

Study No.15

Proverbs

**Timeframe of events:**

c.980 B.C. to c.700 B.C.

Summary:

The book of Proverbs is a compilation of several collections of wise sayings and counsel by different authors. The final edition of 31 chapters, as we have it, dates to no earlier than King Hezekiah's time (c.700 B.C.), and perhaps later. The book is intended to be a guide for one's attitudes and life choices, covering many different themes, as seen in the list on page 4).

Written almost entirely in Hebrew poetic style, about half of the sayings are attributed to King Solomon, though they may have been partly his and partly what he collected from folk sayings over a period of time. The first nine chapters may have been given to him in his youth by his mentors and instructors. Passages by other authors and compilers have been added towards the end of the collection. The book's contents include hundreds of sayings, observations on life, truthful principles and wise counsel for the young - much of which is pithy (brief but meaningful) and even witty. At least half of the content is comprised of two-line sayings, but there are lengthier subsections, the format varying depending on which section is being read.

Although much of the content is timeless, it is worth remembering that it was written during the time that God was dealing with Israel as a special nation, and that they were under the Mosaic Law. This means that some of the sayings have dispensational considerations, and that care should be taken when reading of rewards and promises, as they may not apply to the Christian today.

Main Reading / Listening



Read and/or listen to the following passages at least once. Twice is better for taking it all in!

As a minimum, please read or listen to:

Proverbs 1:2-7.

To read or listen to the entire Bible systematically, this week's passages are:

The book of Proverbs (31 chapters)

Hints on reading the book of Proverbs

There is no other Bible book like Proverbs, either in content or in literary form. It requires a different approach to normal Bible reading.

- **Read the short sayings and couplets one at a time**, pause briefly after each verse or short passage, and put the message into your own words before going on to the next one. Take your time, and make sure you understand the message of what you are reading.
- **Read Proverbs in a parallel Bible or with two different versions** side by side. Many of the teachings vary between Bible translations, and light is often shed on a saying by reading the same verse in different Bible versions.
- **Refer back to Proverbs 1:2-7 for the stated purpose.** Large sections of this book are a collection of almost random sayings, often with little connection to each other. If you're reading through this book and finding it hard to focus on the theme, 1:2-7 is a helpful reminder. Chapters 2 to 4 will also assist in this regard.
- **Read the book of Proverbs from a different perspective:** *"The Book of Proverbs - categorised"* includes every verse from Proverbs, but grouped into broad subject headings. PDF available on the website.

Sections in Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is comprised of a series of shorter collections of sayings. These collections are tabulated below.

Reference	Collection	Notes
1:1-7	Introduction	The stated theme and purpose of the book of Proverbs.
1:8 to 9:18	Counsel for youth	The virtues and benefits of wisdom, and warnings against being led astray by immoral women. Perhaps written by Solomon's mentors in his youth.
10:1 to 22:16	Proverbs of Solomon	The book's longest section. Written or collated by Solomon. Mostly two-line sayings.
22:17 to 24:22	Thirty Sayings of the Wise	30 short edicts. Perhaps based in concept upon an Egyptian collection, and similar in content in parts.
24:23-34	Other Sayings of the Wise	More short edicts of uncertain origin.
Chs.25 to 29	More Proverbs of Solomon	Also ascribed to Solomon, these were compiled later by scribes in King Hezekiah's time.
Ch.30	The Words of Agur	Collection of sayings. Author unknown.
31:1-9	The Words of King Lemuel	Collection of sayings by unknown king.
31:10-31	The Wife of Noble Character	The virtues of a noble wife. This may be a wife in general or a specific woman known to the author.

Significant word occurrences and themes in the book of Proverbs

The themes of this book are summed up by Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Exact terms and occurrences vary slightly from one Bible translation to another, but the the following provides an insight into the themes found commonly in the book of Proverbs.

Very frequent terms and themes:

- **Knowledge, instruction and understanding** (c.200 occurrences)
 - *Understand/ing* (60+)
 - *Instruct/ion/ teach/ learn* (35+)
 - *Know/Knowledge* (60+)
 - *Counsel /ors* (c.20)
 - *Hear / heed /listen* (20+)
- **Wisdom / wise** (6 chapters, also 80+ other occurrences)
- **Family members** - *father, mother, son, children, etc.* (c.120)
- **Lord / God** (90+)
- **Right / righteous** (c.100)
- **Wicked** (90+)
- **Fool / foolish / folly** (c.90)
- **Wealth** (c.90)
 - *Rich/ riches /wealth* (c.40)
 - *Poor/poverty* (c.50)
- **Heart** - *what one feels and thinks* (80+)
- **Way/s** - *i.e. lifestyle, actions, etc.* (70+)
- **Mouth / Tongue** - *what one says* (c.70)

Also found often ...

