

Proverbs

I. The Main Idea of Proverbs

The primary purpose of the book of Proverbs is to reveal to us the hidden principles on which the world was founded and to entice us to live in harmony with those principles so we can experience the joys God intended for us.

These principles are built on the foundational concept “the fear of Yahweh.”

II. Outline of Proverbs

Detailed Outline (using the internal collections as a guide to dividing the book):

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|------------------------|---|---|
| ▪ Proverbs 1–9 | Proverbs of Solomon: | Lady Wisdom and Madame Folly |
| ▪ Proverbs 10–22:16 | Proverbs of Solomon: | The Way the World Works |
| ▪ Proverbs 22:17–24:22 | Thirty Sayings of the Wise: | How to Relate to Other People |
| ▪ Proverbs 24:23–34 | More Sayings of the Wise: | Justice and Home Economics |
| ▪ Proverbs 25–29 | Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah’s Men: | Wise Conduct |
| ▪ Proverbs 30 | The Words of Agur: | Humble Descriptions of the World |
| ▪ Proverbs 31 | The Words of King Lemuel: | Nobility and the Virtuous Wife |

Simple Outline:

- Proverbs 1-9 An Invitation and Introduction to Wisdom
- Proverbs 10-29 An Exploration of Wisdom
- Proverbs 30-31 Concluding Thoughts

III. Interpretive Keys to Proverbs

Genre: Wisdom Poetry

- It expresses “experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose.”
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

Wisdom Literature

What is Biblical Wisdom?

Biblical Wisdom can be defined in this way:

*Wisdom is understanding how God created the world to work
and living in such a way that you are in harmony with how His world works.*

God created the world with inherent rules built into it. If you align your life in the direction God intended, then things will go well for you. If you fight against the rules God built into the world, then you will hit major obstacles.

Illustration: Traveling on a River

Imagine wanting to navigate a vessel on a river to get from one place to another. Because of the physical dynamics involved, there is an effective way to do this and an ineffective way: a wise way and a foolish way.

First, you have to select or create a vessel that will operate effectively on water. If you choose an automobile, a train, or a plane as your vessel, you will not reach your destination because those types of vessels were not designed to operate on water. There is a reason that most boats have a similar oval shape: that is the shape that most effectively floats and moves on water.

Second, you have to operate your vessel in the right way. To efficiently and safely travel upstream or downstream, you must orient the narrow axis of the boat in the same direction as the flow of water. To keep your boat moving, you must keep it in the water (you won't get very far in a boat on land!) and away from the shallow edges of the river.



Like a river, God's creation has dynamics hardwired into it. Some of these dynamics can be seen with the eyes (such as the nature of a river, the changing of the seasons, and the natural growth of plants and animals) but some of them are abstract (such as the blessings of being faithful to your spouse vs. the harsh consequences of committing adultery).

So the aim of Wisdom Literature is to record and reveal these dynamics, both the visible and the abstract, so that you can live in harmony with the world God has created.

What's the Difference Between Law & Wisdom?

- Law: "Obey Yahweh because He is your God."
- Wisdom: "Obey Yahweh because it is good for you."

While the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience is a recurrent theme in the Pentateuch, in several cases a commandment is given and the only justification for it is that Yahweh commanded it:

- Leviticus 11:44-45
"**For I am the LORD your God.** Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. **For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God.** You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."
- Leviticus 18:1-6
"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, **I am the LORD your God.** You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. **I am the LORD your God.** You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: **I am the LORD.** None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. **I am the LORD.**'"
- Numbers 15:38-41
"Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. **I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD your God.**"

This includes the giving of the 10 Commandments:

- Exodus 20:2-3 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

By way of contrast, the Wisdom Literature gives instructions based on the fact that if you obey God's commands then you will be blessed; if you don't obey God's commands, you will suffer natural consequences for your actions. A comparison of how some of the 10 Commandments are treated in the Wisdom Literature illustrates this:

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."	Proverbs 20:20 "If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness."
Exodus 20:13 "You shall not murder."	Proverbs 1:11-18 "If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason... my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives."
Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery."	Proverbs 6:32 "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself."
Exodus 20:15 "You shall not steal."	Proverbs 9:17-18 "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol."
Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."	Proverbs 12:19 "Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment."
Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."	Proverbs 6:25-26 "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life."

