

A Proper Perspective on the Book of Proverbs

Putting aside Christian spirituality as the basis for understanding Proverbs, here is an intelligent approach to the writings.¹



Ancient Israel, like other Ancient Near East (ANE) nations, looked to their elders to provide them with the knowledge to live life. This was a logical attitude to have because older people had the experience of life which they could pass on to the younger generations. Of special value in those times were men of great wisdom who were known as sages.

Sages had wise sayings, as well as much wisdom. Of great value to their nation were sages who had godly wisdom because of their devotion to Yahweh. These men were able to provide godly counsel about the practical and philosophical issues of life that most people faced.

The Book of Proverbs gets its title from the OT Hebrew word *mashal* which meant ‘oracle’, ‘parable’, or ‘wise saying’. We tend to think of proverbs in our Western culture as short, sharp sayings of wisdom, but this is not the case in regard to what was compiled into the collection named “Proverbs”. The book actually contains some longer discourses² (oracles) as well as the expected short, pithy statements.

The distinctiveness of Hebrew proverbs was their formation within the context of Yahweh and his righteous standards which were applicable to his covenant people.

King Solomon is ‘the star’ when it comes to wisdom. He requested wisdom to rule his people when Yahweh asked him for the type of blessing he wanted.³ This unselfish decision resulted in him being given wisdom greater than any monarch of his time.⁴ It’s recorded that he spoke 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs during his lifetime.⁵

Solomon followed this wisdom early in his life, but he failed to persevere with his devotion to Yahweh, so his heart turned away later on,⁶ being led astray by his love for his 700 wives and 300 concubines⁷. His life demonstrates that knowing and/or teaching moral principles, which are merely head knowledge, is not enough to ensure a person lives a spiritual life. A personal, intimate relationship with the Trinity is what’s required, not lots of theological knowledge.

Proverbs contains much of Solomon’s wisdom, however, not all of what he said was recorded. The book’s contents originated with King Solomon in the 10th century BC, but its compilation appears to have taken place during the reign of King Hezekiah in about 700 BC.⁸ The compilation also includes sayings from King Lemuel⁹ and Agur son of Jakeh¹⁰, both of whom are unknown, as well as words of other wise men of the time.¹¹ The collection concludes with an acrostic poem¹² (known as ‘The Wife of Noble Character’ or ‘The Virtuous Wife’), where the verses begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and is of unknown origin.



1 – Literary information in the following section is extracted from the Introduction to Proverbs in the “NIV Life in the Spirit Study Bible” (2003) Zondervan pub. As well as the footnotes to chapter 1

2 – Proverbs 1:20-33; 2:1-22; 5:1-14

3 – 1 Kings 3:5-14

4 – 1 Kings 4:29-32

5 – 1 Kings 4:32

6 – 1 Kings 11:1-11

7 – 1 Kings 11:3

8 – Proverbs 25:1

9 – Proverbs chapter 31

10 – Proverbs chapter 30

11 – Proverbs 22:17-24:34

12 – Proverbs chapter 31:10-31

So, what should we make of the Book of Proverbs?

From an analysis of this particular collection of ANE Hebrew writings:

1. It contains ANE wisdom
2. There is quite a lot of godly wisdom in the sayings
3. **Not all the wisdom in it is godly (righteous)**¹³
4. They were sayings of wise men,¹⁴ kings¹⁵ and queens¹⁶ not directives from ‘God’
5. Many were sayings the monarchs wrote down for their sons¹⁷
6. Sons were advised to listen to the wisdom/teaching of their mothers¹⁸

If we take the attitude that the OT is holy scripture because it was collected by the Israelites, we miss the fact that they were not spiritual people in the way that we are. This misconception will cause us to miss understanding that ANE proverbs were secular/worldly sayings which were highly valued in their society, just like scientific statements and concepts are highly valued today. Just because a religious Hebrew had a wise saying doesn’t mean it came straight from Heaven as an all-time inspiration of righteousness.

For us, Jesus, the Son, is the ultimate wisdom of God.¹⁹ He is the source of all truth because he is the Truth,²⁰ and his knowledge includes heavenly wisdom (Trinitarian wisdom). All this truth and wisdom comes to us from the Trinity via the Spirit.²¹ One of the fruit of walking in the Spirit will be our receipt and display of Trinitarian truth²² which will include wisdom.

NOTE #1: The “mother’s life-giving teaching” in chapter 6²³ cannot be spiritually interpreted to be the church system today. That is despite that interpretation being used by Brian Simmons in his Passion Translation.²⁴ The church (properly known as the *ekklesia*)²⁵ did not exist in the form it is intended to be under the New Covenant at the time for Solomon making the statement (around a millennia before the NC was introduced).

NOTE #2: If we take Proverbs as God-given spiritual scripture, ‘God’ therefore only hates 7 things which are repulsive to him,²⁶ why wouldn’t he hate anything else which is ungodly or find anything else repulsive? Does that mean sin is only limited to 7 things?

CONCLUSION

Much of Proverbs is secular wisdom such as the contents of my Wisdom webpage²⁷. It helps people live their natural lives, not their spiritual lives as sons. After all, how can life statements made under the Law be totally relevant to us under the New Covenant? Any references to the Torah are irrelevant to those who have the Spirit of God, led by the Spirit and who hear from the Trinity with their spirit.

How can a son, knowing what’s righteous believe that these verses are inspired by the Spirit:

Proverbs 31:6-7 (NIV) – *Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*

13 – Proverbs 26:3; 31:2-7

14 – Proverbs 22:17-24:34 ???

15 – Proverbs 1:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1

16 – Proverbs 31:1

17 – Proverbs 1:8, 10, 15; etc., over 20 times

18 – Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 31:1

19 – 1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:2-3

20 – John 14:6

21 – John 16:13

22 – Ephesians 5:9

23 – Proverbs 6:20 (TPT)

24 – classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%206:19-21&version=TPT#en-TPT-2488

25 – Matthew 16:18 (Jubilee Bible 2000)

26 – Proverbs 6:16-19

27 – canberraforerunners.org/?page_id=6325

BTW: One could say the same about Ecclesiastes with statements such as this:

Ecclesiastes 7:16 (NKJV) – *Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?*

Laurence

8-3-2021

(www.CanberraForerunners.org)

COPYRIGHT

*This document is free to copy, republish and distribute, but only 'as is'. It is free to quote from at length.
All Canberra Forerunners' documents are licensed under*

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License

Quotes are the copyright of their authors.

Free graphics are from www.clker.com & free photos are from commons.wikimedia.org unless otherwise credited.