

BIBLE SURVEY

PROVERBS

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

In Psalms we find the Christian on his **knees**, in Proverbs we find the Christian on his **feet**.

The Psalms are for daily devotions, the Proverbs are for daily **work** and **walk**.

The Psalms are for our quiet times and the place of worship, the Proverbs are for the **market place**, the **work place**, the **school room** and the **home**.

Proverbs shows that **Godliness is practical**. The Proverbs deal with our duty to God and to our neighbours, the duty of parents and children, husbands and wives, employers and employees, citizens and rulers.

"The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death."
Proverbs 14:27

Profound

The Proverbs are short, profound sayings of what sometimes is called common sense, but which is increasingly uncommon. Perceptive, practical, pointed and positive.

The Proverbs are ***"like apples of gold in settings of silver"*** Proverbs 25:11.

The Proverbs can be divided into three sections:

Counsel for young men (1–10).

Counsel for all men (11-20).

Counsel for kings and rulers (21-31).

Counsel for the Young

The counsel for young men can be summarised as: **Wise up!, walk straight!, watch your step!**

The young are warned against bad companions, immorality and drunkenness.

Proverbs 4:23-26:

"Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life."

"Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put perverse lips far from you."

"Let your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids look right before you."

"Ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established."

The Proverb goes from our heart, to our mouth, to our eyes, to our feet.

Many of the Proverbs have found their way into **everyday speech**:

"spare the rod and spoil the child."

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."

"Pride goes before a fall."

"Stolen food is sweet."

"Iron sharpens iron."

Recognisable Characters

The characters described 3,000 years ago in the Book of Proverbs can easily be recognised today. The person who talks too much, the wife who is always nagging, the aimless youth hanging around on street corners, the neighbour who is always dropping in and staying too long, the friend who is unbearably loud and cheerful first thing in the morning.

Contrasts in Choices

There are over 900 Proverbs and they cover most of life's important issues.

These are often presented as contrasts:

Wisdom and folly,
Pride and humility,
Love and lust,
Wealth and poverty,
Work and laziness,
Masters and servants,
Husbands and wives,
Friends and relatives,
Life and death.

Proverbs and Jesus

The Lord Jesus Christ emphasised these same choices in the Sermon on the Mount:

The broad road vs. the narrow way,
The wide gate vs. the narrow gate,
The foolish man vs. the wise man,
Building on sand vs. building on the rock,
The bad tree vs. the good tree,
Bad fruit vs. good fruit,
Hell vs. Heaven.

The overarching call of Proverbs is: **Do not waste your life!**

Our Lord Jesus emphasised: ***"You are either with Me, or against Me. You are either gathering, or scattering."***

Proverbs emphasizes how we can make the most of life and warns us against the many ways of wasting or ruining ones life. The emphasis is on **integrity** and **work ethic**.

Balanced Discipleship

Proverbs provides an important balance to the preaching in many churches which emphasises what we are **saved from** and not enough of what we are **saved to** and **for**. Proverbs not only reminds us about the sort of life we need to be saved from, but the sort of life that we are saved unto. Proverbs goes from the **head**, to the **heart**, to the **hands**.

Proverbs tell us **why** it was written:

To lead us to wisdom. The very first step to becoming wise is, to **fear God**. When you understand the holiness of God, our eternal Judge, how nothing escapes His attention and how much He hates evil, then we will learn true wisdom by fearing God.

The Source of All Wisdom

God is the all wise God, the source of all wisdom. It is His wisdom that created the universe and all good things in it. God has chosen to pass on His wisdom, especially through Scripture, and also through parents, grandparents, and other people who are more experienced than us.

God's Rubbish Dump

One of the terms our Lord Jesus used to describe hell, was Gehenna. This referred to the huge rubbish dump outside the walls of Jerusalem, in the Valley of Kidron, which was continually burning. In many ways, hell is God's rubbish dump. Those who have no place for God, those who hate God, those who despise His Word and steadfastly refuse to repent, will suffer the eternal consequences of their life long choices. Those who reject, and turn their back on, the eternal Creator will find themselves in Gehenna; God's rubbish dump.

Wise for Salvation

The Apostle Paul wrote: *"But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for Salvation through Faith which is in Christ Jesus.** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* 2 Timothy 3:13-17

Thoroughly Equipped for Every Good Work

Part of the Scripture that is profitable for doctrine, reproof and for correction, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work is the Proverbs. They are able to make one *"wise for Salvation through Faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

Not Conformed - But Transformed

The Bible instructs us: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* Romans 12:2. Part of the Scriptures that enable one to resist conformity to the world and to prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, to transform us by the renewing of our mind, is Proverbs.

The Wisdom of Solomon

When King Solomon acceded to the throne, God offered him anything he asked for. Solomon asked for wisdom and God not only gave him wisdom and God not only gave him wisdom, but he also gave him fame, power and wealth. The wisdom of Solomon was legendary, it even attracted the Queen of Sheba to travel a long distance to hear his wisdom for herself.

