

# PROVERBS

## INTRODUCTION

That Solomon was the principle author of Proverbs is indicated in ~~<200>~~Proverbs 1:1 and 25:1, compared with ~~<100>~~1 Kings 4:29-32. The last two chapters were the work of other authors to whom reference is made. See also chapters 25-29.

### THEIR CHARACTER

In Solomon's day there was a class of leaders in the eastern nations known as "teachers of wisdom," of which he was the most conspicuous; a supposition which gives countenance to the thought that the address, "My son," is not that of a father to a child, but a teacher to a pupil.

Most of the proverbs seem based merely on considerations of worldly prudence, which was quite like Solomon; but considering the Holy Spirit as the real author, we must believe that faith is the underlying motive productive of the conduct to which the reader is exhorted. Indeed, this is expressed in 1:7; 5:21; 15:11; 23:17-19; 26:10.

Luther called Proverbs "a book of good works"; Coleridge, "the best statesman's manual"; Dean Stanley, "the philosophy of practical life." Angus says, "It is for practical ethics what the psalms are for devotion"; Bridges says, "while other Scriptures show us the glory of our high calling this instructs us minutely how to walk in it"; Oetinger says, "the proverbs exhibit Jesus with unusual clearness." In the millennial kingdom doubtless it will constitute, with a portion of the Levitical ordinances and the Sermon on the Mount, the basis of the laws governing its citizens.

### THEIR LITERARY STYLE

Proverbs is classed with the poetical books of the Bible, but we must content ourselves with a single illustration of the poetic form taken from *The Literary Study of the Bible*.

In 4:10 we have a poem on the Two Paths. Its strophe and antistrophe consist of ten-line figures, varying between longer and shorter lines; the conclusion is a quatrain. This form is a reflex of the thought of the poem; the strophe describes the path of the just, the antistrophe the path of the wicked; the conclusion then blends the two ideas in a common image, as follows:

*Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings;  
And the years of thy life shall be many.  
I have taught thee in the way of wisdom;  
I have led thee in paths of uprightness.  
When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened;  
And if thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.*

*Take fast hold of instruction;  
Let her not go:  
Keep her;  
For she is thy life.*

*Enter not into the path of the wicked,  
And walk not in the way of evil men.*

*Avoid it,  
Pass not by it;  
Turn from it,  
And pass on.*

*For they sleep not, except they have done mischief;  
And their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.  
For they eat the bread of wickedness.  
And drink the wine of violence.*

*But the path of the righteous is as the light of dawn,  
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

*The way of the wicked is as darkness;  
They know not at what they stumble.*

## QUESTIONS

1. What scriptures point to Solomon as the principal author of this book?
2. What scriptures indicate additional authors?
3. What may have been the origin of the book?

4. Is it, on the whole, a book of creed or conduct?
5. Compare it with the psalms.
6. Is it likely to have a future application? If so, when?
7. What is the literary form of the book?
8. Where is the poem on The Two Paths found?

## PROVERBS 1-3

The nature of this book makes divisions of its chapters rather arbitrary, and ours may not always be the best, but it is hoped it may prove useful in some degree. The opening of chapter four suggests a new beginning, for which reason we conclude this lesson at the close of chapter three.

It begins with an advertisement (1:1-6), in which mention is made of the author (v. 1), the object of the book (vv. 2-3), and its great value (vv. 4-6). Then follows its theme, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (v. 7), of which the rest of the lesson is a development or exposition. "Beginning" is rendered in the margin of the Revised Version "chief part." "The fear of the Lord" means a right state of heart towards God as opposed to the condition of an unconverted man. Put the two ideas together, and we learn that the chief part of all knowledge is to be right with God. In working out of the thought:

1. The teacher exhorts his "son" or pupil, to avoid vice (1:8-19);
2. He shows the ruinous conduct of the unwise, a warning placed on the lips of wisdom personified (1:20-33);
3. This warning is accentuated by contrasting the consequences of obedience and a striving after wisdom (2:1-3);
4. The Lord is shown as the protector of those who are wise in this sense (3:19-26);
5. The division concludes with an admonition to charity and justice (3:27-35).

### PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL REMARKS

In this part of the lesson we call attention to particular verses for explanation or application, acknowledging indebtedness to Arnot's "Laws From Heaven for Life on Earth."

<1023> Proverbs 1:23 is a text for a revival sermon, containing a command and a promise joined, like <1812> Philippians 2:12. It teaches in one sentence those two seemingly contradictory doctrines, the sovereignty of God, and the free agency of man. It is when we turn at God's reproof that He pours out His Spirit; though it's also true that unless His Spirit is poured out we cannot turn.

<1024> Proverbs 1:24-32 offers an opportunity to preach on God's mercy to a rebellious people. He calls, stretches out His hands, counsels, and administers reproof. On the other hand men refuse, disregard, set at nought, and reject. The natural consequence follows; sowing disobedience they reap judgment. That judgment consists in calling on God and getting no answer, seeking diligently and not finding Him. The passage closes with a promise to them that hearken — deliverance from death at last and freedom from fear now.

<1025> Proverbs 2:1-9 suggests Christ's words in <2119> Luke 11:9, "Seek, and ye shall find." The seeking is in verses 1-4, the finding in verses 5-9.

<1026> Proverbs 2:10-22 is an outline of "the way of evil" (v. 12 RV). The first step is "speaking froward things"; the second, leaving "the paths of uprightness," the feet soon follow the tongue (v. 13); the third, walking "in the ways of darkness" (v. 13); the fourth, rejoicing "to do evil" (v. 14); the fifth, delighting "in the frowardness of the wicked," we can not take pleasure in doing wickedness without finding pleasure in seeing others do it; and the sixth, to complete the picture, the evil person here particularly in mind is seen to be a woman (vv. 16-22).

<1027> Proverbs 3:5-6 presents one of the strongest promises of the Bible — the first text from which the author of this commentary ever preached. Note how we are to trust, "with all thine heart." God complains as much of a divided allegiance as of none. Note the extent of our trust, "in all thy ways." Few will refuse to acknowledge a superintending providence at certain times, and in certain operations that are counted great, but God wants us to confide in Him in the little, close, and kindly things.

<1028> Proverbs 3:11-12 is quoted in <8125> Hebrews 12:5-6. Note there how the inspired writer interprets the phrase, "My son." The speaker in Proverbs may have been addressing a pupil merely, but the Holy Spirit through him, "speaketh unto you as unto sons."

"Despise not," means do not make light of chastening, or cast it aside as if it had no meaning for you; "faint not" touches the opposite extreme, do not be driven to despair by the experience. The middle way is the path of safety.

~~1013~~ Proverbs 3:13-20 is a description and appreciation of wisdom, which throughout this book means piety or godliness. In Ecclesiastes it is science. And yet piety or godliness hardly expresses it in the highest sense in which it is sometimes found, where as for example in these verses, it suggests Christ. He is the wisdom of God as we learn in the New Testament, who, by the Holy Spirit through the holy Scriptures is made unto us wisdom (1 Corinthians 2). Such wisdom can not be planned, much less created by us, but must be "found" or "gotten" (v. 13).

Observe the figures describing it. It is precious merchandise (vv. 14-15). It is a way of honor, pleasantness and peace (vv. 16-17). It is a tree of life (v. 18).

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the chief part of all knowledge?
2. Give the five general divisions of this lesson.
3. Quote and give the doctrinal teaching of ~~1013~~ Proverbs 1:23.
4. Quote and give the spiritual significance of ~~1013~~ Proverbs 1:33; 3:5-6, 11-12.
5. What does the word wisdom mean in this book?

## PROVERBS 4-7

These chapters begin with reminiscence. A father is reciting to a son the precepts taught him by his father in his youth, and which cover chapter four. Chapter five is a warning against the evil woman. Chapter six deals with suretyship, indolence, malice and violence, while chapter seven returns to the theme of chapter five.

