

PROVERBS
ANCIENT
WISDOM

F O R T O D A Y ' S W O R L D

DANIEL L. SEGRAVES

Ancient Wisdom for Today's World

A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

by Daniel L. Segraves

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Chapter One

Solomon the author (verse 1). The Book of Proverbs opens with the clear statement that Solomon, the son of David, is the author. There is no question that the first twenty-nine chapters are proverbs of Solomon. (See Proverbs 25:1.) Some suppose, however, that chapters 30 and 31 were authored by others, because of the statements at the beginning of those two chapters.

Proverbs 30:1 reads, “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal.” The names in this verse are transliterations rather than translations. (To transliterate is to change the letters of one language into corresponding or equivalent characters of another alphabet or language. For example, the word *baptize* is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo*.) In this case, a literal translation of Proverbs 30:1 would read, “The words of the collector of wise sayings, the son of the obedient one: even the prophecy: the man spake unto With Me Is God, even unto With Me Is God and I Shall Be Completed.” Thus it is possible that this verse refers to Solomon rather than an actual person by the name of Agur. Jewish rabbis identify Agur as another word for Solomon and the obedient one as David.

Proverbs 31:1 reads, "The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him." The name "Lemuel" means "devoted to God." It is possible that this also is a term for Solomon, whose mother, Bathsheba, taught him. II Samuel 12:25 is an example of such a name being given to Solomon. There, "Jedidiah" means "beloved of the LORD."

Regardless of whether the last two chapters of Proverbs were authored by Solomon, we know they are inspired Scripture. The entire book was included in the Hebrew canon (the collection of books accepted as inspired) before the time of Christ, and He gave His stamp of divine approval to the entirety of the Old Testament, including Proverbs (Luke 24:44). In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Proverbs was included in the section known as Psalms, which we call the poetry and wisdom literature.

Wisdom the chief subject (verse 2). The second verse of the Book of Proverbs introduces the major subject of the book: wisdom. From its origin to its practical application in the daily situations of life, wisdom glows deeper than the reddest ruby on every page of the book. *Webster's Dictionary* defines wisdom as "the right use or exercise of knowledge." Bill Gothard has suggested that wisdom is "seeing and responding to life from God's point of view." The English word *wisdom* is the translation of several Hebrew words in the Book of Proverbs; the most common is *hokmah*. This word speaks of the skill with which craftsmen, sailors, singers, mourners, administrators, and counselors perform their duties. Thus, being wise means "being skilled in godly living. Having God's wisdom means having the ability to cope with life in a God-honoring way."¹

The word *wisdom* appears over fifty times in the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs 4:7 declares, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” Wisdom is the *principal* thing. It is more valuable than gold, silver, or rubies.

While wisdom is the first quality mentioned in verse 2, instruction follows closely. The Book of Proverbs is designed so that one who studies it will receive both wisdom and instruction. The word “instruction” is translated from the Hebrew *muwcar* and implies chastisement, reproof, warning, instruction, and restraint. The Book of Proverbs was one of the chief elements in the educational curriculum of ancient Israel. Parents used it to teach their children. When the first elementary schools for boys began about two centuries before the time of Christ, it was one of the main resources used by the teachers. It is a book of instruction, and a large part of the instruction is accomplished by reproof, rebuke, correction, and discipline. Later, the book declares, “Reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Proverbs 6:23). (See also Proverbs 9:8; 12:1; 15:10; Psalm 119:71.)

A genuine education is a painful process; there is no such thing as “easy” learning. At some point in the process, the student must apply himself diligently to the subject at hand and do so at the expense of other, more pleasant, pursuits. A teacher in the classroom knows that even a test is to be a learning tool. In the same way, we receive instruction through the reproofs of life. It is a wise man who learns from painful experiences.

The proverbs are designed not only to give wisdom and instruction but to enable the student to “perceive the words of understanding.” The Holy Spirit has elected to