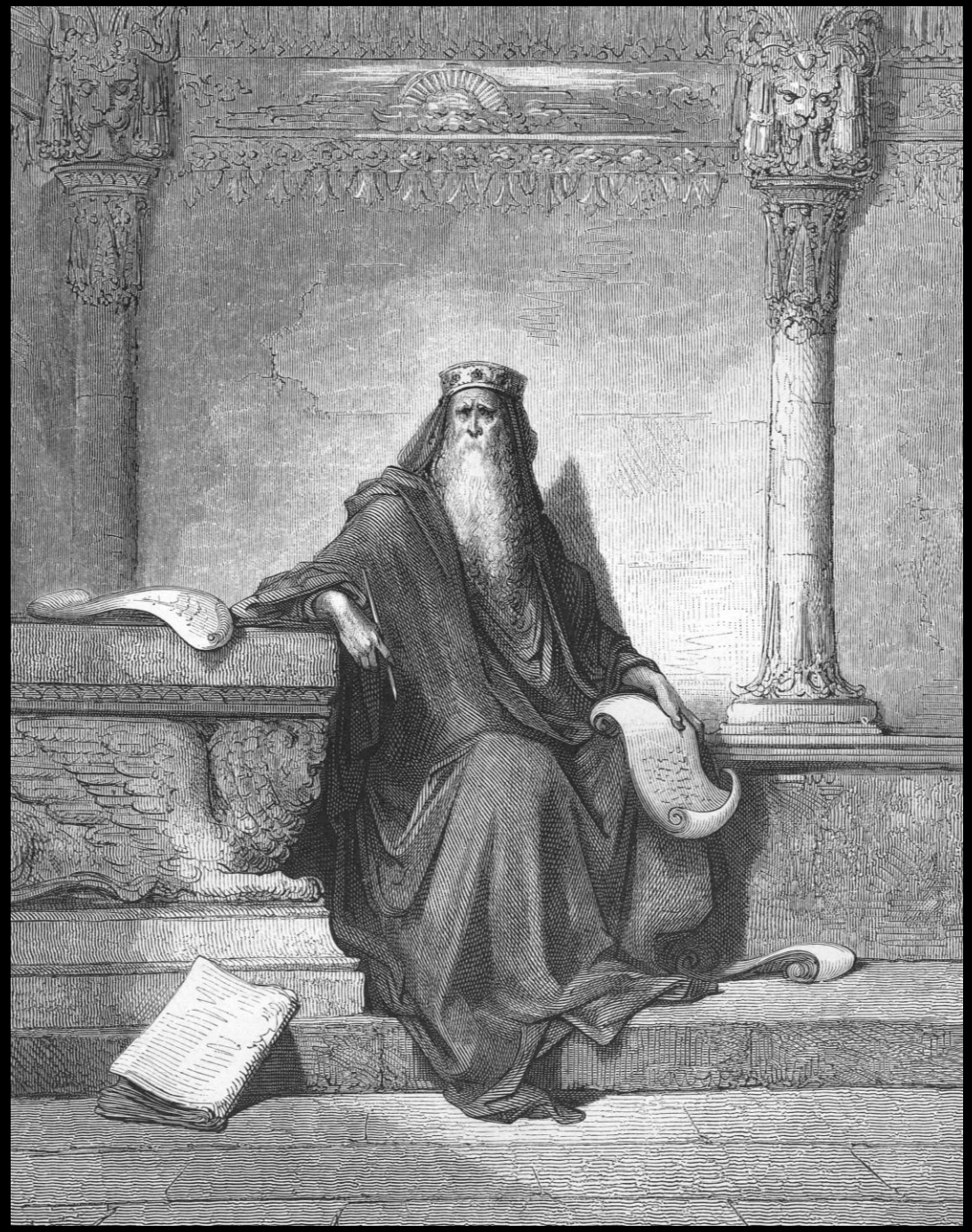


Words to the Wise:
A Topical Study of the Book of Proverbs

Introduction to Proverbs

The "Wisdom" of This World

1. *Radical autonomy*: "I am a sovereign individual; I determine for myself what is true, just, and beautiful."

2. *Hedonism*: "Only that which brings pleasure is good and beneficial; that which brings displeasure is evil and must be eliminated from my life."

