

Synopsis of Proverbs

“Proverbs provides Wisdom teaching that is equally dependent on God’s revealing truth to the obedient, faithful remnant. Here the situations covered are less excruciating than in Job. Normal life settings are addressed with the intent of helping God’s people move from immaturity to maturity. Though this type of material may seem mundane or even secular, the fact is that human beings cannot become wise solely through their own volition.” – *Old Testament Theology, Pg. 439*

“The book as a whole is a book of wisdom. It is, in fact, the most extensive straight ethical section in the Bible. It presents much of what the Bible teaches about how we should live our everyday lives.” – *The Message of the Old Testament, Location 10331*

“Proverbs is the foundational wisdom book of the Bible, teaching the ABCs of wisdom and introducing more complex issues that are further elaborated in Ecclesiastes, Job, and the wisdom teaching of the NT, such as the Sermon on the Mount. In an extraordinary way, Proverbs raises the theological question of the relation of ordinary life in the cosmos to God the Creator.” – *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 2080*

Proverbs

I. **Getting To Know Wisdom (1-9)**

a. What is the goal of Proverbs?

- i. **Proverbs 1:1–7 (ESV)** — **1** The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: **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, **6** to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. **7** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

“The purpose of the whole book is stated in 1:2-7. It is to help the young become wise and the mature wiser, to help them interpret wise sayings, using them to think and act in real-life circumstances, and for general discipline and instruction in ‘righteousness, justice, and equity,’ especially in socioeconomic and judicial relations.” – *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 2109*

b. Wisdom is presented as a path encouraged by both father & mother

Similar to the concept of Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Proverbs teachers parents imparting to their children how to live life and please God.

- i. **Proverbs 1:8–9 (ESV)** — **8** Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, **9** for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.
- ii. **Proverbs 2:1 (ESV)** — **1** My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you,
- iii. **Proverbs 3:1 (ESV)** — **1** My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,
- iv. **Proverbs 6:20–21 (ESV)** — **20** My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. **21** Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck.

Many other instances of similar language occur throughout chapters 1-9. The pinnacle of teaching is that which is handed down from father/mother to son/daughter. Therefore, the emphasis on this communication route in Proverbs relays the importance of learning and putting to use wisdom to live a life pleasing to God.

- c. Either you accept and follow after wisdom or you are foolish and are on a path to destruction. There is no middle ground.
 - i. **Proverbs 1:20–22 (ESV)** — **20** Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; **21** at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: **22** “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?”
 - ii. **Proverbs 3:7 (ESV)** — **7** Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
 - iii. **Proverbs 3:35 (ESV)** — **35** The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.
 - iv. **Proverbs 8:35–36 (ESV)** — **35** For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, **36** but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.”
 - v. **Proverbs 9:5–6 (ESV)** — **5** “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. **6** Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

“Divine wisdom is not for everyone. Some people reject it. There is, however, no neutral ground. For the writer of this book, those who reject its central purpose of seeking wisdom are fools. – *NIV Compact Bible Commentary, Pg. 351*

- d. The starting point for wisdom is the fear of the Lord
 - i. **Proverbs 1:7 (ESV) — 7** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
 - ii. **Proverbs 9:10 (ESV) — 10** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

“In addition to its appearance as the motto for the book of Proverbs, the “fear of the Lord” occurs thirteen more times in that book: 1:29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26 – 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; and 23:17. In addition to this, one should also consider the verbal forms in 3:7; 14:2; 24:21; and 31:30.” – *The Promise-Plan of God, Location 3288*

- e. Wisdom is something we should diligently seek
 - i. **Proverbs 2:1–2, 5 (ESV) — 1** My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, **2** making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding...**5** then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.
 - ii. **Proverbs 3:13–15 (ESV) — 13** Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, **14** for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. **15** She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
 - iii. **Proverbs 7:4 (ESV) — 4** Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend,
 - iv. **Proverbs 8:10–11 (ESV) — 10** Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, **11** for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
- f. Wisdom can help keep you from sin
 - i. **Proverbs 2:6–13 (ESV) — 6** For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; **7** he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, **8** guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. **9** Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; **10** for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; **11**

discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, **12** delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, **13** who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,