In the first-named chapter occurs the beautiful illustration of Hebrew rhythm to which attention was called in Lesson 1; and following it we find in verse 18 and 23, two of as off-quoted texts as are in the whole book.

The "just" man, as usual in the Bible, is he who is justified by faith and walks with God in a holy obedience. On him the Sun of Righteousness shines. His new life is at first like the morning light, a struggle between the darkness and the dawn. Ere long the doubt vanishes, and morning is unequivocally declared. The counterpart is fitted to overawe the boldest heart, "The way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble." The thought is that the darkness is in them and they carry it, an evil heart of unbelief, wherever they go.

As to the other text, notice the fountain — the heart (v. 23), and then the stream — the mouth, the eyes, the feet (vv. 24-27). The heart is kept by prayer and the Word of God, and then the life issuing from it is what it ought to be. The speech is pure, and true and potent. There are no secret longings and side glances after forbidden things, and the steps in matters of business, society, and the home are all ordered of the Lord. (Compare Christ's words ~~4158~~ Matthew 15:18-20.)

### FAMILY JOYS

We have spoken of chapter five as a warning against the evil woman, which is true of its first half; but the reader will observe how the warning is accentuated by the contrast of the pure and happy home life in the second half, beginning at verse 15. The former is a clark back ground to bring out the latter's beauty. The keynote of the first half is "remove far from her." She is deceitful (vv. 3-4), unstable (v. 6) and cruel (v. 9). To associate with her means waste of property and health (vv. 8-9), and at the last remorse (vv. 12-14).

The home in comparison is a pure and well-guarded well (v. 15). Read verses 16 and 17 in the Revised Version, and observe a husband's duty toward his wife (v. 18). Let him avoid biting words, neglect, unnecessary absences and the like. And as Paul says (~~4153~~ Ephesians 5:33), let "the wife see that she reverence her husband."

The suretyship against which we are warned (6:1-5) is of the inconsiderate kind. That imprudent assumption of such obligations leaving out of account the moral unreliableness of the man involved. The advice is to get the quickest release possible (vv. 3-5). It does not mean that we should not kindly and prudently help a neighbor in financial need, if we can.

The "mother" of verses 20-24 must be one who knows God, for it is the instilling of His Word only in the heart of her child that can produce the results indicated. Observe it is a grown son here referred to as keeping his mother's law.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are the general subjects treated in these chapters?
2. Quote and explain ~~cross~~ Proverbs 6:18.
3. What possible evidence is there in this lesson of our Lords acquaintance with Proverbs?
4. What does this lesson teach about conjugal love? About parental authority? About suretyship?

## PROVERBS 8-9

In these chapters we have a public discourse of Wisdom (personified) (chap. 8), and what Lange describes as an allegorical exhibition of the call of men to a choice of wisdom or folly (chap. 9).

It is really our Lord Jesus Christ putting forth this voice (8:1), and crying unto men at the gates of the city (vv. 4-5). It is He who speaks the excellent things (v. 6), and on whose lips wickedness is an abomination (v. 7). Of Him alone can it be predicted that there is nothing crooked (froward) in His mouth (v. 8), or to be desired in comparison with Him (vv. 10-18). It is He whose fruit is better than gold and who fills our treasuries (vv. 19-21). Were there any doubt of this identify would it not be removed by the remainder of the chapter? Who was set up from everlasting (v. 23)? Or, who was daily God's delight (v. 30)? And of whom can it be said that to find Him finds life (v. 35)?

## THE REDEEMER ANTICIPATING REDEMPTION

The heading of this paragraph expresses Arnot's view of the latter part of the chapter. He says that "if the terms are not applied to Christ they must be strained at every turn." Of course in a book written by Solomon it could not be said that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and died upon the cross, but if the Holy Spirit wished to make known something of the personal history of Christ before His coming, how could He have done so in plainer terms?

Quoting Arnot on verses 30-31:

These three things are set in the order of the everlasting covenant:

- (1) the Father well pleased with His Beloved, "I was daily His delight";
- (2) the Son delighting in the Father's presence, "rejoicing always before Him";
- (3) the Son looking with prospective delight to the scene and subjects of His redemptive work, "rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and my delights were with the sons of men."

