

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

LECTURE NO 17

The Book of Proverbs

Also Called *the Book of Wisdom and Instruction*

The Book of Proverbs is known as the Book of Wisdom and the Book of Instruction. It is a collection of moral and spiritual sayings and proverbs, arranged by a mind filled with divine wisdom under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This book contains proverbs and sayings which express certain truths in few words, so that they may capture the attention of the reader and be remembered for a long time. A proverb is a short sentence that conveys a particular truth; a saying or parable is a statement that contains guiding principles.

The Meaning of the Hebrew Title

The Hebrew title of the Book of Proverbs signified “**Commandment**” or “**Instruction**.” The meaning of this Hebrew word is broad, for it may signify a rule of conduct or a revelation of divine truth. Thus, the Book of Proverbs may rightly be called *Heavenly Commands for Earthly Living*. In this sacred book is found not merely human wisdom, but divine wisdom — wisdom that ruled over our daily life and teaches us practical godliness.

The Heritage of Hebrew Wisdom

The Book of Proverbs presented the literary heritage of the wise fathers of Israel. These wise men were sometimes called *Rabbis*. Along with the priests, the prophets, and the kings, the Rabbis formed an important group of leaders within the Hebrew society. In ancient Israel, such wise counsellors were often connected with royal courts and religious teaching. It was also their duty to gather and arrange the writings of wisdom.

Authorship

The Book of Proverbs is often titled *The Proverbs of Solomon*, for many of them were written by that wise king (**Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1**). In **1 Kings 4:32**, we read that Solomon spake three thousand proverbs. The Holy Spirit chose several hundreds of these that they might become part of the Holy Scriptures.

Concerning chapter 30, it is written that these are the words of *Agur the son of Jakeh* (**Proverbs 30:1**). Chapter 31 is introduced thus: “*The words of King Lemuel*” (**Proverbs 31:1**). Of these two persons, we know nothing further. Some have supposed that these were other names for Solomon himself.

Date of Writing

From **Proverbs 25:1**, we learn that “*the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out these proverbs.*” Hence, it is evident that the collection was completed by **about 700 B.C.** It is

therefore not unreasonable to conclude that the proverbs of Solomon were written **around 900 B.C.**

Purpose and Message

The purpose of this book was to gather together the ancient Hebrew writings of wisdom and to provide divine instruction for living a godly life. The literature of wisdom in Proverbs is arranged in such a manner that it buildeth up character and encouraged obedience to the Law of Moses.

The chief message of the book is this: **How a man may live in the fear of the LORD.** It also gives weighty counsel concerning the pursuit of knowledge and instruction. The recurring theme of Proverbs is the beginning of wisdom — *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* (Proverbs 1:7).

Outline of the Book of Proverbs

1. The Proverbs of Solomon Concerning Wisdom and Folly (Proverbs 1:8–9:18)
2. The Proverbs of Solomon Concerning Practical Morality (Proverbs 10:1–22:16)
3. The Proverbs of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17–24:34)
4. The Proverbs of Solomon Collected by the Men of Hezekiah, King of Judah (Proverbs 25:1–29:27)
5. The Words of Agur, the Son of Jakeh (Proverbs, Chapter 30)
6. The Words Which King Lemuel’s Mother Taught Him (Proverbs 31:1–9)
7. The Description of a Virtuous Woman (Proverbs 31:10–31)

Principal Themes of Proverbs

- (a) The Fear of the LORD
- (b) The Law of Retribution and Revenge
- (c) Human Speech and the Power of the Tongue
- (d) The Discipline of Sexual Desires

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Also Called the Book of Human Wisdom

The Book of Ecclesiastes is also known as the Book of Human Wisdom. In many respects it is a difficult book, for at first glance it appeared to be written from a worldly rather than a spiritual point of view. In tone it seemed sorrowful, for it declared how life becomes vain and purposeless when the wisdom of God is rejected.

This book clearly showed the distinction between divine wisdom and human wisdom, and it revealed the emptiness of life without God. Because of its content, it is called the Book of Human Wisdom, as it described earthly life from the standpoint of man — that “**all is vanity.**”

It is the utterance of a Preacher who testified that the pursuit of happiness in worldly things is in vain. It served as a pattern for the believer, showing that when a man, though endowed with wisdom, seeketh joy in earthly pleasures, he findeth nothing but disappointment and vexation of spirit.