- ii. **Proverbs 3:21–23 (ESV)** — **21** My son, do not lose sight of these— keep sound wisdom and discretion, **22** and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. **23** Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.
- iii. **Proverbs 5:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, **2** that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.
- iv. Both literally and figuratively the act of adultery represents the depth of sin when wisdom is procured and applied
 1. **Proverbs 5:1–6 (ESV)** — **1** My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, **2** that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. **3** For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, **4** but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. **5** Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; **6** she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.
 2. **Proverbs 7:6–10 (ESV)** — **6** For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, **7** and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, **8** passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house **9** in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. **10** And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.
- v. Positively wisdom is found in beauty of your own marriage
 1. **Proverbs 5:15–21 (ESV)** — **15** Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. **16** Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? **17** Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. **18** Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, **19** a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. **20** Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? **21** For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths.

- g. Wisdom brings blessings
- i. **Proverbs 3:13–18 (ESV)** — **13** Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, **14** for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. **15** She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. **16** Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. **17** Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. **18** She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.
 - ii. **Proverbs 8:32–35 (ESV)** — **32** “And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. **33** Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. **34** Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. **35** For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord

“The worldview of Prov. 1-9 insists on freedom within form, life within law, and love within limits. Practically, this means that wise persons are constantly aware of the boundaries and limits that separate wise from foolish behavior and excess from enough. They are also aware that behaviors need to be appropriate to the specifics of situations, and to the nature and kinds of persons and things we relate to.” – *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 2149*

II. Wisdom From A Very Wise Man...Solomon (10-24)

The bulk of Proverbs are sayings from Solomon who God endowed with great wisdom. 1 Kings 3:10-12 says, “It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.”

Most of these proverbs are antithetical in nature meaning they start with a positive statement and conclude with an opposite statement. These proverbs cover a multitude of life circumstances and sometimes can seem contradictory. This is because interpreting Proverbs takes great care to understand the different circumstances to which they apply. In other words, not every proverb is universally applicable to every situation in life.

“It must be remembered that *proverb* does not mean ‘absolute promise’ in every specific context. A proverb is a comparison that teaches principles and expected outcomes in life...it is important to establish that exactly what Proverbs does or does not promise must be determined contextually.” – *Old Testament Theology, Pg. 448*

“Most wisdom utterances are situational: they need to be applied fittingly to the contradictory and complex circumstances of life.” – *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 2127*

a. **Example of Antithetical Nature of Solomon’s Proverbs**

- i. **Proverbs 12:1–2 (ESV) — 1** Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but he who hates reproof is stupid.
2 A good man obtains favor from the Lord,
but a man of evil devices he condemns.

b. **Example of Seeming Contradiction**

- i. **Proverbs 22:15 (ESV) — 15** Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
- ii. **Proverbs 27:22 (ESV) — 22** Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.

One of these verses presents that there is a solution to folly, but the other presents there is no solution to a person’s folly. However, in one case it is talking about raising a child, and in the other it is talking about an adult whose ways are set strong in folly. Some are more difficult than others and show us that a proverb is not simply something we recklessly employ in a situation, but seek to use the wisdom of God.

c. **Examples of Various Life Circumstances Addressed**

- i. **Hate is harmful – Proverbs 10:12 (ESV) — 12** Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.
- ii. **Righteousness in business dealings – Proverbs 11:1 (ESV) — 1** A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.
- iii. **Correct treatment of God’s created non-human life – Proverbs 12:10 (ESV) — 10** Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.
- iv. **Honoring the wisdom of our parents – Proverbs 13:1 (ESV) — 1** A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
- v. **Quick wealth ends in failure – Proverbs 13:11 (ESV) — 11** Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

- vi. **Be wary of associations with certain individuals – Proverbs 14:7 (ESV) — 7**
Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.
- vii. **Wisdom on how we talk to one another – Proverbs 16:24 (ESV) — 24**
Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
- viii. **Generosity to the poor – Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) — 17** Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.
- ix. **Don't be lazy – Proverbs 20:13 (ESV) — 13** Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.
- x. **Don't look for ways to get back at someone else – Proverbs 24:28–29 (ESV) — 28** Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. **29** Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done."