3. *Self as sanctuary*: "I am inherently good. Evil exists outside of me; salvation is within."

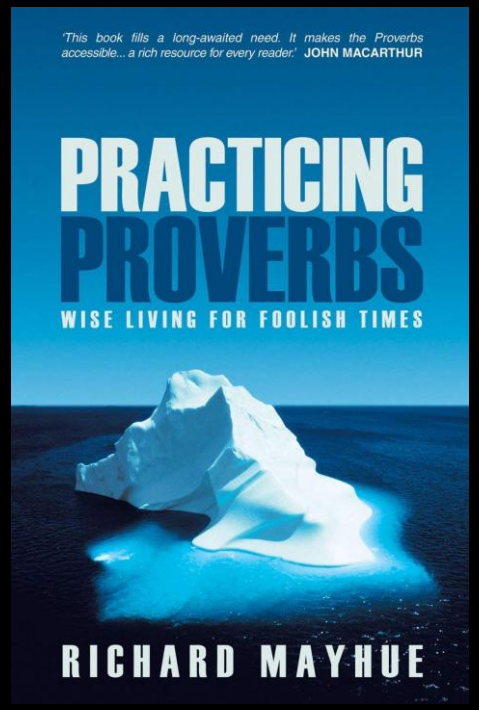
4. *The rejection of cause-and-effect*: "There is no connection between my current circumstances and my prior decisions or actions."

5. *The denial of personal responsibility*: “If I do something harmful, it is because something harmful was first done to me; I had no choice.”

6. *The repudiation of delayed gratification*: “Sacrifice and patience should not be necessary for reward; instant gratification is a right.”

7. *The rejection of natural law and order*: “Meaning is not objective or static; I determine the reality of my world.”

The book of Proverbs confronts the destructive nature of such ideas and beckons its readers to the redemptive alternative—one that is rooted outside of *self*—in God’s revelation.

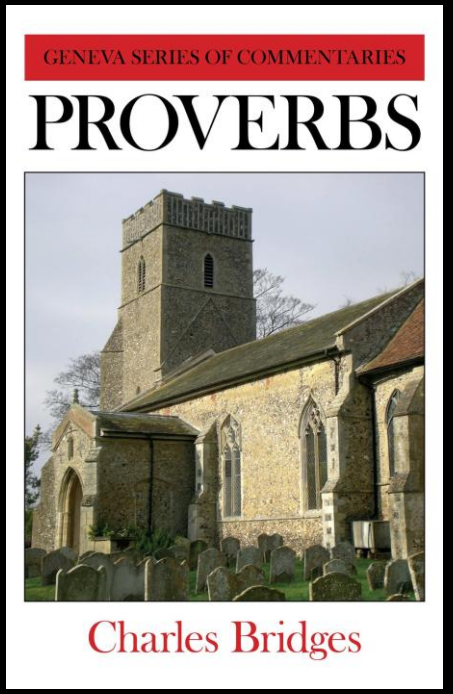


"If I had one message to give to the CEOs, educators, political leaders, media pundits, and social scientists of our day, it would be the teaching of Proverbs, which majors on making one wise unto salvation in Jesus Christ (Prov 30:2–4; 2 Tim 3:14–15) and teaching the wisest way to live for the glory of God."

—Richard Mayhue, *Practicing Proverbs*, 8

"Doubtless, if the world were governed by the whole wisdom of this single book, it would be a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

