

PROVERBS

Introduction

Author. Although the opening title ascribes the proverbs to Solomon it is clear from other passages (22:17, referring to sayings of the wise; 30:1-33, attributed to King Agur; and 31:1-9 attributed to King Lemuel) that he was not the sole author. The headings of 10:1 and 25:1 include Solomon's name stating that they were compiled by Hezekiah's men. Because of Solomon's ability to produce proverbs (1 Kings 4:32 attributes 3,000 to him) it is not unlikely that he was the source of most of the proverbs.

Date. If Solomonic authorship is correct then the majority of the proverbs were written in the 10th century B.C. The role of Hezekiah's men in collecting many of Solomon's words must have taken place from between 715 to 686 B.C.

Wisdom Literature. "Wise men" or "sages" were an important class in Israelite society. Their function was to give advice to kings and instruct the young. Whereas priests and prophets dealt with religious life, wise men were concerned with the philosophical and practical aspects of every day life. The way of wisdom is a description of the way the world runs under the sovereign hand of God. Wisdom is based on the fear of the Lord. Although due to the unforeseen circumstances of life nothing is certain the teachings of proverbs is a valid collection of general principles of the way the world works. The proverbs must not be interpreted as prophecy or statements about certain effects and results as absolute promises. While it is generally true that "the years of the wicked are cut short" and "the righteous live long and prosperous lives" (10:27) it is not always so. While the wicked and righteous usually "receive their due on earth" (11:3), their rewards and punishment often lie after the grave.

Structure. The book opens with a statement of purpose and theme (1:1-7). This is followed by a well balanced discourse on the way of wisdom (chapters 1-9) in which wisdom is commended (2-4) and folly is condemned (5-7). These sections are balanced by appeals to youth in chapters 1 and 8-9. They

may be outlined in the following way:

A	<u>Two Appeals To Youth</u>	1:8-33
	B <u>Commendation Of Wisdom</u>	2:1--4:27
	B ₁ <u>Warnings Against Folly</u>	5:1--8:36
A ₁	<u>Two Appeals To Youth</u>	9:1-18

The next major section is an anthology of Solomon's proverbs (10-22) followed by various collections of wise men (cf. outline, 22-31). The book closes with an acrostic account of the wise woman which corresponds to the opening discourses concerning lady wisdom and lady folly.

Occasion/Purpose. As is the case with all wisdom literature, the application to the audience is transdispensational. The only identifiable audience stated in the text is the young and the wise. The goal of the work is to teach young people wisdom and to make the wise even wiser (1:4-5). The frequent references to "my son" (1:8, 10; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1) emphasize the intention to instruct the young in wise living.

Message Statement. *The path to a wise, abundant life is found in fearing and knowing God.*

Argument

- 1A PROLOGUE: PURPOSE AND MOTTO 1:1-7
 This first section clearly outlines the purpose and axiom of the book. The purpose is to develop moral and mental acumen. For those who already have a certain measure of discernment the proverbs are designed to give even more insight. The basic components of moral acumen are stated to be righteousness, justice and equity. The result of developing mental acumen will be the possession of knowledge and discretion and the ability to understand proverbs, parables, sayings and riddles.

The credo of the book is that a loving reverence for God is the starting point of all wisdom. Submission to his lordship and commands are prerequisites for developing wisdom.

- 1B Two Appeals To Youth 1:8-33
 This section introduces the two basic philosophies which vie for the life of the young. The first way entreats the young man to enjoy the pleasures of exploiting others. The thinking and destiny of fools who live to utilize others is given. Then the young man is warned against rejecting wisdom. The result of such action is described as humiliating, inevitable and irrevocable. The way of folly pays high and unavoidable wages.
- 2B Commendation Of Wisdom 2:1--4:27
 With the two basic ways of life described the author now turns to a positive discussion of

wisdom. The benefits of wisdom are listed and summarized in chapter 2. In chapter 3 the young man is encouraged to have wise (proper) relationships with God, wisdom and with men. In chapter 4 the young man is encourage to hold on to wisdom. It is reliable, it is ancient, it will benefit the young and serve as protection for him.

