

Questions regarding Proverbs that are helpful to us are these: What is the relationship between some of the Proverbs and texts from other ancient cultures which say the same thing? Did one copy from the other or are both from a common source? Do the proverbs embody absolute promises, or are they general principles, or are there both types of statements in the book (for example, is Prov. 22:6 a promise or does it mean that this is the way life tends to work out)? If Solomon collected and preserved proverbs from other cultures, as it seems he did, what implications does this have for biblical inspiration and authority?

Regarding archaeology the age of Proverbs has long been a subject of much discussion. For many years it was thought that chapters 1-9 must have been written during the fourth or third centuries BC because of the supposed Greek influence which, it was alleged, gave the Semitic Hebrews the ability to personify an abstract quality--in this case, Wisdom. Texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia dated to the late third millennium BC and from the Hittite, Hurrian, and Canaanite cultures dated to the second and first millenniums BC personify such abstract concepts as Truth, Justice, and Intelligence.

Also found in Egypt and Mesopotamia are wisdom texts which exhibit a common pattern with Proverbs: a formal title (1:1), followed by a prologue containing numerous exhortations to heed the instructions (1:2-9:18), an occasional subtitle (10:1), and the main body of the teaching (10:2 --22:16). This pattern is additional evidence that Proverbs 1-9 are not a late addition to the book but that they form an integral part of the original work.

Use of a good commentary will also point out many places where the discoveries at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) have helped scholars in their understanding of formerly obscure Hebrew words and points of grammar and syntax.

Keys in the study of Proverbs are directed from the most important points of the book. These include the prologue as Proverbs 1:2-6 list the purposes for which the book was compiled. Chapter 1:7, paralleled by 9:10, is the key principle of the entire book. Chapter eight's portrait of Wisdom is a vivid illustration of the book's abstract center.

Study Tips in Proverbs: Read through the entire book once or twice to grasp the main principles with which the individual proverbs are concerned. Then, to examine the specific concerns of the book, read a chapter each day of the month. Do this every month for a year or so, noting and writing down verses dealing with a particular topic or theme. Or, as you read the daily chapter, memorize one proverb which you pick out as immediately apropos.

Look up in the New Testament quotes from Proverbs. How are the proverbs used by Jesus and his disciples? Look up "Wisdom" and "Wisdom Literature" in a Bible dictionary or encyclopaedia to better understand this aspect of revelation. Find some other proverbs in Scripture (for example, 1 Kings 20:11). Try writing proverbs of your own with 1:2-6 in mind.

For further study and reading you will find a wealth of reading material. Derek Kidner, PROVERBS (IVP) is the best, brief commentary available today. It is appropriate for personal study, leading a Bible study group, or even for a pastor preaching from Proverbs (also in paperback). WISDOM FROM ABOVE FOR LIVING HERE BELOW, Leroy Eims (Scripture Press) covers Proverbs 1-9. A study guide is also available. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, Charles Bridges (Banner of Truth) is an excellent Puritan commentary which has recently been updated by George F. Santa as A MODERN STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS (Mott Media). PROVERBS, Charles Turner, is a handy compact commentary (GBPH).