

## Proverbs

1:1–7 Proverbs is a series of wise sayings for a wide audience—the young and simple (Prov 1:4) to the already wise (vv. 5–6). The book presents itself as for everyone willing to learn but not for the fool who will despise what it offers (v. 7). Particular proverbs are affiliated with Solomon (vv. 1; 10:1; 25:1), Agur (30:1), Lemuel (31:1), men during Hezekiah’s lifetime (25:1), and the “wise” in general (22:17; 24:23).

1:8–9:18 The opening chapters of Proverbs are lectures from a father to his son. In these longer speeches, the father admonishes his son to choose the path of wisdom over the path of folly. The personified figures of wisdom and folly also try to persuade the son (vv. 20–33; 9:1–18). These chapters contrast with the rest of the book of Proverbs, which mostly consists of collections of short sayings. By beginning the book with the father’s instruction, Proverbs establishes the importance of wisdom and creates the context in which to read the shorter proverbs and aphorisms that make up the rest of the book.

1:20–33 In this passage, wisdom is personified as a woman who urges the simple to heed her words. Crying in the streets (Prov 1:20–21), she admonishes the simple, scoffers, and fools to listen to her words (vv. 22–23; see note on v. 4). She describes the disastrous consequences of ignoring her call (vv. 24–27). Wisdom will not respond to those who reject her (vv. 28–30); those who ignore her will eventually be destroyed by their folly (vv. 31–32). Wisdom concludes by encouraging people to heed her call and secure themselves from disaster (v. 33).

2:1–22 This chapter contains a paternal call regarding wisdom. It begins with a series of “if” statements that describe the search for wisdom (vv. 1–4), and it continues with several “then” statements about the results of wisdom. Wisdom provides an understanding of the fear of Yahweh (v. 5) as well as righteousness and justice (v. 9). It also delivers from evil, as the wise person can withstand temptation (vv. 11–19). The person who seeks and finds wisdom walks in righteousness and avoids the judgment of the wicked (vv. 20–22).

2:21–22 Proverbs 2 concludes by describing the results of following wisdom. The upright and those with integrity (see note on v. 7) inhabit the land, while the wicked are cut off. To inhabit the land means to live in safety and enjoy Yahweh’s blessing (10:30; Psa 37:3–4). While “the land” can refer specifically to Israel (Deut 4:1), here it is best understood as meaning the earth in general.

3:1–12 In this section, a father encourages his son to remember his teaching, including love and faithfulness (Prov 3:1, 3). In doing so, the son will be ensured a long and successful life (vv. 2, 4). The father also tells his son to trust in and acknowledge Yahweh rather than his own wisdom (vv. 5–8), to honor Yahweh with his wealth (vv. 9–10), and to accept Yahweh’s discipline (vv. 11–12).

3:13–20 This brief hymn extolling wisdom begins by asserting that the one who finds wisdom and understanding is blessed or happy (Prov 3:13). Wisdom is then compared to silver, gold, and precious stones (vv. 14–15). Wisdom is more valuable than any of these substances (Job 28:15–19) because of its benefits, which can include long life, riches, honor, and peace (Prov 3:15–18). Finally, the hymn describes how Yahweh used wisdom in creation (vv. 19–20).

3:21–35 In this section, the father encourages his son to keep wisdom close. He describes the safety and security that comes from a life lived in wisdom (Prov 3:23–26). He then gives a series of commands

pertaining to the treatment of others (vv. 27–31). Finally, he describes Yahweh’s attitude toward the wicked and the righteous (vv. 32–35).

4:1–27 Chapter 4 consists of three sets of paternal instructions. In the first, the father encourages his sons to listen to wisdom (vv. 1–2) and quotes the teachings of his own father (vv. 3–9). In the second, he urges his son to keep hold of his instruction (vv. 10–13) and warns him not to follow the path of the wicked (vv. 14–19). In the third, he advises his son to continue on the path of wisdom and not turn aside from it (vv. 20–27).

