

PROVERBS

Study Guide

AUTHOR

Many are surprised to discover **King Solomon** is not the only author of Proverbs. True, Solomon is named as the author

- **Solomon** (Prov. 1:1; 10:1-22:16; Prov. 25-29).
- **The Wise** (Prov. 22:17-24:34)
- **Agur** (Prov. 30)
- **King Lemuel** (Prov. 31)

Solomon was not only wise, but he was a prolific writer and poet. He is credited with 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 psalms (1 Kgs. 4:29-34)! Other than Moses, no other author has authored more books in the Old Testament (two Psalms, most of Proverbs, all of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon).

“The wise” were most likely a group of recognized intellectuals in Solomon’s day. Other than the names of Agur and King Lemuel, all we know is that they were not Israelites.

DATE

Proverbs is a compilation of writings written over a span of almost 250 years. Though other books of the Bible cover historical periods of time longer than this, Proverbs is unique in that its span of writing is as long as it is. Most of the material was composed during Solomon’s reign from 971-931 B.C., however, a second collection of Solomon’s proverbs (ch. 25-29) were not added to the book until around 720 B.C. during Hezekiah’s reign.

A WORD ABOUT WISDOM

The term “wisdom” is a Hebrew word, *hokmah*, which literally means “skill.” This skill is not so much intelligence, but rather Godly skill resulting in practical action. Intelligence is one thing, but wisdom is another. Wisdom involves decision-making and action based on God’s values and ways. In other words, the one attaining wisdom (*hokmah*) “will be industrious, will know how to talk, and his will, will be in captivity to God’s. He will have life” (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). The wisdom described in Proverbs teaches us to establish values leading to righteous character, wholeness, and satisfaction.

Some struggle at wisdom personified as a woman, however this may be for a few different reasons. First, the Hebrew word used for wisdom (*hokmah*) is a feminine noun. Secondly, there is a strong contrast throughout the book of wisdom and folly, also portrayed as a woman. Proverbs is full of poetry

and figurative language, so one need not focus too much upon wisdom as feminine. Upon closer look, there are plenty of comparisons of wisdom to the qualities of Christ.

Be on the lookout for the various realms of life where wisdom may be applied: home life, finances, friendships, work, etc.

LITERARY STRUCTURE

Few biblical books so clearly announce their purpose like Proverbs (Prov. 1:2-7). Intended to impart wisdom through pithy and memorable statements, the main foundation is proper fear of the Lord.

I. Proverbs to Youth (Prov. 1-9)

II. Proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 10-22:16)

III. Sayings of the Wise (Prov. 22:17-24:34)

IV. Solomon's Proverbs Collected by Hezekiah's Men (Prov. 25-29)

V. Agur's Proverbs (Prov. 30)

VI. King Lemuel's Proverbs (Prov. 31)

HELPFUL TIPS FOR READING PROVERBS

Like Psalms, this book is also filled with figurative language. However, Proverbs is intensely practical and designed to be easily remembered. This is accomplished through some key ways:

- Exaggeration, emotive language, and poetic phrases
- Contrast
- Comparison
- Description of consequences

Never forget that biblical texts, though timeless, are still rooted in ancient culture. Therefore, some proverbs may reflect specific cultural aspects. In these situations, look for the principle behind what is being described. "It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Prov. 25:24). Our homes don't generally have livable spaces on the roof, so look at the principle being taught: Family discord is so undesirable that any living condition (even the least preferable) seems better.

You will also see phrases listing an amount, with an addition of one (six, yes seven; three..., four...). This is meant for emphasis and also to express it is not an exhaustive listing. Therefore, other objects can be added for similar comparison.

OBSERVATION WORDS

Attached is an observation sheet to help you keep track of what you learn about:

- **Wisdom**
- **Fool / Foolish / Folly**
- **Lessons to Learn**

Also keep track of what you learn about:

- **God** – *names, attributes, what He does/doesn't do, etc.*
- **Jesus** – *standard types/foreshadowings (deliver, salvation, etc.)*
- **Holy Spirit** – *named, works, symbols, etc.*
- **Fear of the Lord** – *anything about God's Word, Law, commands, etc.*

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What did the **Lord teach YOU** through what you read & how will you apply it in your life?

2. Describe wisdom in your own words.
 - What is it?

 - How does one get it?

 - What does a life of wisdom look like?

 - What benefits are there for the wise?

3. Describe the foolish/folly.

4. Choose your favorite proverb (can be part of a chapter) for each, and explain why you chose them. Make sure to give the location (Prov. ____:____-____)
 - Most encouraging

 - Most challenging to you

5. Review Prov. 7. What is disturbing/contradictory about vs. 14 in light of the whole proverb? What do you learn from this?

6. In what ways does Prov. 24:11-12 apply to your life?