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of the Lord (16) • Good (40+) • Fall (c.20) • Eye/s - <i>what one looks at and sees</i> (40+) • Eat/Food/ fruit/ drink (c.50) • King (c.30) • Friend (c.20) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just/ice (20+) • Happy/blessed (c.15) • Sin/sinner (20+) • Life (c.40) • Death (c.30) • Better (c.20) • Pride/proud (14) • Honour (20) • Humility/ Humble/lowly (11) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mocker (c.15) • Prudence / prudent (c.15) • Simple - <i>one without knowledge</i> (c.14) • Shame (16) • Correct/ion (17) • Seek – <i>in both good and bad senses</i> (20) |
|--|--|--|

Enhancing your reading:

Attempt one or more of the following tasks for a better appreciation of the subjects covered by the main readings for this study.



- Jot down any questions arising from this study's readings. Ask someone else for help, or conduct your own research to try and answer these questions.

- Note any passages, verses, themes or lessons that have stood out to you from this study's readings. Write down or verbalise your reasons.

- Read or listen to these other Bible passages that relate to the content of this week's readings, containing or referring to "proverbs" or "sayings") :

1 Samuel 10:9-13; 1 Samuel 24:8-15; 1 Kings 4:29-34;

2 Chronicles 7:19,20; Ezekiel 18:1-3

- Write down any sayings from this book that you think you would benefit from by being reminded of their message. Keep these in a place where you are sure to read them again (e.g. a reminder on your phone, in a frame on your desk, etc.).
- Read the book of Proverbs from a different perspective: **"The Book of Proverbs - categorised"** includes every verse from Proverbs, but grouped into broad subject headings.

(PDF available on the [systematicbiblestudy.com](http://www.systematicbiblestudy.com) website)

**Consider and discuss
the following questions:**



References, such as 1:2-7, refer to the book of Proverbs, unless otherwise stated.

- (1) What is a “proverb”?
- (2) What is “wisdom”, as spoken of in this book?
- (3) Where does King Solomon fit into the writing of this book?
- (4) The introduction (1:2-7) features such educational terms as “knowledge”, “learning”, “instruction”, “understanding”. What role do these concepts play in living wisely?
- (5) What is “the fear of the LORD”? 1:7
- (6) Throughout the book of Proverbs, fools and foolish behaviour are contrasted with wise people and wisdom. Define the word “fool” as it is used in this book.
- (7) Proverbs 1:7 is a key verse. Rephrase it into your own words.
- (8) In 1:8, 10 and several times in the first seven chapters, who is “my son”, and who is speaking?
- (9) Who or what is the “wisdom” that calls aloud in 1:20, and then speaks in v.21b-33 and elsewhere in Proverbs?
- (10) Compare 2:4-6 with 1:7. Explain the relationship between wisdom, knowledge and fear of the LORD.
- (11) What are the general benefits of having wisdom, according to 2:10-15?
- (12) What specific example of a benefit of wisdom is given in 2:16-22?
- (13) How did the edicts of Proverbs 3:1,2 and 1 Kings 3:14 work out in Solomon’s life?

(14) In what way is the advice of 3:5 timeless?

(15) The Septuagint translation of 3:6 includes a long Greek word also found in 2 Timothy 2:15? (a) What is this word? (b) What does it mean? (c) May we draw any theological conclusions from this? Give reasons for your answer.

(16) Proverbs 3:11,12 is quoted in Hebrews 12:5,6. What is the context of this quote in Hebrews 12?

(17) What role did wisdom, understanding and knowledge play in God's creative actions, according to 3:19,20? In what way do you think these things had an impact on the process of creation?

(18) Compare 3:19,20 with 8:22-31. What similarities may be observed?

(19) Why does 4:1-9 address the message of this section to "my children" or "my sons" (plural), as opposed to "my son" (singular), as used more commonly in this book?

(20) In the sense used by 4:5,7, how does a person "get wisdom" and "get understanding"?

(21) What is meant by the phrase in 4:26, "let all your ways be established" ("be steadfast in all your ways" NIV)?

(22) Proverbs chapter 5 was probably given as advice to Solomon as a young man. (a) What did he do with this advice? (b) How did his decision affect his life?

(23) What is the message of 6:1-5 concerning making promises to others? What bearing does this advice have on the events described in Joshua ch.9 and 2 Samuel 21:1,2?

(24) How is the ant an example of wisdom, according to 6:7-11?

(25) What are the actions of a wicked person, according to 6:12-19?

(26) In a few sentences, summarise the counsel concerning adultery in 6:20-7:27.

(27) Many commentators believe that Proverbs ch.8 is really Christ speaking. (a) How could this conclusion be drawn? (b) Do you think this is wisdom or Christ speaking, or perhaps both? Give reasons for your answer.

(28) What is the picture being presented in 9:1-5?

(29) In what sense has wisdom “hewn out seven pillars” and “slaughtered her meat” (9:1,2)?

(30) Proverbs 9:13 is translated differently by the KJV/NKJV (“A foolish woman ...”) and the NIV (“Folly ...”). Which, if either, do you think is correct? Give reasons for your answer.

(31) What is the format of most of the proverbial sayings in Proverbs 10:1-22:16?

