

# Proverbs

## Introduction

**W**hat is a proverb? A secular proverb seeks to state a general (not absolute) truth, such as “a fool and his money are soon parted.” It is typically pithy, that is, it is brief but rich in meaning: “No pain, no gain.” A proverb is practical; it gives advice that is useful in the real world: “A stitch in time saves nine.” It should be applied; the reader should consider what changes he should make in his own life in light of the proverb: “Charity begins at home.” A proverb is derived from astute observations about how life usually works; the creator of a proverb shows himself very knowledgeable and perceptive, able to see what is generally true and to draw conclusions from it: “The pen is mightier than the sword.”

“Wisdom calls out in the street; she raises her voice in the public squares. She cries out above the commotion; she speaks at the entrance of the city gates: ‘How long, foolish ones, will you love ignorance?’ ” [1:20-22a].

In addition to all this, the proverbs in the book of Proverbs are also divinely inspired. Since they come from God, we know they are true and we can be certain they are beneficial: “The one who understands a matter finds success, and the one who trusts in the LORD will be happy” (16:20). Biblical proverbs not only offer practical advice for this life but also guide the reader to eternal life: “For the discerning the path of life leads upward, so that he may avoid going down to Sheol” (15:24).

### Circumstances of Writing

**Author:** Solomon is credited with the proverbs in chapters 1–29 of the book of Proverbs (1:1; 10:1). There is biblical evidence that Solomon was wise and a collector of wise sayings (1Kg 3:5-14; 4:29-34; 5:7,12; 10:2-3,23-24; 11:41). Chapters 1–24 may have been written down during his reign, 970–931 B.C. The proverbs in chapters 25–29 were Solomon’s proverbs collected by King Hezekiah, who reigned 716–687 B.C. (25:1). The last two chapters are credited to Agur and Lemuel (30:1; 31:1), about whom nothing else is known. An editor was inspired to collect the proverbs of Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel into the book that we now have.

**Background:** The reign of Solomon represented the peak of prosperity for the nation of Israel. The period saw the greatest extent of the territory, and there was peace and international trade (1Kg 4:20-25; 10:21-29). It is likely that Solomon knew about the ancient tradition of wisdom in Egypt (1Kg 3:1), but through inspiration and God’s gift he composed even better sayings (1Kg 3:12; 10:6-7,23). Solomon addressed his teaching to his son or sons, but these inspired wise sayings are applicable to all people. The book of Proverbs, like the rest of the Bible, contains stories, teaching, and examples. People should make appropriate application of these truths to their own situation (1Co 10:11).

### Message and Purpose

Because these proverbs are in the Bible, they do not just entertain; they exhort, encourage, and offer hope. Solomon called readers, especially youth, to pursue wisdom rather than foolishness. He encouraged the inexperienced to become wise rather than mockers, to be teachable rather than incorrigible, to live rather than to

#### 5000 B.C.

*The Instruction of Prince Hardjedef,*  
Egyptian Old Kingdom **2686–2160**

*The Instructions Addressed to Kagemni,*  
Egyptian **2600**

*The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep,* Egypt’s Old  
Kingdom **2575–2134**

Collections of proverbs found among the  
royal archives at Ebla **2450–2250**

#### 1800 B.C.

### Abraham 2166–1991

*The Royal Instruction of Khety to Merikare,*  
Egyptian **2160**

*The Instruction of a Man for His Son,*  
Egyptian Middle Kingdom **2040–1640**

*The Instruction of King Amenemhet I for  
His Son Sesostris I,* Egyptian **1925**

*Instructions of Shuruppak,* Sumerian  
Proverb Collection **1900–1700**

die. He predicted that people who pursued wisdom would generally find success and happiness in this life, but he promised that they would absolutely find joy and blessing in eternity.

There is a close connection between wisdom and God. For example, both prescribe obedience and morality and both promise success and eternal life. They are connected because wisdom presupposes the fear of God; because God is the source of this inspired, godly advice; and because God is the One who guarantees the blessings that wisdom promises. The benefits of wisdom and of God are the same. What wisdom promises is what God grants (4:4-8).

