

Studying the Book of Proverbs

Why study the Book of Proverbs? The Book of Proverbs describes the wisdom of God applied to the believer's relationship to God, their relationship to themselves and their relationship to each other. God's wisdom is applied to all aspects of life with the goal that those who read and live by this wisdom will reverently fear God and live a life of holiness before Him and all others. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of practical, relevant and spiritual instructions for living daily with God.

In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the title of this book is "The Proverbs of Solomon." Almost all of the "proverbs" in this book can be attributed to Solomon. Only two chapters of the book are from others, chapter 30 is an oracle from Agur the son of Jakeh and chapter 31 is an oracle from king Lemuel. The tone or setting of the first nine chapters of the book is that of a father speaking to a son or of godly parents speaking to their children. A "proverb" is an instruction "to be like" referring to lessons of Godly morality for daily living. Proverbs are "brief words of wisdom" that can be easily memorized for retention and application for all of life's challenges and circumstances. The "key" verse of Proverbs is 1:7a, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." This verse gives the reader the right mind-set to understand what God expects for daily living with Him.

As a collection of wisdom from God, Proverbs can be studied thematically so that all of its teachings regarding a specific "theme" can be discovered. There are many individual wisdom teachings in this book, but a few general themes should be understood. As noted above, these are (1) the believer's relationship to God; (2) the believer's relationship to themselves and (3) the believer's relationship to each other. These themes are identified in the introduction to Proverbs, in the John MacArthur Study Bible. It should be understood that although the proverbs are a collection of godly wisdom, they are not intended to be absolute promises. They are general statements of living a godly life but do not ensure that all things in life will be comfortable or free from harm or suffering. The Book of Job makes this abundantly clear.

The Book of Proverbs contain many literary forms including (1) allegory (an extended metaphor); (2) anthropomorphism (describing God in human terms for ease of understanding); (3) hyperbole: (an intended exaggeration); (4) litotes (an intended understatement); (5) irony (saying one thing but intending the opposite); (6) metaphor (non-literal term to describe someone or something); (7) synecdoche (the statement of a part to represent the whole); (8) metonymy (reference to something by using an associated term); (9) personification (attributing a human quality to something that is not human); and (10) simile (a similar term). The Book of Proverbs also contains extensive examples of parallelism which is a device stating one truth on one line and the use of a second line to explain this truth or in some cases state an opposite truth. For an extended discussion on the various forms and literary devices in Proverbs, see Bruce K. Waltke. *The Book of Proverbs*. (Introduction), Chapters 1–15, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

Outline of Proverbs

Purpose of Proverbs: Chapter 1:1-7

Proclamations of Wisdom Chapters 1:8-9:18

Principles for Living: Chapters 10:1-29:27

Personal Applications: Chapters 30:1-31:31

Purpose of Proverbs: 1:1-7

The purpose that Solomon gave for the book of Proverbs is stated in 1:2-5: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— 5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance. (ESV). This purpose statement (verses 1-7) then ends with the key verse of the book describing the way to obtain wisdom (knowledge) which is by fearing God.

Proclamation of Wisdom: 1:8-9:18

Many instructions in this section are addressed to the youth of the people of Israel, 1:8-8:36. These instructions include warnings about consenting to the ways of sinners, 1:8-19; the words of wisdom, 1:20-33; the value of wisdom, 2:1-22; 3:13-35; 8:1-1-9:18;; trusting in the LORD, 3:1-12; the wisdom of a father, 4:1-27; warnings against adultery, 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; and practical life lessons, 6:1-19.

Principles for Living: Chapters 10:1-29:27

This large section of Proverbs includes those entitled “The proverbs of Solomon” 10:1-22:16, mostly proverbs containing two lines or couplets; and two sections of the “words of the wise,” (1) Thirty words or sayings: 22:17-24:22 and (2) Six additional words or sayings: 24:23-34. A further set of Solomon’s proverbs collected by those connected with king Hezekiah are contained in 25:1-29:1-27. This large section 10:1-29:27 contain a variety of wisdom sayings covering many aspects of daily life including pleasing and trusting God and living wisely with others.

