

Introducing Proverbs:

Proverbs is about wisdom and how it applies to everyday life*.

The Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokma*) refers to skills, natural abilities, intelligence that equipped people in the Old Testament to understand themselves and their world.

In Proverbs in particular, wisdom is acquired by instruction (see 21:11) or observation of the world around us (6:6-8). Ideas of technical excellence and moral competence are there as well. And wisdom is God's gift.

Proverbs is like other instructional books in the ancient world, especially the Egyptian *seboyet*, which included: (1) a title (Prov 1:1), (2) an introduction (Prov 1:2-7), and (3) the basic contents, exhortations and sayings interwoven together (Prov 1:8-31:31).

The instructional material in proverbs begins by praising wisdom (1:8-9:18), and warning against "the loose woman". The temptations to give in to her seductions are real enough. However she could also be thought of metaphorically as representing folly (the opposite of wisdom).

The last section on the virtuous wife (31:10-31) balances the earlier warning against "the loose woman", and forms an epilog to the book. The virtuous wife is a fine example of the wise person "who fears the LORD" (31:30).

In his book, "The Faith of Israel", William J Dumbrell suggests this outline for the book:

1:1	Title
1:2-7	Introduction; purpose of the book
1:8-9:18	Admonitions and addresses
10:1-22:16	The proverbs of Solomon
22:17-24:34	Sayings of the wise
25-29	Further proverbs of Solomon
30:1-14	Sayings of Agur
30:15-33	A numerical poem
31:1-9	Sayings of Lemuel
31:10-31	In praise of the virtuous woman

*W J Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, Apollos, p.223-224