- 3B Warnings Against Folly 5:1--8:36
- 1C Warning against adultery 5:1-23
This focus of this section is negative counselling the young to avoid folly. Folly is first portrayed in terms of adultery. The young man is admonished not to avoid adultery because of the inherent costs, the overwhelming benefits to be gained from fidelity and because of the omniscience of God.
- 2C Warnings against perverse ways 6:1-19
This section catalogues a selection of inimical ways which are foreign to wisdom. Among them are: becoming surety for a neighbor, slothfulness, deception and things detestable to God.
- 3C The cost of adultery 6:20-35
The author then returns to price of adultery. Loss of wealth, self destruction, endless shame and revenge from the husband are some of the consequences of adultery.
- 4C The description of two women--the harlot and wisdom 7:1--8:36
This section lays before the youth the two ways of life: the prostitute representing folly, and the virtuous lady, wisdom. The house of the harlot is simply a vestibule to death, but the way of wisdom is the way of life.
- 4B Two Appeals To Youth 9:1-18
This last section, with its two appeals, balances the opening section. Once again, the woman wisdom and the woman folly invite the youth to their houses. To enter the one is life; the other, death.
- 2A THE MAIN COLLECTION OF SOLOMON'S PROVERBS 10:1--22:16
This miscellaneous collection of Solomon's proverbs is best described as an anthology of his work. Occasionally a theme will be continued in two or more proverbs but the majority of the time context is of little value in interpreting the teaching. Interestingly the numerical value of Solomon's name is 375, the exact number of verses found in this section, 10:1--22:16.
- 3A THE SAYINGS OF THE WISE 22:17--24:34
This section returns to the style of 1-9 in which a particular theme is continued for more than a verse or two. The introduction to these thirty sayings is found in 22:17-21.
- 4A PROVERBS OF SOLOMON COLLECTED BY HEZEKIAH'S MEN 25:1--29:27
In the great revival under Hezekiah (1 Chron 29:31), Hezekiah restored singing to its proper place (2 Chron 29:30). His interest in the Davidic line, including Solomon give credibility to the heading of this collection.
- 5A THE SAYINGS OF AGUR 30:1-33
Agur was probably a "wise man" or a prophet. His words serve here as the first of two appendices to the book.
- 6A THE SAYINGS OF KING LEMUEL 31:1-9

King Lemuel was not an Israelite. His origin is otherwise unknown.

7A EPILOGUE: THE IDEAL WIFE

30:10-31

This is an acrostic poem of 22 verses which serves as a grand conclusion to the book. The excellent wife is described in detail and serves almost as a personification of lady wisdom. This climax corresponds in style to the opening chapters in which evil and wisdom were personified as women. Like wisdom, this woman is "worth far more than rubies" (31:10; 3:15; 8:11), and like the first part of the book, "he who finds her receives favor from the Lord" (8:35; 18:22). She, of course, is a woman who "Fears the Lord" (1:7; 31:30).

Outline

1A	PROLOGUE: PURPOSE AND MOTTO	1:1-7
1B	<u>Author</u>	1:1
2B	<u>Purpose</u>	1:2-7
1C	Summary statement	1:2
1D	For acquiring moral acumen	1:2a
2D	For acquiring mental acumen	1:2b
2C	Explanation of developing moral acumen	1:3
1D	Righteousness	
2D	Justice	
3D	Equity	
3C	Explanation of developing mental acumen	1:4-6
1D	For the naive	1:4
1E	knowledge	1:4a
2E	discretion	1:4b
2D	For the wise	1:5
3D	The essence	1:6
1E	understanding proverbs	1:6a
2E	understanding parables	1:6b
3E	understanding sayings	1:6c
4E	understanding riddles	1:6d
3B	<u>Motto</u>	1:7
2A	THE SUPERIORITY OF THE WAY OF WISDOM	1:8--9:18
1B	<u>Two Appeals To Youth</u>	1:8-33
1C	Warning against enticements to secure happiness by exploiting others	1:8-19
1D	Introduction: learn from parents	1:8-9
1E	exhortation	1:8
2E	result	1:9
2D	Summary admonition	1:10
3D	The thinking of the wicked	1:11-14
4D	Fuller admonition	1:15-19
1E	the statement	1:15
2E	the reasons	1:16-19
1F	their propensity for sin	1:16
2F	their end	1:17-19
2C	Warning against rejecting wisdom	1:20-33
1D	The prevalence of wisdom	1:20-21
2D	The invitation of wisdom	1:22-23
1E	to turn from folly	1:22
2E	to turn to wisdom	1:23
3D	Consequences of rejecting wisdom	1:24-31