4:23–27 The father encourages his son to keep wisdom by guarding various aspects of his body. His heart should be vigilant (v. 23), his mouth should avoid falsehood (v. 24), and his eyes should be directed forward (v. 25). Finally, he should keep the path of his feet clear and not turn toward evil (vv. 26–27).

5:1–23 This lengthy warning against adultery begins with a typical exhortation for the son to pay attention to the wisdom of his father (vv. 1–2). The father warns that although the forbidden woman may be alluring, she is deadly (vv. 3–6). He warns his sons to avoid her and notes the consequences of not doing so, including economic ruin and social shame (vv. 7–14). He then prescribes fidelity in marriage as the proper outlet for sexual expression (vv. 15–20). He concludes with a more general warning about the fate of the wicked (vv. 21–23).

6:1–19 In Proverbs 6, the father gives his son a series of practical warnings. He begins with instructions on giving a pledge for someone (vv. 1–5). He then uses the example of an ant to warn against slothfulness (vv. 6–11). Finally, he describes the fate of the wicked (vv. 12–15) and lists traits hated by Yahweh (vv. 16–19).

6:20–35 The father gives another warning against adultery (Prov 5:1–23). He begins by encouraging his son to keep his teaching close (vv. 20–21). His commandment and teaching will lead his son and guard him from the temptation of the adulteress (vv. 22–24). He warns his son against desiring her beauty (vv. 25–28). Comparing adultery to theft, he describes the specific consequences that will be taken against him by the woman’s husband (vv. 29–35).

7:1–27 The father again gives an extended warning about adultery (compare 5:1–23). He encourages his son to keep his teaching close (vv. 1–3). If his son keeps wisdom as a close friend—perhaps alluding to wisdom personified as a woman in chs. 2; 8:1–9:9—he can avoid the temptation of the adulteress (vv. 4–5). The father then focuses on the aggressive tactics the adulteress uses to seduce those he calls the simple (vv. 6–21). He describes the consequences of being seduced by her (vv. 22–23) and issues a final warning to avoid her (vv. 24–27).

8:1–36 In this chapter, wisdom is personified as a woman who calls all of humanity to heed her voice (see 1:20–33 and note; vv. 1–5). She describes her speech as noble and righteous (vv. 6–11). She continues by contrasting herself with pride, evil, and deception (vv. 12–14) and explaining her benefits to rulers (vv. 15–21). She also describes her role in creation (vv. 22–31). Finally, wisdom repeats her call, encouraging all to find life by keeping her ways (vv. 32–36).

9:1–18 In ch. 9, wisdom and folly offer competing feasts. In the first section, wisdom prepares for the feast (vv. 1–6). She sets the table and sends out women to invite the simple people, encouraging them to come, feast, and learn to walk with insight (see note on 7:7; note on 1:4). Wisdom then compares the reactions of the scoffer and the wise to reproof and instruction (vv. 7–12). The final section parallels the first, as folly prepares a feast (vv. 13–18). She loudly calls to whomever passes by, inviting the simple people, who unknowingly enter the realm of the dead.

10:1–22:16 10:1–22:16 is a collection of short sayings that are often clustered together to treat particular topics, such as wealth and poverty (vv. 12–18), speech (11:9–12), diligence and sloth (12:24–28), and pride and humility (15:25–33).

11:3–9 These proverbs contrast the security enjoyed by the righteous with the inevitable destruction of the wicked. The righteous enjoy deliverance from trouble (v. 8) and have security because of their integrity (v. 3), righteousness (vv. 5–6), and wisdom (v. 9). In contrast, the wicked's actions ultimately lead to destruction because of their perverseness (v. 3), overall wickedness (v. 5), and lust (v. 6). Instead of avoiding trouble, the wicked walk into it (v. 8). Riches cannot preserve the wicked (v. 4); when they die, their hope and wealth die with them (v. 6).

11:10–11 These proverbs describe reactions to the fate of the righteous and the wicked. The whole city rejoices when the righteous prosper; they also rejoice when the wicked perish. Verse 11 offers the reason for these reactions: The righteous bring blessing to the city, while the wicked destroy it. The righteous are characterized by justice and fairness (1:3; 21:15; 29:4), while the wicked are characterized by violence and oppression (4:17; 17:23; 21:10).

