

Introduction To Proverbs

The Book Of Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of moral and religious teachings, mostly in the form of short sayings. Much of it has to do with everyday, practical concerns. The book can be broken up into three broad sections:

- *Chapters 1-9*

These opening chapters urge the reader to choose wisdom, by outlining the benefits of wisdom in contrast to the dangers of folly (foolish choices).

- *Chapter 10:1-31:9*

This section contains the main body of the book and its sayings. Most of this material is written by Solomon, but there is also wisdom written by others. The sayings in this section cover a vast array of topics. They focus on real issues, addressing the practicalities of life in the home, and in society. The proverbs describe observations and patterns which exist in the world.

- *Chapter 31:10-31*

This concluding section is an acrostic poem about the ideal wife. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It provides the 'A to Z' of wisdom that has been given throughout the book and applies it to this godly woman. All the themes of the book are gathered and illustrated in her.

How Should We Read Proverbs?

The nature of the proverbs (lots of short sayings, that seemingly don't flow from one to the next) means that we need to think carefully about how we read and apply them. Generally speaking, proverbs will point to a way of life which will usually (but not always) be profitable. For example, whilst the Old Testament Law will tell you not to commit adultery, proverbs will tell you how to avoid getting into a situation where you may be tempted to commit adultery.

As we read the various proverbs, we need to allow them to roll around in our minds as we ponder what wisdom we might need to apply to various situations in our life.

Some further thoughts that will be helpful as we read Proverbs:

- We must not read any one proverb in isolation. We must always consider what it is saying in light of the broader themes of the book (in particular, wisdom, and what it means to fear God).
- Some proverbs will provide a specific command (either 'do this' or 'don't do this'), whilst others may simply be a wise saying (and the reader must deduce the action that will lead to the stated outcome).
- Beware of assuming that proverbs are unconditional promises. For example Proverbs 10:4 doesn't guarantee that everyone who works hard will be rich.
- Beware of assuming that any one proverb is an exhaustive statement about the subject which it discusses. We must read them in light of the wider book, and indeed in light of the rest of the Bible.