Personal Applications: Chapters 30:1-31:31

The final two chapters of Proverbs contain general words of wisdom from Agur, chapter 30 and from king Lemuel, chapter 31. The concluding words of king Lemuel, 31:10-31 contain the well-known “wisdom of an excellent wife.”

Verses to memorize from Proverbs.

1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (NIV).

3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (NIV).

9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (NIV).

14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (ESV).

15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (NIV).

16:3 Commit your works to the Lord, And your plans will be established. (NASB).

16:9 A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps. (HCSB).

17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (NIV).

18:12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. (KJV).

18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (ESV).

22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (KJV).

27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (ESV).

30:5 Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. (NKJV).

31:10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. (NIV).

Resources for studying the Proverbs.

See the article on how to study the Bible for suggestions on the method of Bible study and recommended resources to obtain. Suggested commentaries and studies are listed below for a more extensive study. Some are available on-line in a pdf format.

One Hour – One Book

Scroll down to video on Proverbs.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSrCJNW5eUWQMyVw_2VqW_w

Commentaries

Buzzell, Sid S. *Proverbs*. The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament. Victor Books, 1985.

Constable, Thomas. *Notes on Proverbs*, latest edition. Online at Plano Bible Chapel.

Finkbeiner, David. *Proverbs*. The Moody Bible Commentary. Moody Publishers, 2014.

Garrett, Duane A. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. New American Commentary, Broadman Press, 1993.

Harris, R. Laird. *Proverbs*. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Moody Press, 1962.

Jensen, Irving L. *Proverbs*. Everyman's Bible Commentary series. Moody Press, 1982.

Kidner, Derek. *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Tyndale, 1964.

Ross, Allen P. *Proverbs*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 56, Zondervan, 1991.

Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs, 2 Volumes*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Eerdmans, 2004, 2005. Note: This is a commentary mostly suitable for scholars and seminary students. But serious students of the Bible will gain much insight from Waltke. These volumes are quite expensive.

Waltke, Bruce K. and Ivan D. V. De Silva. *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary*. Eerdmans, 2021. This is an abridged version of Waltke's NICOT commentary. It is more affordable than the NICOT commentary.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Skillful (Proverbs): God's Guidebook to Wise Living*. David C. Cook. 2009.

Studies

Articles from Journals may be downloaded in .pdf format from the Internet.

Barker, Kenneth, L. *Prov 23:7—"To Think" Or "To Serve Food"? An Exegetical Note*. The Master's Seminary Journal, 5/2 (Fall 1994) 203-210.

Bricker, Daniel P. *The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in Proverbs*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 38:4 (December 1995):501-17.

Byargeon, Rick W. *The Structure and Significance of Prov 9:7-12*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 40:3 (September 1997):367-75.

Dyer, Charles H., and Eugene H. Merrill. *Nelson's Old Testament Survey*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Fields, Lee M. *Proverbs 11:30: Soul-Winning or Wise Living?* Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 50:3 (September 2007):517-35.

Hanna, Kenneth G. *From Moses to Malachi: Exploring the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. CrossBooks, 2014.

Harrison, Roland K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969.

Hildebrandt, Ted. *Motivation And Antithetic Parallelism in Proverbs 10-15*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 35/4 (December 1992) 433-444.

Mayhue, Richard. *Practicing Proverbs: Wise Living for Foolish Times*. Christian Focus, 2012.

Rydelnik, Michael, Edwin Blum, General Editors, *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, Moody Publishers, 2019.

-Leventhal, Barry R. *Messianism in Proverbs*. Pages 727-737.

-Postell, Seth D. *Proverbs 8: The Messiah: Personification of Divine Wisdom*. Pages 739-746.

-Rydelnik, Eva. *Proverbs 30:4: The Riddle of the Son*. Pages 747-756.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Living the Proverbs: Insights for the Daily Grind*. Worthy Publishing. 2014.

Zuck, Roy B. *A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs*. A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament. Moody Press, 1991.