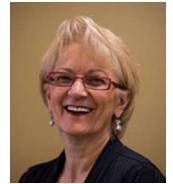


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In this study, we're going to do a very brief overview of some of the main features of the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs has thirty-one chapters. It's a wonderful, wonderful place to go and spend time to meditate on who God wants us to be, how He wants us to behave . . . It's a real place where you get teaching—basic teaching—on aspects of life, all aspects of life. They're all covered in the book of Proverbs. What I decided to do years ago was to read every day five psalms and one [chapter of] Proverbs, which meant that every month I was reading through the entire book of Proverbs (31 chapters) and the entire book of Psalms (150 chapters). And every time I went through the book of Proverbs, every day I would learn something new, even though I had read it time and time again. So the sayings, the wisdom sayings of the authors, are teachings that are precious and alive and very rich in content from the beginning to the end of the book.

The book begins with the purpose of the book of Proverbs and ends with this marvelous acrostic poem on the excellent woman, the virtuous woman. It's a beautiful way to end the book, which is unlike the end of any other book of the Bible. It ends with this beautiful poem honoring this virtuous woman, who obviously has learned a lot from the sayings of the wise throughout the book.

So the book of Proverbs belongs to Wisdom Literature. Other books that do belong to this genre of literature are the book of Job and the book of Ecclesiastes; some people look at Psalms as also part of Wisdom Literature. But these three (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) are the main ones that definitely ... have a similar tone in how God wants to deal with individuals—how should we live this out—which is very different from the Mosaic law, for example. The Mosaic law gives a lot of commands, or commandments, of “do this,” “don’t do this.” But these sayings that are found in the book of Proverbs are simple sayings that really touch what we say, touch what we do, touch what we think—



Wisdom Literature

Collections of statements by wise individuals that . . .

- Provide insight on a wide range of subjects.
- Offer guiding principles for successful living.
- Promote a life of virtue.
- Teach about divinity.

Wisdom Literature

Wisdom is . . .

- Personified as a woman who serves as a model for living for God.
- The application of divine knowledge acquired by faith.
- Seeing opportunities to live a life that pleases God.
- Seeking to see things from a divine perspective.

Writers of the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs 1:1 ESV

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel . . .

our intentions, our ethical values—touch all these aspects of life that are difficult to put in legal material. So they're instructions, they're teachings, they're collections that are left with us to know how to please God, because it's really about how to live a virtuous life for God.

Now, what is Wisdom Literature? Wisdom Literature consists of a collection of statements made by wise individuals—men and women. And they provide insight on a wide range of subjects from wealth to spirituality and to relationships and to how to treat members of your family, how to treat your neighbor, etc. They are guiding principles for successful living. And in our world, we think of success as, you know, having much . . . looking outwardly as if we are successful. Well, true success in the biblical sense is really fulfilling the will of God in our lives, walking with God, fearing the Lord, which is made very clear in Wisdom Literature. It also . . . the book promotes the walk of . . . this virtuous walk that is pleasing to God. The Wisdom Literature provides teachings about who God is, about divinity. It doesn't use a lot out of theological terms. It uses very human terms, but in the sense that these human behaviors—how should they be performed in such a way that they please God, and that they are considered virtuous in the eyes of God?

Now, what is wisdom? In Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman who serves as a model of one who walks with God, a model of one who speaks for God, who leads people in the right direction. Wisdom is the application of divine knowledge. Whatever we learn from God—the instructions that we receive from God—do we just know them on the cognitive level, or do we apply them in every situation of life? So wisdom is knowing how to live these things out, how to apply them. Wisdom . . . someone who is wise sees the opportunities to live a life that pleases God at all levels—emotionally, spiritually, in behavior, and in ethics. And so someone who is wise . . . seeks the opportunities to live out the directives that God gives in Wisdom Literature.

