

Proverbs

Authorship: Proverbs includes wise sayings from several authors, with the vast majority coming from Solomon, who had asked the Lord for wisdom instead of wealth (see 1 Kings 3:5-9):

- Solomon: Proverbs is divided into seven sections (see Outline). 1:1 suggests that Solomon may have authored the entire first section (1-9), although that verse may be an introduction to the book as a whole (Solomon may have compiled the entire book). The second major section (10:1-22:16) is directly attributed to Solomon, as is the fourth (25-29). Proverbs probably includes at least 800 of Solomon's 3,000 proverbs (see 1 Kings 4:32).
- Solomon may have also written many of the proverbs in the third section, the "Words of the Wise" (22:17-24:34), whose compiler and authors are anonymous. Many scholars also assume he wrote the final section, the tribute to the worthy woman (31:10-31).
- Agur, apparently a non-Israelite, is credited with the proverbs of the fifth section (30).
- Lemuel authored the sixth section (31:1-9). He was a king (31:1), presumably a non-Israelite. Some scholars believe, however, that Lemuel was actually Solomon.

Date: Solomon reigned 970-930 B.C. The "advisors of King Hezekiah" (25:1) would have lived some 200 years after Solomon. Dates for the anonymous collection and the collections of Agur and Lemuel are unknown.

Overview: The book of Proverbs rises out of the kingdom era of Israel's history. Solomon is the primary author. The wise men of Hezekiah's reign later compiled other proverbs during the Judah period.

Background: The book of Proverbs is a collection of proverbs and wise sayings brought together for the purpose of imparting wisdom. Some of the proverbs deal with serious moral issues, while others are simply observations and advice about everyday life, such as one might expect from a person with the broad interests of King Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:32-33). The proverbs tend to be brief and memorable, easily learned and applied. Proverbs focuses on the differences between the wisdom that results from belief in God and the folly that results from denial of His existence. It describes the fate of the "fool", who, because he has deliberately rejected God (see Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:18-23), becomes one of "the wicked." As the wicked fool moves ever further from God, he moves further from wisdom and common sense as well. By contrast, the wise person realizes God exists and has a healthy "fear" of God's authority. He or she realizes, therefore, that right and wrong actions have consequences. Such awareness of how the world works leads to a happy and satisfying life.

Purpose: Proverbs seems in large part to be addressed to those who are "simple," who have not yet made up their mind between the way of wisdom and the way of folly. It seeks to impart to them the wisdom that comes from the "fear of the Lord" and to show them how to apply that wisdom to life.

Outline:

- I. A Call to Pursue Wisdom (1-9)**
 - A. Introduction to Wisdom (1:1-7)
 - B. Fatherly Wisdom for a Son (1:8-9:18)
 - 1. Introductory Call to Wisdom (1:8-9)
 - 2. Warning to Avoid Ill-gotten Riches (1:10-19)
 - 3. Wholesome Call of Wisdom (1:20-33)
 - 4. Values of Godly Wisdom (2:1-3:35)
 - 5. Exhortation to Follow Wisdom Over Folly (4:1-27)
 - 6. Warning to Avoid the Adulteress (5:1-23)
 - 7. Warnings Against Folly (6:1-19)
 - 8. Warnings Against the Adulteress (6:20-7:27)
 - 9. Attractive Call of Lady Wisdom (8:1-36)
 - 10. Contrast Between Wisdom and Folly (9:1-18)
- II. First Collection of Solomonic Proverbs (10:1-22:16)**
- III. Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:34)**
- IV. Solomonic Proverbs Compiled by Hezekiah (25:1-29:27)**
- V. The Wisdom of Agur (30:1-33)**
- VI. The Words of Lemuel (31:1-9)**
- VII. Epitome of Wisdom: Wife of Noble Character (31:10-31)**

Key Verse

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths"
(Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV).

Sources:

Journeying with God: A Survey of the Old Testament, Purposeful Design Publications.
Wilmington, Harold L. *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1997.