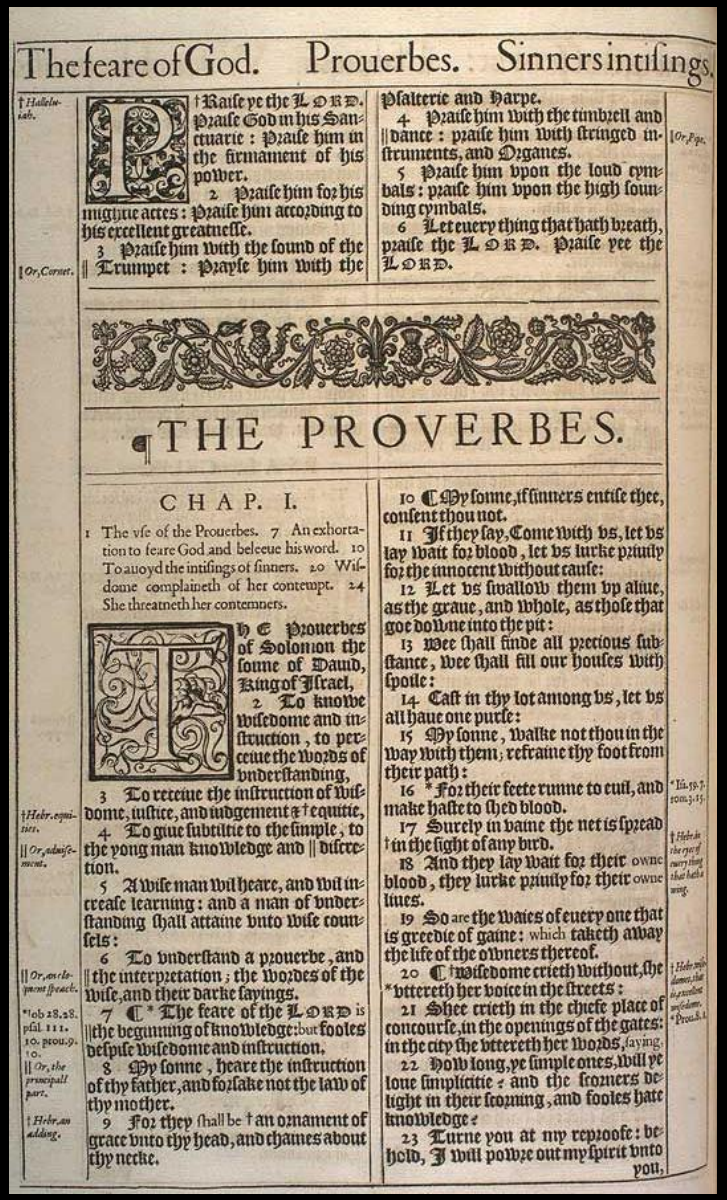
—Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, xiv





“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel—to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

—Proverbs 1:1–7



The feare of God. Prouerbes. Sinners intisings.

† Hallelu-iah.

† Raise ye the LORD. Praise God in his Sanctuarie: praise him in the firmament of his power.
2 Praise him for his mightie actes: praise him according to his excellent greatnesse.
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23 Turne you at my reproofe: behold, I will powre out my spirit vnto you,

† Heb. equities.

|| Or, admonishment.

|| Or, parables.

* Iob 28.28. psal. 111. 10. prou. 9. 10.

|| Or, the principall part.

† Heb. an adding.

* Isa. 59. 7. rom. 3. 15.

† Heb. in the eyes of euery one that hath a wing.

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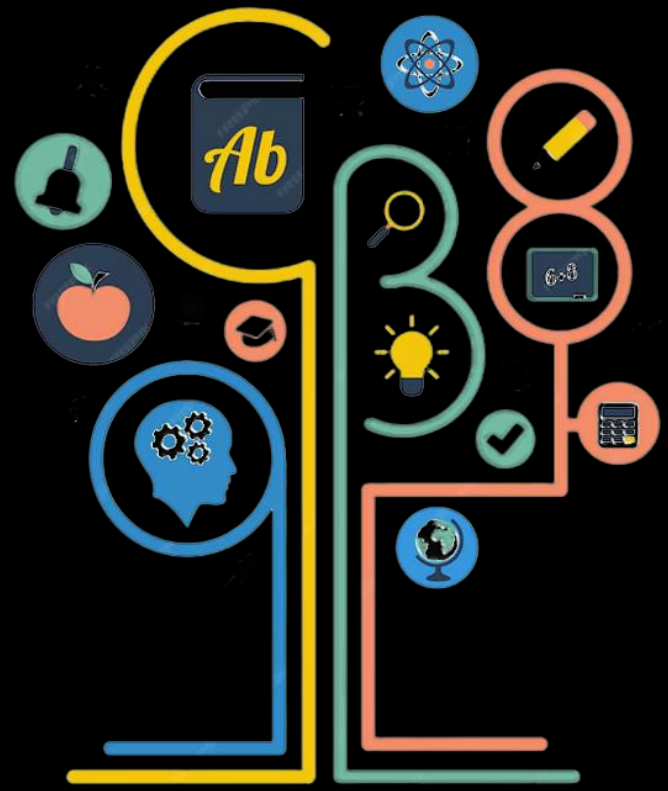
- **PURPOSE:** to provide the young and simple with the knowledge and skill necessary to live successfully before God and man in a fallen world.

