

# OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### PROVERBS

The authorship of this book is announced in the preface, "**The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel,**" 1:1.

It is the first book of the Bible to name the author at the beginning. Solomon lived long before the sages of Greece, five hundred years before the "seven wise men," and seven hundred before Socrates and Aristotle. There is little foundation for the Rabbinical tradition that some of the Grecian writers borrowed largely from Solomon, and certainly there is less for the notion that the book borrowed from them. He was peculiarly qualified, apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to write such books as are ascribed to him in the Bible, viz.: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song; for he possessed in an extraordinary degree a remarkable comprehensiveness of mind.

**"Wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore,"** is the description in I Kings 4:29.

He was a philosopher, a poet, a botanist, zoologist, architect, as well as king, I Kings 4:32-34. His mental grasp is perhaps more clearly seen in his character as moralist than in any other aspect. Yet he had very unusual powers of analysis and classification. To Solomon belonged the rare distinction of possessing that subtle, piercing intuitiveness of mind which sees at a glance what others less gifted reach only by laborious processes of reasoning.

To have this seeing faculty in its fullness is to have the loftiest human endowment; and it was bestowed upon him in the highest degree. His analytical power is exhibited in his thorough acquaintance with and description of human character. In all its phases and manifestations; in its fullness and poverty, its strength and weakness, he is familiar with it. He sees the springs of all action; he understands the motives and passions and propensities which sway men and which make them what they are.

Nor is his acquaintance with human character confined to any one class, as for example, the ruling class with which he was personally identified. He knows by an inspired intuition universal man; the peasant equally well with the monarch, the philosopher as well as the simpleton.

With swift and unerring hand he labels each man according to the character he has discovered in him, and instantly sets him in his proper place. Like the other inspired writers, Solomon knows but two classes among men: the righteous and the wicked, or, as he generally designates them, the wise and the fools. He no sooner fastens his gaze on a fellow mortal than he determines, by the prevailing temper he has detected in him, to which company he belongs, and he fixes his standing accordingly.

“**Wisdom**” is the key word, and 1:7, the key verse of the book.

1. The proverb:—“A master sentence,” “maxim or brief sententious saying,” “enigmatical utterance,” etc. Such are some of the more common definitions of a proverb. That given by an English statesman is full of significance—“The wisdom of many and the wit of one.”

Proverbs are very abundant among all peoples. Many of them, although they sound new to us and wonderfully apposite, have descended from the remotest antiquity. Some are worthless, many are wicked, but generally proverbs are the product of the wisdom and experience of the ages. Those of this book are not only true, but given us by the unerring Spirit of God, and of course must be filled with the best instruction.

**The proverb of the Bible follows the general rule of Hebrew poetry. It presents a great truth by a very apt comparison, or by a sharp and striking contrast. A parable is truth set forth in a lengthened similitude or narrative; a proverb is truth in the form of a sententious aphorism, a concentrated, pithy and pregnant saying.**

2. The design of this book is quite clearly indicated in 1:2-4:

**“To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.”**

A noble aim, worthy of the Spirit of God. Its main object is to instruct the believer in the things of God; to furnish him with those mighty and enduring principles according to which he is to order his life so as to escape the perils of the wicked, and establish his way in righteousness and peace.

Dr. Arnot’s title for the book is a good description of its chief design: “*Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth.*” It is the application of that wisdom which created the heavens and the earth to the details of life in this world of confusion and evil. We have in it the ways of God, the divine path for human conduct, and the discernment of what the world is.

It has to do with God’s government of the world, and with our own happiness here, if we maintain our earthly relationships according to God. It keeps turning a powerful light on the dark and dangerous places; it unfolds that deep law which applies so universally, “**Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;**” it points out with marvelous clearness that a false step may lead to bitter consequences; and it contrasts false ways with right, the path of life with the path of death.

### 3. Analysis of the book.

It naturally falls into two great sections:

- (1) Chaps, 1-9, which give the general principles in broad outlines;
- (2) chaps, 10-31, Proverbs proper.

A more particular and exhaustive division would arrange the contents of the book into five parts, as follows:

(1) Chaps, 1-9, in which are contained wise and fatherly exhortations addressed mainly to the young, together with a masterly description of wisdom. The thought in this section is more consecutive than in Proverbs proper.

(2) Chaps, 10-22, 16. Moral aphorisms, or master sentences, bearing on practical life.

(3) Chaps, 22, 17; 24, in which the method of more or less connected thought is resumed, as in the first section.

(4) Chaps, 25-29. The proverbs of this part are said to be those of Solomon “**which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out.**”

It is difficult to determine precisely what this statement means. It hardly warrants us in affirming a different authorship for this section. The sayings are attributed to Solomon; it is only said that these men “**Copied out,**” arranged and compiled them. The memory of these learned men of Hezekiah’s court is perpetuated in Jewish tradition. In the Talmud they are called a “society,” or “academy,” and it is declared that “Hezekiah and his academy wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, the Song and Ecclesiastes,” which can only mean that they compiled and arranged them.