## Structure

The book of Proverbs is in the wisdom genre. Wisdom books consist of the intelligent author's observations on the world and the people in it. However, without an inspired godly perspective, the world would be depressing and hopeless, as parts of Job and Ecclesiastes show. Ultimately, biblical wisdom is informed by and founded on faith in God.

The process of observation, contemplation, and inspiration can be seen in Pr 24:30-34. After observing the deteriorated condition of "the field of a slacker" and "the vineyard of a man lacking sense," Solomon contemplated what he was seeing and was inspired: "I saw, and took it to heart; I looked, and received instruction" (v. 32). He either composed a new proverb or applied a familiar proverb to the situation: "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit" (vv. 33-34).

Proverbs is written as Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is terse and concise, it uses a lot of imagery, and generally the second line complements or contrasts the thought of the first. Contemplating how the second line relates to the first is a profitable way to meditate on a proverb.

In chapters 1–9 Solomon used imagery and sustained arguments to teach about the value of wisdom and the

## 1600 B.C.

### Moses 1526–1406

The Phoenicians develop a 22-letter alphabet that consisted of consonants only. It was read from right to left and became an important step in the development of the modern Western alphabet. This was the world's first purely phonetic alphabet. It was based on sounds and not symbolic representations of objects. 1600

*The Counsels of Wisdom*, Akkadian 1500–1200

Events in Judges 1380?–1060?

## 1200–800 B.C.

### Samuel 1105?–1025?

*The Instruction of Amenemope*, Egypt  
1186–1069

Saul anointed king 1050

David becomes king over all Israel. 1003

Solomon becomes king. 970

Proverbs 970

seduction of evil. In 22:17–24:34 there are “sayings” made up of several verses each, and in chapters 30–31 there are more sayings, including numerical sayings and an alphabetic acrostic in praise of a capable wife. In the rest of the book, each proverb is generally one verse. Some scholars argue that these individual proverbs are carefully arranged in groups and each should be interpreted in the context of its group. Other scholars view the collection as unsystematic and argue that the immediate context seldom has any bearing on interpretation.

In either case, it is important to interpret any single proverb in the context of the book of Proverbs and the Bible as a whole. For example, while 21:14 may seem to encourage bribery, the rest of the book of Proverbs is clearly against it (15:27), as is the rest of Scripture (Ex 23:8; Ec 7:7).

## Outline

- I. Solomon’s Exhortations and Warnings (1:1–9:18)
  - A. Contrast between wisdom and riches (1:1–3:20)
  - B. Praise of wisdom, love, and worthy conduct (3:21–4:27)
  - C. Warnings against lust, idleness, and deceit (5:1–7:27)
  - D. A portrayal of wisdom (8:1–9:18)
- II. Solomon’s Proverbs (10:1–29:27)
  - A. Collected proverbs (10:1–22:16)
  - B. Thirty sayings of the wise (22:17–24:22)
  - C. More sayings of the wise (24:23–34)
  - D. Hezekiah’s collection (25:1–29:27)
- III. Other Proverbs (30:1–31:31)
  - A. Words of Agur (30:1–33)
  - B. Words of Lemuel (31:1–9)
  - C. Praise of a capable wife (31:10–31)

