

PROVERBS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

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?

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?

"The Hebrew title of this book is *mishley shelomoh*, translated "the Proverbs of Solomon." Early Christian writers called the book *Sophia* (Gk.), meaning "wisdom." The term "proverb" (*mashal*, Heb.) is derived from a root meaning primarily "to be like" and is used of comparisons, rules of living, parables, sayings, or discourses on wisdom. Characteristic of the proverbs in this book is a device which is formed by a balanced antithesis, e.g., the wise and the foolish, the good and the wicked, etc. The term *mashal* is not confined to wise or pithy sayings, however, but also is used to cover other forms, e.g., the oracle of Balaam (Num. 23:7; 24:15), songs (Is. 14:4; Hab. 2:6), and the extended comparisons of allegory (Ezek. 17:2; 20:49; 24:3). The major categories of proverbs are: (1) the *historical* proverbs, which use a past event or a colloquial saying to express a general sentiment (6:27, 28); (2) the *metaphorical* proverbs, which express a moral truth through a literary figure drawn from the world of nature or the life of man (1:17; 6:6); (3) the *enigmatic* proverbs, which hide moral truth under the guise of obscure questions (30:4, 15); (4) the *parabolic* proverbs, which are concise expressions of wisdom (9:1); and (5) the *didactical* proverbs, which give precise instruction on religious or moral behavior (1:5, 33; 2:1-5).

AUTHOR: Solomon and Others: The involvement of King Solomon in producing the Book of Proverbs is clearly indicated in Scripture (1:1; 10:1; 25:1; see also 1 Kin. 4:29-34; Matt. 12:42), and there is no reason to doubt it. Nevertheless, since the book did not achieve its final form before the time of Hezekiah (25:1), and there were others who contributed to it (22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1), 1:1 should be taken as a title and an indication of predominant authorship. Although he was evidently the principal author/collector of the proverbs, he was not the only one. Though the book is a collection, it reveals its unity in the general nature of its contents, i.e., the virtue of wisdom and the vice of folly.

DATE: Edited 729-686 B.C. Since Solomon is given the most significant role in the book, most of the proverbs would have been collected during the tenth century B.C. Hezekiah's men (25:1) compiled and edited it from 729-686 B.C.

THEME: Practical Wisdom: The author clearly sets forth his purpose to impart wisdom and understanding to all men, even the young and the simple (1:2-4). This outpouring of wisdom is

to guide believers in practical, everyday living, giving instruction concerning duty to God (1:7; 3:5; 14:9), duty to oneself (1:10; 14:30; 16:5, 18, 19), duty to one's neighbor (12:25; 16:24), duty within the domestic circle (20:7; 22:6), and duty to civil authorities (16:10, 12; 20:28). Some of the book's content is intensely theological: (1) the attributes of God are set forth—omniscience (15:3, 11; 21:2), omnipotence (10:27, 29; 12:2), justice (15:11; 16:2; 17:3; 20:27); (2) the concept of the covenant relationship is present (2:16ff.; 3:5, 7; 22:19; 29:25); (3) the sovereignty of God is revealed (16:4, 9; 19:21; 22:2); and (4) directives for relationships within the home are expounded (10:1; 17:21, 25; 18:22; 19:14, 26; 20:7; 21:9, 19; 23:24ff.; 27:15ff.; 31:30). The family holds a pivotal position in the Book of Proverbs just as it does in the Pentateuch (three of the commands of the Decalogue in Ex. 20 are directly related to family relationships—Ex. 20:12, 14, 17). Husband and wife are admonished to be united joyfully in a clearly monogamous (one man and one woman) union despite the deviate polygamy practiced at that time. Both parents are directed to share in the training of the children and nurturing them in the faith of YAHWEH. Sins which attack the divine order of the home are straightforwardly exposed.

