

## FINAL WORDS

Proverbs is a word for the king and by the king. The king who rules by wisdom will bless his people, and the people who practice these principles will be prosperous.

Since wisdom comes from the Lord, pursuing wisdom is pursuing God's revelation to man. It is not one thing to seek wisdom and something else to seek the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. There is no wisdom apart from the Lord. One can gain knowledge, but the application of truth in a way that results in blessing comes only in submission to the Lord.

### OTHER WISDOM BOOKS: GUIDES FOR KINGDOM LIVING

All of the Wisdom Books are guides for kingdom living. How is one to live now that Israel is a nation living in its own land? How can we experience joy and blessing in our lives? Ecclesiastes describes the peril of living life apart from God and extols the blessings of living in fear of God and enjoying his good gifts. Job helps man to trust God when life doesn't make sense and he cannot understand the causes of his suffering. Song of Songs describes the exquisite pleasure that a man and his wife can enjoy in a faithful marriage. Altogether the Bible's Wisdom Literature helps the reader to find satisfaction and blessing in life on earth.

### GOING FURTHER

How could Proverbs have led the nation of Israel into a glorious era of prosperity and peace?

How does Proverbs communicate that gaining wisdom is ultimately about a relationship?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Prepare for next week's study of the Messiah in the Old Testament by reading Luke 24:13-49, with particular attention to verses 25, 26, and 44 and thinking (or writing) about what Jesus said to the disciples. For extra credit: listen to Handel's Messiah. Use my guide if you like: [www.toddbolen.com/messiah.pdf](http://www.toddbolen.com/messiah.pdf)

## PROVERBS FOR A KING

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Proverbs 1-9, Ecclesiastes 1, 6, 12, Job 1-2, 38-42. As you do, think about why these books (and wisdom literature in general) are included in the Bible. How does it fit (or seem not to fit) with our study of God's work in the world and plan of redemption?

### THE ROYAL NATURE OF PROVERBS

Scholars who are seeking to identify a single theme or "center" for the Old Testament struggle in particular with how Wisdom Literature fits in. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs don't seem to fit easily into the theme and thrust of the narrative and prophetic books. Consequently many themes suggested for the Old Testament have been rejected by scholarship because they cannot account for the place of the Wisdom books.

Perhaps the key to understanding the place of Proverbs is found in the first verse in the book, "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel." This suggests several important issues must be understood as one approaches this book.

1. Proverbs was written by a king. Thus it is a royal book (like Psalms, as we discussed last week). It was written by a king for his sons. The royal son(s) is addressed 19 times in the first 9 chapters, beginning in 1:8. The second section of the book begins in 10:1 with a proverb about a wise son and a foolish son. But though these have application to all sons everywhere, in their original context they were addressed by Israel's king to his heir.

2. Solomon is identified as the "son of David." This recalls the glorious promise that God made to David that he would "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:13). But the Lord also promised to discipline disobedient kings. The book of Proverbs was intended to help Israel's kings keep on the straight path, pursuing wisdom and leading the nation in covenant faithfulness. If one of

David's sons was going to rule over the kingdom forever, he would have to be characterized by the wisdom described in this book.

3. These proverbs were intended for the king of Israel, a nation that God intended to use to bless the world. All people would be blessed through Abraham's seed, and Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6). Placed in the center of the nations, Israel was to obey God's law carefully, "for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deut 4:6). Israel's destiny was to be a wise people and for that they needed a wise king who would lead them in understanding.

In other words, rather than think of Proverbs as a "Manual for Christian Living," we should first consider it to be a "Guide to Wisdom for Israel's Kings." But as Israel's righteous kings naturally wanted the people to pursue wisdom themselves, the book was made available to all and it served as a "Guide to Kingdom Living." The nation desired to know peace and prosperity, and God desired to give this to them (1:33). Proverbs and all of the Wisdom Books offered such a destiny to the nation who followed its precepts.

### **PROVERBS FOR KINGS AND THEIR SUBJECTS**

Though much of the book was written and compiled by Solomon, two other kings played roles in the book. Hezekiah, king of Judah, had his men compile more proverbs of Solomon (25:1) and the last chapter of the book was written by King Lemuel, an unknown figure. About 40 proverbs mention a king or ruler explicitly. These encouraged the king to govern wisely and exhorted the people to respond appropriately to the one God had put in authority.

For the king: kings reign by wisdom, speak with authority, are protected by love, provide stability for the country, practice justice, and avoid wine (8:15; 16:10; 20:28; 29:4, 14; 31:4).

For the king's subjects: fear the king, be honest with the king, a pure heart makes the king one's friend, and be persistent with the king (17:7; 22:11; 24:21).

### **PROVERBS AND THREE KINGS**

Parts of Proverbs are more stirring in light of the sins of Solomon, his father David, and his son Rehoboam. The strong warnings in chapters 5, 6, and 7 against an adulterous woman recall David's sleeping with Uriah's wife. The proverbs that promise stability and strength to the kingdom point to Solomon's failures and the gradual dissolution of his empire (Prov 28:16; 29:4; 31:3; 1 Kgs 11-12). Rehoboam ignored the admonitions to choose one's friends and advisers wisely and he was left ruling only a single tribe as a result (Prov 13:20; 25:5; 29:12). If these kings had heeded the way of wisdom articulated in this book, they would have avoided great heartache for themselves and their nation.

### **PROVERBS 4: A KING'S ADMONITION**

Proverbs 4 comes alive when heard from Solomon's voice. Here the king is exhorting his sons to listen to his instruction. He recalls his boyhood in his father David's house when his dad told him to pursue wisdom at all costs. Solomon heeded that advice for when the Lord asked him what he desired, Solomon requested a discerning heart to govern the people (1 Kgs 3:9).

Now Solomon is passing that same advice on to his son who will follow in his footsteps as Israel's king. He tells him that if he follows his way he will enjoy a long life, echoing what God said to him (1 Kgs 3:14). He also instructs him to "hold on to instruction," perhaps a personal reflection of Solomon's decision to abandon wisdom and seek his own pleasures, as he described in Ecclesiastes. The chapter ends with a stern admonition to walk in the way of wisdom, guarding one's heart and sticking to the straight path. The rulers of Israel who did that would be blessed, but unfortunately most of them chose to disregard Solomon's counsel and pursue foolishness.