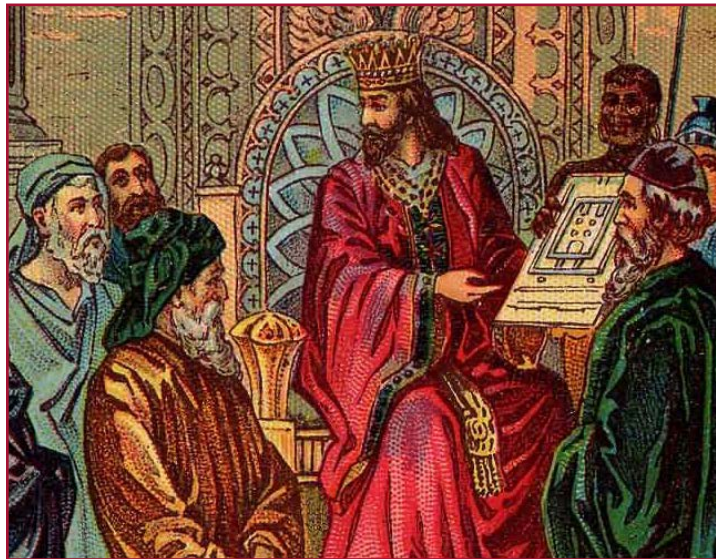




Mastering the Fascinating Book of Proverbs!



Solomon and the Plan for the First Temple, 1896. Illustration from a Bible card published by the Providence Lithograph Company.

In this study let us attempt to get a better grip and understanding of the Old Testament (OT) book of Proverbs. We will gain an understanding of the various kinds of formal structures that God has incorporated in this book; such insights will greatly aid our comprehension.

God penned this book through His servant Solomon, the wisest man of his day (cf. 1 Kings 3:28) and of all time (1 Kings 3:12).

Most interestingly for those who hold governmental office, a king wrote the book to his son who would be king. Accordingly, it has great, direct application to those whom God has called to represent Him in the capital community; it is necessary study for anyone who seeks to lead! What follows will greatly aid you in wise governmental leadership.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

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- Governors:** Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom
- Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff:** Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom
- Senate Members:** Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served
- House Members:** Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Rm., Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served

The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.



VERSE OF THE WEEK



Proverbs 18:15

*The mind of the prudent
acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise
seeks knowledge.*



May God grant you a wonderful understanding and spiritual growth from this magnificent book of the Bible.



I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most common ancient methods of teaching wisdom was via the medium of *proverbs*, short succinct sayings that communicate truths in a profound way. With brevity of words, vast principles for living are illuminated for and exhibited to the reader. Often this instruction is done by comparing a truth—paralleling it—to a picturesque, commonly known image from everyday life. With that useful insight in mind, the book itself is easier and more enjoyable to study!

Ancient literature records that proverbial forms of communication existed in the East, in Egypt, Edom, and Babylon, but only those written in the Bible's book of Proverbs bear God's stamp of veracity and trustworthiness. Only these proverbs are sealed with God's authority. (Keep in mind that no fewer than 3,600 times does the OT claim to be the Word of God.)

The Hebrew word for Proverbs is *Mishlei* and, in a basic sense, means "to be like." In essence, Proverbs conveys *godly wisdom*, which is skill at living life. Therefore, if we desire to increase living our lives successfully—especially if we desire to lead in God's various ordained institutions—then the book of Proverbs needs to be a staple of our daily spiritual diet. And, although proverbs are found elsewhere in Scripture,¹ this is the one book amongst the 66 God-inspired books of the Bible that specifically, broadly, and succinctly addresses the subject of wisdom.

II. THE POTION OF PROVERBS

Five forms of parallelism commonly occur in the 31 chapters of the book of Proverbs that convey timeless principles for living life with great skill for God's glory, i.e., wisely. Summarily, these forms are as follows:

Form	Illustration
Identical/Similar	16:18
Opposite	11:17
Expansive	10:18
Comparative	25:25
Formal	16:28

These forms of parallelism used in Proverbs are usually expressed in two poetic lines. The second line facilitates what is captioned previously to create understanding. That is to say, the second line completes the first line in a fashion consistent with one of these five specific forms. Sometimes, however, the captioning is accomplished in four lines (24:3–4), six lines (23:19–21) or eight lines (23:22–25). What follows are examples of each (note that the New American Standard Bible text which I always use in my studies capitalizes the start of the second stanza to help the reader make this distinction—something the Crabby Microsoft Edit Lady frowns on—but I like it very much!):

A. IDENTICAL PROVERBS

The second stanza provides more insight concerning the subject of the first stanza:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling (16:18).

B. OPPOSITE PROVERBS

The second stanza contrasts the first stanza to qualify the specificity of the principle:

The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm (11:17).

C. EXPANSIVE PROVERBS

The second stanza explains more information about the principle first elucidated:

He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool (10:18).

D. COMPARATIVE PROVERBS

The second stanza compares the principle of the first stanza to something quite familiar:

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land (25:25).

E. FORMAL PROVERBS

The second stanza completes the thought expressed in the first stanza:



A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends (16:28).

Learn to look for each of these five forms of parallelism when reading and meditating on the book of Proverbs. Employing such skills will aid your interpretive abilities to understand the authorial intent of the passage and will lead to a proper application in and to your life. I recommend that you embark on a study of Proverbs and conduct the following exercise as you do: read one chapter per day, taking the time to identify and record in the margin which type of parallelism is represented by each. Mark each one with A through E per my identifiers. I think you will find this exercise to be stimulating, fun and extremely helpful to your mastery of this book!