SETTING: Typical of proverbs in the ancient Near East, these proverbs seem to have arisen in the context of the home—evidently that of the king or his officials. Although the term “son” can be used in the sense of “pupil,” it is likely that what is implied here is a family setting in which father and mother are instructing their son in the skills of godly living. The term “son” occurs in forty-four verses in the book, “father” in fifteen, and “mother” in eleven (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 12; 23:22–25; 29:15; 30:17; 31:1).” (*Believer's Study Bible* - intro to Proverbs)

“Many people think that what's written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting people into heaven—getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not mostly. It is equally concerned with living on this earth—living well, living in robust sanity. In our Scriptures, heaven is not the primary concern, to which earth is a tagalong afterthought. “On earth as it is in heaven” is Jesus' prayer. “Wisdom” is the biblical term for this on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living. Wisdom is the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. It has virtually nothing to do with information as such, with knowledge as such. A college degree is no certification of wisdom—nor is it primarily concerned with keeping us out of moral mud puddles, although it does have a profound moral effect upon us. Wisdom has to do with becoming skillful in honoring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions within ourselves and attitudes toward others that make for peace. Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God.

Proverbs concentrates on these concerns more than any other book in the Bible. Attention to the here and now is everywhere present in the stories and legislation, the prayers and the sermons, that are spread over the thousands of pages of the Bible. Proverbs distills it all into riveting images and aphorisms that keep us connected in holy obedience to the ordinary.” (*The Message* - Introduction to Proverbs)

“We're living in the “information age,” but we certainly aren't living in the “age of wisdom.” Many people who are wizards with their computers seem to be amateurs when it comes to making a success out of their lives. Computers can store data and obey signals, but they can't give us the ability to use that knowledge wisely. What's needed today is wisdom.

“The Book of Proverbs is about godly wisdom, how to get it and how to use it. It's about priorities and principles, not get-rich-quick schemes or success formulas. It tells you, not how to make a living, but how to be skillful in the lost art of making a life.” (*Be Skillful*)

“The book of *Proverbs* is a collection of moral and religious teachings in the form of sayings and proverbs. Much of it has to do with practical, everyday concerns. It begins with the reminder that “to have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD,” and goes on to deal with matters not only of religious morality, but also of common sense and good manners. Its many short sayings reveal the insights of ancient Israelite teachers about what a wise person will do in certain situations. Some of these concern family relations, others, business dealings. Some deal with matters of etiquette in social relationships, and others with the need of self-control. Much is said about such qualities as humility, patience, respect for the poor, and loyalty to friends.” (*GNB*-Introduction to Proverbs)

“The wisdom which the book teaches, covers a wide field of human and divine activity, ranging from matters purely secular to most lofty moral and religious truths, such as God’s omniscience (Pro 5:21; 15:3–1), power (Pro 19:21; 21:30), providence (Pro 20:1–4), goodness (Pro 15:29), and the joy and strength resulting from abandonment to him (Pro 3:5; 16:20; 18:10). The teaching of the entire book is placed on a firm religious foundation by the principle that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Pro 1:7; cf. Pro 9:10).” (*NAB* - Introduction to Proverbs)

“The vast majority of the sayings show no particular connection with religion or faith, being purely a matter of deep good sense, but every now and then they reveal a belief that all wisdom comes from Yahweh. They reflect a sharp, competitive, cynical, secular society, where compassion too has its place. To this central core are added various supplements. There are four little collections at the end, appendices which speak for themselves; but the two most important are sections III and I. Section III is founded on the very ancient Egyptian Wisdom of Amenemophis (written down c. 1000 BC but already then ancient), which shows how Israel learnt from the neighbouring cultures. Section I is the latest part of the book, probably post-exilic; it is an invitation to acquire wisdom, acquired by faith in Yahweh, which reaches its climax in Wisdom’s own self-description at 8:22.” (*New Jerusalem Bible* - Introduction to Proverbs)

“The book of Proverbs is a collection of sayings that were used in ancient Israel to teach God’s people how to live right. For the most part, these sayings go back to Solomon, but others are traced back to Agur (30.1) and King Lemuel (31.1).