IV. Key Passages of Proverbs

Proverbs 1:7

***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction."***

Proverbs 9:10

***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."***

- “The Fear of the Lord” is the foundation on which the rest of the proverbs are built. If you don’t start with a belief in God and a reverence for Him, then the benefit you will receive from the rest of the proverbs is going to fall short.
- “Fear” in these verses is referring more to having a healthy respect for God. We know that he loves us ... but along with that we know that he loves us so much that he will discipline us when we go astray.
- Also, fearing God and obeying God are so closely linked that “fear” is synonymous with “obey.” Someone who fears God is someone who obeys God.
 - Leviticus 19:14 “You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.”
 - See also Lev. 25:17; 2 Kgs 17:34; Deut. 17:19.
- Thus, fear of God’s retribution and a healthy respect for God’s power were motivating factors to obedience. In this sense, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”
- “The fear of the Lord” is a recurring theme in Proverbs that ties the book together:
 - I. Proverbs 1-9
 - Introduction: Fear Of the Lord as the Beginning of Knowledge (1:7)
 - Fear of the Lord in the Father’s First Speech (1:29)
 - Fear of the Lord as the Knowledge of God (2:5)
 - Fear of the Lord in Lady Wisdom’s Call from Creation (8:13)
 - Woman Wisdom’s Last Speech: Fear as the Beginning of Wisdom (9:10)
 - II. Proverbs 10-29
 - Fear of the Lord in the Proverbial Sayings (10:27; 14:27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17)
 - III. Proverbs 30-31
 - Traits of the Valiant Woman: Fear as Her Preeminent Virtue (31:30)

V. Messianic Elements within Proverbs

- Jesus is the ultimate example of a wise person. In fact, the New Testament portrays him as the personification of Wisdom.
 - Luke 2:40 “And the child grew and became strong, filled with **wisdom**. And the favor of God was upon him.”
 - Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in **wisdom** and in stature and in favor with God and man.”
 - 1 Corinthians 1:24 “but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the **wisdom** of God.”
- Some wisdom teachings of Jesus:
 - Matthew 5:3–5
 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
 - “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ...”

- Matthew 7:24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ..."
- Matthew 16:26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Ecclesiastes

I. The Main Idea of Ecclesiastes

When you look at life from an earthly point of view, life is meaningless.

However, when you look at life from a heavenly point of view,
you can find meaning and enjoy life.

II. Outline of Ecclesiastes

1:1	The Messianic Wisdom of the Son of David
1:2-11	The Circularity of Life
1:12-6:9	Pleasure, Wisdom, and Toil Are a Grasping for Wind, But the Gift of God Is to Eat, Drink, and Enjoy Your Labor
6:10-11:6	Man Is Unable to Understand God's Work by Finding What Is Good or Knowing What Will Be, But the Gift of God Is to Eat, Drink, and Enjoy Your Labor
11:7-12:8	Youth and Old Age
12:9-14	The Messianic Wisdom of the One Shepherd: Fear God and Keep His Commandments

III. Interpretive Keys to Ecclesiastes

Genre: Wisdom Poetry

- It expresses "experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose."
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.
- Classified as "Wisdom Literature" along with Job & Proverbs. (Song of Solomon is also sometimes included in that group.)
- Heavy use of metaphors.
 - Example: Eccl. 12:1-8
 - Describing old age in figurative language.

Author: Solomon

- "the son of David" (Eccl. 1:1)

- “king in Jerusalem” (Eccl. 1:1)
- ruler over a united kingdom of Israel (Eccl. 1:12)
- “acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me” (1:16)
- The book seems to be Solomon’s reflections as an old man looking back over his life. He realizes that he made some mistakes, so he is writing to pass on what he has learned.

