

Resource: Study Notes (Biblica)

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Proverbs 1:1–7, Proverbs 1:8–9:18, Proverbs 10:1–30:33, Proverbs 31:1–9, Proverbs 31:10–31

Proverbs 1:1–7

The purpose of a proverb is to teach wisdom. The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to instruct people about how to live well.

Living well means living wisely. Living wisely means doing what is right and honest and fair. This is because wisdom is based on respecting God. God taught the Israelites (Israel) how to do what is right and honest and fair. He taught them this through the Law of Moses.

Knowing God's laws isn't the only way to understand what is right and honest and fair. This can also be learnt by listening to what wise people say. Wise people have skill, knowledge and understanding. But respecting the Lord is more important than any of those things. Respecting God is how people start to become wise and to live well.

Proverbs 1:8–9:18

In this section of the book of Proverbs, a father speaks to his son. The father and the mother have taught the son how to live well. They have taught him with their words and with the example of how they live. The father urges the son to live according to what they have taught him.

The advice from the parents is about many things. It's about being humble and trusting God completely. It's about the son guarding his heart. The son's heart is where he makes decisions. The advice is about the son saying no when he is tempted to do evil. This includes stealing and getting rich in ways that aren't honest. It includes refusing to share with others. It includes lying, being jealous and having sex with another man's wife.

The advice is also about becoming wise. People begin to be wise when they respect God. Wisdom is something that God gives. He wants all human

beings to have it. God gives wisdom freely to those who ask for it. This is made clear in the poems about wisdom and in James 1:5.

Wisdom is described as a woman who calls out to everyone in public. She invites everyone to come to her house and share in a feast. This means that people listen to wisdom and obey wise teachings. That is how people get wisdom. Obeying wise instructions leads to health, riches, success and honour. That is the pattern of life that the parents have noticed. That is the pattern they want their son's life to follow.

Wisdom is also described as the first thing that God created. Wisdom was with God when he created the world. Wisdom was full of joy and delight as God created the world and all people. This shows that wisdom can also be learnt by studying creation.

The poems about wisdom talk about foolishness being the opposite of wisdom. Foolishness is described as a woman who knows nothing and is full of pride. She treats others badly. Like wisdom, foolishness also calls out to everyone and invites them to a feast. But obeying her instructions leads to danger, suffering, trouble, shame and death.

Proverbs 10:1–30:33

Many poems, sayings and proverbs are collected in this section of the book of Proverbs. Some were written or collected by people who are named. This includes Solomon, Hezekiah and Agur. Others were written or collected by people who aren't named. This includes the sayings of a group called the wise people (Proverbs 22:17 – 24:34).

People can become wise when God gives them wisdom. This was true in Solomon's case. The story about this is recorded in 1 Kings 3:1–15. People can also become wise by studying the world around them. This includes studying plants, animals, weather, other people and everything God made.

As people study, they gain knowledge. They come to understand many things about how life works. These are lessons or patterns that they have noticed. When knowledge and understanding are combined with respect for God, they become godly wisdom.

For hundreds of years in Israel, wise people shared with others these lessons and patterns. They shared them through poems, sayings and proverbs. The poems, sayings and proverbs in this section give instruction about many different matters. These matters include anger, jealousy, arguing, food, honour, being humble and pride. They include relationships in family groups, between husbands and wives and between parents and children. They include relationships in communities, between men and women and between friends and neighbours. They include money and relationships between rich people and poor people. They include matters of work, being lazy, farming, business and trade. They include justice and matters of courts and of government. They also include the mind, heart, mouth and ears of each person. All the instructions teach about doing what is right and fair.

Proverbs 31:1–9

In this section of the book of Proverbs, a mother speaks to her son. It isn't known who King Lemuel was but his mother's wisdom was from God. Some of her advice was like the father's advice in Proverbs 1 – 9. She warned Lemuel about sexual sins.

Most of her advice was about how to rule wisely as king. Her advice agreed with God's rules for kings in Deuteronomy 17:17–20. This included not having many wives. It included remembering what had been commanded. In Israel, this was the Law of Moses. Forgetting it led kings to treat others badly.

Instead, Lemuel was to protect and help poor and needy people. This is described as speaking up for people who can't speak up for themselves. As a leader, Lemuel had more authority than other people. He was to use this authority to take care of others and to be fair.

Proverbs 31:10–31

The last section of the book of Proverbs is an alphabet poem. It describes someone who has listened to wisdom as described in Proverbs 8:6.

This person has learnt the lessons taught throughout the book of Proverbs. This person has put these lessons into practice in every part of their life.

Earlier poems in Proverbs describe wisdom like a woman. This poem describes this wise person like an excellent woman. This person is like a woman who is strong and smart. She takes care of everything and everyone that she is responsible for.

She gives freely to those who need help. She makes careful plans and works very hard. She is bold and isn't worried about the future. The members of her family and her city trust her.

It's clear to everyone by the way she lives that she has respect for God. This leads people to honour her. She isn't honoured for being beautiful or having charm. She is honoured because in her heart and in her actions she is wise.