

BOOK OF PROVERBS

Here is a quick review of the preceding book, the book of Psalms:

God has placed the book of Psalms in the centre of the Bible. It is a book of worship comprising songs of worship to God. This is because worship is to be the centre of every Christian's life in response to God's love.

What is the Book of Proverbs about?

1. Proverbs is not so much about our heart but it is about life, our daily life!
2. Proverbs 1:2. It is one of the few books in the Bible that states its purpose, which is "To know wisdom!"
3. Like the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs is a very popular book amongst Christians because it is about daily living! The characters in the book of Proverbs are easy to recognize, e.g. nagging wife. It is a guide on how we can live a godly life pleasing to God every day.
4. The word "Proverb" means a catchy phrase or saying, that teaches us some general truth or gives us a piece of advice. There are proverbs for different situations. "Pro" means "for" and "verb" means "word" or "verbal".
5. The word "wisdom" in Hebrew means "practical wisdom" or life skills, e.g. how to be a good mother or husband. It is about practical wisdom that we need to live a life pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). It is not just about life skills but LIFE SKILLS IN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE (i.e. as God sees us). It teaches us skills for godly living.
6. Proverbs 1:7 shows the source of wisdom. It says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!" How do we get wisdom? It is by reverence of God; by realising that God is wise and is our Maker and has the right to set rules in our lives!
7. It is the wisdom that comes from God, not men.
 - a) In Genesis Chapter 2, one of the trees that God planted in the midst of the garden was the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam not to eat from this tree because it belongs to God!
 - b) We must not set our own rules because God knows what is good for us!! For example, for a machine to function properly, we must follow the instructions in the manual provided by the manufacturer.
 - c) If we follow our Maker's instructions, we will live well in God's world.
8. The book of Proverbs is not like the other books which were given directly by God as seen in verses like "Thus says the Lord "
 - a) It is the accumulated wisdom of mankind, through the ages, put together by King Solomon and other wise men. God selected from this collection of wisdom and inspired men to write it into the book of Proverbs in the Bible.
 - b) Therefore, Proverbs must be treated differently from the promises of God! A proverb is a general truth, not a promise.
 - c) For example, Proverbs 16:3 which says, "Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established!" However, this may not be true all the time even if you have committed all to God because a proverb is only a general truth.

- d) An example of a promise is seen in John 3:16 which says that “Whoever believes in Him will have everlasting life”, and that is always true.
- e) Another example, Proverbs 10:27 says, “The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” Again, this is generally true but there are exceptions as some good people do die young and some wicked people live long; it is a proverb, not a promise.
- f) Proverbs are probabilities, not promises.

Who wrote the book of Proverbs?

It was mostly written by King Solomon, the wisest man.

- 1. He prayed for wisdom from God. He wrote 3000 proverbs and 1000 songs.
- 2. However, Solomon himself lost that wisdom in his later life, e.g. he married 700 wives and had 300 concubines.
- 3. Solomon probably wrote Song of Solomon at a young age; Proverbs in middle-age and the book of Ecclesiastes in his old age!
- 4. Probably Solomon collected all these writings for his son but his son, King Rehoboam, was foolish!

What was the writing style of the Book of Proverbs?

- 1. Like the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs was also written in the style of poetic parallelism. Parallelism means a pair of sentences where the second sentence will either emphasize the first or contrast with the first. Below are some examples:
 - a) Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”. This is an example of a contrast in parallelism.
 - b) Proverbs 14:13 says, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief”. This illustrates synonymous ideas in parallelism.
 - c) Proverbs 14:14 says, “The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways”. This shows opposite ideas in parallelism.
- 2. Hence, it is good to read the book of Proverbs aloud. It would be even better when we listen to a good reader reading Proverbs for us to appreciate the style of parallelism. As we keep listening to the Proverbs, we learn to repeat them automatically in our mind so that we have the right thoughts and will be able respond with the right behaviours when certain situations arise. This leads to the transformation of the mind with godly ways and thoughts.

What is the Structure of the Book of Proverbs?

- 1. It has three parts:
 - a) Chapters 1-9 give the introduction by means of 10 speeches.
 - b) Chapters 10-29 give the actual proverbs (with parallelism) of Solomon.
 - c) Chapters 30-31 give the closure.
- 2. Chapters 1 to 9 - Introduction.

- a) The 10 speeches in these chapters are from a father (Solomon) to his son, pleading with his son not to be foolish. The phrase, “My son, do not” appears 17 times. These 10 speeches are not Proverbs. However, Chapters 8 and 9 are written as poems and not speeches.
 - b) Wisdom is personified as a mother or a wife who is wise. When everything was made, it was wisely made by God! For example, a cell is so amazingly made by God. We can see the stamp of God’s wisdom in all His creation, be it the seas, mountains, the perfect human body, etc. It is like a mother demonstrating her wisdom in making a perfect home!
3. Chapters 10 to 29 – Actual Proverbs
These proverbs cover every possible topic and all aspects of life. E.g. How to use money, how to forgive, etc.
4. Chapters 30 and 31 – Conclusion
- a) These chapters were written by 2 persons, namely Agur and King Lemuel.
 - b) These are not typical proverbs.
 - c) Chapter 30 was written by Agur. He was a model student as in Proverbs 30:2. He was willing to learn, though he was not born smart.
 - d) Chapter 31 was written by Lemuel. Proverbs 31:10-31 depicts a model woman. Lemuel learned to rule with his mother as the role model. This chapter was written in the Hebrew acrostic style, which adopts one of the 22 Hebrew alphabets at the start of every sentence of the poem systematically until all the 22 alphabets have been used up. Note that the Hebrew language has 22 alphabets unlike English which has 26 from A to Z.
5. Why did the book of Proverbs start with King Solomon pleading with his son and end with King Lemuel up holding his mother as a role model?
It tells us about wisdom. We can learn wisdom from God as well as from our parents and their life experiences. There is a Chinese saying that our parents are wiser as “they have eaten more salt than we have eaten rice”.

What do we learn about God from the Book of Proverbs?

1. That God is wise! There is a stamp of His wisdom in everything that He created. See Psalm 19:1.
2. We thought that the book of Proverbs is just a book to make us wise BUT it shows that God is the wisest and we must learn to be more like Him. We must learn from Him, yet we often question God about why He does certain things. God created the universe that lasted thousands of years. Nothing man-made can last that long! First and foremost, the book of Proverbs is about God’s wisdom. We, who are made in His image, should reflect His wisdom. Christians should not only have love in their hearts but should also be thinking wisely.
3. Appreciate the wisdom of God in His creation every day!