

AN OUTLINE OF PROVERBS

I. <u>Wisdom and folly contrasted</u> 1-9			
The aim of the book	1:1-6	The strange(r) woman	5
Wisdom's basis	1:7-19	Sorrows of suretyship	6:1-5
Wisdom's warning	1:20-33	The sluggard	6:6-11
Wisdom, the deliverer	2	The sower of discord	6:12-19
Wisdom's rewards	3:1-10	Father's and mother's warning	6:20-35
Wisdom, the supreme prize	3:11-20	Another warning against strange women	7
Wisdom secures safety	3:21-26	Eternal wisdom's manifesto	8
Do good and not evil	3:27-30	cp. 1 Cor. 1:24,30	
Jehovah's friendship	3:31-35	Wisdom's invitation	9:1-6
A father's advice	4:1-9	The scoffer	9:7-12
The two paths	4:10-19	Folly's invitation	9:13-18
Health for the whole man	4:20-27		

II. Proverbs of Solomon, set in order by himself 10:1-22:16 (375 proverbs)

A. Proverbs 10-12. 91 proverbs - The Blessing of Jehovah

Every proverb may be illustrated by some Scriptural person or incident,
as for example:

v.1a, Solomon; v.1b, Esau; v.5a, Haman; v.2b, Mordecai; v.3a, Habakkuk;
v.3b, rich fool; v.4a, some Corinthians (2 Cor. 9:6a) and some Thessalonians (2 Thes. 3:7-12); v.4b, Ruth; v.5a, Paul; v.5b, Demas; v.6a, Paul;
v.6b, Neor; v.7a, Paul; v.7b, Nero; v.8a, Nebuchadnezzar; v.8b, Belshazzar;
v.9a, Joseph; v.9b, Ziba; v.10a, cp. Judas' kiss; v.10b, Belshazzar;
v.11a, Samuel; v.11b, Nero; v.12a, Doeg, the Edomite (1 Sam. 9:19); v.12b,
Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12:1-14); v.13a, Solomon (1 Ki. 3:5-28); v.13b,
Rehoboam (1 Ki. 12:8-19); v.14a, Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14-15); v.14b, Elymas
(Acts 13:6-11); v.15, "not in the day of wrath," 11:4; v.16a, Abel; v.16b,
Cain; v.17a, David; v.17b, Saul (1 Sam. 15:23); v.18a, Lev. 19:16 "tale-
bearer," Joab (2 Sam. 3:27); v.18b, the accusers of Jeremiah (Jer. 37:
11-15); v.19a, Haman before King; v.19b, Christ before judges; v.20a,
Peter (Acts 8:23); v.20b, Simon Magus; v.21a, Samuel; v.21b, Saul; v.22,
Habakkuk and Paul (Hab. 3:17-19; Phil. 4:11-13); v.23a, Balaam (Num.
31:16); v.23b, Phinehas (Num. 25:6-13); etc.

B. Proverbs 13-15. 93 proverbs - Better Things

C. Proverbs 16-18. 85 proverbs - The Safe Name

D. Proverbs 19:1-22:16. 106 proverbs - The Right Way

III. Words of the wise 22:17-24:34

Words of truth	22:17-21	Wisdom's reward	24:13-20
Various warnings	22:22-23:14	True loyalty	24:21-22
Parental joy	23:15-28	Respect of persons	24:23-29
Perils of wine	23:29-35	The field of the sluggard	24:30-34
Wisdom's power	24:1-12		

IV. Proverbs of Solomon copied out by the men of Hezekia 25-29 (119 proverbs)

V. Three supplementary collections 30-31

A. Agur's fourfold mysteries, 30

B. A mother's anxiety, or Bathsheba's instructions to Solomon, 31:1-9

C. The ideal wife (or mother), 31:10-31

THE STRUCTURE, AUTHORSHIP, DATE AND TEXT OF PROVERBS

The book tells us that it is the work of several authors. Three of these are named (Solomon, Agur and Lemuel), others are mentioned collectively as 'Wise Men', and at least one section of the book (the last) is anonymous. There is one editorial note (25:1) to say when one of the sections was compiled, but nothing is said of the date at which the collections were all brought together.

