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Introduction

This Commentary is based on 46 years of my research and reflections on this fabulous book of wisdom. Its rules of conduct and action have molded, built, and challenged my life and ministry. While I've chosen to take a practical approach to my comments, I have labored over the Hebrew text to insure both accuracy and integrity. I've included the Hebrew text only when I thought it would be of practical value to nurture the reader's understanding. I recommend reading one chapter of **Proverbs** each day, corresponding to the day of the month. You will then read this book twelve times per year, and have a daily reminder of how to live skillfully.

I also believe that every word of the Bible is the Word of God.

"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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

All Scripture provides the totality of divine truth needed to live a godly life. Scripture corrects wrong behavior and provides training in godly behavior. I believe that **The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version (KJV)** best translates the original text into the English language.

Right from the beginning, let me affirm my brief overview of this marvelous **Book of Proverbs**. The key word in **Proverbs** is *wisdom*; the ability to live life skillfully. However, a godly life in this ungodly world is no simple assignment. **Proverbs** provides God's detailed instructions for His people to deal successfully with the practical affairs of everyday life, including how to relate to God, parents, spouses, children, friends, neighbors, and government. Thus King Solomon, the principal author, uses a combination of poetry, parables, essential questions, short stories, and wise maxims to give the common sense and divine perspective necessary

to handle life's issues.¹

In this book, Solomon pulls together 513 of the most important proverbs from the 3,000 that he wrote (see 1 Kings 4:32), along with some proverbs from others influenced by his wisdom. Since the word "proverb" means "to be like," the book makes comparisons between the common and concrete descriptions of life's most profound truths.

These proverbs are simple, moral statements that illustrate and emphasize the realities of daily living. As a dear friend expressed to me, a proverb is "a nugget of wisdom from God." They were written by Solomon, who sought the Lord for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:8-12), and to whom it was mightily granted. The Hebrew meaning of the name "Solomon" is "peaceable." He brought peace to his people. Solomon placed wisdom before any desire for wealth and fame. Thus, these were written that mankind might be motivated to fear God and live according to His wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). Ultimately, the whole masterpiece of wisdom points to the Lord, Jesus Christ, who is Wisdom personified. This is most evident from the Apostle Paul's declaration in:

*"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us **wisdom**, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."* (1 Corinthians 1:30)

King Solomon ruled Israel from 971-931 B.C. and became the wisest man in the world (1 Kings 4:29-34). While most of the proverbs were personally written by Solomon, he also collected some proverbs from others. For instance, Proverbs 30 bears the name of Agur, and Proverbs 31 are the words of Lemuel. This collection of proverbs was later finalized under the reign of Judah's King Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.). Significantly, Solomon completed his proverbs prior to his lapse of faith recorded in 1 Kings 11:1-11, when his numerous wives turned his heart after pagan gods. His faith in God was later restored, and he went on to write Psalms 72 and 127,

¹ Selected from Introduction to Proverbs; Thomas Nelson Bible

along with the books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

Someone once said that wisdom is knowing what to do; skill is knowing how to do it; and virtue is doing it. With that in mind, let us consider what this sacred book reveals, and then how to practice its rules of conduct and action.

Just two major themes run through this book: *wisdom* and *foolishness*. They are often overlapping in the experiences of life. Solomon praises wisdom as being rooted in the fear of the Lord; i.e., reverence for God, leading to obedience to God's Word. On the other hand, foolishness constitutes everything opposite to wisdom; for instance, stupidity, deceit, meddling, rashness, and wickedness.

Many of the proverbs overlap in meaning with some repetition. However, the repetitions should not be considered unnecessary. Each proverb is divinely inspired, and any repetition is an instrument to emphasize its importance. The prophet Isaiah declared the need to teach God's wisdom. He then revealed the method of instruction, which is repetitive:

"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." (Isaiah 28:10)

There are a number of helpful themes in **Proverbs**, as illustrated by the following outline:

I. Man's Relationship to God

A. His Trust	Proverbs 22:19
B. His Humility	Proverbs 3:34
C. His Fear of God	Proverbs 1:7
D. His Righteousness	Proverbs 10:25
E. His Sin	Proverbs 28:13
F. His Obedience	Proverbs 6:23

G. Facing Reward	Proverbs 12:28
H. Facing Tests	Proverbs 17:3
I. Facing Blessings	Proverbs 10:22
J. Facing Death	Proverbs 15:11

II. Man's Relationship to Himself

A. His Character	Proverbs 20:11
B. His Wisdom	Proverbs 1:5
C. His Foolishness	Proverbs 26:10-11
D. His Speech	Proverbs 18:21
E. His Self-Control	Proverbs 6:9-11
F. His Kindness	Proverbs 3:3
G. His Wealth	Proverbs 11:4
H. His Pride	Proverbs 27:1
I. His Anger	Proverbs 29:11
j. His Laziness	Proverbs 13:4