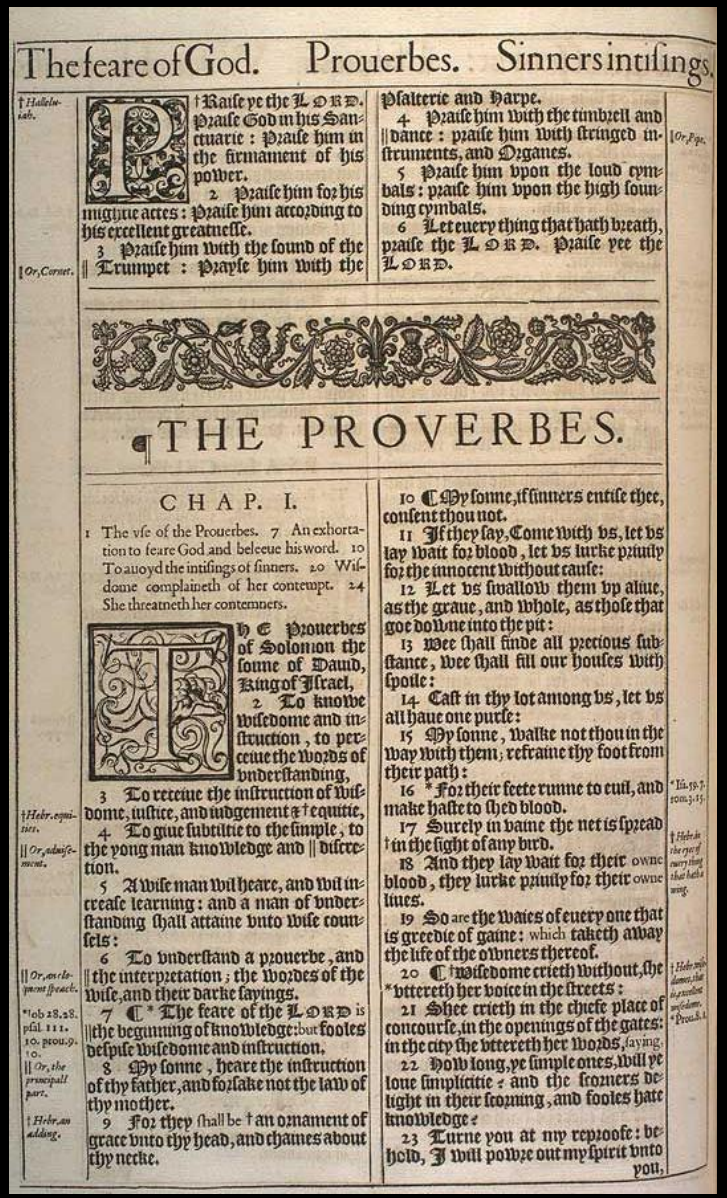
- Its frequent references to “son” (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; etc.) indicate it has special application to family instruction (see Deut 6:6–9).

- The references to “kings” (1:1; 25:1; 31:1) indicate it was intended for the training young leaders.

“The book of Proverbs remains the model of curriculum for humanity to learn how to live under God and before humankind.”

—Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, xxi





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The Focus of Proverbs

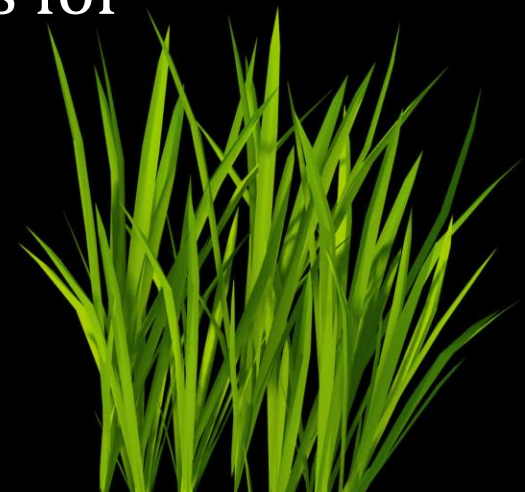
- **KEYWORD:** *Wisdom = skill for living.*
- Wisdom > knowledge, IQ.
- "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom" (Charles Spurgeon).
- Many intellectual geniuses are miserable fools.