IV. Key Passages of Ecclesiastes

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2)

- Hebrew word: *hebel*.
 - Means “breath” or “vapor” but used metaphorically to refer to things that are meaningless and passing.
 - This word is used 38 times in Ecclesiastes (over 50% of the occurrences in the entire Bible), at least once in every chapter except chapter 10.
- Solomon explores human experience from an earthly vantage point.
 - In the book, there is very little focus on life after death. What Solomon finds is that human activity in and of itself has very little meaning and no lasting value.
- When you look at life from an earthly point of view, it is meaningless.

Divinely inspired advice:

- Enjoy Life (Eccl. 2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 8:15; 9:7-9). The work and fleeting pleasures of this life are intended by God to be enjoyed by His children.
 - Don’t get so wrapped up in the work you have to do that you miss out on the good things in your life: delicious food and drink; work that satisfies and is enjoyable; and the companionship of your family & friends.
- Obey God (Eccl. 12:13-14). We shall all appear before the judgment seat of God, therefore we should seek to obey him continually. Meaning in life comes not by looking only at what this life has to offer. Life’s meaning is tied to the judgment seat of God.

V. Messianic Elements within Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 12:14 “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

- Ultimately, every human in history will stand before Jesus, the Judge of all the earth.
 - Unbelievers:
 - John 5:24-29. The Father gave Jesus “authority to execute judgment,”

- Acts 17:30–31. The Father appointed Jesus to “judge the world in righteousness.”
- Believers:
 - 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat [*bema*] of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

Song of Solomon

I. The Main Idea of Song of Solomon

Human sexuality was created by God, is good within the context of marriage, and is intended to be enjoyed and celebrated in appropriate ways.

II. Outline of Song of Solomon

- 1-2 Opening Dialogues
 - 3:1-6 Bride's Dream?
 - 3:6-11 The Beloved Praises Solomon's Arrival
 - 4:1-15 Solomon Praises His Beloved
 - 4:16-5:1 Consummation
 - 5:2-8 Bride's Dream?
 - 5:9-6:3 The Beloved Praises Solomon
 - 6:4-10 Solomon Praises His Beloved
 - 6:11-13 Back in the Garden
- 7-8 Closing Dialogues

III. Interpretive Keys to Song of Solomon

Genre: Poetry

- It expresses "experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose."
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

Author: Solomon (Song 1:1)

- The phrase "song of songs" is a Hebrew idiom that means "the very best song." Thus, if this is Solomon's "song of songs," then out of the 1,005 songs that Solomon ever wrote (1 Kgs. 4:32), this was the best one.

Is this truly a series of love poetry between a man and a woman, or is it a metaphor for something else?

- Although there are many in the history of the church who have interpreted this book allegorically or symbolically (for example as portraying God & Israel, or Christ & the Church), a straight-forward

reading of the text suggests that the primary intention of this book is to celebrate human love and intimacy in marriage.

- There can be secondary illustrations drawn from the book that teach us truths about our relationship with God, but primarily it should be understood as describing the relationship between a man and a woman.

IV. Key Passages of Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon 1:15–16

- He: “Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.”
- She: “Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”
- Note how throughout the book, the man and woman praise each other. This highlights the need for verbal affirmation in a marriage relationship. We need to constantly be telling our spouse how they are beautiful in our eyes, building them up and affirming our longstanding commitment to them.



Song of Solomon 2:7 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

- Repeated in Song 3:5 and 8:4.
- Emphasizes the dangerous nature of sexual attraction. This is not something we should handle lightly. We need to be extremely careful that we are only exploring sexual experiences in the correct context: marriage.

Song of Solomon 2:16 “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” (cf. Song 6:3 & 7:10)

- Reflection of God’s ultimate goal: “I will be your God. You will be my people. I will dwell among you.”

V. Messianic Elements within Song of Solomon

Foreshadowing

- As explained above, on a secondary level the picture in the Song of Solomon is a picture of Christ and the church.

- The New Testament describes the church's relationship with Jesus as a bride & groom relationship. So the desire, love, and admiration we see between the couple in the Song of Songs should be reflected in our relationship with Jesus.