Wisdom Requires Right Choices and Right Living

Of course, it would appear that Solomon was wiser in his proverbs than he was in his life. Solomon reminds us that we can be wise in our minds without being wise in our hearts and actions. There was an important condition attached to God's gift of wisdom. As he told Solomon: *"I will give you a wise and discerning heart... **if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands.**"* (10:11). Wise men store up knowledge.

The Author

Solomon wrote **Song of Songs** in his youth, **Proverbs** in his middle age and **Ecclesiastes** in his old age. Solomon was not only a king and a philosopher, he was also the architect of the Temple that was one of the wonders of the world. Although Solomon wrote, or gathered, most of the Proverbs, he was not the only author. Other Proverbs come from Hezekiah, Augur, and Lemuel. God is referred to 90 times in Proverbs as *Yahweh*. The wisdom in Proverbs is from God.

A Word for a Situation

The English word Proverb comes from the Latin *Proverba*. *Pro* means for and *verba* means word. Literally a Proverb is a word for a situation. An appropriate word to fit the situation.

Parallelism

The poetry in Proverbs often consists in parallelism. Some would be **synonymous parallelism**, for example: *"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

Far more common is **antithetical parallelism**, where the second line contrasts with the first:

"He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." (10:4).

"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray." (10:17)

"Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid."

Proverbs 12:1

In **synthetic parallelism**, the thought in the first line is advanced by the second:

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life." (4:23)

The key words *and*, *but* and *for* indicate what type of parallelism is being used.

Most of the Proverbs in chapters in 10 to 15, are antithetical parallelism. Most of the Proverbs in chapters 16 to 22, are synonymous parallelism.

Acrostics

Proverbs also makes use of acrostics, such as chapter 31, where each line begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Numerics

On other occasions the structure is numerical, for example:

"There are six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord amongst brethren."

Proverbs 6:16-19. These forms are to enable the reader to more easily remember the Proverb.

Patriarchal

Some people may complain that the Book is too patriarchal, being presented as a fathers advice to his son. This is because of the Scriptural principle that if the men are right, the women and children will be right too. The Bible is primarily addressed to men, because it is their responsibility to lead their families by teaching and leading by example.

Seek Wisdom

Wisdom is presented as a wonderful woman, who we should love, court, make a beloved member of our family and be faithful to for life. ***"Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand at the top of the high hill, aside the way, where the paths meet, she cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors... all those who hate me love death."*** (8:1,36). In Proverbs 9: 1-12, we read of the wise woman building her house through knowledge and understanding.

Avoid Foolishness

Folly is depicted as a prostitute, who by smooth talk entices and seduces men with tempting offers. Folly will destroy your livelihood and integrity. Foolish ideas are dangerous and destructive.

Disastrous Decision

The original temptation in the Garden of Eden offered the knowledge of good and evil, but by choosing to ignore the commandment and warning of God, Adam and Eve chose foolishly. The result of their sin was disastrous: disease, decay and death.

Every Choice Has Consequences

The Book of Revelation also contrasts the two women in conflict: The bride of Christ and the harlot of Babylon. The Bible frequently confronts us with choices: Life or death? Light or darkness? Heaven or hell? What we sow is what we reap. Everything has consequences. Every thought, action, even attitude, has consequences.

More Precious than Rubies

The wife you chose will have great consequences. Proverbs concludes with the acrostic chapter 31, describing the good wife, mother, neighbour and trader, who is vital to good stable, healthy family life, and who is *"more precious than rubies."*

Wisdom is Morality in Action

Proverbs presents wisdom and folly as primarily moral choices. There are many people who might be intellectually intelligent, but morally very foolish. Many know the truth in their head, but do not make wise choices in their lives. You can be mentally clever, but morally foolish. Proverbs applies the Lordship of Christ to all areas of life, teaching us how to put feet to our Faith, wisely practising the presence of God in every area of life.

Revelation Vision

"Where there is no vision the people perish." This is not just speaking about a vision of life. Many people think of a vision as what they would like to do, but it is God's Revelation. ***"Where there is no Revelation, the people cast off restraint, but happy is he who keeps the Law."***
Proverbs 29:18

Wise Choices

Proverbs advises the young: Obey your parents. Seek wisdom. Guard your heart. Be faithful to your spouse. Do not get into bad company. Do not commit adultery. Do not take out loans. Do not be lazy. Avoid foolish people. The lives of the godly and the lives of the wicked are contrasted.

Righteousness in Action

The reoccurring themes of Proverbs are: Seek wisdom. Avoid bad company. Do not fall into the trap of immorality. Avoid laziness. Be humble. Be loyal. Fear God. Righteousness is defined as **humility** in self, **justice** for others and the **fear of the Lord**.

Wisdom Defined

There are numerous synonyms used in Proverbs used to describe wisdom: Prudence, sensible, judicious, appropriate, careful, discreet and discerning.