Perhaps the true explanation is, that the proverbs of this section had been transmitted orally from Solomon to the time of Hezekiah, and that the work of Hezekiah’s men was that of collecting and editing them in this permanent form. This view seems to be confirmed by the fact that many of the proverbs of these chapters are repetitions, with slight variations, of some which occur in the preceding section.

(5) Chaps, 30, 31, which may be considered as a sort of an appendix to the whole book, and of which the authorship is a problem that cannot be solved.

The thirtieth is ascribed to Agur the son of Jakeh. Who he was it seems next to impossible to determine. The word “prophecy” with which the chapter begins, or oracle, points to a higher character, if we may so say, than other portions of the book. Verses 4, 19, 24-28, 30, 31 remind one of Job, while the oft recurring “three” and “four” recall Amos. The chapter is addressed to Ithiel and Ucal. Who they were, or whether these are proper names or symbolical titles, is not known.

So also the “**King Lemuel**” of the thirty-first is supposed by the older students of the book to be another name for Solomon, and by later ones as symbolical. From beginning to end, there is but one subject, the delineation of a perfect wife. Trapp is of the opinion that Lemuel is Solomon, and his mother, Bathsheba, was the author of this surpassingly fine description of the perfect wife.

#### 4. Principal topics of Proverbs.

##### (1) *Wisdom*, 8.

Clearly something more than an attribute is meant by the Wisdom of this chapter. We might conceive God’s wisdom personified using the language of vs. 22, but when we proceed to vss. 23-31, nay, even to the end of the chapter, we are irresistibly led to think, not of a poetic personification, but of the personal God Himself, in His awful majesty and holiness.

There is a remarkable similarity between wisdom as described here, and Christ as He is set before us in the New Testament. It is quite surprising how the parallel between them can be exactly traced.

- Wisdom is represented as dwelling with God from eternity; so also is Christ, John 1, 1, 2.
- Wisdom is before all things, so also is Christ, Colossians 1, 17.
- Wisdom is the eldest child of God; Christ is the first-born of the whole creation, Colossians 1, 15, the only Begotten of the Father, John 1, 14.

Indeed, the parallel may be followed out to the greatest length and with the utmost minutia. It cannot be reasonably doubted, therefore, that the Wisdom of Solomon is identical with the Lord Jesus of later Scripture; and by this title and portraiture Solomon adumbrated the God-man Messiah.

##### (2) *Filial piety*.

In the law given at Sinai, the obligation to honor parents was placed first after duties to God. It underlay all morality in Israel. It underlies all morality still. As might be expected, this subject occupies a prominent place in Proverbs; e. g., 1:8, 9; 6:20, 21; 13:1; 15:20; 19:26; 30:17, etc.

##### (3) *Bad company*.

The warnings in respect to this are very urgent and solemn, for they are of immeasurable importance: 1:10-19; 4:14-19; 13:20; 24:1, 2; 29:24.

##### (4) *Licentiousness*.

Solomon calls the harlot “**the strange woman**,” a title which reminds one of “**the strange gods**” which the prophets so often and so fiercely denounce. She is regarded as a foreigner, an alien; for from the days of Balaam, when at his foul instigation Midianite women beguiled Israel to sin, female influence had again and again brought immoral practices and lewdness into the land.

It was by foreign wives and concubines that the great king himself was led astray, I Kings 11:4. She is well named—a stranger to all good, purity, happiness, the foe of herself and of all her kind. The prevalence and danger of this sin are so great as to make the revelation about it very full and explicit: 2:16-19; 5:3-20; 6:23-35; 7:4-27; 22:14.

(5) *Intemperance.*

This and the sin of uncleanness are twin serpents infinitely more deadly than the fabled snakes of Laocoon. Nothing can exceed the vividness with which Solomon portrays the evils of intemperance. No other Scripture more abounds with the details of its horrors. Here are found some of the most powerful texts from which to preach against this dreadful sin: 20:1; 23:1-3, 29-35; 31:4-6.

(6) *Contention. Strifes, disputings, family brawls, quarrels, etc.;* their causes and consequences are very fully treated: 3:30; 10:12; 13:10; 15:1, 2, 4, 18; 16:27, 28; 18:6-8, etc.

(7) *Lying.*

Truthfulness and honesty need to be strongly pressed, for the natural tendency of men is to deceive in order to gain an advantage or elude a loss; consequently the book emphatically condemns such conduct: 6:16, 17; 12:13, 14, 21, 22; 19:5-9.

(8) *The tongue. Bridling the tongue:* 4:24; 10:19; 4; 21:23.

(9) *Sloth.*

Paul as earnestly denounces idleness as Solomon. His terse and sufficient rule is, “**If any would not work, neither should he eat,**” II Thessalonians 3:10. It is well to ponder, in these days, the forcible teaching of Solomon: 6:6-11; 10:4, 5; 13:4; 24:30-34.

(10) *Pride and its consequences,* 8:13; 11:2; 18; 29:23.

(11) *Riches.* How true is the description: 11:4, 28; 23:5; 27:24; 30:8.

(12) *Liberality:* 3:9-10; 11:24, 25; 13:7; 19:17:

**“He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.”**

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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