# PROVERBS TOPICAL CHART

## HUMAN BEINGS

### EMOTIONS

<b>ANGER</b>	indignation, vexation	12:16a; 17:25; 21:19; 27:3
	anger, indignation	14:17a; 14:29; 15:1; 16:32; 19:11a; 21:14; 22:24-25; 24:17-18; 27:4; 29:8b; 29:22; 30:33
	wrath, rage	11:4; 11:23b; 14:35; 20:2; 22:8
	rage, anger, troubled, sullen	19:12; 22:14
	burning anger, wrath, rage	6:34; 15:1; 15:18; 16:14; 19:19; 21:14; 22:24-25; 27:4; 29:22
<b>ANXIETY</b>	12:25a	
<b>BITTERNESS</b>	14:10a; 17:25	
<b>DESIRE, JEALOUSY</b>	lust, passion	10:24; 11:23; 13:12; 13:19a; 18:1; 19:22; 21:25-26; 23:6; 24:1
	desire, lust	3:15
	desire, lust, mischief	10:3; 17:4
	envy, jealousy	3:31; 6:34; 14:30; 23:17; 24:1a; 24:19b; 24:20b; 27:4
	desire, delight	21:20
<b>GRIEF, SADNESS</b>	10:1; 14:13; 17:21a	
<b>HAPPY, BLESSED</b>	8:32-36; 14:21b; 16:20b; 20:7; 31:28	
<b>HEALING</b>	3:7-8; 4:20-22; 12:18b; 13:17b; 14:30a; 15:4a; 16:24; 17:22a; 29:1	
<b>HOPE</b>	10:28a; 11:7a; 11:23; 13:12a; 19:18a; 23:18; 24:14; 26:12; 29:20	
<b>JOY</b>	10:28; 12:20b; 13:9a; 14:10b; 14:13b; 15:13a; 15:21a; 15:23a; 15:30; 17:21b; 21:15a; 23:15; 24:17; 27:9a; 27:11; 29:2a; 29:3a; 29:6b	
<b>DELIGHT, REJOICING</b>	8:30-31	
<b>LOVE AND HATE</b>	8:35-36; 9:8a; 10:12; 13:24; 14:20	
	love	1:22; 4:6b; 5:19a; 7:18; 8:17; 8:20-21; 9:8b; 15:9b; 16:13; 17:9a; 17:19a; 18:21; 19:8; 21:17; 27:5-6
	hate	1:29; 5:12; 6:16; 8:13; 10:18; 11:15; 12:1b; 13:5a; 14:17a; 14:20; 15:10b; 15:17; 15:27; 19:7a; 25:17; 25:21-22; 26:24-26; 26:28; 27:6; 28:16; 29:10a; 29:24; 30:21-23
<b>PANIC, DREAD</b>	1:33; 3:25-26; 28:14	
<b>SEPARATION</b>	17:11; 18:1	
<b>SHAME</b>	shame, ignominy, and disgrace	3:35; 6:32-33; 9:7a; 11:2a; 12:16; 13:18; 18:3; 25:8-10a
	causing shame	10:5b; 14:34-35; 17:2a; 19:26; 29:15b
<b>SPIRIT</b>	1:23; 11:29; 14:29; 15:4b; 15:13a; 16:2; 16:18-19; 16:32; 17:22b; 17:27b; 18:14; 25:28; 29:23	
<b>FAMILY</b>	11:29a; 15:27a; 17:13; 27:8	
	wife	5:18b-19; 12:4; 18:22; 19:13b-14b; 21:9; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15-16; 31:10-31
	both parents	1:8-9; 6:20-24; 10:1; 20:20; 23:22; 23:24-25; 28:24; 30:11-14; 30:17
	father	3:12; 4:1-9; 13:1; 15:5; 17:6; 19:13; 22:28; 28:7; 29:3
	mother	7:7; 10:1; 10:5; 13:1; 13:24; 14:26a; 15:20a; 17:2; 17:6; 17:25; 19:13a; 19:18; 19:26; 19:27; 20:7; 27:11; 28:7; 29:15; 29:17; 31:28a
	children	31:28a
	youth, boys	7:7; 20:11; 20:20; 22:6; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15
	grandchildren	13:22a; 17:6
	brother	6:19b; 17:17b; 18:19a; 18:24; 19:7; 27:10b
	widows	15:25b
	orphans	22:28; 23:10-11; 31:8
ancestors	22:28; 23:10a	

