

# Overview of Proverbs

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### INTRODUCTION:

The key word in Proverbs is “wisdom,” *the ability to live life skillfully*. A godly life in an ungodly world, however, is no simple assignment. Proverbs provides God’s detailed instructions for His people to deal successfully with the practical affairs of everyday life: how to relate to God, parents, children, neighbors, and government. King Solomon, the principle author, uses a combination of poetry, parables, pithy questions, short stories, and wise sayings to give the common sense and divine perspective necessary to handle life’s issues.

### DATE AND SETTING:

Proverbs is a collection of topical maxims about life. It is not a historical book. It is a product of the wisdom school of Israel. According to Jeremiah 18:18 and Ezekiel 7:26, three groups communicated to the people on behalf of God: the priests imparted the Law; the prophets communicated the divine word and visions; and the sages, or elders, gave counsel to the people. The sages provided the practical application of godly wisdom to specific problems and decisions. The “Preacher” of the book of Ecclesiastes is a good example of the wisdom school (see Eccl. 1:1,12; 7:27; 12:8-10). The *Qoheleth*, or “Preacher,” meant “one who addresses an assembly”: he presided over a “school” of wise men and “taught the people knowledge” (Eccl. 12:9). “My son” in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes evidently refers to the pupil. The was similar to Samuel’s role of heading Israel’s school of the prophets.

Solomon’s proverbs were written by 931 B.C., and his proverbs in chapters 25-29 were collected by King Hezekiah about 230 years later (Hezekiah reigned from 715 to 686 B.C.). Under Solomon Israel was at its spiritual, political, and economic summit. Solomon probably wrote his proverbs in his middle years, before his character began to decline into carnality, materialism, and idolatry.

### THEME AND PURPOSE:

Proverbs is one of the few Biblical books that clearly spells out its purpose. The purpose statement in chapter 1, verses 2-6 is twofold: (1) To impart moral discernment and discretion (1:2a,3-5); and (2) to develop mental clarity and perception (1:2b,6). The words “wisdom”

*(hokhmah)* means “skill” and “instruction” (*musar*) means “discipline (which is the way it is translated in the NIV—Prov. 1:2a). No skill is perfected without discipline. Proverbs deals with the most fundamental skill of all: practical righteousness before God in every area of life. This requires knowledge, experience, and a willingness to put God first (3:5-7). Chapters 1-9 are designed to create a sense of our need for wisdom and Proverbs as a whole is designed both to prevent and to remedy ungodly life-styles. The book served as a manual to impart the legacy of wisdom, prudence, understanding, discretion, knowledge, guidance, competence, correction, counsel, and truth from generation to generation.