1. Creation itself—God's *general* revelation—provides knowledge for skillful living.

"The implication is that God through wisdom placed 'order' in the very fabric of the cosmos. The whole book [of Proverbs] . . . is designed to exhibit the order that holds together all of life. Within this context there is a 'solidarity' between all parts of God's creation, over which He is Ruler, from the universe itself down to a colony of ants. . . . What one observes in the natural cosmos has implications for understanding the social and moral order."

—Greg Parsons, "Guidelines for Proverbs," 157–58





2. Scripture especially—God's *special* revelation—provides knowledge for skillful living.

- It is "the commandment" that serves as "a lamp" and "the law" that serves as "light" (Prov 6:23; cf. Ps 119:105; 2 Pet 1:19).

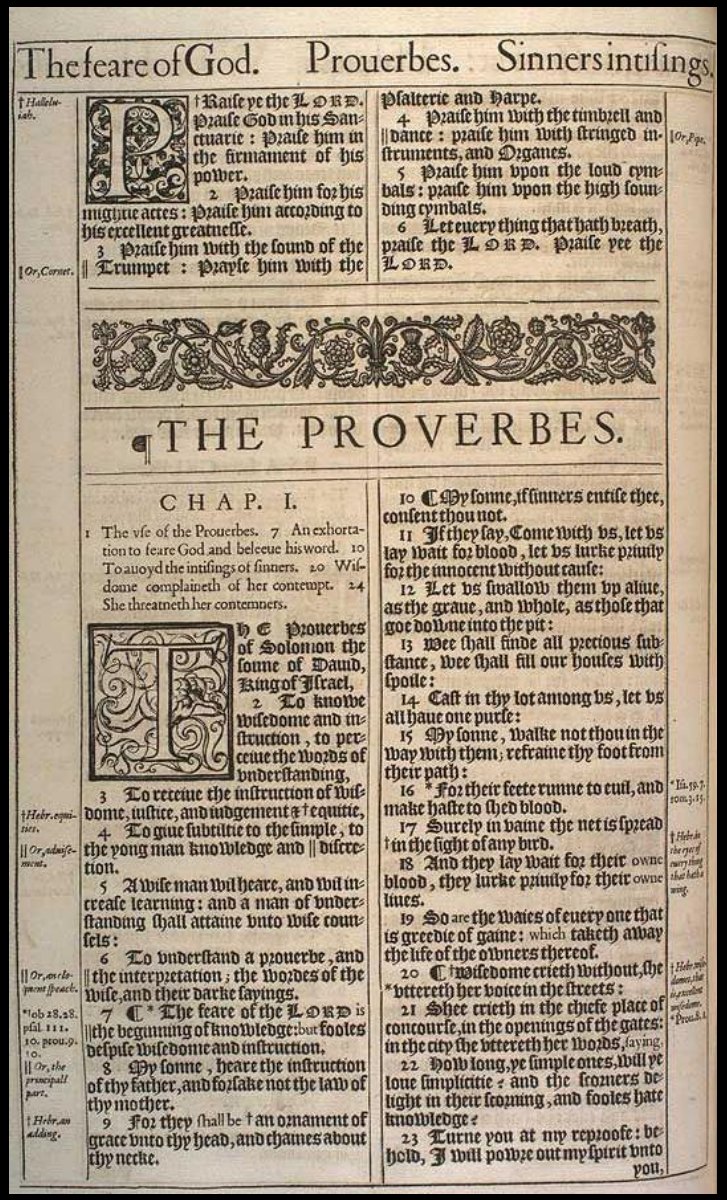


- It is "the fear of the LORD" that serves as the "beginning of" or "instruction for" wisdom (1:7; 9:10; 15:33; cf. Ps 19:9).

- Familiarity with the Pentateuch is particularly important for understanding Proverbs.

