

General Characteristics of Israelite Wisdom Literature The Book of Proverbs

**Poetic and Wisdom Literature Class
Dr. Robin Gallaher Branch
Week 8**

Wisdom Literature:

- Looks at life from a long-term perspective
- Bases success in life on right speaking, right relationships, and right actions
- Shows how to achieve a stable and successful life
- Maintains that Wisdom is teachable
- Encourages the ongoing pursuit of Wisdom throughout life
- Argues that one's well-being relates to one's choices
- Demonstrates that Wisdom is an acquired skill
- Bases its teaching on the fear of the Lord
- Is part of an international heritage
- Affirms there is no difference between the saving God of history and the God of daily human experience
- Warns against the possibility of self-deception and being wise in one's own eyes
- Contains poems like Psalm 34 and Proverbs 2
- Searches for order
- Sees the activity of the Lord in all that happens
- Acknowledges that exaggeration teaches students and one's children
- Recognizes the importance of advice and of planning for a venture, especially for marriage and for war
- Contains long speeches like those of Job, his friends, and God in the Book of Job
- Acknowledges the mysterious activity of God
- Bows to the Lord's sovereignty
- Maintains a balance between being religious in nature and yet advising people on how to operate successfully in the real world
- Teaches by comparisons, absolutes, parallels, and opposites
- Presents stereotypes, good and bad models of those who have chosen various paths

The Israelites adopted Wisdom Literature to some extent from their neighbours but cut out any polytheistic references.

Wisdom Literature advocates retribution theology.

Retribution theology includes the following principles:

- a. goodness results in prosperity
- b. calamity comes because of sin and
- c. in extreme cases, the person suffering is to blame for his own suffering

Wisdom Literature, on the whole, does not mention

- The Patriarchs or Israel's heroes and heroines
- Salvation history
- The Exodus
- The Sinai Covenant or any other covenant
- The religious institutions
- The current political situation

The Book of Proverbs

General Information:

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of timeless truths whose unifying theme is instruction in how to live life righteously before God and justly with one's fellow human beings.

In Hebrew, a proverb is called a figure of speech, a *meshallim*. A proverb is a succinct, persuasive saying proven true by observation and experience.

A biblical proverb is broad general principle; it is not a hard and fast promise. *Remember: A proverb is not a legal guarantee from God.*

A proverb states a way to approach aspects of life, but a proverb cannot be treated like a divine mandate for success.

A biblical proverb is not a universal command; it is a general observation about life given in the imperative

The collected sayings in Proverbs span centuries and encompass creation, the universe, life in general, instruction, observations, advice, and responses to life's situations.

Many proverbs are didactic sayings that use comparison to illustrate a lesson; they utilize the master/student format

Note this: Proverbs offers principles instead of (instant) promises.

Date: Compilation took place perhaps from the 10th century, Solomon's time, to the redactional activity of Hezekiah's wise men in the 7th century. Proverbs probably reached its final form during a time of peace.

Author(s): Proverbs appears to be an anthology of texts composed over a period of time by different authors including the following:

Solomon	Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1
"the wise"	Prov. 22:17; 24:23
"the men of Hezekiah"	Prov. 25:1
Agur	Prov. 30:
King Lemuel	Prov. 31:
Perhaps Bathsheba	Prov. 31

Literary Features: There are no references to God's great acts of redemption and there is no reference to the covenant

There is very little reference to God
Some call this a book of "secular" wisdom

The book of Proverbs contains a clear-cut outline and structure
The book clearly states its purpose, Prov. 1:1-7:
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline

It outlines experiences of life common to human culture(s).
By observation and reflection it seeks to instruct people in "right behaviour"

Proverbs constantly affirms that the way of wisdom leads to life, safety, health, abundant welfare, peace, long life, and prosperity. The way of wisdom leads to favour with God and with one's fellow human beings.

Themes in Proverbs: Two Predominate

Retribution Theology: All people must choose between wisdom and folly
wisdom seeks God
folly disregards God and his instruction
folly is self-destructive

Successful Living: The preferred outcome of wisdom is a successful life. One of the choices of a successful life is how to have a successful marriage.