15:16–17 These two proverbs promote godliness and contentment over material wealth—a common theme in Wisdom Literature. An impoverished but peaceful home is preferred over one that is wealthy but contentious (17:1). The author of Ecclesiastes also promotes a restful life over the pursuit of profit (Eccl 4:6).

16:1–9 This section is framed by a comparison of the plans of people's hearts and the direction of Yahweh (vv. 1, 16:9). Yahweh establishes the plans of those who seek Him and follow Him; He causes their enemies to be at peace with them (vv. 3, 16:7). Yahweh looks at the heart of humankind (v. 2) and punishes the arrogant (v. 5). Yahweh has created everything—even the wicked—for a purpose (v. 4).

16:10–15 These proverbs address the monarchy. The first involves the judgment of the wise king (v. 10). Since justice originates from Yahweh (v. 11), the righteous king will have his throne established (v. 12). Verse 13 notes that the king delights in righteous advisors. Finally, two proverbs encourage seeking the king's favor and appeasing his anger (vv. 14–15).

16:27–30 These proverbs address people who cause problems. People who are worthless (v. 27), dishonest (vv. 28, 30), or violent (v. 29) negatively affect those around them. They bring evil by tempting and dividing those who associate with them.

18:20–21 These two proverbs show the power of speech, to be life giving or taking. See note on 12:13.

22:17–24:22 The first section of Solomon’s proverbs (10:1–22:16) now comes to an end. The proverbs in this section are attributed to “the wise” in general, not to a specific author. Longer than those in 10:1–22:16, these proverbs sometimes span several verses (23:29–35). A short prologue (vv. 17–21) instructs the reader to listen to the words of the wise, which are true and pleasant (vv. 18, 21).

22:22–23 This proverb addresses the exploitation of the impoverished. Because they are unable to protect their legal rights, the poor are an easy target for the rich and powerful. The rationale given here for not robbing them is that Yahweh defends them.

22:24–25 This proverb exhorts the reader to avoid chronically angry people (15:18; 27:3; 29:22). While quarrelsome people bring destruction, the greatest danger of associating with them is becoming like them. This threat of corruption is also a common theme in Egyptian wisdom literature.

22:26–27 This proverb warns against putting up security or pledges. It echoes a common theme in Proverbs (e.g., 6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; see note on 6:1).

23:1–3 This proverb advises caution when eating with someone in a position of authority. It specifically warns against overindulging. Rulers might notice such behavior and think less of a person. Alternatively, rulers might have ulterior motives—like the stingy man of vv. 6–7—and use the indulgence as an opportunity to require something from a guest.

23:4–5 This proverb does not condemn wealth; it warns against the pursuit of wealth. Ecclesiastes also warns about pursuit of wealth and its inability to satisfy (Eccl 5:10). It describes two situations: In one, a person pursues wealth but never enjoys it or finds satisfaction (Eccl 4:7–8). In the second, someone loses all their wealth and is left with nothing (Eccl 5:13–17).

23:6–8 This proverb warns against eating with a stingy person. The stingy person may appear hospitable and generous on the outside but is resentful and calculating inside (Prov 23:7).

23:10–11 This proverb warns against taking advantage of widows and orphans by seizing their property. Widows were especially vulnerable and depended on relatives to protect them, and this proverb asserts that God Himself will take up their case (Deut 10:18; Psa 68:6).

23:12–14 This proverb admonishes the reader to take discipline to heart and also to administer it to children. Discipline given now can keep children from later peril.

23:15–16 This proverb encourages a son to learn wisdom and in doing so make his parents happy. See 10:1.

23:17–18 This proverb warns against envying the wicked and encourages the righteous to look to the future instead. In doing so, it implies that sinners sometimes find success. This proverb resembles Psa 73, where the Psalmist feels envious of the success of the wicked (Psa 73:2–3) but regains confidence when witnessing their ultimate fate (Psa 73:16–17) and destruction (Psa 73:27).