Now who wrote the book of Proverbs? We know the introduction of the book tells us that the book was written by Solomon. The first verse of chapter 1 says, “The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.” However, there are other people who have also contributed whose collections we have, and they were included in the book of Proverbs.

Now we know that Solomon had wisdom like no other, and we find that in 1 Kings 4:29–34: “And God gave Solomon wisdom and

1 Kings 4:29–34 ESV

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and

understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom" (ESV).

And what we find in 1 Kings 10 is, the queen of Sheba had heard about the reputation of King Solomon. So she decided to come and look into it for herself and really see if she could engage, interact, or listen, and learn at the feet of King Solomon. So in 1 Kings 10:1–7, we read, "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more breath in her. And she said to the king, 'The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard'" (ESV).

She was most impressed with what she saw, what she heard. And she had come being quite skeptical of what she had heard about the wisdom of Solomon. She was a leader herself. So she probably was recognized for having wisdom as a leader. However, when she finally encountered the wisdom of Solomon, she was so impressed that she was overwhelmed. She . . . I love the way Scripture says it: "There was no breath left in her" (v. 5). She was in such awe at the wisdom of Solomon. So we know that Solomon . . . We read that he spoke 3,000 proverbs. We do not have obviously all of these 3,000 proverbs in the book of Proverbs. We probably . . . many of them

are lost. We don't know if all of them were written, were recorded. This is a mystery to us. We only have what was left as literature for us to look at and study from.

So definitely Solomon contributed the majority of the proverbs that we find in the book of Proverbs. However, there were a number of other people who also contributed to the book. And so we read the first collection of Solomon is introduced in chapter 1 (1:1). Then there's a second collection of "The proverbs of Solomon" introduced in chapter 10, verse 1, we read the same thing, "The Proverbs of Solomon" (10:1).

Then in chapter 22, there is a heading that says, that encourages the reader to listen to "the sayings of the wise men" (22:17) . . . actually uses the masculine plural form, the *hakhamim*, "the wise men." So then we . . . this goes two chapter 24. Then in chapter 24, we read that "these sayings are also from the wise," from *hakhamim* (24:23). So are they from the same wise, an additional collection of proverbs, or were they proverbs from other wise men who also contributed to the collection?

Then we read that about "the proverbs of Solomon" that were copied by the men of Hezekiah (25:1), which is interesting because Solomon was in the tenth century BC and Hezekiah was in the eighth century BC. So we can see that the proverbs were transmitted from generation to generation . . . had been copied for at least two centuries to the time of Hezekiah. And these were so precious and so rich in content that they were preserved in the Israelite community and transmitted from generation to generation. We also read in Proverbs 30 at the beginning of the chapter that the proverbs of that chapter are "the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh" (30:1). So he is another author, contributor, wise man, poet possibly, but someone who had wisdom and left wisdom as his legacy.

In chapter 31, the chapter begins with "the words of King Lemuel" that his mother taught him (31:1). So some people attribute King Lemuel with King Solomon, possibly being a different name for Solomon . . . possibly that his mother taught him . . . would be Bathsheba, but there are different views on this. So if his mother, Bathsheba, taught him the Proverbs in Proverbs 31, it is possible that he also wrote the acrostic poem at the end of chapter 31 on the virtuous or the successful woman.

Writers of the Book of Proverbs

- 1:1–9:18 - Solomon
- 10:1–22:16 - Solomon
- 22:17–24:22 - Wise Men

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- 22:17–24:22 - Wise Men
- 24:23–34 - Wise Men
- 25:1–29:27 - Solomon
(copied by the men of Hezekiah)

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- 1:1–9:18 - Solomon
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- 24:23–34 - Wise Men
- 25:1–29:27 - Solomon
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- 30:1–33 - Agur
- 31:1–31 - Lemuel

So Solomon gave us such a precious gift in leaving all these sayings to us as a collection that we can read every day, learn from, meditate on, and imitate or apply to our lives today in order to please God in our walk with Him.