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THE PROVERBS

*Practical wisdom for a godly life*

SETTING

From 970 to 700 BC.

KEY VERSE

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

1:7

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is often called "Proverbs of Solomon", and 1 Kgs 4:30-32 says that Solomon's wisdom surpassed all the wisdom of the East and Egypt and that he wrote 3000 proverbs. He has written most of the proverbs in this collection, but the book itself states that he is not the only one:

**Ch. 1-9: "Introduction" by Solomon.** Wisdom and Folly are personified as two women, and this section ends by asking the reader to choose between these two. This is equivalent to choosing between God and the idols. This intro makes the rest of the book "theological", although some of the proverbs are "worldly" and practical. Some appear in other contemporary religions as well. The proverbs spring from Wisdom and God himself, as God has created a world where his wisdom is part of the "setup".

**Ch 10:1–22:16: Proverbs of Solomon.** Short proverbs set up as parallelisms (further explained in the main content).

**22:17-24:34: Proverbs of "the wise".** These are similar to Egyptian proverbs from approximately 1100 BC, but it is unknown who borrowed from whom or whether they are independent of each other.

**Ch 25-29: Proverbs of Solomon collected in Hezekiah's time.** Hezekiah was king of Judah around 700 BC.

**Ch 30: Words of Agur**

**Ch 31: Words from King Lemuel.** Although neither Agur nor Lemuel appears to be Israelites, the introduction puts all these proverbs in a relationship with God.

The purpose of the book is given in 1:2-7, and it is about practical wisdom for a godly life. Wisdom in the Bible is not about IQ but about godliness. And the proverbs are principles for life, not promises. They fit into different situations in life and show what usually happens if you live this way or that way.

Wisdom is central in Proverbs and was the master builder when God created the world (8:22-31). In the NT, it is Jesus who takes on this role (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:2-3). And the relationship with God's wisdom that the Proverbs encourage is fulfilled in the relationship with Jesus, who is God's wisdom (1 Cor 1:24).

*“Psalms teach us how to worship; Proverbs, how to behave; Job, how to suffer; Song of Solomon, how to love; Ecclesiastes, how to live.”* J.I. Packer

*“It is a book which seldom takes you to church. Like its own figure of Wisdom, it calls across to you in the street about some everyday matter, or points things out at home. Its function in Scripture is to put godliness into working clothes.”* Derek Kidner

**Biblical Wisdom:**

* Applied knowledge
* Practical wisdom
* Godly lives

### Structure

Ch. 1-9 “Introduction” by Solomon

Ch. 10:1-22:16 Proverbs of Solomon

Ch. 22:17-24:34 Proverbs of "the wise"

Ch. 25-29 Proverbs of Solomon collected in the time of Hezekiah

Ch. 30 Words of Agur

Ch. 31 Words from King Lemuel

## THE OPENING (1:1-7)

v. 1 connects it to God's history with Israel. This is not just random gold nuggets; it has to do with God.

*"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel"* v. 1

Audience:

*"for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young — let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— "* vv. 4-5

Basis: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* v. 7a

To fear the Lord stands as the opposite of despising admonition and wisdom.

*“but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* v. 7b

It is not that the foolish do not find or choose wisdom — they despise it! And thus they despise the Lord. They reject this relationship, which is fundamental to gaining wisdom.

The common misunderstanding is to see this book as a collection of proverbs and not a book about a relationship with God.

## CHAPTERS 1-9: “INTRODUCTION”

The purpose is given in 1:2-7: To pass on the traditional wisdom with fear of the Lord as the foundation.

The first nine chapters contain longer proverbs than from Chapter 10 onwards

The proverbs are written by a father to a son (1:8): Can be either biological or "professional". Addressed to young men, but applies to all of us.

Wisdom is described as a woman (*“she”*).

*"Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."* Proverbs 3:13-14

The Book of Proverbs warns against the adulterous, wayward (turned or turning away from what is right or proper, perverse) woman.

*"My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword."* Proverbs 5:3

*"Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man’s wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?"* Proverbs 5:20

*"keeping you from your neighbor’s wife, from the smooth talk of a wayward woman."* Proverbs 6:24

*"Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and to insight, “You are my relative.” They will keep you from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words."* Proverbs 7:4-5

Folly is described as a simple woman who refuses to be disciplined.

*"Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing."* Proverbs 9:13

## THE WISDOM (1:20-33, 3:13-20, CH. 8, 9:1-6)

Associated with honesty (8:6), truth (8:7), justice (8:8), wisdom, knowledge and

consideration (8:12), insight and strength (8:14).