23:19–21 This proverb warns against dissipation, specifically drunkenness and gluttony (compare Deut 21:20). The son has two ways he can go, and choosing the wrong one will land him among drunkards and gluttons—a sure path to ruin. The theme of drunkenness is continued later in Prov 23:29–35.

23:22–25 This proverb encourages the son to accept his parents' instruction and to pursue wisdom. He will then gain wisdom and make his parents rejoice (see 10:1; 23:15–16).

23:26–28 This proverb warns about the destructive nature of the adulteress—a theme throughout Proverbs (e.g., Prov 2:16–19; 5:3–23; 6:23–35; 7:4–27; see note on 2:16).

23:29–35 This longer proverb addresses problems associated with drunkenness. It begins with a series of questions that list the issues faced by those who linger over wine (vv. 29–30). It warns against the initial allure of wine (v. 31) before describing the results of drunkenness. Verse 32 compares the effects of drunkenness to the bite of a snake. In v. 33, drunkenness affects people's vision and causes them to stagger as if they were on a ship (v. 34). Oblivious to surroundings, the drunk foolishly seeks another drink (v. 35).

24:1–2 This proverb advises against envying wicked people, perhaps for the success and prosperity they enjoy (3:31; 23:17; 24:19; Psa 37:1). They are intent on destruction and deceit, and Proverbs makes clear elsewhere what happens to such people (Prov 1:10–15; 3:31–33; 23:17–18).

24:3–4 This proverb describes the constructive nature of wisdom. Proverbs elsewhere personifies wisdom as an industrious woman who builds her house (9:1). Here, wisdom does not just build the house; she fills it with prosperity and happiness (see note on 3:2).

24:5–6 This proverb praises the power of wisdom. It is more powerful than physical strength and military prowess, a common theme in Proverbs (compare 11:14; 15:22; 20:18).

24:8–9 This proverb describes someone who schemes and says the schemer will acquire a reputation that invites hatred.

24:10–12 This proverb calls for the rescue of people threatened by death. This may refer to instructing people in life-saving wisdom or righteousness—helping others avoid the path that ultimately leads to death (13:14; 14:12). Alternatively, it may instruct that people condemned to execution not be abandoned. The proverb warns against ignoring such people and later claiming ignorance; God weighs the heart and knows the truth.

24:13–14 This proverb compares the sweetness of honey to the sweetness of wisdom. Just as honey is sweet to the mouth, wisdom is sweet to a person's whole life. Elsewhere, the law is compared to honey (Psa 19:10–11).

24:15–16 This proverb warns that trying to destroy the righteous is futile. While the righteous may be defeated temporarily, ultimately the wicked will be destroyed (Prov 14:32).

24:17–18 Following the warning about trying to destroy the righteous (vv. 15–16), this proverb warns against gloating at the fall of an enemy. Proverbs 20:22 warns against revenge, encouraging the wise to wait for Yahweh. Here, readers are advised not to rejoice when their enemy falls because God may end up having mercy on the enemy.

24:19–20 This proverb warns against envying the wicked (compare vv. 1–2). They will die and may not leave any descendants (13:9; 20:20; 23:18).

24:21–22 This proverb admonishes the son to respect divine and human authority and to avoid those who disregard their authority. Both God and the king have the power to destroy (14:35; 16:14; 19:12; 20:2).

24:23–34 This section of the sayings of the wise is the shortest collection of proverbs (see 22:17–24:22 and note). It addresses the topics of justice in the courts (vv. 23–26, 28–29) and hard work in the home (vv. 27, 30–34).

24:30–34 This proverb describes the consequences of laziness. The sluggard's laziness results in an overgrown field and broken down wall. This leads to the sluggard being poor and in need. See note on 21:25.

25:1–29:27 Men during Hezekiah's reign copied this second and final collection of proverbs attributed to Solomon (see 10:1). Hezekiah reigned for 29 years as a righteous and prosperous king. He is credited with a religious revival in Israel (2 Kgs 18:2–8; 2 Chr 29:3–31:21).