# PROVERBS TOPICAL CHART

## HUMAN BEINGS

<b>FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, STRANGERS, ENEMIES</b>	friends, intimate companions, chief	16:28b; 17:9b	
	neighbor, companion, friend	3:28-29; 6:1-5; 6:29; 11:9; 11:12; 12:26; 14:20-21; 16:29; 17:17a; 17:18; 18:17; 18:24a; 19:4; 19:6b-7; 21:10; 22:11; 24:28-29; 25:8-10; 25:17-18; 26:18-19; 27:9-10; 27:14; 29:5	
	companions: good and bad	2:20; 3:31-32a; 13:20; 14:7; 19:6; 19:7; 20:19; 22:24-25; 23:20-21; 24:1-2; 24:21-22; 27:17; 29:5; 29:6	
	nobles, philanthropists	17:7; 17:26; 18:16; 19:6	
	stranger	5:10; 6:1-2; 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 27:2; 27:13	
	foreigner, stranger	5:10; 5:20; 6:23-24; 7:4-5; 20:16; 27:2; 27:13	
	enemy	16:7; 24:17-18; 25:21-22; 27:6	
	adulterer	6:26-35; 30:20	
	other women	9:13; 14:1; 31:2-3	
	strange woman, alien, foreign woman	2:16-19; 5:3-14; 5:20; 6:23-24; 7:4-5; 27:13	
	whore	6:23-26; 7:4-27; 23:28	
virgin	30:18-19; 30:21-23		
<b>DYNAMICS OF RELATING</b>	gossip and secrets	11:12-13; 16:28; 25:9b-10; 26:20	
	the witness	6:19a; 12:17; 14:5; 14:25; 19:5; 19:9; 19:28; 21:28; 24:28-29; 25:9-10; 25:18; 26:18-19	
	betrayal (treachery)	11:6; 13:2; 13:15; 21:18b; 25:19; 26:18-19; 26:28; 29:12	
	braggart	27:1-2	
	meddling	26:17	
	disputes	quarreling	22:10
		strife, contention	3:30; 15:18; 17:1; 17:14; 17:19a; 18:6a; 20:3; 26:17; 26:21
strife		13:10; 17:19	
<b>OUR TONGUES AND BODIES</b>			
<b>LONGEVITY</b>	3:1-2; 3:16-18; 4:10; 8:35-36; 9:11; 10:11; 12:28; 13:3a; 13:12b; 13:14; 14:12; 14:27; 14:32b; 15:27b; 16:22; 18:21; 19:16; 19:23a; 23:17-18		
<b>STRENGTH</b>	strength, mighty, fierce	10:29a; 21:22; 24:5; 30:25; 31:17a; 31:25	
	strength, vigor, power	14:4; 14:26; 18:10; 18:19; 20:29; 21:22; 24:5; 24:10	
	strength, valor, might	8:14; 21:22	
	strength, power, valor, army	12:4; 31:3	
