

Book of Proverbs: Introduction

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Abstract

This introductory lecture by Dr. Knut Heim provides a foundational overview of the biblical Book of Proverbs, highlighting its complex literary composition, historical development, and core educational aims. While traditionally attributed as a whole to King Solomon, the text demonstrates that Proverbs is actually an anthology comprising seven distinct sub-collections assembled across several centuries by diverse named and anonymous compilers. The lecture explores important background topics including international connections with ancient Egyptian wisdom literature like the Instruction of Amenemope, key dating debates, and nuanced interpretations of wealth, morality, and social justice regarding the poor. Ultimately, Proverbs is presented as an inspiring intellectual and spiritual invitation designed to shape ambitious youth into wise, morally grounded, and effective contributors to society.

Outline

I. Introduction and Speaker Background

- A. Speaker Introduction: Dr. Knut Heim (Methodist Minister, Denver Seminary)
- B. Purpose and excitement of the lecture series on Proverbs
- C. Reference to the Society for Old Testament Studies (SOTS) online wiki resource
- D. Primary invitation: An intellectual feast and spiritual journey

II. Structure and Composition of Proverbs

- A. Evaluation of Solomonic authorship across 915 verses and 31 chapters
- B. The Seven Sub-collections:
 1. Collection 1 (Chs. 1–9): Solomonic lectures and speeches
 2. Collection 2 (Chs. 10:1–22:16): First Solomonic proverbs collection
 3. Collection 3 (Chs. 22:17–24:22): Sayings of the Wise (Collection 1)
 4. Collection 4 (Chs. 24:23–34): Sayings of the Wise (Collection 2)
 5. Collection 5 (Chs. 25–29): Solomonic proverbs compiled by Hezekiah's court officials
 6. Collection 6 (Ch. 30): Sayings of Agur, son of Jakeh

7. Collection 7 (Ch. 31): Sayings of King Lemuel (via Queen Mother) and the Capable Woman poem (vv. 10–31)

C. Bruce Waltke's synthesis on the final Persian-period editor (ca. 540–332 BCE)

D. Folk proverbs vs. royal compositions and the attribution to King Solomon

III. Historical Dating and International Context

A. Compilation time span covering up to 600 years (10th to 4th century BCE)

B. Dating specific sub-collections:

1. Chapters 10–22:16 as the oldest core (Solomonic era, 10th century BCE)
2. Chapters 25–29 compiled under King Hezekiah (late 8th century BCE)
3. Chapters 30–31 as post-exilic or late pre-exilic additions

C. Debate over Chapters 1–9:

1. Traditional/Post-exilic dating based on form criticism
2. Pre-exilic/Solomonic argument (Prof. Catherine Dell)

D. International context and wisdom traditions:

1. Non-Israelite authors (Agur, King Lemuel)
2. Direct creative dependence on the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope (Prov. 22:17–24:22)

IV. Key Interpretive Themes and Ethical Aims

A. Ethical orientation: Prudential self-interest vs. other-directed morality

B. Absence of core Israelite covenantal themes (Exodus, Patriarchs, Prophets)

C. Socio-economic ethics and perspective on poverty:

1. Critique of laziness vs. recognition of social injustice by the rich
2. Ethical imperatives for generosity toward the poor

D. Target audience: Ambitious, intellectually curious youth (peti) seeking wisdom and societal contribution