

Proverbs

The Authorship and Dating

There are three passages within the text that claim Solomon as their author (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). 1 Kings acknowledged Solomon as the author of 3000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:29-32).¹ The last two chapters of Proverbs are not attributed to Solomon but to Agur (30:1) and King Lemuel (31:1) of whom we do not have any information.² A middle section (22:17-24:34) closely parallels that of the *Instruction of Amenemope* which has been dated to 1200 B.C..³ However, the lack of a clear statement of its origins and arrangement (such as 25:1, 30:1, 31:1) gives indication that the proclamation of Solomon's involvement is sustained through this section. Although Solomon likely knew of the material and although he likely quoted the material, none-the-less the entirety of Proverbs stands as Inspired and authoritative material through the pen of Solomon.

Consideration of Proverb's dating must take into account 25:1: *These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.* Here it is to be understood that the men of Hezekiah transcribed from one book to another the chapters that follow the statement. The word "copied out" (הֶעֱתִיקוּ) means, just what has been stated, to "transcribe" from one page to another.⁴ The fact that Hezekiah's men "copied" or "transcribed" does not follow that they created a new proverb. Then exactly what did they do? What change took place at this point in the book? Several things should be kept in mind when considering this issue. First, by their statement in 25:1 the men of Hezekiah mark off the following section. It is assumed that whatever they start in 25:1 continues until Agur is quoted in chapter 30 and Lemuel is quoted in 31. Second, their statement in 25:1 indicates that they did not do the same thing in the previous section. Third, it should not be concluded that they changed the material given. The word itself "copied out" or "transcribed" limits any changes to the words and demands a simple movement from one page to another. These three thoughts leave us, for the most part, a couple possibilities. First, they may have used the word "transcribe" to mean they copied an entire body of material and placed it on the parchment completely as a whole. However, this conclusion would require that the entire previous section had already existed on the scroll in order that a declared difference may be maintained with the selected section. While this is possible it seems improbable. Second, they copied the previous material on a new parchment as a whole and then copied and *arranged whole individual* Proverbs in the next section. Given the previous material, the pithy nature of a proverb and the fact that Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs, many more than recognized by Proverbs, this seems the most plausible. I therefore date the material in the following manner: 1) the individual proverbs in chapters 1-24 and the arrangement of those proverbs are entirely attributed to the hand of Solomon (971-931 B.C.) 2) the entirety of the individual proverbs in chapters 25-29 are attributed to Solomon's era while

¹ Although Solomon's amount was honored, it was not unusual for Kings to write proverbs.

² Paul N. Benware, *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 2003) 118.

³ Bill T. & Bryan T. Beyer Arnold, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 319.

⁴ BDB indicates that the Hiphil form of in 25:1 means to very "transcribe (remove from one book or roll to another;" Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles, and Charles Augustus Briggs, "Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon," (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

the arrangement is dated with the men of Hezekiah (circa 700 B.C.). 3) Chapters 30-31 are unknown origin and time and probably written during or after men of Hezekiah.

The Recipients

The phrase “my son,” along with the warning passages of the adulterous women as well as the admonition for a godly wife in the concluding chapter indicate that Proverbs was addressed primarily to younger men.

The Purpose

Proverbs was written under the genre called wisdom literature. It was customary for Kings during this period to give instruction concerning life. Under Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon wrote within this style in order to communicate to the young men general lessons concerning life (1:1-7). These lessons demonstrate the value of making godly, faith-based⁵ decisions concerning everyday living.

The Message

The bulk of Proverbs focuses on “life” and “death.” To live “life” throughout the book of proverbs is to live within wisdom under God’s direction. This is contrasted with man’s common understanding of wisdom. The common understanding of wisdom is an individual’s successful decision toward self preservation and advantage. However, Proverbs presents a different kind of Wisdom.

Proverbial wisdom is rooted in God (2:6), begins with a fear of God (9:10), is to be searched for (4:5-7), is counter to one’s own understanding of life preservation and blessing (3:5-6), provides a blessed life (9:1), is associated with discernment (10:13), given to the upright (2:7), is not associated with ungodliness (12:8), is not associated with the prideful (10:23), is not available to the unbeliever (14:6), is more valuable than gold (16:16), is to be obtained and kept (23:23) and is not associated with those who deny God (24:7). Proverbial Wisdom is rooted in a continual trust in the Lord whereby the believer actively engages to understand the Lord’s established ways of righteousness. Such wisdom doesn’t depend upon man’s understanding but patiently seeks God’s direction and thus expecting blessing through Him.

Death, however, is to follow lustful cravings (2:18; 5:5; 7:27), is to disrespect the Lord’s ways (8:36), is associated with the pursuit of money (12:28), is associated with what man thinks is right (14:27; 16:25), is associated with wrongful use of tongue (18:21), is the result of dishonest gain (21:6), hates/rebels against God (8:36), is associated with the grave (5:5). Proverbial death is to live according to one’s own passions and/or personal discretion while pursuing personal security/wealth without a desire or respect of God’s direction.

Theme

Wisdom

⁵ “Proverbs gives wisdom on all areas of human experience. Wisdom is not simply a matter of the intellect—it is viewing life and self from God’s perspective, which is the only true and valid perspective.” Benware, 174.

Outline of Proverbs⁶

- I. Collection 1: Discourses on Wisdom chs. 1-9
 - A. Introduction to the book 1:1-7
 - B. Instruction for Young People 1:8-8:36
 - C. Wisdom and Folly Contrasted 9.
- II. Collection 2: Solomon's couplets expressing Wisdom 10:1-22:16
 - A. The Marks of wise living 10-15
 - B. How to Please God 16:1-22:16
- III. Collection 3: Thirty sayings of the Wise 22:17-24:22
 - A. Introduction to the 30 sayings 22:17-21
 - B. The 30 Sayings 22:22-24:22
- IV. Collection 4: Six more sayings of the wise 24:23-34
- V. Collection 5: Solomon's Maxims expressing Wisdom 25-29
 - A. Introduction of the later Solomonic Collection 25:1
 - B. Instructive Analogies 25:2-27:22
 - C. A Discourse on Prudence 27:23-27
 - D. Instructive Contrasts 28-29.
- VI. Collection 6: The Wisdom of Agur 30:1-33
- VII. Collection 7: The Wisdom of Lemuel 31:1-31

⁶ This represents the larger divisions of Dr. Thom Constable's outline. Thomas Constable, "Dr. Constable's Notes on Proverbs", Sonic Light <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/proverbs.pdf> (2011)

Questions Concerning Proverbs

1. Who wrote Proverbs?
2. What is the purpose of Proverbs?
3. Name five attributes of "Life."
4. Name five attributes of "Death."
5. How is wisdom portrayed in chapter 8.
6. Describe the textual issues brought on by 25:1.
7. Name several qualities of a virtuous woman.
8. Name several qualities of an adulterous woman.
9. Define wisdom in proverbs.
10. To whom was Proverbs written?

Bibliography

Arnold, Bill T. & Bryan T. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Benware, Paul N. *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 2003.

Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles, and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000.

Constable, Thomas, "Dr. Constable's Notes on Proverbs", Sonic Light
<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/proverbs.pdf> (2011).