“Like the psalms, all the proverbs are written in poetic form. A typical proverb takes the form of a short verse in which the first half states the theme and the second half echoes it. What makes the Bible’s proverbs so popular is that they make such powerful statements with very few words. This makes them easy to memorize and apply to daily life.

“One of the main teachings in Proverbs is that all wisdom is a gift from God. This wisdom supplies practical advice for everyday living, in the home, in society, in politics, at school and at work. The book of Proverbs also teaches the importance of fairness, humility, loyalty and concern for the poor and needy.

“Because most proverbs are so brief, and make their point in one verse, many are often not connected to those around them. In some parts of the book, however, a common theme can be found. How not to be a fool is the theme of chapter 26.1-12, for example. In chapters 8 & 9, Wisdom is pictured as a woman who advises people to turn from their foolish ways and to live wisely.” (*Contemporary English Version* - Intro)

“The Book of Proverbs is as modern as today. It deals with the problems of life that each of us has to face.

“If any book in the Bible could be said to be beamed especially to young people, this one could.

“When a young man said to Carlyle that there was nothing in the Book of Proverbs, he replied: ‘Make a few proverbs and you will think differently of the book.’

“Proverbs is the world’s finest collection of sound, sanctified common sense, written so that young people might not have to make some of the dreary mistakes their elders have made.

“The purpose of Proverbs is stated in 1:1–7. In brief, it is to give wisdom and understanding to a young man so that he will find true blessedness in life and escape the snares and pitfalls of sin. The key verse is 9:10, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Arnot calls the book, “Laws from heaven for life on earth.” That describes its contents very concisely.

“A proverb is a pithy statement of wisdom, often worded in a clever way to make it easy to remember. Most of the proverbs consist of two clauses, presenting either similarities or contrasts.” (*Believer’s Bible Commentary* - Intro to Proverbs)

There is good evidence that Solomon did not write all of the proverbs. But it is also true that many of the proverbs that Solomon wrote were not included in the Proverbs. Does this mean that some were not “inspired”? We have no way of knowing. Solomon may also have “borrowed” or adapted proverbs that he learned from others.

God is interested in everything that we do and that concerns us. These bits of “wisdom” are very useful and have been quoted and modified since the days of Solomon to our own.

The proverbs collected in the Proverbs almost certainly were those that Solomon or his followers considered to be the most important. Some bits of wisdom were appropriate in more than one setting.

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?

God probably gave Solomon a very discerning mind, and a curiosity that led him to investigate many things (See Ecclesiastes). A lot of Solomon’s “wisdom” may have been learned from experience with all of his projects. But God refuses to limit our freedom and thus Solomon changed from being an example for his people to being a total fool. Fortunately, down near the end of his life, when God told him what the result of all that folly would be, Solomon apparently came to his senses and turned back to God. (See Ecclesiastes) Certainly we don’t need to make the same mistake.

Much of Solomon’s foolishness seems to have come from the fact that he always wanted to be trying something new. How many people today get into trouble because they want to try everything at least once! Think of all the drug addicts who got started by “experimenting” at a party, for example. Do we have to make all of the mistakes before we can decide that they are mistakes? None of us would survive very long if we didn’t learn anything from other people’s mistakes! But we are reminded of the “proverb” that seems all too true: “The only thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history!” What is God suggesting when He tells us to ask Him for wisdom? (James 1:5) Might He be suggesting that we try to do things His way before trying any of the other “ways”? **What would our lives be like if we always tried to do things God’s way first?**

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)

God is clearly incredibly gracious in His treatment of sinners. We humans would have been very reluctant to be that gracious. There is no way a typical church in our day would have treated Solomon so generously! God realized that Solomon had effectively ruined the nation that he ruled and started it on the path of deterioration that would result finally in the crucifixion of Christ. In spite of all this, God treats Solomon as graciously as He can under the circumstances.