### **THE MARRIAGE SUPPER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Arnot gives the foregoing title to the opening verses of chapter 9, where Wisdom, personifying the Son of God, has now come nigh unto men, having his habitation among them. Here we have the house, the prepared feast, the messengers, the invited guests, and the argument by which the invitation is supported. The positive side of that argument is: "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled." The negative is: "Forsake the foolish, and live."

The chapter closing exhibits Christ's great rival standing in the same wide thoroughfare of the world and bidding for the youth who thronged it. All that is contrary to Christ and dangerous to souls, is gathered up and individualized in the person of an abandoned woman lying in wait for unwary passengers, baiting her hook with sin and dragging her victims down to hell.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What have we in these chapters?
2. Who really is speaking here?
3. What proves it?
4. Analyze verses 30-31 from the New Testament point of view.
5. What parable of Christ is suggested in chapter 9?



## PROVERBS 10-15

Some regard the division now entered upon as the original nucleus of the whole collection of proverbs (see the first sentence of verse one). The division extends really to the close of chapter 22, and contains "maxims, precepts and admonitions with respect to the most diverse relations of life." In so much of it as is covered by the present lesson we have a contrast "between the godly and the ungodly, and their respective lots in life."

We have this contrast set before us, first in general terms (chap. 10), and after that, to the end of the lesson, in detail, as follows:

As to the just and unjust, and good and bad conduct towards one's neighbor (chap. 11)

As to the domestic and public associations (chap. 12)

As to the use of a temporal good, and of the Word of God as the highest good (chap. 13)

As to the relation between the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, masters and servants (chap. 14)

As to the various other relations and callings in life, especially within the sphere of religion (chap. 15)

### MEMORY VERSE AND CHOICE TEXTS

This lesson is not suggestive of questions, but contains verses it would be well to memorize. For example, in:

~~1007~~ Proverbs 10, verses 7, 9, 14, 22, 25;

~~1008~~ Proverbs 11, verses 1-2, 13, 24-26, 30;

~~1009~~ Proverbs 13, verses 7, 15, 24;

~~1010~~ Proverbs 14, verses 10, 12, 25, 27, 32, 34;

~~1011~~ Proverbs 15, verses 1, 3, 8.

## PROVERBS 16-24

In these chapters we have a series of exhortations to a life of godliness expressed in general terms about as follows:

1. Confidence in God as a wise ruler (chap. 16)
2. A disposition of peacefulness and contentment (chap. 17)
3. The virtues of affability, fidelity, and others of a social nature (chap. 18)
4. Humility and meekness (chap. 19)
5. Sobriety, diligence and kindness (chap. 21)
6. Justice, patience, submission (chap. 21)
7. The attainment and preservation of a good name (chap. 22)
8. Warnings against avarice, licentiousness, and similar vices (chap. 23)
9. Warnings against ungodly companionship (chap. 24)

## PROVERBS 25-29

This division of the book is introduced in the first verse of chapter 25, as the "proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out." What these words mean it is difficult to say, except in the general sense that the teachers of Hezekiah's period selected and gathered together wise sayings that had been written, or handed down orally in previous generations. They may have been those of Solomon only, and yet his name may be attached to them simply because they were now made part of his general collection. They contain admonitions to the fear of God and the righteousness, addressed partly to kings, and yet also to their subjects. They also contain warnings against evil conduct of various kinds (chap. 26); against conceit and arrogance (chap. 27); against unlawful dealings, especially of the rich with the poor (chap. 28); and against stubbornness and disobedience (chap. 29).

## PROVERBS 30-31

The last division consists of two supplements, one of the words of Agur (chap. 30), and the other of Lemuel (chap. 31).

Agur's words begin with an exaltation of the Word of God (vv. 1-6), followed by short and pithy maxims with reference to the rich and the poor, pride and greed, etc.

Lemuel's words open with a philosophical statement, apply chiefly to kings, followed by his well-known poem in praise of the virtuous woman.