

# PROVERBS

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*A Literary Legacy of the Hebrew Sages*

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- The book contains a preface and eight collections of wise sayings, five of which identify the author/compiler.
  - Solomon is credited with uttering some 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs.
  - Clearly King Solomon stands as the patron of the arts in ancient Israel.
  - Not only did he popularize the wisdom tradition of the Hebrews, but also his example as sage and scholar served as the model for future generations.
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## **Writing of the Book**

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- Nothing is known of Agur and Lemuel of Massa.
  - It seems likely they were members of the northern Arabian tribe of Massa, one of the sons of Ishmael.
  - They give evidence of the international character of Israelite wisdom.
  - The reference to the editorial work of Hezekiah's scribes in compiling at least one of the wisdom collections in Proverbs indicates that the book could not have been completed before his reign over Judah ended.
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## **Writing of the Book**

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- This means that the wisdom literature of Proverbs dates anywhere from the tenth century to the sixth century B.C., the latter being the most likely time for the final composition of the book.
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## **Writing of the Book**

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- The actual events of Hebrew history play almost no role in the book, underscoring the universal nature and value of the wisdom within it.
  - Of course, writing down their wisdom reflected Israel's role in being a light to the nations as well, with the **wisdom** being a **conscious reflection** of what it meant to be **godly in both character and behavior**.
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## Background

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# **Outline of Proverbs**

- I. Title and Purpose (1:1-7)**
  - II. A Father's Reflection on the Way of Wisdom**
    - A. Discourses on Wisdom (1:8-4:27)**
    - B. Instructions on Marriage and Warnings Against Adultery (5-7)**
    - C. Wisdom Personified (3:1-5)**
  - III. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)**
  - IV. Anonymous Wise Sayings (22:17-24:22)**
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**V. More Anonymous Wise Sayings (24:23-34)**

**VI. More Proverbs of Solomon (25-29)**

**VII. Appendices**

- A. Sayings of Agur (30)**
- B. Sayings of King Lemuel (31:1-9)**
- C. Anonymous Acrostic Poem on the Ideal Wife (31:10-31)**

# **Outline of Proverbs**

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- The message of Proverbs hinges on the **belief that wisdom can be taught and can be passed on from one generation to another.**
  - The heart of Old Testament wisdom instruction is desiring and **choosing to learn and apply “the fear of the Lord” to daily life.**
  - This means forsaking the way of darkness and **walking in the way of righteousness.**
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## Purpose and Message

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- The purposes of the book of Proverbs are stated in the prologue to the wisdom collections. They include:
    - to know wisdom and instruction;
    - to receive teaching in wise dealing, righteousness, and justice;
    - to help the simple gain prudence and the youth to gain knowledge and discretion;
    - to increase learning and to acquire skill in understanding;
    - to understand proverbs, parables, wise sayings, and riddles;
    - to learn the fear of the Lord.
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## **Purpose and Message**

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## **The Fear of the Lord**

- The book of Proverbs **equates the fear of the Lord with the knowledge of God.**
  - Since God alone possesses wisdom and dispenses understanding to humanity, **only those who know God through the experience of covenant loyalty will find wisdom's hidden treasures.**
  - The concept of the fear of the Lord **bridges the human subject with the divine king** in such a way that **God's storehouse of wisdom may be appropriated by his saints.**
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## **Major Themes**

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- Finally, the idea of the fear of the Lord prevents proverbial wisdom from degenerating into a rigid and mechanistic system of cause-and-effect relationships.
  - The fear of the Lord **preserves the inscrutable nature of God** and maintains the profound mystery of life.
  - These qualities help us explain the tension between the two stands of Hebrew wisdom – the **instructions for the ideal life** and the **discussions about the consuming issues of real life**.
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## Major Themes

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## **Retribution Principle**

- The retribution principle expressed in the blessings and curses of the Pentateuchal covenant formulas resurfaces in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.
  - First, proverbial wisdom presumes that the “vertical” dimension of covenant relationship with Yahweh has **been a firmly established pattern of life.**
  - Second, the “blessings” of the path of wisdom are contingent on the premise that the “horizontal” dimensions of covenant relationship with Yahweh have been **demonstrated practically in doing what is “right and just and fair.”**
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## **Major Themes**

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- More important, **the “ideal” paradigm of obedience** – an adherence to the way of wisdom that naturally yields the “profits” of prosperity, peace, health, and long life – **is qualified by the reality of human sin** and the “crookedness” of a fallen world.
  - So, the Preacher reminds us that the race is not always won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, but **“time and chance happen to them all.”**
  - Finally, **equal attention must be given to character development** as part of the benefits of walking in the way of wisdom.
  - Ultimately the way of wisdom is **keeping to the path of righteousness**, because only men and women of integrity will remain in the land.
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## Major Themes

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## Human Speech

- The book of Proverbs has much to say about the use and abuse of the “tongue.”
  - First, **words have great power**, for even life and death are in the power of the tongue.
  - Second, **words are sometimes futile** as well.
  - Finally, **Proverbs gives instructions on human speech at its best.**
  - The **words of the wise are marked by the qualities of honesty, brevity, serenity, and aptness.**
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## Major Themes

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## **Human Sexuality**

- The wisdom of Proverbs extols the virtue of monogamous marriage and warns against the folly of sexual license.
- The insights of the Hebrew sages on the intricacies of the male-female relationship remain a valid resource for addressing the problems associated with human sexuality in the modern era.

## **Major Themes**

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- The biblical affirmations, admonitions, and guidelines for this aspect of human life include:
    - the value of wisdom instruction as an antidote for sexual sin;
    - the sanctity of marriage and the appropriateness of erotic (heterosexual) love within marital bonds;
    - the need to guard and discipline the “eyes” and “mouth,” as these are the primary gates for the temptations that lead to unchastity;
    - being aware of the destructiveness of jealousy stemming from adultery;
    - being aware of the dangers spawned by “idleness”
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## **Major Themes**

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- The biblical affirmations, admonitions, and guidelines for this aspect of human life include (*continued*):
    - the importance of the family unit in teaching and enforcing sexual mores;
    - being aware of the subtlety of sexual sins;
    - the easy manner in which sexual sins are rationalized, thus hardening the heart to godly moral principles;
    - the need to evaluate and choose a marriage partner based on internal standards related to character, not external standards related to physical attraction;
    - the necessity for mates to avoid quarreling and maintain open channels of communication.
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## **Major Themes**