

# PROVERBS - A STUDY GUIDE

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## THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

### What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
  - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Did Solomon write all of the book of Proverbs? See Proverbs 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1 and 31:1. Did he think up all of these things himself? Is it possible that some of the Proverbs were “collected” from other sources by Solomon? How many of Solomon’s reported 3,000 proverbs were original with him? (See 1 Kings 4:32) Is it possible that some of these proverbs were originally taken from “uninspired” sources? Does this book teach us anything about God? Why would God want to put a book full of witty, common-sense maxims about practical everyday concerns in the Bible? Would some of the statements in Job or in the Psalms qualify as “proverbs”? What about statements from the New Testament such as the “golden rule”? (See Matthew 7:12) Why are a number of the proverbs repeated verbatim or nearly so? (see Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10; 19:13 and 27:15; 21:9 and 25:24; 6:10,11 and 24:33,34; 14:12 and 16:25) Did Solomon forget that he had used them earlier? Or were they considered especially noteworthy?
2. When Solomon prayed for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9) what did God do? Did God give him a “wisdom implant”? Did He rewire his brain so it would think better? Did God change him in any way against his will? Would that be a violation of Solomon’s freedom? Was Solomon still free after God gave him this wisdom? How could a truly wise person end up making such a fool of himself? Did God’s “gift” take away any of his freedom? Could we ask God for wisdom? (See James 1:5) Would it make any difference? If so, shouldn’t all Christians be as wise as Solomon? Would you give up your freedom for a “guaranteed salvation”? With all of the information overload that we have available to us at the present time, shouldn’t we all be wise?
3. When Solomon finally tried to come back to God, did God say, “First, you must destroy all of those ghastly heathen temples on the Mount of Olives, then divorce all those extra wives and then we will consider you for church membership”? (See 1 Kings 11:1-9) How long would Solomon have lasted as a member of a modern Christian church? How could God possibly ask him to write another book of the Bible, or did He? If Solomon was “inspired” to write Song of Solomon and then Proverbs was everything he wrote and said “inspired” from that point on? What kind of people does God ask to write books of the Bible? (See 2 Peter 1:21)
4. There are many comments in Proverbs about the use of wine (see Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4,5) Is it safe for us to use these verses and ignore Proverbs 31:6,7? (Compare 1 Timothy 5:23) How many people can you think of from the Bible who were specifically told not to use alcohol for some reason? (Leviticus 10:8,9; Judges 13:4,5; Luke 1:15) Did alcohol have any medicinal uses in Solomon’s day?
5. Could we use Proverbs 31:6,7 “Give beer to those who are perishing...wine to those who are in anguish” (NIV) as a guide for our addiction medicine ministry? To cover expenses, would we dare put it together with Deuteronomy 14:25,26? (take the tithe and buy strong drink with it and rejoice before the Lord!) Does God intend for us to say to those depressed in the inner city, “You’re hopeless, degraded—take some alcohol?” How did Jesus relate to the poor? What would Christ do for a terminally ill cancer patient, if He had our limitations? What is the real issue involved here? Could you give a coherent “temperance talk” on Proverbs 31:4-7? Would you dare to give wine in a bottle? What about in a “pill?”

6. Why did the wisest man who ever lived spend so much time talking about fools? What do you think is implied by Proverbs 26:4,5? Do Proverbs 17:28 and 18:2 suggest that we should never speak up to ask questions? If we did so we might end up like Proverbs 26:12! Or like the apocryphal proverb, "The man who lectures to a fool lectures to one who is dozing, and at the conclusion he will say, 'What was it?'" (*Sirach 22:8, Goodspeed*)
7. What about the description of the ideal wife? (Proverbs 31:10-31) While this woman was working so hard, where was her husband? (Proverbs 31:23) Where is there any theology in this passage? Does it tell us anything about God?
8. There are many "proverbs" about the problems of bad wives/women including prostitutes and adulteresses (Proverbs 5 and 7). How should we put all these ideas together?  
 19:13; 27:15 "A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is a constant dripping."  
 (NIV)  
 21:9; 25:24 "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."  
 (NIV)  
 21:19 "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife." (NIV)

The Apocrypha has a wide variety of statements about women as well:

Sirach 25:20: "Like a sandy climb to an old man's feet, is a talkative wife to a quiet man."  
 (Goodspeed)

Sirach 22:3 "To have a daughter is a disadvantage." (*Goodspeed*)

Where did Solomon get all his ideas about women? (1 Kings 11:1-3) How did the women feel about Solomon (Song of Solomon 3:10, *TLB*)? Do you think Solomon (and the rest of the Bible) are too hard on women or too generous? Should Christians be using some of these passages either to promote or hinder the "women's lib" movement? Are there any chapters in the Bible on good husbands?

9. Must we "fear" God to have wisdom? Does God want us to be "frightened" of Him? How does this fit with Exodus 20:20; 1 John 4:18; Psalms 112:1; 128:1,4 and Proverbs 28:14? If God is first and foremost a God of love, (1 John 4:8) Would He ever desire us to be in terror of Him? How can one translation say "fear" and another say "reverence"? Are these words really related? If you had been standing with the children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, do you think you would have experienced "reverence" or "terror" or both? Was anybody in the New Testament who really knew Jesus afraid of Him? Jesus said "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." (John 14:9) Proverbs 8:13 says that, "to fear the Lord is to hate evil." How does that fit in?
10. What does Proverbs 16:4 mean? (compare Romans 8:28; 9:14-29) Do different versions help our understanding?
11. When trouble comes is God punishing? (Proverbs 3:11,12. See Hebrews 12:5,6) In Revelation 3:19 doesn't He say He reproves and chastens those whom He loves? Compare Proverbs 13:24; 22:15. Is Solomon strongly recommending physical punishment here?
12. What should we do with Proverbs 22:6? "Train (or educate) up a child in the way he should go..." Does this mean that any child who apostatizes is a failure on the part of the parents? What about God? Didn't He lose Lucifer and one third of the angels? If a family loses all their children have they done a bad job? Should we deprive our children of their freedom and try to control them? When they realize their freedom won't they run? Isn't it true that the child will remember all his life?

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