God apparently "inspires" some remarkable people at times! But was Solomon "inspired" in his early years and then "uninspired" for a while and then "inspired" again? It appears that God doesn't seem too worried about drawing strict lines between "inspired" and "uninspired". Did He come along later and "inspire" others to decide which of Solomon's materials were "inspired" and which were not?

4. What are we supposed to learn from the following passages:

Job 28:28: "And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'" (NIV)

"God said to human beings, "To be wise, you must have reverence for the Lord. To understand, you must turn from evil." (GNB)

Psalms 111:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do *his commandments*..." (KJV)

The way to become wise is to honor the LORD;
he gives sound judgement to all who obey his commands..." (GNB)

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction." (KJV)

"To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD. Stupid people have no respect for wisdom and refuse to learn." (GNB)

9:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." (KJV)

"To be wise you must first have reverence for the LORD. If you know the Holy One, you have understanding." (GNB)

15:33: "The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility." (KJV)

"Reverence for the LORD is an education in itself. You must be humble before you can ever receive honours." (GNB)

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?

In the Biblical setting the word “fear” is used with two distinct meanings: reverence and terror. What is intended in each passage must be determined by the context. There are very few serious Bible scholars who would want to say that we should always be “scared to death” of God. However we must recognize that some have felt that this was a necessary motivator in some cases to get people to behave themselves. Terror has often been used by church authorities to get people to “line up” and do what their leaders wanted them to do! It is very clear from Scripture that this kind of motivation never lasts more than a short period of time. The children of Israel were “scared to death” at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:18-21) But that wasn’t enough to prevent them from dancing drunk and naked around the golden calf a mere forty days later. (Deuteronomy 9:9-11)

When God speaks in the strongest possible terms to us in our day (Revelation 14:6-12) it doesn’t prevent people from doing whatever they feel like! God apparently hasn’t scared us too much!

By contrast, God needs and wants our reverence and respect. It is impossible to learn unless there is respect. This is why we have the references in Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. If we have no respect for God, there is very little chance that we will learn anything from Him despite His best intentions.

5. 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?

God has had to go to some extraordinary ends to discipline His children and to curb evil. Some examples are the flood (Genesis 6-8), the destruction of thousands at the foot of Sinai (Exodus 32:25-29), the destruction of Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:6-8; 1 Chronicles 13:9-14; 15:1-4), and even calling down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). **Destruction however does not discipline the one being destroyed.** God on rare occasions seems to destroy some to discipline the larger group. (Uzzah, the idol worshipers at Sinai, and Achan) In most cases God is incredibly patient in disciplining each individual person in hopes that that person will change his mind and follow God.

In the light of what God has done, it should not be surprising that Solomon seems to recommend even physical punishment. This however should never be done in anger. It tends only to make the rebellious child more so!

6. There are many “proverbs” about the problems of bad wives/women including prostitutes and adulteresses (Proverbs 5 & 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?

Song of Songs 3:9,10: ⁹ For King Solomon made himself a chariot from the wood of Lebanon. ¹⁰Its posts are silver, its canopy gold, the seat is purple; and the back is inlaid with these words: ‘With love from the girls of Jerusalem!’” (*TLB*)

The status of women in the Bible was quite different than it is in our day in the U.S.A. They were not even counted in census taking. (Numbers 1:2,3,18,49; 26:3,4,51; Matthew 14:21; 15:38) Even the value of a female in fulfillment of a vow was less. (See Leviticus 27:3-7) And so was the value of a female slave. Some will claim that this is because after Eve ate the fruit from the tree, all women were given a subordinate position. (Genesis 3:16) In Solomon’s day, even princesses were used almost as barter to seal agreements! (1 Kings 11:3) By contrast there is not a single case of a woman having more than one husband *at the same time* in the Bible. Solomon certainly had enough experience with women if he indeed had 700 wives and 300 concubines at the same time. His attitude toward women may be reflected by Ecclesiastes 7:28!