a. The structure and authorship

The sections are as follows:

- Title, Introduction and Motto: 1:1-7
- I. A Father's Praise of Wisdom: 1:8-9:18
- II. Proverbs of Solomon: 10:1-22:16
- IIIa. Words of Wise Men: 22:17-24:22
- IIIb. Further Words of Wise Men: 24:23-34
- IV. Further Proverbs of Solomon (Hezekiah's Collection): 25:1-29:27
- V. Words of Agur: 30:1-33
- VI. Words of King Lemuel: 31:1-9
- VII. An Alphabet of Wifely Excellence: 31:10-31

The title (1:1), 'The proverbs of Solomon', may be intended as a section-heading to chapters 1-9 or as the editor's title of the whole book. I take it to be the latter.¹ On the present view, Solomon is named at the outset as the principal author, although his own collection of proverbs will not be reached till chapter 10, where the heading is repeated. (If chapters 1-9 consisted of proverbs of Solomon we should expect 10:1 to be phrased: 'These also are proverbs of Solomon', on the pattern of 24:23 and 25:1.)

Solomon's own proverbs are deferred for the good reason that the reader needs preparation if he is to use them fruitfully. So the *introduction* (1:2-6), an extension of the title, makes it clear that this book is no anthology, but a course of education in the life of wisdom. The *motto* (1:7) at once goes to the heart of the matter, and *Section I* (1:8-9:18) expounds it in a series of fatherly talks which illustrate and press home to the pupil the fateful choice he must make between wisdom and folly. By now the reader is in a position to orientate himself in the thicket

of individual sayings which he enters in *Section II* (10:1-22:16), and to see in each cool, objective aphorism a miniature and particular outworking of the wisdom and folly whose whole course he has seen spread out before him in *Section I*.

In *Section III* (a. 22:17-24:22; b. 24:23-24) the teaching style returns - less expansively than in chapters 1-9, but nonetheless in sayings that spread into paragraphs and speak directly to the reader. There is a hand on our shoulder again.

Section IV (chapters 25-29) has Solomon's own touch in its terse sayings, as in *Section II*. But Hezekiah's scribes have introduced more grouping of sayings than the earlier section can show (e.g. kings and courtiers, 25:2-7 (but cf. 16:10-15); fools; 26:1,3-12; sluggards, 26:13-16; mischief-makers, 26:17-28); they have also used some longer sayings, and (except in chapter 28) fewer antitheses.

Sections V (chapter 30) and *VI* (31:1-9) are both from non-Israelites, perhaps Arabians from Massa (see commentary). The language of 30:4 and the spelling of the word for God in 30:5 are reminiscent of the book of Job, which is set in the same region. We know nothing of these two authors. In the LXX these sections are displaced (showing perhaps that they once circulated independently), to straddle the 'Further Words of Wise Men' in 24:23ff. and to swell chapter 24 to 77 verses.

Section VII (31:10-31), an alphabetic acrostic, is anonymous: in the LXX it is separated from the previous section by five chapters (see note above). Its portrait of a fine wife brings this book of wholesome living to a fitting close, showing a united family (31:28ff.) honouring the one who, under God, can do most to build up the character extolled in these pages.

b. The date

Until about the mid-point of this century, critical opinion was largely agreed that the Sages came rather late on the Israelite scene, to produce the bulk of their work after the Exile. It was conceded that Proverbs contained some pre-exilic matter, but the mature conception of wisdom in chapters 1-9 seemed to owe too much to Persian² or Greek³ thought to have taken shape before the fifth to third centuries BC; and this line of argument was reinforced by Gunkel's theory of the internal development of wisdom teaching, whereby the briefer a unit was, the earlier it must be; and the longer and more spiritual, the later.

¹ See, for a different theory, C. C. Torrey, *JBL*, 1954, pp. 93ff.

² O. S. Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature* (1936), p. 252.

³ C. H. Toy, *Proverbs* (ICC), p. xxii.