<b>OUR BODY</b>	3:6-8; 5:3-6; 6:10-11; 6:12-14a; 6:16-19; 6:20-26; 7:1-3; 12:13-15a; 14:30; 15:30; 20:27; 25:19; 31:12-13		
<b>BONES</b>	12:4; 14:30; 15:30; 17:22b; 25:15		
<b>HEAD</b>	1:8-9; 25:22		
<b>GRAY HAIR</b>	16:31; 20:27		
<b>FACE</b>	7:13; 10:26; 15:13; 20:12-13; 21:29a; 23:9; 24:23; 27:19-20; 30:11-14		
<b>EYE</b>	4:25; 6:4; 15:3; 16:30a; 17:24; 20:8; 21:4; 22:12; 23:5; 23:26; 28:27; 29:13		
<b>EAR</b>	2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 15:31; 21:13; 22:17; 23:12; 25:12; 28:9		
<b>MOUTH, TONGUE, LIPS</b>	4:24; 6:1-3; 7:21; 8:6-9; 8:13b; 10:6; 10:11; 10:13-14; 10:18-21a; 10:31-32; 11:9a; 11:12-13; 12:13a; 12:14; 12:17-19; 12:22; 12:25b; 13:2a; 13:3; 14:3; 14:7; 14:23; 15:1-2; 15:4; 15:7; 15:14b; 15:23; 15:26b; 15:28; 16:1; 16:10; 16:13; 16:21b; 16:23-24; 16:27b; 16:28b; 17:4; 17:7; 17:20b; 17:27a; 17:28; 18:4; 18:6-8; 18:13; 18:17; 18:20-21; 19:1; 19:9; 19:28; 20:15; 20:17; 20:19; 20:25; 21:6; 21:23; 21:28; 22:11-12; 22:14; 22:18; 23:9; 23:16; 24:2; 24:7; 24:26; 24:28-29; 25:9b-10; 25:11-15; 25:18; 25:23; 26:7; 26:9; 26:20-28; 27:2; 29:20; 30:10; 30:32; 31:8-9; 31:26		
	<b>NECK</b>	1:8-9; 3:3-4; 3:21-22; 6:20-21	
	<b>HAND</b>	12:14; 14:1; 21:25; 31:13b; 31:16b; 31:19-20; 31:31a	
	<b>HEART</b>	3:5; 4:23; 6:20-21; 13:12a; 14:10; 14:13; 15:11; 15:13a; 15:15b; 15:21a; 15:28a; 15:32b; 16:9a; 17:3b; 17:22a; 18:12; 18:15; 19:3; 19:8a; 19:21; 20:5a; 20:9; 20:30; 23:15; 24:12	
	<b>FOOT</b>	1:15-16; 3:6; 3:23-26; 4:11; 4:14-19; 4:26-27; 5:5; 5:21; 6:28-29b; 7:11; 16:9; 20:24; 26:6; 29:5	
	<b>GODLY TRAITS</b>		
	<b>BLESSED</b>	blessed, benediction	3:33; 5:18a; 10:6a; 10:7a; 10:22; 11:11; 11:24; 11:26; 20:21; 22:9; 24:25; 27:14; 28:20; 30:11
		blessed, happy	See Human Beings/Emotions/Happy, Blessed
	<b>COVER, CONCEAL</b>	10:6b; 10:11b; 10:12; 10:18; 11:13; 12:16b; 12:23; 17:9; 24:31; 25:2; 26:26	