The Preacher sought satisfaction in all things under the sun and found none. In the end, he declared that only faith in God gives meaning and purpose to life.

Authorship

There are diverse opinions concerning the authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes, yet traditionally Solomon hath been regarded as its writer. There are indirect evidences that support this view.

In [Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12](#), the writer described himself as *the son of David, king in Jerusalem*. Though the word *son* could signify a later descendant, the details correspond closely with the known circumstances of Solomon’s life, giving strong weight to this conclusion.

Date of Writing

If Solomon indeed be the author, and if we believe that he wrote this book after learning the vanity of his self-indulgent and pleasure-seeking life, then the date of composition would be around 930 B.C.

Purpose and Message

The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to reveal that **under the sun there is nothing that can give lasting meaning to life**. Even if one find temporary satisfaction, yet it shall soon vanish, for death awaited all. None can escape the troubles and disappointments of this world.

The book delivered a profound message: **Life without God is meaningless, and true joy and peace are found only in Him.**

Outline of the Book of Ecclesiastes

1. Prologue – All Things under the Sun Are Vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:1–11)

2. The Vanity of All Earthly Pursuits (Ecclesiastes 1:12–6:12)

3. Instructions for Life under the Sun (Ecclesiastes 7:1–12:8)

4. Epilogue – The Best Thing under the Sun (Ecclesiastes 12:9–14)

The Song of Solomon Also Called the Song of Songs

Meaning and Title

The title “*Song of Songs*” is a Hebrew expression meaning “*the most excellent or the most noble of songs*.” In the ancient Jewish *Midrash* (a collection of early rabbinic writings on the Old Testament), it is called “*the song most worthy of praise, most excellent, and most precious*.”

One ancient writer declared that the *Song of Songs* is among the most mysterious books of the Old Testament. Scholars are not of one mind concerning its nature. Some regard it as a collection of disconnected love lyrics, others as a short dramatic poem, and yet others as a unified love dialogue in dramatic form.

Since it contained recurring refrains and described a queen, a beloved, and a rich scenic setting, the last view — that of a dramatic love poem — seemed most fitting. Yet, through the ages, interpreters have differed widely in their understanding of it. Some have dismissed it as merely sensual, while others, reverently and devoutly, have seen in it a sacred mystery to be read with awe and delight. The *Song of Songs* is thus an ancient and beautiful example of Hebrew love poetry — profound, tender, and symbolic. Its title, “*Song of Songs*,” followed the same pattern as “*Holy of Holies*” or “*King of Kings*,” meaning “*the greatest of its kind*.” Of the one thousand and five songs attributed to Solomon (1 Kings 4:32), this is esteemed the greatest.

Nature and Interpretation

This divine poem portrayed human reality as man and woman in covenantal love and provided sacred guidance concerning marital affection and purity. According to Jewish tradition, the *Song of Solomon* was read during the Feast of Passover, for the Jews beheld in it a symbol of God’s love for Israel.

The book contained **five songs**, describing the progressive deepening of affection between a bridegroom and his bride. It also showed that the bride must overcome many trials before entering into full union with her beloved.

Authorship

According to ancient tradition, **Solomon** is regarded as the author. Some Jewish writers, however, have ascribed it to **King Hezekiah**. Yet, Jewish tradition holdeth that Solomon

wrote this song in the days of his youth, the Book of Proverbs in the strength of his maturity, and the Book of Ecclesiastes in the weariness of his old age — a most fitting sequence.

Because the author exalted marital faithfulness and purity, it is said that Solomon dedicated this poem in honour of his first and lawful wife.

Solomon's name is mentioned **seven times** within the song, and the very first verse ascribed the poem to him: "*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*" This may also be rendered, "*The Song concerning Solomon.*"

Solomon's known interest in the natural world (**1 Kings 4:33**), along with his references to royal chariots, horses, and palanquins, further support his authorship. The geographical references also suggest a united kingdom, consistent with the age of Solomon's reign.

