

An Overview of the Book of Proverbs, Part 2

Context

Many proverbs are “stand-alone” – they are intended to be spoken and understood completely on their own. Others are just part of a broader group of proverbs that are somehow related. We need to determine the natural context to properly interpret it. Don’t assume that a proverb is the same as a single verse.

Context	Example	Text
Single verse	18:9-14	Each verse has no apparent connection with the others
Verse pair	3:1-12	1-2 go together; 3 and 4; 5 and 6; etc.
Verse triplet	4:20-22	God’s word gives life and health
	6:6-8; 9-11	Two triplets in a row, where one logically leads in to the other
Short section	23:29-35	Against drunkenness
	30:11-14	An evil generation
	30:24-28	Four “little” things that show wisdom
Long section	31:10-31	The virtuous wife
Long but related sections	7	Warning against the call of the harlot
	8:1 – 9:12	The call of wisdom (notice 9:4-6)
	9:13-18	The call of the “foolish woman” (i.e., harlot) (notice 9:15-18)

Literary devices

Device	Example	Text
Contrast (to show opposite characteristics or results)	10:11	The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.
	10:12	Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.
	10:19	In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.
	15:2	The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. <i>Today, “It is better to keep your mouth closed and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and confirm the notion.”</i>
	16:2	All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.
Comparison or analogy; simile or metaphor	11:22	As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.
	18:10	The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.
	25:28	He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.
	26:11	As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.
	6:23	For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light...
	6:27-29	Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbor’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.
Cause and effect	3:5-6	Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.
	3:7-8	Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.
	3:9-10	Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.
	16:3	Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.
	22:6	Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.
Expansion, clarification	8:13	The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Repetition	14:5	A faithful witness will not utter lies: but a false witness will utter lies.
	15:16-17	Better is little with fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.
	16:32	He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.
	18:7	A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.
Simple statement	18:13	He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.
	26:16	The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.
	27:22	Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.
Advice, admonition, commandment	1:10	My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.
	4:7	Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.
	9:8	Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.
	14:7	Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the words of knowledge.
	19:27	Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge.
	20:13	Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.
Deeper meaning, or a lesson from an observation	1:17	Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.
	5:15-20	Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. (be satisfied with your own wife)
	6:30-32	Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; . . . But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.
	20:12	The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.
Irony	28:10	... shall fall into his own pit ...
	28:22	Haste to be rich results in poverty
	28:23	A rebuke is better than flattery
Lists	6:16-19	These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him
	30:15	There are three things that are never satisfied . . .
	30:18	There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four ...
	30:21	For three things the earth is disquited, and for four which it cannot bear ...
	30:24	There be four things which are little upon the earth
	30:29	There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going ...
Acrostic verses	31:10-31	Each verse starts in Hebrew order (aleph, bet, gimel, ...) (like Ps.119)
Apparent contradictions	26:4-5	Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.
	27:6	Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
	28:27	He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.
Observations	20:14	It is naught, it is naught, sayeth the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.
	30:11-14	There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.
Combinations	16:18	Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (cause and effect with repetition)