# PROVERBS TOPICAL CHART

## HUMAN BEINGS

### GODLY TRAITS (CONTINUED)

<b>DISCERNING, JUDICIOUS, ASTUTE</b>	17:10; 17:24a; 28:2; 28:7; 28:11	
<b>DISCRETION</b>	discretion, devising, plotting	2:11; 3:21; 5:2; 8:12; 11:19; 12:2; 12:12a; 14:17; 14:19; 24:8c
	discretion, taste, flavor	11:22
<b>FEAR</b>	fear, to be afraid, to revere	1:29; 2:2,5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:24; 10:27; 14:2; 14:16; 14:26-27; 15:16a; 15:33a; 16:6b; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 28:14; 29:25; 31:30b
	fear	1:26-27; 1:33; 3:25
<b>GLORY</b>	4:8-9	
	glory, ornament, beauty, finery	16:31; 17:6; 20:29
	honor, respect, reverence	3:9; 3:16; 3:35; 8:18; 11:16a; 15:33b; 18:12b; 20:3; 21:21; 22:4; 25:27; 26:1; 26:8; 29:23
	ornament, splendor, honor	14:28
<b>EVEN, STRAIGHT, LEVEL</b>	1:3; 2:9-10	
<b>HUMBLE, LOWLY, MEEK</b>	3:34; 15:33b; 18:12; 22:4	
<b>INTEGRITY, BLAMELESS, WHOLENESS</b>	2:7; 2:21; 10:9a; 11:3; 11:5a; 11:20b; 13:6a; 19:1; 20:7; 28:6; 28:18; 29:10	
<b>LEARNING, INSTRUCTION</b>	1:5a; 4:2a; 9:9; 16:21; 16:23	
<b>PRACTICAL WISDOM</b>	8:14; 18:1	
<b>PRUDENCE</b>	astute, cunning, crafty	8:5a; 8:12; 12:16b; 12:23; 13:16a; 14:8a; 14:15b; 14:18b; 15:5; 17:2; 19:25a; 22:3; 27:12
	wise, skillful	10:19b; 15:24; 16:20a; 17:2; 19:14b
	good sense, insight	12:8a; 13:15a; 16:22a; 19:11a; 21:16
<b>PURE</b>	pure, clean	16:2a; 20:9; 20:11; 21:8b
	purity, clean	15:26; 20:9; 22:11; 30:12
<b>RIGHTEOUS</b>	2:9-10; 2:20; 3:33; 4:18; 8:8; 8:15-16; 8:18; 8:20-21; 10:2b-10:3a; 10:6a; 10:7a; 10:11a; 10:16a; 10:20a; 10:21a; 10:24-25; 10:28-32; 11:4b-11; 11:18b-19a; 11:21; 11:23a; 11:28b; 11:30a; 11:31; 12:3b; 12:5a; 12:7b; 12:10; 12:12b; 12:13b; 12:17; 12:21a; 12:26a; 12:28a; 13:5a; 13:6a; 13:9a; 13:21b; 13:22a; 13:25a; 14:19b; 14:32b; 14:34a; 15:6a; 15:28a; 15:29b; 16:8; 16:12; 16:13; 16:31; 17:15; 17:26a; 18:5b; 18:10; 18:17; 20:7; 21:3; 21:12; 21:15; 21:18a; 21:21; 21:26; 23:24-25; 24:15-16; 25:5; 25:26; 28:1; 28:12; 28:28; 29:2; 29:6b-7a; 29:16; 29:27; 31:9	
<b>SATISFIED, TO BE FULL</b>	12:11a; 12:14a; 14:14; 18:20; 19:23; 20:13; 27:20; 30:15b	
<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	understanding reason, intelligence	2:1-8; 2:10-15; 3:13-20; 5:1-2; 8:1; 10:23b; 11:12; 14:29a; 15:21b; 17:27b; 18:2; 19:8; 20:5; 21:30; 24:3-7; 28:16
	understanding, discernment, perception	4:1-9; 7:4; 8:5; 8:14; 9:6; 9:10; 10:13a; 14:6b; 16:16b; 17:28; 19:25b; 23:23; 28:11; 30:2-3
<b>UPRIGHT, INTEGRITY</b>	2:21; 3:32; 4:11; 8:6; 8:9; 9:15; 11:3a; 11:6a; 11:11; 12:6b; 12:15; 14:2a; 14:9a; 14:11b; 14:12; 15:8b; 15:19b; 15:21b; 16:13; 16:17; 16:25; 17:26b; 20:11; 21:2; 21:8b; 21:18b; 21:29; 23:16; 28:10; 29:10; 29:27	
<b>UNGODLY TRAITS</b>		
<b>ABOMINATION, HORRIBLE DEED</b>	3:32; 6:16-19; 8:7; 11:1; 11:20; 12:22; 13:19b; 15:8a; 15:9a; 15:26a; 16:5; 16:12; 17:15; 20:10; 20:23; 21:27; 24:9b; 26:24-25; 28:9; 29:27	
<b>BACKSLIDER</b>	14:14a	
<b>BOORISH, BRUTISH, STUPID</b>	12:1b; 30:2	
<b>CRUEL</b>	5:9; 11:17b; 12:10b; 17:11; 27:4	
<b>DECEIT</b>	deceit, fraud	11:1; 12:5; 12:17; 12:20a; 14:8; 14:25; 20:23b; 26:24
	deceit, treacherous	13:2; 13:15b; 22:12; 25:19
	lie, falsehood, deceit	10:18; 11:18; 12:19; 12:22a; 13:5; 14:5; 17:4; 20:17; 21:6; 25:14; 25:18; 26:28; 29:12; 31:30a

# PROVERBS TOPICAL CHART

## HUMAN BEINGS

### UNGODLY TRAITS (CONTINUED)

DECEIVE, ENTICE	24:28b	
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