“An individual is ‘successful’ as he directs his life in accord with God’s divine design, His plans for the world. Seeing God’s moral order, sensing from divine revelation what God desires and has planned for mankind, one is then challenged by the wisdom literature to conduct his life in line with those principles established by the Creator. To the extent an individual follows these principles or rules of God’s order or pattern for life, to that extent he is able to cope with realities, and to enjoy inner order and harmony. Neglecting God’s order leads to disorder and chaos; heeding God’s design results in satisfaction and peace.”

—Roy Zuck, “Theology of the Wisdom Books,” 213



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The Genre of Proverbs

- **PROVERB:** a short, memorable saying that provides practical advice on how to live life well.
- A “simple, concrete word-picture used to communicate a profound, transcendent truth.”
- A “short sentence drawn from long experience,” “a pithy sentence packed with thought-provoking punch.”
- A “proverb” can range from a short saying (10:1–30:33) to longer sections of poetry-styled instruction (1:8–9:18; 31:1–31).

The *genre* of Proverbs is effective for four reasons:



1) To *attract* attention.

3) To *aid* in recollection.





2) To *awaken* contemplation.

4) To *accelerate* application

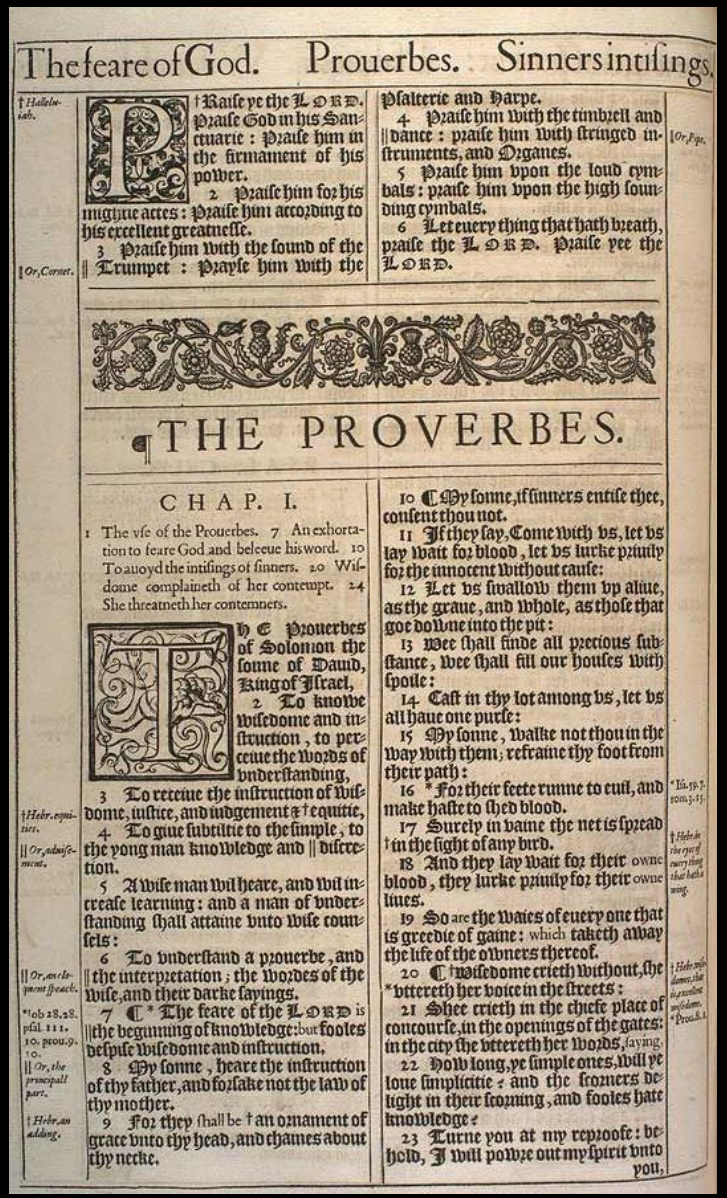


“Proverbs are simple, concrete, and mundane, and at the same time profound, abstract, and transcendent. Their meanings are singular and particular, yet multifaceted and universal. Proverbs are widespread among the common folk, yet they are collected and utilized by the royal court. They are given as instruction for the young and savored by the aged as well. They present themselves as ancient wisdom, yet are amazingly contemporary. They appear to be closed, fixed, cliché-like, and authoritative, yet they are open to transformation, exception, and situational variation.”

