

An Overview of the Book of Proverbs

1. Introduction – one of the Poetic books of the Bible

Author - mostly Solomon. The title in Hebrew is "Mishle Sh'lomoh" (Proverbs of Solomon). 1:1 and 10:1 plainly call them proverbs of Solomon. 25:1 starts a section saying "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah copied out." Chapter 30 is said to be by Agur, and 31 by king Lemuel (both now unknown but for these writings).

1 K. 4:29-32 says Solomon was the wisest man on earth, and composed 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs.

Date - around 950 BC

2. Purpose

A proverb is a short, pithy, memorable generalization about life. This is a collection of proverbs, but not just haphazard. It's real purpose is seen in 1:1-6 - to instruct in wisdom.

3. Outline of the book

A. True wisdom	1-9
1. Introduction - the purpose of the book	1:1-6
2. Warning against following the ungodly	1:7-19
3. The call (invitation) of 'wisdom'	1:20-33
4. The instruction of wisdom to a son	2-6
5. The seductress as antithesis of wisdom	7, 9:13 - 18
6. The call (invitation) of 'wisdom'	8:1 - 9:12
B. Collections of Solomon's proverbs	10-29
C. Proverbs of Agur	30
D. Proverbs of Lemuel	31
1. Responsibilities of a wise king	31:1-9
2. Acrostic poem about the wise wife (22 verses in Hebrew alphabetic order)	31:10-31

4. Notable points

A. Proverbs chapters 1-9 have a recurring theme and phrase – “My son, ...” They have extended sections all dealing with a specific topic, whereas later chapters are often relatively context-free (each verse or pair of verses stands pretty much on its own). While the whole book of Proverbs could be seen as instructions to a son, the first 9 chapters are quite explicit in that regard. Prov.1-9 are written and spoken by the father (or by Wisdom) directly to the son, whereas for the most part, later verses are less direct (for example, describing the differences between a wisdom and foolishness).

B. The eminence of wisdom

4:1-7 – Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.... Get wisdom, get understanding ... Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

C. Admonitions to the son to pay attention to, and obey, the instructions of the father

1:8 – My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother...

6:20-My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them upon thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light: and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

8:32-36 – Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. ...

23:26 – My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

D. Warnings to the son

- 1:10-19, 4:14-19 – My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. (The importance of avoiding evil companions)
1:20-32- the consequences of turning away from wisdom
3:11-12 – My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.
5-7 – warnings against sexual temptations
19:27 – Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.
23:15-25 – My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. ...

E. Promises of blessings to the son

- 2:1-9 – My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, ... incline thine heart unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding, ... criest after knowledge, ... liftest up thy voice for understanding, ... then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, ... Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path.
3:1-2 - My son, forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. ...
3:21... - My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. ...
4:10-13 – Hear, O My son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many ... Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her, for she is thy life.
4:20-27 – My son, attend to my words; incline thine ears unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes: keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

F. Literary devices

1. Contrast (often seen by the use of the word 'but' to compare the two halves of the verse) - this is by far the most common type of proverb
 - a. In a verse - 10:11, 12, 19; 15:2, 16:2
 - b. In a chapter - wisdom (9:1-12) vs. seduction (9:13-18)
2. Comparison, analogy (often seen by the words 'as' or 'like')
 - a. In a verse – 11:22; 18:10; 25:28; 26:11
 - b. In a section - 6:20-35
3. Cause-and-effect - 3:5-10; 16:3; 22:6
4. Expansion (further definition) - 8:13
5. Repetition - 14:5; 15:16-17; 16:32; 18:7
6. Simple statement - 18:13; 26:16; 27:22
7. Advice, admonition, or commandment - 1:8-10; 4:7; 9:8; 14:7; 19:27; 20:13
8. Deeper meaning, or moral truth - 1:17; 5:15; 6:32; 20:12
9. Lists - 6:16-19; 30:15, 18, 21, 24, 29
10. Acrostic verses (31:10-31 - each verse starts in Hebrew order (aleph, bet, gimel, ...))
11. Things that are not as they seem – 16:2, 25
12. Apparent contradictions – 26:4-5; 27:6; 28:27
13. Observations – 20:14; 30:11-14
14. Combinations – 16:18 is cause-and-effect with repetition