25:6–7 This proverb warns against self-promotion: It is better to remain humble and be promoted than to be presumptuous and be rebuked. Jesus teaches a similar lesson in Luke 14:7–11, applying it to all of life.

25:21–22 Earlier proverbs warned against revenge (20:22; 24:29) or rejoicing at an enemy's defeat (24:17–18). This proverb goes further, encouraging readers to show generosity to their enemies; generosity shames the enemy and hopefully encourages repentance. Paul quotes this proverb in Romans when he encourages his readers to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:17–21).

26:4–5 These two proverbs seem to contradict each other. The first one warns not to answer a fool according to his folly, while the second encourages answering a fool according to his folly. However, the book of Proverbs is not a list of rules; it is a collection of general principles for life—principles which must be applied carefully to relevant situations. For example, Prov 19:11 says it is a glory to overlook someone's offense. However, 19:19 says not to spare a man of great wrath. In certain situations, the offense should be overlooked, but in other situations, it should not.

26:7–12 This series of proverbs makes various comparisons that show the worthlessness of the fool: A proverb is useless (v. 7) and painful (v. 9) in the mouth of a fool. Giving a fool honor is pointless and absurd, like tying a stone into a sling (v. 8). Hiring a fool is a dangerous gamble (v. 10). Finally, the fool's inability to learn is highlighted as the fool returns to folly like a dog to vomit (v. 11). The proverbs strongly emphasize the negative aspects of the fool. However, v. 12 changes focus to show that the person who is wise in his own eyes is even worse than the fool.

26:13–16 These proverbs are about the sluggard (see note on 6:9). They ridicule the person too lazy to protect themselves (v. 13), get out of bed (v. 14), and bother to eat (v. 15). The sluggard's most destructive trait is that he considers himself wise (v. 16; compare vv. 5, 12); thus, the sluggard will never change.

26:17–22 These proverbs warn against careless speech that provokes quarrels. They remind the reader that butting into other people's arguments is dangerous, and they compare the person who deceives and claims to be joking to someone who recklessly throws around deadly flaming arrows (vv. 18–19). Three proverbs warn of the damage caused by slander and quarrels (vv. 20–22).

26:23–28 This section concerns a dishonest or deceitful person who disguises evil intentions with gracious speech. However, the person's wickedness will eventually be exposed. Ultimately, the sins of the deceitful person will lead to destruction, like someone who falls into their own pit (v. 27).

27:23–27 This proverb discusses the fleeting nature of wealth. Proverbs 23:4–5 warned against wasting effort on acquiring wealth (see 23:4–5 and note). Here, the proverb emphasizes being wise with wealth by preparing for lean days. People should pay careful attention to their flocks so that when conditions deteriorate, they will not be in need.

30:1–33 This section of proverbs is attributed to Agur son of Jakeh (see note on v. 1). Noticeably different in style than other sections of Proverbs, it begins with a confession of ignorance (vv. 2–4), an assertion of the truth of God's word (vv. 5–6), and a prayer that God will keep him from falsehood (vv. 7–9). Agur follows this first-person introduction with a series of proverbs (vv. 10–33), many in the form of numerical sayings (see v. 18 and note).

31:1–31 This final section of Proverbs is attributed to King Lemuel. It is presented as a teaching from his mother and can be divided into two sections: advice for the king related to his rule and administration of justice (Prov 31:2–9) and a description of an excellent wife in the form of an acrostic poem (vv. 10–21).

31:10–31 Proverbs closes with an acrostic poem describing an excellent wife. The woman is married and seeks the best for her husband (Prov 31:11–12). Industrious and hard-working, she takes care of her household (vv. 15, 21–22, 27) and finds success in a variety of fields (vv. 13–14, 16–19). She is generous to the impoverished (v. 20) and teaches wisdom (v. 26). Her children and husband praise her because her excellence surpasses other women (vv. 28–29). Most importantly, she fears Yahweh (v. 30) and should be publicly recognized and praised (v. 31).