Foolishness Described

There are over 70 Proverbs which describe what a fool is like. A fool is ignorant, obstinate, arrogant, reckless, rash, careless, wasteful, irresponsible, inexperienced, aimless, gullible, complacent, insolent, flippant, sullen, boorish, boring, argumentative, quick tempered, opinionated, loud, selfish and unteachable.

Foolish Choices

Fools prefer **fiction** to reality, **fantasy** to fact. They prefer **illusions** to truth and **make-belief** rather than history. They prefer **amusement** to education. The fool is both **disturbing** and **dangerous**. He brings sorrow to his parents. *"...he who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who trusts in wisdom is kept safe."* (28:26).

Star Fools

The stars of the fools show are exhibit A: **the scoffer** – cynical and critical of everything and everybody, except himself.

Exhibit B star fool is: **the sluggard**, the slothful, lazy man who is hinged to his bed. He tosses and turns and gets no further than a door swinging on its hinges. *"He who is slothful in his work is brother to him who is a great destroyer"* (18:9). *"Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble."* (25:19)

Sins of the Tongue

One of the key subjects in Proverbs is the sin of the tongue. Words can cut deep. Words can be **careless, clumsy** and **cruel**. A person's sense of worth can be ruined by words. Words can even make one's estimation of one's self too high or too low. Even our physical health can be affected by words. Our beliefs, convictions and attitudes can be formed by words. For good or ill, words can have an enormous effect. Amongst the seven abominations most hateful to God listed in Proverbs 6, four are sins of the tongue.

The Limitations of Words

Proverbs also shows that words have their limit. **Words are no substitute for deeds**. The tongue cannot alter facts. Denial and imaginative excuses do not change reality. Words cannot compel people to respond. Even the best teacher cannot teach a disinterested student. Only the malicious would pay any attention to gossip.

Profitable Speech

Proverbs advocates four categories of speech:

Honest words – the straightforward Yes, or No.

Few words – the less said, the better.

Calm words – that should refresh and encourage.

Appropriate words – which are suited to the situation, edifying and constructive.

Engage Brain Before Putting Mouth in Gear

Wise words need time for reflection first. We should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry. *"He who guards his lips guards his soul, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin."* (13:3)

Our Character is Revealed by What We Say

What we say flows from what we **are**. Our speech reflects our character. *"If you falter in times of trouble how small is your strength."* (24:10). *"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."* (12:18).

The Family Unit

Proverbs speaks much about relationships, especially concerning the family, the basic building block of society. The husband and wife are to be united in loving partnership to share their childrens training and faithfully discipline their children. The husband and wife must be moral, faithful and loyal. The person who strays from marriage and commits adultery loses honour and liberty, throwing away their life, courting social disgrace and physical danger. An adulterer commits moral suicide.

Discipline is Love in Action

If parents do not discipline their children then they are fools. Discipline is a loving act. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child. Children are naturally foolish and need encouragement to be wise. If you do not promptly punish your children when they do wrong, then you do not love them. Proverbs plainly runs counter to the humanistic philosophy prevalent today!

Train Them Up in the Way They Are to Go

We are to foster wise habits in our children at an early age, teaching them a Christian work ethic, that they may learn to enjoy the sense of accomplishment that can only come from hard, diligent work and wise choices.

More Faithful than a Brother

Brothers can be helpful and faithful, but there are also the kind who brings discord, injury and bitterness. There is a friend who can be more faithful than a brother. *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbour come back later, I will give it to you tomorrow..."* (3:37-28).

Good Neighbours

We are to be good neighbours, in harmony with those we live and work amongst. We need to be generous and willing to help our neighbour in need. This should include respecting property and privacy. We also need to know how to say No to unwise agreements.

True Friendship

Proverbs gives standards for true friendship:

A true friend will be **loyal**.

A true friend will be **honest**.

A true friend will give you **advice** or caution.

A true friend will be **courteous**.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

The Teachers of the Law were Amazed at His Wisdom

We read that our Lord Jesus Christ was filled with such wisdom as a child that the teachers of the Law in the Temple were amazed at his wisdom.

Greater than Solomon

"The Queen of the South will rise up in the Judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and indeed a greater than Solomon is here." Luke 11:31

Wisdom from God

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and Redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:27-30

Proverbs and the Apostles

In 2 Peter 2, the Apostle quotes from Proverbs 26: *"As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly."* When Peter exhorted his readers to fear the Lord and honour the King, he was quoting from Proverbs 24. The letter of James deals with many of the same themes as Proverbs when analysing the sins of the tongue and advocating practical discipleship, putting the Word of God into practise through wise choices.

God Disciplines His Children

Hebrews quotes from Proverbs 3, regarding God's discipline of His children: *"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son do not despise the chastening of*

the Lord, to be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live?... Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Proverbs 12:4-1. *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."* (28:13)

Daily Wisdom

Proverbs is an important weapon in the Christian army. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. There are 31 chapters of Proverbs, one for every day of the month. Reading a chapter of Proverbs is a great way to start any day.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones." Proverbs 3:5-8

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