This section will help youth discern between right and wrong (5:1-2).
 2. Sexual purity's many benefits will help readers avoid the stupidity of sexual sin (5:3-23).
 - a) Sexual sin is enjoyable in the short run but bitter in the end (5:3-6).
 - (1) Immoral people's advances are genuinely enticing in touch and sound (5:3).
 - (2) However, following such advances leads to certain ruin (5:4-5).
 - (3) Sex addicts can't discern momentary pleasure from long-term goals (5:6).
 - b) Sexual sin has many physical, financial, and emotional woes (5:7-14).
 - (1) Don't expose yourself to temptations in the sexual arena (5:7-8).
 - (2) Exposure to sexual sin leads to poor health, poverty, and regret (5:9-14).
 - (a) Sexual sin gives strangers the bodily strength and money for one's spouse (5:9-10).
 - (b) Sexual sin leads to a life of public regret for disobeying teachers (5:11-14).
 - c) Sex with one partner in marriage is the most enjoyable experience (5:15-20).
 - (1) Sex should be shared with only one person (5:15-17).
 - (2) Sex is most satisfying with one's spouse (5:18-20).
 - d) Avoid sexual sin because God calls it evil and will judge us for it (5:21-23).
 - (1) Resist sexual sin because God sees all we do and judges each deed (5:21).
 - (2) Resist sexual sin because it is an evil deed that causes personal ruin (5:22-23).
- I. Wisdom is valuable because it preserves from poverty (6:1-11).
- J. Wisdom is valuable because it preserves from dissension (6:12-19).
- K. Wisdom is valuable because it preserves youth from sexual immorality (6:20–7:27).
- L. Wisdom is personified in its valuable virtues, rewards, and use in creation (Prov 8).
1. Wisdom is valuable in its many virtues and rewards (8:1-21).
 2. Wisdom was valuable to God himself when creating the earth (8:22-36).
- M. Wisdom is valuable compared to the claims of foolishness (Prov 9).

III. About 375 two-line proverbs of Solomon teach the practical benefits of wisdom over wickedness in everyday life (10:1–22:16).

- A. Solomon's *antithetical* proverbs contrast righteous and wicked attitudes and conduct, along with their consequences, to exhort living wisely (Prov 10–15).
- B. Solomon's *indicative* proverbs observe from experience how wisdom applied to everyday life leads to godliness (16:1–22:16).

IV. Longer sayings of wise men admonish practical wisdom in many areas (22:17–24:34).

- A. Sayings of Jewish wise men admonish practical wisdom in many areas, with explanation of the reasons to heed their advice, especially due to Israel's faith in God (22:17–24:22).
- B. Additional sayings of other wise men emphasize moral and social responsibility but with little stress on spiritual motivations for obedience (24:23–34).

V. The final collection of Solomon's proverbs, by Hezekiah's scribes 250 years later, guides social relationships and various activities (Prov 25–29).

- A. Proverbs about *relationships* guide wise living in the social dimension (Prov 25–26).
- B. Proverbs about *various activities* guide wise living in other dimensions of life (Prov 27–29).

VI. The sayings of the unknown Agur to the unknown Ithiel and Ucal show insights from nature and social relationships (Prov 30).

VII. The unknown Lemuel's mother prepares him for kingship by advising him to avoid the excesses of women and wine, and to protect the rights of the underprivileged (31:1–9).

VIII. An acrostic and anonymous poem of a noble wife exhorts young women to be godly and diligent and exhorts young husbands to praise these qualities in their wives (31:10–31).

Note that nothing is said about her "personal relationship with her husband, her intellectual or emotional strengths, or her religious activities" (Ross, *EBC*, 5:1129).

"The model of women in tribal patriarchy is a brood mare;
in hedonistic naturalism, she is the bunny or plaything;
in feminist ideology, she is the self-sufficient career woman;
in romanticism, she is the fairy princess or maiden in distress waiting to be rescued;
in biblical faith, she is the partner in ministry."

— Theologian Donald Bloesch (1928–2010)

Topical Arrangements of Proverbs

Only portions of Proverbs are arranged by topic. However, some resources have done this:

Hubbard, D. A. *Proverbs*. Communicator's Commentary. Waco, TX: Word, 1989. 487 pp.

A more scholarly work in tone than the other preaching-oriented commentaries in this series, but still readable. Includes six principles of interpretation and essential guidelines for the proper understanding of the literary devices. Discusses Proverbs 10ff. topically rather than verse-by-verse, but it is somewhat difficult to use.

Voorwinde, Stephen. *Wisdom for Today's Issues: A Topical Arrangement of The Proverbs*. Phillipsburg, NY: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1981. 186 pp.

A small paperback that reprints the NASB text topically in 55 chapters, such as adultery, anger, food, giving, greed, kindness, laziness, prayer, political leaders, speech, and women.

Woodcock, Eldon. *Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. 237 pp. Paper, US\$8.95.

Introductory matters and topical arrangement of the book. Chapters conclude with questions and suggestions for further study.

