

Proverbs and the Wisdom Books

Chapter 8 – To Be Wise

What are some of our Proverbs?

“Look before you leap” . . .

Most say, “Oh well, live and learn.”
Wisdom says, “Know well, learn and live.”

What is wisdom literature?

- Hokmah (Hebrew for wisdom) describes someone who is both knowledgeable and skillful in their craft.
- Biblical wisdom essentially involves knowledge and skill in the art of godly living.
- Covers practical issues like lending and borrowing money, saving money, making friends, wrestling with life’s questions, training children, discipline, purity, faithfulness, marriage and more.

What are the OT wisdom books?

Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

General Guidelines For Reading OT Wisdom Literature



A. The goal of wisdom literature is to apply the Word to practical living.

- They help us make wise, godly choices in the practical aspects of life.
- Wisdom literature encourages use to apply broad principles and general truths to our own experiences.

B. The wisdom books are not a collection of universal promises.

Prov 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

- This is a general principle of wisdom.

Prov 16:3 Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.

- **Not legal guarantees from God!**

C. The wisdom books are insights and guidelines for development of godly character

D. Wisdom literature often uses figurative imagery

Prov 15:19 The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.

E. Understand the differences between the wisdom books.

- **Proverbs** – proverbial wisdom – Basic rational approach to life
 - The moral maxims found there were used in ancient Israel to help the young acquire mental skills that promote wise living.
 - **Concise – memorable – simple – profound**
 - States wise observations with sense of certainty and authority.
 - Remember, Proverbs are general truths, not promises.
 - Contrast between a life of folly and a life of wisdom.
 - Proverbs often follow some of the principles of poetry – particularly parallelism.
 - Synonymous
Prov 7:4 Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend,
 - Antithetical - Contrast
Prov 10:1 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.
 - Synthetic Parallelism - Builds or explains the thought in the second phrase.
Prov 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
 - Proverbs must be read as a collection.
*Prov 26:4-5 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

Ch 1-9: Paragraphs of thought and easy to outline.

Ch 10-31: Collection of proverbs

- **Job** – speculative wisdom (wrestling with the great issues of life)
 - Exception to Proverbs: The Suffering of the Righteous.
 - Why do righteous suffer?
 - Will they worship God even when they suffer?
 - Is God still on the throne?

Ch 1-2: Testing of Job

Ch 3-37: False comfort of Job’s friends

Ch 38-42: God’s poetic dialogue – climax of book.

The wise person will not have to know why, but rather trust God who is supreme.

- **Ecclesiastes** – speculative wisdom – Failure of the rational approach alone.
 - Expresses the fruitlessness of trying to find the meaning to life apart from trusting in a wise, good, and just God.

- Read it realizing that the author is exploring worldly wisdom and coming to conclusions about life apart from God.

- “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Ecc 12:13-14 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

➤ **Song of Solomon** – lyrical wisdom

- Poetry – take it for what it says it is. A series of love poems between a husband and wife.
 - We shouldn’t allegorize it.
- It gives romantic wisdom in marriage.
- The wisdom of saving sex for marriage and enjoying within the context of marriage alone.

Practical Process For Reading Wisdom Literature



A. Observation – What do I see?

- Look for figures of speech.
- Look for parallelisms.
- Look for pictures you do not understand or that may seem cultural.

Prov 12:27 Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

B. Interpretation – What does it mean?

- Interpret wisdom literature in light of its specific book context.
 - Are there other proverbs about this topic?
- Interpret wisdom literature in light of its overall **biblical** context.
 - Compare with other scripture.
- For each segment of wisdom literature, write down in one or two sentences the answer to the overall question: What does this segment mean?
- Look closely for the historical-cultural **context**. (refer to the things you wrote down in observations)

Prov 15:24 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

C. Application – How does it relate and what do I do?

- Look for the biblical truth.
 - Identify a theological principle in its Old Testament context.
 - Filter that theological principle through the New Testament.
 - Ask two primary questions:
 - Does the New Testament add to that principle?

Does the New Testament modify that principle?

- Look for the eternal and cross-cultural principles
 - What does this passage tell us about wise, skillful living in this area?
 - What general pattern/truth does God reveal for His people?
 - What specific behaviors does this passage challenge us to embrace?

- What timeless truth(s) are present? Write it out using present tense verbs.
 - Meditate on it.
 - Relate it to today.

- How can you apply these truths today?
 - Who shall I be?
 - How should I think?
 - What should I do?
 - Who will I teach?

Putting It Into Practice – Wisdom Literature



Have someone start with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to reveal truth from His Word.

Read the following Proverbs: Prov 18:2, 13, 21; 14:23; 11:9; 16:27-28; 21:23; 10:19; 12:19

A. Observation – What do I see?

- What do you see in the text?

- What are some figures of speech used?

- What kind of parallelisms are in each of these Proverbs?

B. Interpretation – What does it mean?

- List some things these Proverbs mean. How is the author using imagery to make a point?

- How would these Proverbs help fathers pass on “wise living” truths to their children and how would they have helped the children live godly lives?

C. Application – How does it relate and what do I do?

- What are some of the biblical truths from these Proverbs? Can you think of any other passages that correspond to these truths?

- What does this passage tell us about wise, skillful living in this area?

- What general patterns/truths does God reveal for His people?

- How can you apply these truths today?
 - Who shall I be?
 - How should I think?
 - What should I do?
 - Who will I teach?

Pray for God to help us apply His Word.