



Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is a collection of poems, longer teachings and very short sayings which communicate the wisdom of Ancient Israel. It contains wisdom of all sorts – from folk wisdom, which would have been relevant to everyone’s life, to wisdom for people in the royal court. It is a complete smorgasbord of wise sayings to live by.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 1 ¾ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-7; 8.1-9.18;
 22.17-24.22; 31.10-31



Genre

Wisdom



Anything tricky?

Proverbs is one of the few books of the Bible not really designed to be read as a book in one go. It is better savoured over a long period of time, saying by saying.



Inspiring quotes

Too many to include but here are a few of the best:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.
(Proverbs 1.7)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
(Proverbs 3.5)

²² The LORD created me [wisdom] at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth... ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.
(Proverbs 8.22-23, 30-31)

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.
(Proverbs 14.12)



About the Author

Proverbs is traditionally associated with Solomon, and there is no doubt that some of these proverbs originated with him or his court, but it seems likely that the book grew over time, accumulating wisdom from many different sources and people as well.

What do we know about him?

King Solomon was David's successor and widely renowned for his great wisdom.



About the times

Solomon was king between about 961 and 922 bc, but the book of the Proverbs seems to have grown from then, accumulating a wide range of wisdom from around Israel, until it reached its final form maybe in the sixth century ad or maybe even later than that.

Other books set around this time

1 and 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles



What kind of Book is it?

Wisdom literature – most of its contents reveal wisdom for everyday life.



Look out for...

Throughout Proverbs, but especially in chapters 1–9, you find an extended definition of what wisdom is – look out for the definition and see if you agree with it.

This wisdom offers everyday advice to people from all sorts of backgrounds. As you read see if you can work out who, in particular, would find the advice most relevant.

Proverbs use a lot of similes (this is like that), look out for them and see if you can find a favourite one.



How is it structured?

- 1.1–9.18 Essays on how to live a life shaped by wisdom
- 10.1–22.16 Proverbs associated with Solomon
- 22.17–24.34 A collection of wise sayings
- 25.1–29.27 Proverbs said to be by Solomon, copied during the time of Hezekiah
- 30.1–33 Wise sayings by Agur
- 31.1–31 Wise sayings by King Lemuel, including an ABC of what makes a capable wife.



What could this mean for me?

We need wise advice today as much as the people of Solomon's day did. As you read ask yourself which of this advice applies most easily to our lives today. How might we communicate this ancient wisdom most effectively today?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' - what do you think this means? How might you put it into modern language?
- Proverbs offers a few definitions of wisdom. How would you define 'wisdom' today? Is what was wise in Solomon's day still wise now?
- Discuss 'the capable wife' of Proverbs 31.10-31. What did you think about what is said?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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Bringing *the Bible to* **Life**

