

# Old Testament Survey

## The Book of Proverbs

### ***The Title of Proverbs***

The Hebrew term for proverb is *masal* which comes from a root which means parallel. It is a pithy saying which teaches truth by way of comparison.

### ***An Outline of Proverbs***

- I. Title and Purpose - Proverbs 1:1-6
- II. Fifteen Lessons on Wisdom for Youths - Proverbs 1:7-9:18
  - A. Lesson 1 - Proverbs 1:7-19
  - B. Lesson 2 - Proverbs 1:20-33
  - C. Lesson 3 - Proverbs 2:1-22
  - D. Lesson 4 - Proverbs 3:1-18
  - E. Lesson 5 - Proverbs 3:19-26
  - F. Lesson 6 - Proverbs 3:27-35
  - G. Lesson 7 - Proverbs 4:1-5:6
  - H. Lesson 8 - Proverbs 5:7-23
  - I. Lesson 9 - Proverbs 6:1-5
  - J. Lesson 10 - Proverbs 6:6-11
  - K. Lesson 11 - Proverbs 6:12-19
  - L. Lesson 12 - Proverbs 6:20-35
  - M. Lesson 13 - Proverbs 7:1-27
  - N. Lesson 14 - Proverbs 8:1-36
  - O. Lesson 15 - Proverbs 9:1-18
- III. Additional Proverbs by Solomon - Proverbs 10:1-22:16
- IV. The Sayings of the Wise - First Series - Proverbs 22:17-24:22
- V. The Sayings of the Wise - Second Series - Proverbs 24:23-34
- VI. Proverbs of Solomon as Recorded by the Committee of Hezekiah - Proverbs 25:1-29:27
- VII. The Sayings of Agur ben Jakeh - Proverbs 30:1-33
- VIII. The Sayings of Lemuel - Proverbs 31:1-9
- IX. The Perfect Wife - Proverbs 31:10-31

### ***Terms for Wisdom in Proverbs***

1. *Hokmah* - a proper grasp of the basic issues of life, particularly one's relationship to God as a moral agent. It includes the ability to determine right from wrong and make the proper judgment on moral and ethical issues.
2. *Bina* - denotes the ability to determine between sham and reality. The root is from *ben*, which means "between", hence the ability to choose between two issues.
3. *Tasiyya* - this denotes wisdom in terms of spiritual or psychological truth. The basic idea is that the source of this wisdom is divine and not earthly.

### ***Authorship and Date of Proverbs***

1. Many sections denote Solomon as their author. Some examples are Proverbs 1:1-9:18, 10:1-22:16, and 25:1-29:27. This is easy to see in light of the fact that according to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon's original collection of proverbs numbered over three thousand.
2. Two sections are attributed to other wise men.

3. Chapter 30 is attributed to Agur son of Jakeh.
4. Lemuel, an unknown king, authored some of the proverbs in Chapter 31. The description of the perfect wife in Proverbs 31 can be attributed to Lemuel or to some other unknown author.

### ***Critical Theories as to the Authorship and Date of Proverbs***

Liberal critics almost universally assign most of Proverbs to a time just before or after the exile. Many deny the Solomonic authorship of most of Proverbs, allowing only the central portion to be attributed to him. C.H. Toy, one of the more radical critics, advances the theory that Proverbs was written around 350 B.C. during the late Persian period. He offers the following as proof:

1. Since Solomon became the symbol of wisdom due to his reputation, it would be reasonable to assume that any wisdom writing appearing late would be attributed to him in order to gain acceptance. As a case in point, look at the Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal book assigned to Solomon in order to be accepted by the Jews.

*Sure, so Solomon is a symbol of one who is wise. How did he get this reputation if he never wrote any proverbs? Furthermore, just because one apocryphal book is ascribed to Solomon does not prove that the Proverbs are falsely ascribed to him as well.*

2. Proverbs shows an advanced form of pure monotheism, something unknown in Solomon's time.

*It appears he did not read the rest of the Old Testament which shows ample proof that the Israelites were monotheistic from very early times.*

3. Proverbs is missing a lot of nationalistic traits. This proves that the nation had been scattered when they were written.

*The answer to this is twofold. First, the nature of wisdom literature is individualistic and not nationalistic. Secondly, during Solomon's time Israel had extensive contact with foreign nations which would evidence itself by an exchange of ideas and culture.*

4. Proverbs exhibits vices known only to the post-exilic Israelites.

*Oh yeah, where did he get this idea!*

5. The equating of virtue to knowledge and wickedness to evil appears to mimic that of the Greek philosophers as exemplified by Plato.

*There is a fundamental difference between the Greek sophia (wisdom) and the Hebrew wisdom (hokmah). Hebrew wisdom is concerned about one's moral standing before God whereas Greek wisdom is concerned with head knowledge and speculation.*

6. Proverbs was the product of a professional caste of wise men who also wrote Ecclesiastes, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus.

*The very supposed existence of a caste of wise men assumes a founder. Additionally, even if such a group existed does not necessarily mean that they wrote Proverbs and the other wisdom books.*

Interestingly enough, William F. Albright has shown that the metre of Proverbs parallels very closely other ancient writings around the time of Solomon. These stylistic similarities do not exist during the time that the critics want to date Proverbs, but in fact occur much earlier.

***Proverbs 22-24 and the Wisdom of Amenhotep***

In 1888 an Egyptian work was discovered called the *Wisdom of Amenhotep*. The content of this document closely parallels that of Proverbs 22-24, and since it was dated to be from the eighteenth dynasty (1584-1352 B.C.), the natural assumption was that Solomon borrowed from it. Later study has dated this Egyptian document as belonging to the twenty-second dynasty which would put it around the year 1000 B.C. In any case, liberal scholarship almost universally assigns this document to be the source of Proverbs 22-24. However, a careful study shows that it was the *Wisdom of Amenhotep* that borrowed from Proverbs and not the other way around.

1. There are more Semitisms in Amenhotep's text than in other work on Egyptian morality. This would point to a borrowing from Proverbs.
2. There are a number of cases of Egyptian words that have been garbled that can be easily explained as textual corruptions from earlier Egyptian translations of the Hebrew.
3. There are several cases in which the Egyptian translator has mistranslated a Hebrew word. It is possible to reconstruct the Egyptian text from the Hebrew, but not the other way around.
4. The word for "third man in the chariot" in Proverbs 22:20 has been mistranslated as the word "thirty." The *Wisdom of Amenhotep* took this literally and made its text come out to thirty proverbs as opposed to Solomon's twenty-seven.