

## **#16. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS**

1. **Psalms is a book of pithy statements devoted to wisdom, discipline, and profitable life choices.** I once heard Warren Wiersbe describe a proverb as “a short saying based on long experience!” The emphasis is on moral discretion, personal discipline, and relational dynamics. The ultimate source of such profitable living is seen as God Himself. The word *proverb* denotes the idea of *being like* something.

2. **The author of most Proverbs is Solomon. The final sections were written by Lemuel and Agur.** Proverbs is the first of Solomon’s three volumes of wisdom: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (also known as Song of Songs). It contains about one-third of the wise sayings put forth by Solomon (1 Kings 4:32). It is also probable that some of the wisdom sayings were in existence long before King Solomon’s era and were simply collected by him.

- The setting of the Proverbs was primarily from (1) parent to child, (2) royal instruction to a rising prince, and (3) the general collection of wisdom literature.
- Proverbs was not assembled in its present form until the days of Hezekiah or even later.
- Solomon is also credited with authorship of Psalms 72 and 127.

3. **The Date:** probably around 931BC or a little earlier. Solomon’s reign was from 971BC until 931BC. Final composition was in the days of Hezekiah, as late as 700BC.

### **4. Key Verses**

- **Proverbs 1:7 NASB** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- **Proverbs 3:1-12 NASB** My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup>For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. <sup>3</sup>Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. <sup>4</sup>So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man. <sup>5</sup>Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup>Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup>It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones. <sup>9</sup>Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first

of all your produce; <sup>10</sup>So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. <sup>11</sup>My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, <sup>12</sup>For whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

- **Proverbs 31:10-31** is famous for its portrayal of wise womanhood.

## 5. Key People

- **Solomon and his audience** - The context of Proverbs is (1) the preparation of Solomon to follow his father David as King of Israel, (2) Solomon's advice for his followers, and (3) general advice for his own children. The promised wisdom of God to Solomon makes his collection of wisdom of particular significance (1 Kings 4:29; Ecclesiastes 12:9).

## 6. Key Themes

- **Wisdom as a gift from God** - the general idea of wisdom is the focus of Proverbs. It is seen as proceeding from God and beginning with Him (Proverbs 1:7).
- **Quality Relationships** - advice for recognizing and relating to enemies, friends, the wise, and the foolish is scattered throughout the Book of Proverbs.
- **Life Choices** - through Proverbs, we are taught to discern, pursue, and practice wise choices in every area of life, including work ethic, speech, relationships, appetites, money, and emotional management.
- **Leadership Proverbs** - the final seven chapters are general proverbs addressed in particular to kings and various societal leaders.

## 7. The Contents of Proverbs

- 1:1-7 is an introductory section stating the title, purpose, and theme.
- 1:8-9:18 is predominantly for the young.
- 10:1-29:27 is a collection of general proverbs.
  - 10:1-22:16 are proverbs from Solomon.

- 22:17-24:34 are proverbs collected from various wise men.
- From Solomon; compiled by Hezekiah
- 30:1-33 are proverbs from Agur.
- 31:1-31 are proverbs from Lemuel (possibly another name for Solomon).

### Worth noting

- Solomon came to the throne of Israel with great promise and opportunity. His father David taught him that true wisdom is found in knowing God first. Solomon, however, failed to live up to his *great expectations*. Also, his son Rehoboam rejected the wisdom his father Solomon taught in his earlier years (1 Kings 12:6-11).
- The structure of Proverbs is that of short, easily remembered maxims.
  - The summation of Proverbs is that people who follow Godly wisdom generally enjoy a higher quality of life (2:20-22; 3:13-18; 12:21). Fools, however, suffer unnecessarily by rejecting Godly counsel (3:35, 10:31). The observation must be made, however, that proverbs are statements of truth that are considered *generally to be the case*. In other words, it is wise to treat the proverbs (at least most of them), as a distillation of truth - principles of general wisdom, not always as absolute divine truth. Let me explain - the truths of the Proverbs in many cases are statements that are generally true, but not in an inviolable sense. For instance, consider the statement “a wise son is the delight of his father”. That is almost always true. But there are times when the father himself is a fool, and he does not find delight in the wise behavior of his son. That does not make the proverb untrue; but it does make the case that the proverbs are *generally true*. The idea of a proverb is *behave this way, and this is what you can expect to happen*. We do need to remember that the proverbs collection is divinely inspired, and God is able to use a proverb to make an unbreakable promise to us if He so desires. However, Proverbs are not intended to be *legal guarantees* from God.
- **When reading the Book of Proverbs:**
  - Remember that Proverbs is Hebrew poetry, so the emphasis is not upon rhyme, but upon amplification of thought. Translation from Hebrew to English is along the lines of thought for thought, not a structure of traditional English poetry.
  - Remember there is a sharp dividing line presented between choices of wisdom and choices of folly and foolishness. The moment of decision may not reveal a great difference between the two choices, but the passing of time will reveal the great divergence of the two paths.