III. Solomon's Wisdom Compiled By Hezekiah's Men (25-29)

"It is thus noteworthy that the content of nearly all of these sayings relates to political rule or governance. The application of these principles applies, of course, to private as well as public life. The focus, however, is clearly public life. One could entitle this section 'Principles of Leadership.'" – *NIV Compact Bible Commentary, Pg. 354*

- a. **Don't try to take the seat of honor – Proverbs 25:6–7a (ESV) — 6** Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, **7** for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.
- b. **Don't wear out your welcome – Proverbs 25:17 (ESV) — 17** Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.
- c. **Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought – Proverbs 26:12 (ESV) — 12** Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
- d. **Don't be a wicked leader – Proverbs 28:15 (ESV) — 15** Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.
- e. **Be a wise ruler and do not trust in yourself – Proverbs 28:26 (ESV) — 26** Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

- f. **Make just decisions – Proverbs 29:14 (ESV) — 14** If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever.

IV. Wisdom From Agur (30)

This section of Proverbs takes a turn from the more pithy statements to proverbs more focused on more deep theological truths.

- a. **Don't add to God's Word – Proverbs 30:5–6 (ESV) — 5** Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. **6** Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.
- b. **Learning from God's creation – Proverbs 30:24–28 (ESV) — 24** Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise: **25** the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer; **26** the rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs; **27** the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank; **28** the lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.

V. Wisdom From Legur & His Mother – A Picture Of A Blessed Woman (31)

The closing chapter of Proverbs presents the picture of a Godly woman. In the Hebrew Bible the book of Ruth follows Proverbs and expounds on the picture of this blessed woman from Proverbs 31. The chapter opens with some instruction for the King from his mother and closes with the description of an excellent wife.

Starting in verse 10 the poem is an acrostic with each line beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

- a. Some of the characteristics of an excellent wife
 - i. **The value of an excellent wife – Proverbs 31:10 (ESV) — 10** An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
 - ii. **Seeks the success of her husband – Proverbs 31:12 (ESV) — 12** She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
 - iii. **Makes good financial decisions – Proverbs 31:16 (ESV) — 16** She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
 - iv. **Works hard – Proverbs 31:18 (ESV) — 18** She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

- v. **Cares for the poor – Proverbs 31:20 (ESV) — 20** She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- vi. **Speaks wisdom – Proverbs 31:26 (ESV) — 26** She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- vii. **Her husband and children praise her – Proverbs 31:28 (ESV) — 28** Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
- viii. **She fears the Lord – Proverbs 31:30 (ESV) — 30** Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Conclusion

“[Proverbs] can be perplexing and even dangerous if read the wrong way. In fact, you might liken it to the experience you may have had if you are married, and you said to your spouse (or he or she said to you), “That may be what I said, but that’s not what I meant.” When reading Proverbs, as when communicating in marriage, we must sometimes work to understand the words being spoken.” – *The Message of the Old Testament, Location 10354*

“And the very wisdom by which he had formed the world originally, he offered to men and women as his wisdom. Without that wisdom, humanity was destitute of effective leadership and bankrupt in its appreciation or apprehension of God, humanity, and things; in fact, life itself became meaningless and devoid of satisfaction and joy. But when the fear of the Lord led the way, then life was a blessing from God.” – *The Promise-Plan of God, Location 3312*

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A proverb (from Latin: *proverbium*) is a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Collectively, they form a genre of folklore. Some proverbs exist in more than one language because people borrow them from languages and cultures similar to theirs. In the West, the Bible (including, but not limited to the Book of Proverbs) and medieval Latin (aided by the work of Erasmus) have played a significant role. A complex, intriguing, and important verbal entity, the proverb has been the subject of a vast number of opinions, studies, and analyses. To accommodate the assorted possible audiences, this volume outlines seven views of the proverb -- personal, formal, religious, literary, practical, cultural, and cognitive. In general, the book extends the challenge of proverb cognition by using much of what cognitive science has to offer.