Ecclesiastes 7:28,29: ²⁸I have looked for other answers but have found none. I found one man in a thousand that I could respect, but not one woman. ²⁹This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated.” (*GNB*)

Even in many modern societies in developing countries the status of women is sometimes very low. They are treated as property to be bought and sold. In many languages you will note that men “marry” but women “are married” in the passive mode.

God very clearly made men and women equal in the beginning and the closer we come to God’s ideal, the more equal men and women will be treated. In most of the societies of history equality for women was not even considered (at least by the men)!

7. What does Proverbs 16:4 mean? (compare Romans 8:28; 9:14-29) Do different versions help our understanding?

Proverbs 16:4:

“All things hath Jehovah wrought for Himself, And also the wicked worketh for a day of evil.”
(*Young’s Literal*)

“The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” (*KJV*)

“The Lord made everything for a purpose, Even the wicked for an evil day.” *Tanakh*

“The Lord has a reason for everything he does, and he lets evil people live only to be punished.” (*CEV*)

“Everything that the LORD has made has its destiny; and the destiny of the wicked is destruction.” (*GNB*)

“The LORD has made each thing for its own end; he made even the wicked for a day of disaster.”
(*NEB*)

“The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.” (*NIV*)

“The LORD has made everything for his own purposes—Even the wicked, for punishment.” (*Living Bible*)

“The LORD has made everything for its purpose, Even the wicked for the day of trouble.” (*NRSV*)

“The Eternal has made everything for an end of its own—Yes, and the wicked for their day of doom.” (*Moffatt*)

“Everything the Lord made has a future, But the future of the wicked is extinction.” (*Clear Word*)

“God made everything with a place and purpose;

even the wicked are included—but for *judgment*.” (*The Message*)

“The Lord has made everything for his own purpose, even wicked people for the day of trouble.”
(*God’s Word*)

“The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.”
(*NASB, 1995*)

“The Lord makes everything go as he pleases. He has even prepared a day of disaster for evil people.” (*NCV*)

“The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.” (*NIV*)

“The Lord has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.” (*NKJV*)

“The Lord has made everything for his own purposes, even the wicked for punishment.” (*NLT*)

“The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.”
(*RSV, NRSV*)

“Everything the Lord made has a future, but the future of the wicked is extinction.” (*Clear Word*)

This passage seems to suggest that God has made everything, and everything has its intended purpose and end. In the Hebrew mind, since God was fully in control they did not see any distinction between God allowing something and God causing it. So it was clear in their thinking that the wicked, who must ultimately end up being “punished” were being “punished” by God. We would say that God is ultimately in control but our freedom limits God’s control. Theoretically, of course, God could change the way He runs the universe and save everyone, either by turning them into robots so they do only what He tells them to, or by controlling them in some way so they cannot hurt each other. God’s respect for our freedom doesn’t allow Him to do either of those things. If He had any plans to manipulate our freedom then He should have done so back in eternity when sin first began. What possible reason could there be for allowing the whole great controversy to play itself out to this point if God plans to violate our freedom in the end?

8. 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?

It is most helpful to look at different translations of this passage:

Proverbs 22:6:

“Give instruction to a youth about his way, Even when he is old he turneth not from it.” (*Young’s Literal*)

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and [even] when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
(*KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NASB, 1995*)

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (*NIV*)

“Train up the child according to the tenor of his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (*Darby, 1890*)

“Train a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not turn away from it.”
God’s Word

“Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it.” (*NAB*)

“Train children how to live right, and when they are old, they will not change.” (*NCV*)

“Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” (*NRSV*)

“Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older he will remain upon it.” (*TLB*)

“Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.”
(*NLT*)

“Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their lives.” (GNB)
 “Teach your children right from wrong, and when they are grown they will still do right.” (CEV)
 “Train a lad in the way he ought to go; He will not swerve from it even in old age.” (Tanakh)
 “Start a boy on the right road, and even in old age he will not leave it.” (NEB)
 “Train a child for his proper trade, and he will never leave it, even when he is old.” (Moffatt)
 “Train a child in the way he ought to live and he’ll remember it even when he’s old.” (Clear Word)
 “Point your kids in the right direction—when they’re old they won’t be lost.” (Message)

This passage does not imply that parents are responsible for all the mistakes that their children make. God gives each of us the freedom to choose our own way. Lucifer chose to rebel and go his own way right in God’s very presence in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary! And it was not because he had bad parents or a lousy environment! Jesus by contrast grew up in Nazareth, proverbial for its wickedness and still lived a sinless life. We must strive to teach our children the art of making correct choices as early as possible. This will prepare them for the day when they will be on their own.

9. 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?

At a time when there were no aspirin, antihistamines, or any other pain medications and no antibiotics, alcohol served the purpose in some cases. The use of alcohol clearly is not the ideal but God once again reaches out to us in our predicaments and speaks to us in a language we can understand.

Proverbs 31:6,7:

“Use wine and beer only as sedatives,
 to kill the pain and dull the ache
 Of the terminally ill,
 for whom life is a living death.” (The Message)

10. 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?”

It is obviously possible to misuse some of these passages! It should be noted first of all that the words used in these passages refer to drinks that were clearly alcoholic. This is not a discussion of grape juice. We would certainly agree that those who are in positions of responsibility need to keep their minds clear by avoiding the use of alcohol. But what about those who are dying? What about those who have severe pain? In a day when none of our modern pain medications were available would it be okay for a person to use some alcohol to get a little bit of relief?

Many of our modern liquid medicines have some alcohol in them. Does this mean that no Christian should use any of these medicines? The small amount of alcohol in these medicines probably has no effect at all on the body and serves only as a solvent to keep the medicine in

suspension. The wise abstinence from alcohol for those in positions of authority combined with the judicious use of it in medicinal ways where necessary was probably God's intentional meaning of this passage and we should not find this a real problem.

11. 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*)

Proverbs 26:4,5: ⁴ If you answer a silly question, you are just as silly as the person who asked it. ⁵ Give a silly answer to a silly question, and the one who asked it will realize that he's not as clever as he thinks." (*GNB*)

Proverbs 17:28: After all, even a fool may be thought wise and intelligent if he stays quiet and keeps his mouth shut." (*GNB*)

Proverbs 18:2: A fool does not care whether he understands a thing or not; all he wants to do is to show how clever he is." (*GNB*)

Proverbs 26:12: The most stupid fool is better off than someone who thinks he is wise when he is not." (*GNB*)

Perhaps Solomon spoke so many times about fools because so many of the people around him seemed like fools to him! Foolishness is an obvious contrast to wisdom and no doubt is used as a tool in some of the proverbs for contrast. In his later life he may have been able to speak about foolishness from first hand experience!

12. 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? Where did this passage come from? Compare:

18:22 "Find a wife and you find a good thing; it shows that the LORD is good to you."
(*GNB*)

19:14 "A man can inherit a house and money from his parents, but only the LORD can give him a sensible wife." (*GNB*)

If these are the words of a wise mother to her son who was already a King (See Proverbs 31:1), then no doubt she was hoping that he would choose a good wife! Is it possible that these were the words of Bathsheba to Solomon? The passage was certainly not intended to make women feel inadequate! The husband of this wife was not just wasting his time. The city gate was where most of the business had to take place since it was the easiest place to catch people in an age where there were no phones, pagers, or mail system!

This passage describes a very prosperous and energetic wife. Based on the two passages quoted above, such a wife would certainly be considered a gift from the Lord. Marriage was always intended to be one of God's great gifts to humanity. Any husband who gets a wife that is even half as ambitious as this one is described as being should be very thankful.

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