Date of Writing

Among Solomon's one thousand and five songs, this was the most exalted, poetic, and beautiful. It was likely composed during his forty-year reign (**971–931 B.C.**), perhaps in his early years before he was drawn into the snares of many foreign wives.

Purpose and Message

The purpose of this sacred book is to reveal the **goodness and holiness of marital love** as ordained by God — showing His divine design within the covenant of husband and wife. In a sense, the *Song of Solomon* is an inspired continuation of the principle declared in *Genesis 2*, that man and woman were created for sacred union.

Its message exalted the sanctity of pure affection within marriage. The union of man and woman before God is shown to be vital for the blessing and continuation of the human race (*Genesis 1:28*). The book revealed that physical intimacy, rightly expressed in the covenant of love, bringeth strength, peace, joy, and fulfilment to the relationship.

Principal Themes

- (a) The Law of Retribution and Revenge
- (b) Experience versus Revelation
- (c) Godly Life versus Worldly Life

Outline of the Song of Solomon

1. The Beginning of Love – First Affection
(**Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7**)

2. Fainting Love – The Testing of Devotion
(**Song of Solomon 2:8–3:5**)

3. Growing Love – The Union of Bride and Bridegroom
(**Song of Solomon 3:6–5:1**)

4. Transforming Love – Separation and Longing (Song of Solomon 5:2–8:5)

5. Mature Love – Final Union and Fulfilment (Song of Solomon 8:5–14)

THE METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

(a) Literal or Historical Interpretation

According to this method, the *Song of Solomon* is to be understood **literally** as a record of **King Solomon's love for the Shula mite maiden**, describing their courtship and marriage. It portrayed the sanctity and beauty of love between husband and wife as ordained by God.

(b) Symbolic, Spiritual, or Devotional Interpretation

This interpretation holdeth that the book speaketh **not primarily of Solomon and his bride**, but rather **in a spiritual sense of the love between God and Israel**. The tender affection of the Bridegroom toward His beloved is seen as a divine allegory of the LORD's covenantal love for His people.

(c) Traditional Interpretation

The traditional understanding embraced **both** the literal and the spiritual senses. It acknowledged the **historical love of Solomon and the Shula mite**, yet declared that beneath this earthly picture lieth a **heavenly mystery**—the love of **God for Israel**, and, in the age of grace, the love of **Christ for His Church**.

Thus the Song is both a **celebration of pure marital affection** and a **revelation of divine communion**.

THE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON

(a) It Is Good

When God created man and woman, He made them male and female. And God beheld all that He had made, and, behold, **it was very good**.
(Genesis 1:27, 31)

Therefore, the union of man and woman in holy matrimony is **not unclean**, but part of God's perfect design.

(b) It Is to Be Mutual

The Song emphasized the **mutual belonging** of husband and wife:

"I am my beloveds, and my beloved is mine." (Song of Solomon 6:3)

Such affection is not one-sided, but reciprocal, flowing from a covenant of love and trust.

(c) It Is Meant to Be Pleasurable

While procreation is one purpose of marriage, **God also ordained physical union for joy and satisfaction** that man might not fall into unholy relations.

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” (Hebrews 13:4)

Thus, within marriage, intimacy is both pure and blessed.

(d) It Was Intended to Be Beautiful

Before sin entered the world, **Adam and Eve were naked and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).**

In a godly marriage, therefore, **there is no shame in physical union**, for it is a gift of God designed for beauty, affection, and unity.

THEMES

(2) The Positive Aspect of Human Love

The writer revealed that in contrast to **the destructive power of sinful passion**, there is great **virtue in purity** within the life of the young and the faithful.

The Holy Scriptures reject all forms of **fornication or adultery**, permitting only that love which is bound by the covenant of marriage.

The *Song of Solomon* thus presented a **positive vision of human affection**, showing the strength and sweetness of the bond between a man and a woman joined in holiness.

This book upholdeth the **goodness and purity of physical love** within the marriage ordained by God.

The Old Testament encouraged the married to rejoice in the companion of their youth:

“Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.” (Proverbs 5:18)

“Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest.” (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

“The LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth.” (Malachi 2:14)

Thus the Song declared that **true love is both sacred and joyous**—a reflection of God’s own faithfulness and beauty.