

Old Testament Survey—Proverbs

What do you think of when you think of the book of Proverbs? Here are some things that come to my mind: Wisdom. How to live for God in practical terms. The fear of God. Interaction between a dad and his sons.

Discuss: What are some of the proverbs that come to your mind?

To do: How many different subjects can you find addressed in Proverbs in 3 minutes? Suggestion: Start in chapter 10. Write down the topic addressed and the reference. The person with the most wins. E.g.--The fear of God (14:26), patience (14:29), how to treat the poor (14:31), the tongue (15:1), discipline and parenting (15:5), prayer (15:8)...

Observations:

What observations can we make about the book itself--its organization, its subject matter, its literary type, etc?

--It is located in the poetic section of the Old Testament ("The Writings").

--31 chapters

--Much of the book is the record of a father speaking to his son

--Some chapters are cohesive (like the story of the immoral woman in ch 7)

--Other chapters seem to be a series of "unrelated" verses (beginning in 10:1)

--There are several headings throughout the book

Note: The Hebrew name *masal* means "to be like or compared with."

Note: Proverbs are classified as "wisdom literature."

Preliminary Overview of the Sections in Proverbs:

1:1 "The Proverbs of Solomon"

The chapters 1-7 begin over and over with "My son, "my son."

8:1 "Wisdom"

Chapters 8 & 9 personify wisdom.

10:1 "The Proverbs of Solomon"

Chapters 10-22

22:17 "The Sayings of the Wise"

24:23 "More Sayings of the Wise"

25:1 "Proverbs of Solomon"

More proverbs, copied by the men of Hezekiah, in chapters 25-29

30:1 "The Sayings of Agur"

31:1 "The Sayings of King Lemuel"

An oracle his mother taught him.

Who wrote the book?

--Solomon (some published under Hezekiah)

--The wisemen

--Agur

--King Lemuel

Note: Solomon wrote over 3000 proverbs and 1005 psalms (1 Kgs 4:32; Eccles. 12:9-10). We have only several hundred of them recorded in Scripture.

When was the book written?

--Solomon, who lived in the 10th century B.C., wrote most of the book.

--The book could not have been completed before Hezekiah's time (according to 25:1), which would have been 715-686 B.C.

--The final editing was completed in Hezekiah's day (acc. to Harrison), or at least by the fifth century (L.H.B.).

Why was the book written?

"The prime mission of Proverbs is to spell out strikingly, memorably, and concisely just what it means to be fully at God's disposal (L.H.B., 548)."

Proverbs is a "how to" book. God gave the Israelites the Law (Torah) to record the covenant guidelines for His relationship with them. The Torah focused on *what*--what God expected the Jews to be, to know, and to do. But Proverbs focuses on *how*--how to live the kind of life that pleases God.

Proverbs is also a motivational book. It shows us that God's Word is practical and relevant. It reveals not how to "get saved," but how to "live saved." As you read Proverbs, you see the advantages of living for God, and the consequences of disobeying God.

Theme: Wisdom

What is the outline of the book?

(by James F. Stitzinger, Jr., taken from *Masterpiece*, May/June 1990)

- I. The Prologue (1:1-7)
 - A. The Title--1:1
 - B. The purpose of the book--1:2-6
 - C. The motto of the book--1:7
- II. A Father's Praise of Wisdom (1:8-9:18)
 - A. A warning about enticement--1:8-19
 - B. A warning about rejecting wisdom--1:20-33
 - C. The value of wisdom--ch 2
 - D. The disciple of wisdom--ch 3
 - E. The quest for wisdom--ch 4
 - F. Wisdom about marriage--ch 5
 - G. Temptations to wickedness--ch 6
 - H. A warning about seduction--ch 7
 - I. The praise of wisdom--chs 8 & 9
- III. The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1--29:27)
- IV. The Words of Agur (ch 30)
- V. The Words of King Lemuel (ch 31)
 - A. Concerning life--31:1-9
 - B. Concerning the excellent wife--31:10-31

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Proverbs teaches us in practical terms how to be wise in life and so please God.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. *Proverbs reminds us that God is vitally interested in how we live.*

Proverbs addresses a host of relevant topics in our lives.

Discuss: What counsel does Proverbs give us on dealing with a person who claims to know God, yet shows little interest in living for God?

2. *Proverbs deals with three basic categories which were affected by the fall, and which God desires to transform in redemption. (by Stitzinger)*

a. Man's relationship to himself: his character (20:11), anger (29:11), wealth (1:4), pride (27:1), speech (18:21), laziness (13:4), self-control (6:9-11), etc.

b. Man's relationship to other men: his love (8:17), friends (17:17), gossip (20:19), truthfulness (23:23), fathers, mothers, children (20:7; 31:11ff; 3:1-3), etc.

c. Man's relationship with God: death (15:11), fear of God (1:7), rewards and punishment (12:28); trust (22:19), etc.

The work of Christ reverses the effects of sin in these three categories of our lives.

3. *The standard of wisdom was met and fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ.*

See: The following NT references...

Luke 2:52 "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Col 2:3 "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"

4. *Proverbs reminds us we can learn from the counsel and experiences of others.*

We need to be careful here, for experience is a subjective teacher. We need to build our lives upon God's truth, not people's experiences (like the parent who says, "Well, when I was your age, I did this..."). Experience is not infallible, but God's Word is.

However, in the multitude of counselors, there is wisdom (15:22). A proverb is a lesson learned by experience. We can learn from one another, and the experiences God has allowed others to have.

Discuss: Can you think of a way you benefited from someone else's experience this week?

See: The One Another commandments in the NT

Ways to Study Proverbs:

1. Read a chapter a day, to go through the book in a month

2. Pick a theme (such as the tongue). Go through the book and list every reference that mentions the tongue (or speech, or lips).

3. In small groups—read ahead of time a few chapters and discuss the truths that most impacted each of you