III. Man's Relationship to Others

A. His Love	Proverbs 8:17
B. His Friends	Proverbs 17:17
C. His Enemies	Proverbs 19:27
D. His Truthfulness	Proverbs 23:23

E. His Gossip	Proverbs 20:19
F. As a Father	Proverb 30:7; 31:2-9
G. In Educating Children	Proverbs 4:1-4
H. In Disciplining Children	Proverbs 22:6

Selected from the MacArthur Study Bible

1. Understanding the literary structure of Proverbs

The literary structure of Proverbs is quite unique. This rhythmic use of parallelism places truths side by side, so that the second line somehow enhances the first line. That means the second may basically repeat the first with some alteration of the words, or the second may further define, expand, complete, or even contrast the first. For example:

- a. **Comparison** (Synonymous)—the simplest proverbial form where the second line repeats the first with similar words.

*“My son, attend unto my wisdom,
and bow thine ear to my understanding.” (5:1)*

*“The liberal soul shall be made fat:
and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” (11:25)*

- b. **Contrast** (Antithetical)—where the second member is in contrast to the first, showing the other side of the picture. This construction is very prevalent in Proverbs.

*“In the multitude of words there wanteth (lacks) not sin:
but he that refraineth his lips is wise.” (10:19)*

*“The thoughts of the righteous are right:
but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.” (12:5)*

- c. **Completion** (Progression)—where the second member adds a progressive thought, thus completing or further defining the first.

*“The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
beholding the evil and the good.” (15:3)*

*“The name of the LORD is a strong tower:
The righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” (18:10)*

2. Understanding the nature (purpose) of Proverbs

The Proverbs are not commandments or inflexible laws. They are poetic statements of wisdom under the direction of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 2:21). The most common mistake is to interpret Proverbs as promises rather than statements of principle. These are written by Solomon to grant guidance to those desiring to live wisely and successfully. To consider them to be direct promises of God will lead to frustration and error.

For example, Prov. 15:1 says:

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger,”

Generally speaking, a soft answer given to an angry person will temper his “wrath” (response), but that’s no guarantee that he will stop his angry tirade. Thus, this statement is a *principle* rather than a promise.



Chapter 1

The Beginning of Knowledge

Prov. 1:1

“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;”

The opening statement of this marvelous book identifies the author as Solomon, the son of David, the King of Israel. Like the parables of Jesus, proverbs depict earthly situations that point to heavenly applications, bywords, similarities, ethical wisdom, and popular moral sayings.

We could further define a proverb as a short meaningful statement of a general truth which boils down a common experience of life into a memorable form. In the next several verses, Solomon begins to define the purposes of these statements of wisdom:

Prov. 1:2

“To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;”

To know wisdom and instruction; To “**know**” here is more than simple head knowledge. It speaks of inner perception of truth. **Wisdom** is the ability to use knowledge skillfully, along with seeing life from God’s perspective. “**Instruction**” here has the idea of correcting a fault, which is the information needed for discipline and direction.

To perceive the words of understanding. The study of **Proverbs** can help one to discover or realize and distinguish the words of understanding in it. Thus, “**to perceive**” is the ability to separate information mentally and to make proper distinctions, leading to the right conclusions and actions.

Prov. 1:3

“To receive the instructions of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;”

To receive the instructions of wisdom. Another purpose is to receive or take the instruction of wisdom. The word used for wisdom here also includes the idea of clever insight and thoughtfulness:

Justice is the word for that which is right (morally and legally), lining up with truth.

Judgment refers to the process of deciding what is right.

Equity is the idea of fairness, doing things right before God and man.

All of these virtues are the opposite of confusion, which prevails today in our society! Take away the Word of God, and there's no direction, clarity of purpose, or right procedure for living.

Prov. 1:4

“To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.”

To give subtilty to the simple. **Subtilty** is used to express cleverness or resourcefulness. This quality is especially needful to simple people, usually the young and inexperienced. Of course, such wise subtilty is essential in every stage of life. Jesus said that we were to be *“wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”* (Matthew 10:16)

To know how to function legitimately in society with wisdom is a necessity for every believer in Christ. The world is tricky and underhanded; it is essential to understand and cleverly respond to those who are sophisticated sinners.

To the young man knowledge and discretion. Significantly, **the simple** one is placed beside **the young man**, who is also unsophisticated and easily seduced. Most young men are impulsive, easily led astray and seduced by the sins of the flesh. **Proverbs** can provide **knowledge and discretion** to prevent one from being overtaken by subtle temptations of wickedness.