—Ted Hildebrandt, “Proverbs,” 233

Fundamental Themes

- ✓ Fearing God
- ✓ Forsaking Folly
- ✓ Pursuing Wisdom
- ✓ Building Relationships
- ✓ Accepting Correction
- ✓ Preserving Purity
- ✓ Keeping Silent
- ✓ Speaking Truth
- ✓ Cultivating Humility
- ✓ Esteeming Work
- ✓ Valuing Wealth
- ✓ Practicing Charity
- ✓ Respecting Authority
- ✓ Raising Children
- ✓ Handling Fools
- ✓ Pursuing Justice
- ✓ Uprooting Anger
- ✓ Trusting God



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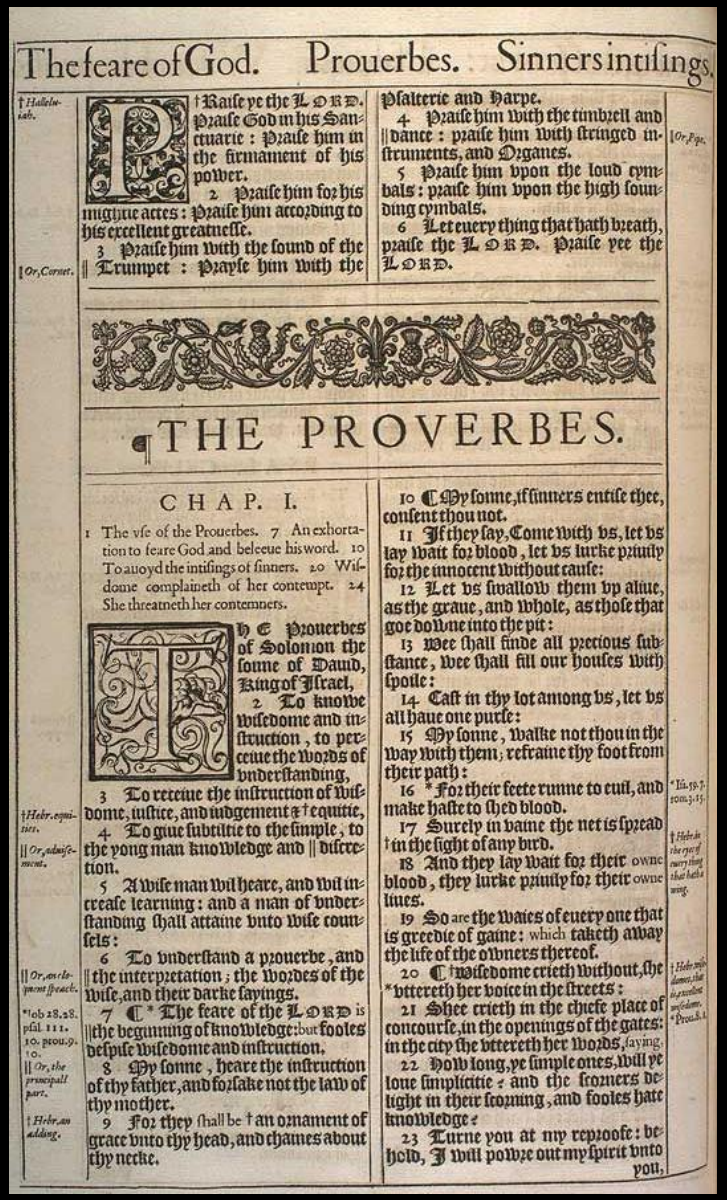
The Interpretation of Proverbs

1) Interpret each proverb dependent on God's assistance (Prov 1:7).

2) Give attention to a proverb's literary context—immediate and broad.

3) Consider the proverb's historical and cultural context.

4) Contemplate each proverb's revelatory context—general and special.



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5) Take into account each proverb's internal structure.

6) Do not treat a proverb as an exhaustive summation of reality.

7) Do not assume that a proverb is an absolute guarantee.

8) Recognize that some proverbs look at life as it is, not as it should be.