Words and Speaking in Proverbs

Wrong Uses of Words	Right Uses of Words
<i>Lying</i> 6:16-17a; 10:18a; 12:17b, 19, 22a; 14:5b, 25b; 17:4b, 7; 19:5, 9b, 22b, 28a; 21:6, 28; 25:18; 26:28a	<i>Truthfulness</i> 12:17a, 19a, 22b; 14:5a
<i>Slandering</i> 10:18b; 30:10	<i>Speak to help and encourage</i> 10:11a, 20a, 21a; 12:14a, 18b; 15:4a; 18:4, 20-21
<i>Constant talking</i> 10:8, 10b, 19; 17:28; 18:2; 20:19b	<i>Few words</i> 10:19; 11:12b; 13:3a; 17:27a
<i>Mocking</i> 13:1b; 14:6a; 15:12; 17:5a; 19:29a; 21:11a; 22:10; 24:9b; 30:17	<i>Carefully chosen words</i> 13:3a; 15:28; 16:23a; 21:23
<i>Harsh talk: perverse, reckless, evil, sly words</i> 10:31b-32; 12:18a; 13:3b; 14:3a; 15:1b, 28b; 17:4a; 19:1, 28b	<i>Fitting words: kind, appropriate, pleasant</i> 10:32a; 12:25; 15:1a, 4a, 23; 16:24; 25:11, 15
<i>Ignorant or foolish words</i> 14:7; 15:2b, 7-14; 18:6-7	<i>Words expressing wisdom</i> 10:13a, 31a; 14:3b; 15:2a, 7a; 16:10, 21b, 23b; 20:15
<i>Gossiping</i> 11:13; 16:28b; 17:9b; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20, 22	
<i>Boasting</i> 17:17a; 20:14; 25:14; 27:1-2	
<i>Quarreling</i> 13:10; 15:18; 17:14, 19; 19:13; 20:3; 21:9, 19; 22:10; 25:24; 26:17, 20-21; 27:15	
<i>Flattering</i> 26:28b; 28:23; 29:5	

Adapted from Sid Buzzell, "Proverbs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:918

Positive and Negative Topics and Other Subjects in Proverbs

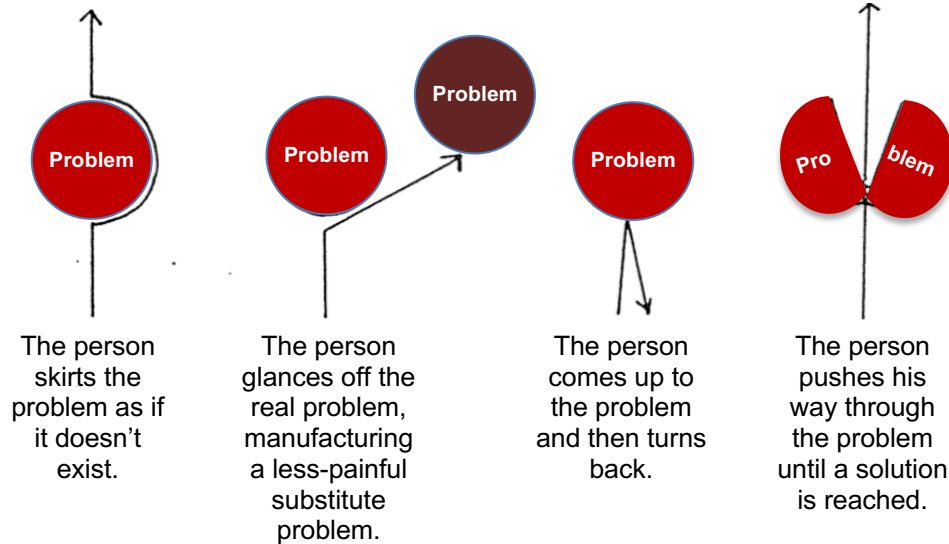
Sid Buzzell, "Proverbs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:918

Positive (Righteous/Wise)	Negative (Wicked/Foolish)	Other Subjects
Wisdom, wise	Folly, fool	Fear of the Lord
Righteous	Wicked	Husbands
Life	Death	Wives
Knowledge	Ignorance	Fathers
Work, diligence	Laziness	Mothers
Orderliness	Disorderliness	Children
Success	Failure	Kings, rulers
Self-control	Anger	Masters
Faithfulness	Unfaithfulness	Slaves
Obedience	Rebellion	Prostitutes
Honesty, integrity	Cheating, deceit	Orphans and the needy
Justice, fairness, equity	Injustice, unfairness	Business dealings
Truth	Lying, deception	Hypocrisy
Honor	Dishonor	Stealing
Commendation	Criticism	Rebuke
Humility	Pride	Gluttony, food
Purity	Impurity	
Encouragement	Slander	
Peace	Strife, jealousy	
Love	Hatred	
Mercy, kindness	Cruelty	
Generosity	Greed	
Joy	Sadness	
Hope	Anxiety	
Good company	Bad company	
Friendliness	Animosity, enmity	
Wealth	Poverty	
Virtue	Shame	
Soberness	Drunkenness	
Friendliness	Unfriendliness	
Trust	Worry	
Pleasure	Misery	
Quietness	Talkativeness	
Contentment	Envy	
Teachableness	Unteachableness	

Proverbs and Problem Solving

Charles Swindoll, *Proverbs Bible Study Guide*, 2

The capsules of truth preserved in Proverbs help men and women approach life's problems in ways that lead to growth and healing. Jay Adams has provided us with a simple set of diagrams that illustrate man's four common approaches to problem-solving.



PEANUTS



Proverbs versus Ecclesiastes

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are both wisdom books that share similar teachings in content and style. Both contain proverbs, both were written by Solomon to help young people deal with life, and both are likely to have been written after Solomon had experienced many of life's challenges. However, the books are different in some radical ways:

Proverbs	Ecclesiastes
Challenges of life	Meaning of life
Practical advice	Philosophical musings
How to live for God	Why to live for God
Ideals	Reality
Several authors	One man's testimony
Godly wisdom only	Godly and worldly wisdom
Positive	Negative
General	Exceptions
Present orientation	Eternal orientation
Black & white orientation	Gray areas
Wisdom praised	Wisdom doubted