Asks us to stay away from injustice, deceit, falsehood, arrogance, and pride (8:7-8:13).

Especially important: 8:22-31

*“The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old”* Proverbs 8:22

[About the creation] *"Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."* 8:30-31

Wisdom is a form of creation theology. God has created the world "by wisdom" (3:13) = with wisdom.

*"By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place;"* 3:19

He has created a world where His wisdom is part of the "setup".

God communicates through his creation. By observing God's world and reflecting on its inherent moral order, humans can deduce timeless truths.

Wisdom = living according to God's moral order in creation

By starting to fear God and studying His wisdom in the proverbs, life in God's world will become better.

*"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man."* Proverbs 6:6-11

**Observation:**

6:6 The ant works all the time.

**Interpretation:**

6:7-8 No one tells it what to do, but it gathers food all the same. A pattern of hard work. God has arranged nature in this way.

**Application:**

6:9-11 We should follow how God has arranged nature and work. Laziness leads to poverty.

## WISDOM & FOLLY CH. 8-9

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | THE WISDOM | THE FOLLY |
| Target group | Those who walk on the road: *“At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand”* (8:2-3) | *“Those who pass by”* (9:15) |
| Shouting | *“Let all who are simple come to my house!”* (9:4) | *“Let all who are simple come to my house!”* (9:16) |
| Invites | *"To those who have no sense she says, “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.”* (9:5) | *"To those who have no sense she says, “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!”* (9:17) |
| Living | *“the highest point of the city”* (9:3) | *“the highest point of the city”* (9:14) |

## 1-9 CHOOSE WISDOM!

God or idols?

Chapters 1-9 make the rest of the book "theological". We cannot read the individual proverbs as "worldly", even if they are practical.

The wisdom in Proverbs is a theological concept. Whoever is wise is in a relationship with God's wisdom and thus with God himself.

## CHAPTERS 10-31

* The world is ordered "morally".
* Principles - not promises
* Live wisely = live according to how God has arranged the world
* About how it usually goes - not the exceptions
* Marriage, justice, words and speech, character, family, friendship, work, generosity, wealth and poverty, alcohol...

## THE WISDOM IN PROVERBS…

*Retrieved from Kathleen Nielson*

* Comes to us in the context of God's word and God's people.
* Touches all areas of life.
* Is found in a relationship with God
* Is the opposite of foolishness
* Extends through God's revelation and is fully revealed in Jesus

## JESUS IN THE PROVERBS

Wisdom was the builder when God created the world (8:22-31) → God created through Jesus (John 1:1-3, Col 1:15-20, Heb 1:2-3)

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."* John 1:1-3

*"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”* Col 1:15-16

*"but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things,* *and through whom also he made the universe."* Heb 1:2

Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24, Col 2:3).

*"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."* 1 Cor 1:24b

*"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* Col 2:3

Relationship with Wisdom → relationship with Jesus

## PARALLELISMS (“THOUGHT RHYMES”)

**Synonyms (17:4)**

*"A wicked person listens to deceitful lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue."*

**Opposite (10:20)**

*"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value."*

## HOW TO BECOME A FOOL

**Step 1:** Foolish actions. "Normal status" is to recognize and correct a foolish action.

**Step 2:** Take the step onto the path of folly. Foolish actions become habits when one:

1. no longer listens to voices one should trust
2. repeats foolish acts on purpose
3. have started to like what one does: *"A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes"* 10:23a

**Step 3:** The hardening. The fool's heart and attitude become harder and harder because they think they know everything and need no guidance. And because they have taken the easy way out for so long, a change of course back to wisdom becomes very unlikely.

**Step 4:** Collapse and anger. Their actions are ruining their lives. The fools rage against all who have "failed them" — including God.

## TOPIC: WORDS AND SPEECH

18.21a: *“The tongue has the power of life and death”*

15:1: *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

16:24: *“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*

The connection between words and heart:

10:20: *"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value."*

16:23: *“The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction."*

10:19: *“Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.”*

12:23: *“The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves, but a fool’s heart blurts out folly.”* (We have to discern when it is the time to tell something and when to keep silent).

13:3: *“Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.”*

17:28: *“Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.”*

20:19: *“A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.”*

21:23: *“Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.”*

29:11: *“Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.”*

But:

25:12: *“Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear.”*

27:5: *“Better is open rebuke than hidden love.”*

Do you think you talk too much? Insufficient? Why?