OLD TESTAMENT · POETRY AND WISDOM · BOOK 20 OF 66

Proverbs

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (1:7)

31	Solomon	c. 970–700 B.C.	Wisdom
Chapters, 915 Verses	with Agur and Lemuel	Written and Gathered	For Everyday Life

STRUCTURE

The Book in Four Parts

Proverbs opens with long talks from a father to his son (1–9), then gives hundreds of short sayings (10–29), and closes with the words of Agur and Lemuel and the poem of the virtuous woman (30–31).



Each bar shows that part's share of the 915 verses.

I 1–9 · 256 verses

A Father's Call to Wisdom

Get wisdom; beware of folly; Wisdom and Folly each call to the simple.

II 10:1–22:16 · 375 verses

The Proverbs of Solomon

About 375 short sayings on the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked.

III 22:17–29:27 · 220 verses

The Wise and Hezekiah's Men

The words of the wise, and more of Solomon's proverbs copied by Hezekiah's men.

IV 30–31 · 64 verses

Agur and Lemuel

Humility, numbered sayings, a mother's counsel, and the virtuous woman.

THE WRITERS

Who Wrote Proverbs?

Each collection in the book begins with a heading that names its source.

1 1:1

Solomon (1–9)

"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel."

2 10:1

Solomon (10:1–22:16)

"The proverbs of Solomon." About 375 two-line sayings.

3 22:17; 24:23

The Words of the Wise

"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise."

4 25:1

Hezekiah's Men (25–29)

Proverbs of Solomon copied out about 715–686 B.C.

5 30:1

Agur

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh."

6 31:1

King Lemuel

"the prophecy that his mother taught him."

God gave Solomon "a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:12), and "he spake three thousand proverbs" (1 Kings 4:32).

PROVERBS 1:1–7

The Purpose of Proverbs

The opening verses tell why the book was written and who it is for.

1:2

To Know Wisdom

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding."

1:3

To Live Rightly

"To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity."

1:4

To Teach the Young

"To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."

PROVERBS 1:7

The Motto of the Book

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

How to Read a Proverb and the Two Ways

HEBREW WISDOM

How to Read a Proverb

A proverb is a short, true saying about how life usually works under God. Most have two lines that work together.

CONTRAST · 15:1

But …

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

ECHO · 16:18

And …

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

PICTURE · 27:17

So …

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”

Proverbs must be read together. “Answer not a fool according to his folly” and “Answer a fool according to his folly” stand side by side (26:4–5): wisdom knows which one fits the moment.

WISDOM AND FOLLY

The Two Ways

Proverbs sets two paths side by side and shows where each one leads.

THE WAY OF WISDOM	THE WAY OF FOLLY
“whoso findeth me findeth life” 8:35	“all they that hate me love death” 8:36
“The path of the just is as the shining light” 4:18	“The way of the wicked is as darkness” 4:19
“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning” 1:5	“fools despise wisdom and instruction” 1:7
“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” 13:20	“a companion of fools shall be destroyed” 13:20

> *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*
>
> Proverbs 14:12 (KJV)

The Fear of the LORD and Wisdom for Daily Life

THE FOUNDATION

The Fear of the LORD

Not terror but reverent awe, trust and obedience toward God. Proverbs names it fourteen times.

1:7
The Beginning of Knowledge
Where all true learning starts.

8:13
To Hate Evil
“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.”

9:10
The Beginning of Wisdom
“and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

14:26–27
Strong Confidence
“a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.”

15:33
The Instruction of Wisdom
“and before honour is humility.”

31:30
True Beauty
“a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.”

> *“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.”*
>
> Proverbs 3:5–6 (KJV)

EVERYDAY WISDOM

Wisdom for Daily Life

The short sayings return again and again to a few great subjects.

WORDS · 18:21
The Tongue
See also 10:19; 12:18; 15:1; 25:11.

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”

WORK · 6:6
Diligence
See also 10:4; 12:24; 24:30–34.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise”

MONEY · 11:1
Honesty and Giving
See also 3:9–10; 11:24–25; 19:17.

“A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is His delight”

FAMILY · 22:6
Parents and Children
See also 1:8; 13:24; 23:22.

“Train up a child in the way he should go”

FRIENDS · 17:17
Friendship
See also 18:24; 27:6, 17.

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”

PRIDE · 16:18
Pride and Humility
See also 3:34; 11:2; 29:23.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”

PROVERBS AT A GLANCE · PART 4 OF 5

Seven Things the LORD Hates and the Virtuous Woman

PROVERBS 6:16–19

Seven Things the LORD Hates

“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him” (6:16). Proverbs often counts this way: six, yea seven.

1. **A proud look**
2. **A lying tongue**
3. **Hands that shed innocent blood**
4. **An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations**
5. **Feet that be swift in running to mischief**
6. **A false witness that speaketh lies**
7. **He that soweth discord among brethren**

Agur gives more numbered sayings: four things never satisfied, four too wonderful to know, four little and exceeding wise (30:15–31).

PROVERBS 31:10–31

The Virtuous Woman

The book ends with an alphabet poem: each of its 22 verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

> *“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.”*
>
> Proverbs 31:10 (KJV)

31:11–12 — Trusted
“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.”

31:13–19 — Hard-Working
She works willingly with her hands and rises early.

31:20 — Generous
“She stretcheth out her hand to the poor.”

31:25 — Strong
“Strength and honour are her clothing.”

31:26 — Wise and Kind
“in her tongue is the law of kindness.”

31:28 — Honoured
“Her children arise up, and call her blessed.”

“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised” (31:30).

Christ Our Wisdom, Key Themes and Key Verse

LOOKING FORWARD

Christ, the Wisdom of God

The wisdom that Proverbs praises is found in its fullness in Jesus Christ.

PROVERBS 8:22–31 · JOHN 1:1–3

With God from the Beginning

Wisdom was with the LORD “from everlasting, from the beginning”; the Word “was in the beginning with God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:24, 30

The Wisdom of God

Christ is “the power of God, and the wisdom of God,” “made unto us wisdom.”

COLOSSIANS 2:3

All the Treasures

“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

MATTHEW 12:42

Greater than Solomon

“behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

The Fear of the LORD

Reverent trust in God is where wisdom begins.

1:7; 9:10; 15:33

Wisdom and Folly

Two ways of life, leading to life or to death.

8:35–36; 9; 14:12

Trust in God

He directs the steps of those who acknowledge Him.

3:5–6; 16:9; 21:1

The Power of Words

The tongue brings life or death.

12:18; 15:1; 18:21

Work and Diligence

The diligent prosper; the sluggard comes to want.

6:6–11; 10:4; 24:30–34

Family

Hear your parents; train your children; honour marriage.

1:8; 5:18; 22:6

Honesty and Justice

Just weights, true witness and care for the poor.

11:1; 14:31; 31:8–9

Pride and Humility

Pride falls; the humble receive honour.

3:34; 16:18; 22:4

God Sees All

Nothing is hidden from the eyes of the LORD.

5:21; 15:3, 11

KEY VERSE

“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.”

Proverbs 3:5–6 (KJV)