III. THE PROGENITORS OF PROVERBS

Solomon wrote much of the book of Proverbs and acted as its general editor (as chapter 30 records the words of Agur and chapter 31 the words of Lemuel, both of whom scholars say could be pen names of Solomon due to the close similarity in style). King Solomon ruled Israel from 971–931 B.C. and, as previously mentioned, was granted great and unique wisdom by God. It is interesting to note that Solomon desired understanding above riches per 1 Kings 3:11–12 (and 2 Chronicles 1:11–12):

God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.”

God obviously honored Solomon’s heart and priorities as we see by the fascinating study of this book.

What are the inner priorities of your heart? What is it that God looks for and blesses?

Note 2 Chronicles 16:9:

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.”

Put away *idolatry*, i.e., anything that supersedes God’s rightful, preeminent priority in your inner being. Such priority slippage is evidenced in Solomon’s heart as in his later years he turned away from God (cf. 1 Kings 11:1–11). His penning of this OT book, however, along with Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, occurred well before that time. Solomon then is yet another biblical illustration of the consequences of sin and the fall of man. Slowly, over the course of Solomon’s life, he wandered away from obedience to God. He failed in his old age to live out the truths God had given him and which he had recorded in his writings. Of further interest is Solomon’s son Rehoboam, to whom the book is written. Rehoboam completely rejected his father’s teaching, and his political leadership was a disaster (cf. 1 Kings 12:6–11). One wonders whether this may have been a result of observing his father’s ungodly behavior. May this never be the case with you, my friend.

IV. THE PRINCIPLES OF PROVERBS

The broad conveyance of the book of Proverbs is that wise people—those who live a life of obedience to God—will live longer (9:11), prosper (16:20), experience joy (3:13–18), and the overall goodness of God (12:21) during their life here on earth. Conversely, those who fail to live according to Proverbs (referred to by this book as *fools*) suffer shame (3:35) and death (10:21).

While these truths are generally evident, note that the Bible also teaches that the wicked sometimes prosper temporarily (Psalm 73:3, 12:8) and that sometimes godly people suffer (cf. the book of Job). An important consideration when studying Proverbs therefore is not to do so with an attitude of seeking personal gain and success as though this book contains a sure

formula for that. Rather, study the book for purposes of spiritual maturity and wisdom to glorify God and to become more Christlike. Accordingly, Proverbs contains principles, not promises.

V. THE PURPOSE OF PROVERBS

This book answers the question, “How should I live my life?” In answering that it is not a selfish how-I-can-be-successful book, but rather, one that instructs the believer on how he can know for certain if he has lived a life that is pleasing to God and worthy of reward before the day of judgment. This book deals with personal morality, duty, ethics, values, and virtues that inform and instruct what exactly God’s will is—even in the complex matters of life! To the student of the book, it clarifies what exactly righteousness looks like—and is—in any given situation. Proverbs will inform the believer repeatedly as to what is the right thing to do. States one commentator:

[It] pricks the conscience, penetrates the soul, and probes the deepest recesses of the heart By design Proverbs, being a proactive book, promotes personal holiness at the most practical levels of living.²

I hope everyone in the Capitol community will find this study both critical and intriguing. They should.

A lifelong study of the book of Proverbs will help mold, reinforce, and strengthen the resolve of every person’s conscience.

Remember, our conscience works from the basis of our conscientiousness.

VI. THE PROCEDURE OF PROVERBS

The following ten tips for interpreting Proverbs are excerpted from *Practicing Proverbs*, by Dr. Richard Mayhue. Each point will greatly aid your study as you examine and work to understand this great book over a lifetime.



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TIP 1 Realize that no proverb or section in Proverbs intends to be an exhaustive, final treatment on the subject.

TIP 2 Proverbs must be understood in terms of context, which includes the language of Scripture, the section in Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, Solomon's writings, the wisdom section of OT Scripture, the complete OT, and the entire Bible.

TIP 3 Proverbs demands to be interpreted in the cultural and historical setting of the time in which it was written.

TIP 4 Proverbs are not guaranteed promises but generalizations that can have exceptions.

TIP 5 Poetic features and figures of speech need be taken into consideration during interpretation versus a wooden literalistic interpretation.

TIP 6 Proverbs are not a formula for selfish gain but rather a glorification of God via spiritual maturity.

TIP 7 If a proverb is unclear, read it in another translation or use trusted commentaries.

TIP 8 Interpret Proverbs to discover the original authorial intent, discover the timeless principle, and then make application.

TIP 9 Proverbs is not designed for large doses of reading. Study small portions, contemplate and reflect.

TIP 10 Treat what Proverbs states as divine and obey it versus an optional idea coming from the secular world.

VII. SUMMARY

May our Lord grant you wonderful understanding and spiritual growth from this magnificent book of the Bible—one that is written primarily to prepare an individual for leadership of a nation! This book has great relevance to a public servant today!

1. Cf. 1 Samuel 10:11–12; Ezekiel 12:22–23; Matthew 9:12; John 4:35; 1 Corinthians 6:13. Oftentimes the NT quotes from the book of Proverbs, e.g., Hebrews 12:5–6; James 4:13. As a matter of fact, no less than 38 times are Proverbs quoted by NT writers.
2. Richard Mayhue, *Practicing Proverbs, Wise Living for Foolish Times* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 33.

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