OT Wisdom Literature (OT6)

The Book of Proverbs
May 22, 2014

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Lakeside institute of Theology
OT Wisdom Literature (OT6)

Apr 3  – Introduction to Wisdom Literature
Apr 10 – The Book of Job
Apr 17 – No Class (Holy Week)
Apr 24 – The Book of Psalms, Part 1
May 1  – No Class
May 8  – No Class
May 15 – The Book of Psalms, Part 2
May 22 – The Book of Proverbs
May 29 – The Book of Ecclesiastes
June 5 – The Song of Songs; Final Exam
### The Structure of the Old Testament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genesis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Job</strong></td>
<td><strong>Isaiah</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exodus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Psalms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jeremiah</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leviticus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proverbs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lamentations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Numbers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ecclesiastes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ezekiel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deuteronomy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Song of Solomon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Daniel</strong></td>
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**Number of books in the Old Testament:**

18 books

**Number of books in the New Testament:**

5 books

**Number of books in the Bible:**

27 books
The Book of Proverbs

Title: The Hebrew name for the book is *Mishle Shlomoh*, or “Proverbs of Solomon,” though Solomon is not the only author of the content of this book of wisdom literature.

Author: Proverbs is a “collection of collections,” made up of seven distinct units, plus an epilogue. Tradition holds that Solomon was author of parts of the book, but Proverbs itself attributes some of the writings to other wise men (Agur, King Lemuel, etc.)

Date of Writing: If Solomon is seen as a primary author of Proverbs, then these sections would date to the 10th century BC, during the time of the United Kingdom. But some sections (such as references to the role of Hezekiah’s men in ch. 25) likely were not added until sometime between 715 and 686 BC.
Recipients: The ancient Jewish people, and everyone since.

Themes: Proverbs is an excellent example of ancient wisdom literature, dealing with questions of values, moral behavior, the meaning of human life and right conduct. A major theme is “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.”

Content: Superscriptions divide Proverbs into seven sets of sayings, plus a final Epilogue about the “perfect woman”:

Proverbs 1-9: “Proverbs of Solomon, Son of David, King in Israel”


Proverbs 24:23-34: “These Also are Sayings of the Wise”

Proverbs 25-29: “These are Other Proverbs of Solomon that the Officials of King Hezekiah of Judah Copied”

Proverbs 30: “The Words of Agur”

## Outline of Proverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1:1-6</th>
<th>1:7</th>
<th>10:1</th>
<th>21:1</th>
<th>30:1</th>
<th>31:1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Appeal to Wisdom</td>
<td>One-verse maxims</td>
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<td>Larger Couplets</td>
<td>Good Woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Proverbs</td>
<td>Wisdom Personified</td>
<td>Proverbs of Solomon</td>
<td>Proverbs of Hezekiah</td>
<td>Words of Agur</td>
<td>Words of King Lemuel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book of Worship</td>
<td>Book of Wisdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks to our Spirit</td>
<td>Speaks to our Intellect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life in prayer</td>
<td>Life out in the street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaches us how to be holy before God</td>
<td>Teaches us how to practice holiness before men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind</td>
<td>Love your neighbor as yourself</td>
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The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

2 for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; 3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; 4 for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young — 5 let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance — 6 for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
The Book of Proverbs

Some literary forms in Proverbs:

- **Instructions** – extended admonitions, usually addressed to “my son” or “my sons.”
- **Wisdom Speeches** – poems of several verses which personify wisdom and folly.
- **Proverbs** – short aphorisms making a moral or ethical point.
  - **Sayings** – give descriptions of how wisdom or folly work, and are indicative rather than imperative.
    
    *The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools.*  
    *But let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.*  
  - **Admonitions** – giving an imperative command, with either positive nor negative consequences.
    
    *There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four things I do not understand…*  
    *Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*
Some literary forms in Proverbs:

- **Proverbs** – short aphorisms making a moral or ethical point.
  - **Calls to attention** – demanding focus.
    
    *My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding.* (Pr. 5:1)
  - **Reflection on experiences** – shared from a teacher to a student.
    
    *For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother.*  
    *Then he taught me, and he said to me, “Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live.*  
    *Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them.* (Pr. 4:3-5)
  - **Account of personal observation** – another form of argument from experience.
    
    *At the window of my house I looked down through the lattice.*  
    *I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense.*  
    *Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.* … (Pr. 7:6-7,10)
  - **Beatitudes** – promises or exclamations of happiness.
    
    *Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding.* (Pr. 3:13)
  - **Allegory/extended metaphor** – usually with imagery, especially of water.
    
    *Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.* … (Pr. 5:15ff)
The Book of Proverbs

I. Purpose and theme. (1:1-7)

II. The superior way of wisdom (1:8-9:18)
   A. Appeals & warning confronting youth (1:8-33)
      1. Enticements to use violence (1:8-19)
      2. Warnings against rejecting wisdom (1:20-33)
   B. Commendation of wisdom (chs.2-4)
      1. Benefits of wisdom’s instructions (ch.2)
      2. Wisdom bestows well-being (3:1-20)
      3. Wisdom’s instructions and benefits (3:21-35)
      4. Challenge to hold on to wisdom (ch.4)
   C. Warnings against folly (chs.5-7)
      1. Warning against adultery (ch.5)
      2. Warning against perverse ways (6:1-19)
      3. Cost of committing adultery (6:20-35)
      4. Warnings against the adulterous woman (ch.7)
The Book of Proverbs

D. Appeals addressed to youth (chs.8-9)
   1. Wisdom’s call (ch.8)
   2. Invitations of wisdom and folly (ch.9)

III. Main collection of Solomon’s proverbs (10:1-22:16)

IV. Thirty sayings of the wise (22:17-24:22)

V. Further sayings of the wise (24:23-34)

VI. Hezekiah’s collection of Solomon’s proverbs (3:13-18)

VII. Sayings of Agur (ch.30)

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

IX. Epilogue: The wife of noble character (31:10-31)
Some Themes in the Proverbs

- The Way of Wisdom
- Principles of Work

- Skilled work will lead to success
- Diligent work will lead to success

Go to the ant, O sluggard
Observe her ways and be wise,
Which, having no chief,
Officer, or ruler;
Prepares her food in the summer,
And gathers her provisions in the harvest.

Proverbs 6:6-8
Some Themes in the Proverbs

- The way of Wisdom
- Principles of Work
  
- Principles of Generosity, Business and Finance
  
27
Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.
28
Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you. (Proverbs 3:27-28).

He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf. (Proverbs 3:27-28).
Some Themes in the Proverbs

- The way of Wisdom
- Principles of Work
- Principles of Business and Finance

- Principles of Spiritual Speech

For lack of wood the fire goes out,
And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.
Proverbs 26:20
Lessons from the Proverbs

- The universal need for wisdom
- The universal arena of wisdom
- What is wise is also what is good
- Principles rather than promises
- A real view of the real world
- Watch your tongue
- Pay attention
- Be generous
- Keep your pants zipped