(32) Whilst the former section (chs. 1 to 9) contains a few sections about adulterous women, and chapter 31 extols the virtues of a noble wife, the proverbs ascribed to Solomon in chapters 10 to 22 and 25 to 29 say almost nothing about these subjects. Why might this be? Cp 1 Kings 11:1-13.

(33) The second line of many of Solomon’s two-line proverbs (chs. 10-22 & 25 to 29) commences with the word “but”. (a) What is the basic teaching method behind such proverbs? (b) How is 10:1 an example of this?

(34) Are the proverbs ascribed to Solomon (chs. 10-22 & 25 to 29) ordered or grouped by subject matter? If so, how?

(35) Compare 16:7 with the way the religious leaders of Christ’s day sought to kill Him (e.g John 7:1). Does the NT contradict the teaching of this proverb?

(36) What is the modern-day saying equivalent to the proverb of 16:18?

(37) What do you think is the validity of the proverb in 21:5 (a) in Solomon’s time, and (b) today?

(38) Compare 21:28 in the KJV/NKJV and the NIV. What are the very different messages? Which one (if either) do you think is right, and why?

(39) Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22 is comprised of thirty sayings “of the wise” (cp 22:20). What is the main literary difference between the Thirty Wise Sayings section and the Proverbs of Solomon in the previous 12 or so chapters?

(40) What is the possible link between the Thirty Wise Sayings and the Egyptian philosopher Amenemope(t)?

(41) How would you describe the “Further Sayings of the Wise” (24:23-34)?

(42) Chapters 25 to 29 contain more proverbs ascribed to Solomon, but compiled by scribes of King Hezekiah's time. (a) Who was King Hezekiah? (b) How long after Solomon did he live? (c) How do the sayings in this section compare in format with the proverbs ascribed to Solomon in 10:1-22:16?

(43) The proverbs of 25:2-12 have a general theme concerning the king and the judgement of courts. Find some examples of these themes in this passage.

(44) The proverbs of 26:1-12 have a general theme concerning fools. Put some of the examples into your own words.

(45) Concerning answering a fool, do 26:3 and 26:4 contradict each other? Give reasons for your answer.

(46) The proverbs of 26:13-17 have a general theme concerning lazy people or "sluggards" (NIV). What are some of these proverbs saying?

(47) The proverbs of 26:17-27:3 have a general theme concerning a person's words. What are some of these proverbs saying?

(48) Why might 27:10 be wise advice?

(49) The proverbs of 27:23-27 have an agricultural theme. How might some of these proverbs be applied to people in a non-agricultural setting?

(50) Compare 29:21 in the KJV/NKJV and the NIV. What are the very different messages? Which one (if either) do you think is right, and why?

(51) Compare 30:1,2 in the KJV/NKJV and the NIV. How do they differ?

(52) Who were Agur, Jakeh, Ithiel and Ucal? (30:1)

(53) What is the implied but unstated answer to the questions in 30:4? What is the message of this verse?

(54) What is the point of the statements including the words "three" and "four" (30:15,18,21,29)?

(55) Who was King Lemuel, and what role did his mother play in these proverbs? (31:1)

(56) Proverbs 31:10-22 describes the wife of noble character. Do you think this passage was given by King Lemuel, and why or why not?

(57) Some of the characteristics of 31:10-31 include descriptions of a woman who works with fabrics and sells them. (a) Does this passage refer to a specific woman known to the author, or to wives in general? (b) What are some of the virtuous features described?

(58) What is the message of the following verses? Consider each of these individually:

1:8,9 1:10-19 1:20-33 10:26 11:22 11:31 12:27 13:3
 14:7 14:12 14:20 14:26 (NIV) 15:8 15:11 15:17 15:29
 16:1 16:33 17:1 17:17 18:4 18:17 18:19 19:2 19:24
 19:25 20:14 20:16 20:24 21:18 21:22 22:13 25:2 26:17 27:13
 27:20 28:1 29:5 29:18

(59) Are the edicts found in the following verses truth for all time? Consider each of these individually and give a reason for your response:

2:10-22 3:1,2 3:7,8 3:9,10 9:9 9:10,11 10:3 10:27
 13:25 14:34 15:1 18:22 19:8 19:16 19:23
 20:8 21:12 22:4 22:16 28:8 28:10 28:16 28:18 28:20
 28:27 29:1 28:14

(60) The terms “Israel”, “Judah” and “David” only occur once each in the book of Proverbs, and only in section introductions; whilst the terms “Jew”, “Jerusalem”, “temple” and “house of the LORD” do not occur at all. Given that they were all important concepts in Solomon’s time (as well as in his successors’), why do you think there is a scarcity of these terms in the book?

(61) In broad terms, what messages are found in the book of Proverbs concerning: (a) wisdom, (b) the fear of the LORD, (c) knowledge and understanding, (d) righteous people, (e) fools, (f) laziness, (g) wealth (h) parents, (i) kings, (j) the mouth, (k) the heart (a person’s attitudes)?

(62) How might the observations, sayings and advice in the book of Proverbs be applied to your own life: (a) in general terms, and (b) in more specific ways?