

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Proverbs

**The Bible's twentieth book**, Proverbs follows Psalms in order and popularity among Old Testament writings, often appearing with it in printed New Testaments.

**With Job and Ecclesiastes**, Proverbs is a book of wisdom, a common literary form in the ancient Near East. Hebrew wisdom differs from the others by emphasizing trust in Yahweh and obedience to Him.

**Proverbs** gets its name from the pithy sayings of Solomon that comprise much of it (1:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1; 1 Kings 4:32). These adages impart wisdom, instruction, knowledge, understanding, judgment, prudence, counsel, and discretion (1:2-6) especially to the young, that they might enjoy a happy life here and a reward in the life to come.

**Wisdom** is the ability to make right choices based upon likely results. Foolishness (i.e., simplicity) is a refusal to receive counsel or to change behavior when aware of its negative result (22:3; 27:12).

**Key verse:** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7; 9:10; 15:33).

**Personification:** Often the writer refers to wisdom in personal terms. Wisdom is "she" who speaks, who warns the foolish, and who has the last laugh (1:20-33). She stands in public places crying out (8:1-11). She sets up rulers (8:12-21). Wisdom was with God in the beginning (8:22-36). She builds her house (9:1-6).

### How to become wise

- Begin by fearing the Lord (1:7; 9:10).
- Hear the instruction of godly parents (1:8, 9).
- Do not follow evil men (1:10-19; 2:10-22).
- Seek and diligently search God's Word as your highest treasure (2:1-9).

**Chapters 1-9 and 30-31** address topics in paragraphs: value of wisdom (3:13ff; 4:1ff), things God hates (6:16-19), a virtuous woman (31:10ff), etc.

**In chapters 10-29**, the proverbs are arranged randomly, with little relation between one verse and the next. Each proverb is a two-part sentence in which the second half either parallels and amplifies the first or states its opposite. In the latter case, the word *but* often connects a moral virtue with a contrary vice. Proverbs differ from laws in that they offer observations and general rules about how life usually works and are not intended as absolute commands.

### What wisdom teaches about

- marriage, sexual morality (5:15-20; 6:24-35; 7:4-27; 9:13-18; 12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:13, 14; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15)
- words, the tongue (10:18, 19; 12:17-19, 22; 13:2; 15:1; 16:24; 17:7, 28; 18:20, 21; 25:11; 26:18-28; 27:2; 29:11, 20)
- rich, poor, wealth, greed (3:9, 10; 10:15; 11:4, 24-28; 13:7, 11; 14:20-24; 15:16, 17, 27; 16:8; 17:1, 5; 19:1, 4, 6, 17; 20:14, 21; 21:13, 17, 26; 22:1, 7, 22, 23; 23:4, 5, 21; 28:6, 8, 20, 27; 29:7)

- parents, children (10:1, 5; 13:1, 24; 15:5, 20; 17:21, 25; 19:13, 26; 20:7; 22:6, 15; 23:13-25; 28:7, 24; 29:15, 17)
- friends, neighbors, enemies (3:27-30; 6:1-5; 11:9, 15; 14:20; 16:7, 28, 29; 17:9, 18; 18:24; 19:4-7; 22:24-27; 24:17, 18, 28; 25:17, 21, 28; 27:1-10, 14; 28:23)
- diligence, laziness (6:6-11; 10:4; 12:24, 27; 14:23; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:25; 22:13; 23:21; 24:30-34; 26:13-16; 28:19)
- honest dealings (11:1; 13:11; 16:11; 20:10, 14; 21:6; 29:27)
- God, salvation, faith. It is common to think of Proverbs as mostly concerned with faith in shoe leather — not very "spiritual." But note what is written about the Lord (3:5, 6; 10:22; 15:3; 16:4; 19:21; 21:3, 30; 22:2; 24:12; 26:10; 30:4) and His salvation (10:23-30; 11:5-31; 12:2, 3, 28; 13:9, 21; 14:11, 26, 27, 32; 15:11, 24; 16:6, 20; 18:10; 19:23; 20:9, 22; 21:21; 22:19; 23:17; 24:16, 20; 28:13, 18, 25; 30:5).

**Attitude is everything:** Proverbs calls it our spirit, or heart (4:23; 18:14; 20:27). We should be

- peaceable, not contentious (17:14; 18:1; 20:3; 22:10; 25:8; 26:17, 21)
- humble, not haughty (11:2; 15:25; 16:5, 18, 19; 18:12; 20:6; 21:4; 25:6, 7, 27; 26:12; 29:23)
- joyful, not depressed (12:25; 13:12, 19; 14:10, 13; 15:13, 15, 30; 17:22; 18:14; 25:20)
- yielding, not stubborn (16:2; 18:19; 19:21; 21:2; 29:1)
- merciful, not vengeful (11:17; 19:11)
- calm, not angry (14:17, 29, 30; 15:18; 16:32; 19:19; 21:24; 22:24; 27:4; 29:22)

**Proverbs in a sentence:** Trust in God, teachability, self-control, hard work, generosity, a good attitude: These are the marks of a wise person.