

Proverbs

Purpose: To demonstrate that wisdom can and should be taught and learned, to the glory of God.

Outline: I. Prologue (1:1-7)

II. The Way of Wisdom (1:8-9:18)

III. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)

IV. Thirty Anonymous Proverbs (22:17-24:22)

V. More Anonymous Proverbs (24:23-34)

VI. More Proverbs of Solomon, from Hezekiah's collection (25:1-29:27)

VII. Words of Agur (30:1-33)

VIII. Words of King Lemuel (31:1-9)

IX. Epilogue: The Ideal Wife (31:10-31)

(Purpose and Outline are from Dan Ledford)

Author: Solomon, Agur & Lemuel of Massa, and other anonymous authors. Compiled by an editor.

Date: The Proverbs were written from the tenth century to the sixth century BC; the latter being the most likely time for the final composition of the book.

Highlights:

The prologue (1:1-7) and epilogue (31:10-31) provide a purposeful opening and closing to the book). The prologue introduces the main themes and the epilogue – an acrostic poem – highlights the ideal outcomes of the way of wisdom.

The first nine chapters contain a series of proverbs contrasting the way of the wise with the way of the fool. Each section of proverbs (in these chapters) begins with “my son(s)” except the sections where personified wisdom speaks (1:20, 8:1, 22; 9:1).

The main collection of the proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16) contain couplets where one line contrasts the other. The second grouping of the proverbs of Solomon (25:1-29:27) contain mostly two-line verses. But there are some with three or even four lines.

The “thirty anonymous proverbs” and “more anonymous proverbs” function as a sort of appendix to 10:1-22:16.

The “Words of Agur” and “Words of King Lemuel” function as a sort of appendix to 25:1-29:27). Nothing is known of Agur and King Lemuel of Massa. They were likely members of the northern Arabian tribe of Massa, one of the sons of Ishmael.

“The book of Proverbs was very likely a ‘school textbook’ and an important part of the curriculum in the education of Hebrew youth. This practice continued into the early centuries of the Christian church as portions of the biblical proverbs...were incorporated into the catechism designed to train the Christian youth in godliness” (Hill, Andrew & Walton, John. *A Survey of the Old Testament*).

“The Retribution Principle,” which states that ultimately the righteous will prosper while the wicked will suffer, is confirmed in the proverbs. Though, this prospering and suffering may not occur in this life. Thus, the truths of the proverbs are general principles to direct our lives.

Proverbs are principles not promises.

The Way of Wisdom (1:8-9:18): The first section (1:8-33) introduces the common temptations of foolishness. The second section (2:1-4:27) commends wisdom; while the third section (5:1-7:27) warn against foolishness [especially in regards to sexuality]. The fourth section (8:1-9:18) personify wisdom.

Wisdom personified (Chapter 8-9): The personification of wisdom should not confuse you to think that wisdom is an actual person. Throughout history (and even recently) there have been pagan rituals revolving around the goddess “Sophia” (the Hebrew word for “Wisdom”). This is a literary tool in which we see “Lady Wisdom” and “Lady Folly” tempting youths to follow her ways.