	1E	the foolish choice	1:24-25
	2E	the disaster	1:26-27
	3E	the irrevocability of the choice	1:28-31
4D		The summary	1:32-33
	1E	of the fool	1:32
	2E	of the wise	1:33
2B		<u>Commendation Of Wisdom</u>	2:1--4:27
1C		The benefits of seeking and accepting wisdom	2:1-22
	1D	Conditions for finding wisdom	2:1-4
	2D	Results of searching for wisdom	2:5-22
	1E	summarized	2:5-8
	1F	God will give wisdom	2:5-6
	2F	God will give strength	2:7-8
	2E	delineated	2:9-22
	1F	the reception of wisdom	2:9-10
	2F	the protection of wisdom	2:11-19
		1G summary	2:11
		2G from wicked man	2:12-15
		3G from wicked women	2:16-19
	3D	Summary	2:20-22
	1E	for the wise	2:20-21
	2E	for the foolish	2:22
2C		The encouragement to have a right relationship	3:1-35
	1D	Introduction	3:1-4
	1E	exhortation to get wisdom	3:1-3
	2E	results: favor with God and man	3:4
	2D	With God	3:5-12
	1E	trust brings success	3:5-6
	2E	trust brings health	3:7-8
	3E	honoring God means wealth	3:9-10
	4E	God's discipline means love	3:11-12
	3D	With wisdom	3:13-26
	1E	its value	3:13-18
	2E	its relation to life	3:19-20
	3E	its benefits	3:21-26
	4D	With men	3:27-35
	1E	in actions toward others	3:27-30
	1F	doing good to others	3:27-28
	2F	doing evil to others	3:29-30
	2E	in attitudes toward others	3:31-35
	1F	statement	3:31
	2F	basis	3:32-35
3C		The challenge to hold on to wisdom	4:1-27
	1D	The reliability of wisdom	4:1-4
	2D	The priority of wisdom	4:5-9
	3D	The benefits of wisdom	4:10-19
	4D	The discipline necessary for wisdom	4:20-27
3B		<u>Warnings Against Folly</u>	5:1--8:36

1C	Warning against adultery	5:1-23
1D	Introductory call to heed fathers words	5:1-6
1E	statement	5:1-2
2E	reason: harlots seductiveness and results	5:3-6
2D	The cost of adultery	5:7-14
1E	strength	5:7-9
2E	wealth	5:10
3E	physical deterioration	5:11
4E	mental anxiety	5:12-14
3D	The benefits of fidelity	5:15-20
4D	The omniscience and judgment of God	5:21-23
2C	Warnings against perverse ways	6:1-19
1D	Concerning surety for a neighbor	6:1-5
2D	Concerning slothfulness	6:6-11
3D	Concerning deception	6:12-15
4D	Concerning things detestable to God	6:16-19
3C	The cost of adultery	6:20-35
1D	Introductory warning	6:20-25
2D	Loss of wealth	6:26
3D	Inevitable punishment	6:27-29
4D	Self destruction	6:30-32
5D	Endless shame	6:33
6D	Revenge from the husband	6:34
4C	The description of two women--the harlot and wisdom	7:1--8:36
1D	The harlot	7:1-27
1E	the father's exhortation	7:1-5
2E	her behavior	7:6-21
3E	a fool's response	7:22-23
4E	the father's moral	7:24-27
2D	Wisdom	8:1-36
1E	wisdom's call	8:1-5
2E	wisdom's benefits	8:6-21
3E	wisdom's relation to the created world	8:22-31
4E	father's moral	8:32-36
4B	<u>Two Appeals To Youth</u>	9:1-18
1C	The woman wisdom	9:1-12
1D	Her appeal	9:1-6
2D	Responses to her appeal	9:7-12
1E	the mocker	9:7-8
2E	the wise	9:9-12
2C	The woman folly	9:13-18
3A	THE MAIN COLLECTION OF SOLOMON'S PROVERBS	10:1--22:16
4A	THE SAYINGS OF THE WISE	22:17--24:34

1B	<u>Group One: Thirty Sayings</u>	22:17--24:22
2B	<u>Group Two: Miscellaneous</u>	24:23-34
5A	PROVERBS OF SOLOMON COLLECTED BY HEZEKIAH'S MEN	25:1--29:27
6A	THE SAYINGS OF AGUR	30:1-33
7A	THE SAYINGS OF KING LEMUEL	31:1-9
8A	EPILOGUE: THE IDEAL WIFE	30:10-31

