

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 1,

Introduction

6-min. Video Overview

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All right, today we're jumping into one of the most famous books of wisdom out there, Proverbs. And what we're going to uncover is a pretty surprising, honestly, a fascinating story about where it actually came from. So let's kick things off with what seems like a super simple question, right? Who wrote the book of Proverbs? I bet if you ask pretty much anyone, one name immediately pops into their head.

And that name, of course, is King Solomon. I mean, the book's very first verse says it's from Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, a guy famous for being unbelievably wise. So case closed, right? Well, not so fast, because when you actually dig into the book itself, you find a much bigger, more complex story.

It turns out this wasn't the work of just one brilliant person. It's something else entirely. Okay, so here's the key thing to understand.

Proverbs isn't a single book written by one person from page one to the end. Think of it more like a greatest hits album, or better yet, an anthology. It's a carefully curated library of wisdom, a collection of other collections, all brought together over a huge span of time.

In fact, if you look closely, you can see there are actually seven distinct collections all stitched together, and each one has its own vibe, its own style and focus. Yeah, some of them are credited to Solomon, which makes sense. But the others? Well, that's where things get really interesting.

So this whole collection-of-collections idea tells us there was a whole team involved. It wasn't just one author. The book itself actually gives us clues, introducing a whole cast of different writers and editors who all had a hand in this thing over hundreds of years.

So who's on this team? Well, besides Solomon, you've got this unnamed group just called the Wise. Then you have the guys in King Hezekiah's court. And get this, they were compiling Solomon's Proverbs 300 years after he was even around.

Then we've got these two mysterious figures, Agur and King Lemuel. And to top it all off, some final anonymous editor came in and put the whole package together. And yeah, about those two guys, Agur and Lemuel, they're total mysteries.

We don't see their names pop up anywhere else. And a lot of experts think they probably weren't even Israelite. And that right there, that's our first big clue that this book has some pretty surprising international connections.

So with all these different authors, it's pretty obvious this book wasn't a weekend project. No, putting Proverbs together was a massive undertaking, something that took generations to complete. And this timeline, wow, it really puts the sheer scale of this into perspective.

You've got the earliest bits and pieces maybe coming from Solomon's time, way back around 950 BCE. Then jump forward 300 years, and you have Hezekiah's adding to the collection, but the whole thing probably wasn't finished, all tied up with a bow, until the Persian period, maybe around 400 BCE. Just think about that.

That's a 600-year gap, six centuries of people collecting, editing, and curating all this wisdom. So yeah, we really have to stop thinking of Proverbs as just a book. It's more like a library built and added to generation after generation.

But you know what? The most shocking part might not even be who wrote it, but where some of this wisdom came from. Remember how we mentioned those mystery authors who might not have been Israelite? Well, that was just scratching the surface. Get ready for this.

Scholars found a direct, undeniable link between a chunk of Proverbs and a much older text from ancient Egypt. It's a text called the Instruction of Amenemope. And when I say link, I don't mean they're just kind of similar.

I mean, it's almost word for word. The phrasing is nearly identical. This isn't an accident.

It's straight-up literary borrowing. The people compiling Proverbs were basically reading the international bestsellers of their time and saying, hey, that's good stuff. Let's include it.

And just so you know, this isn't some wild new theory. It's pretty much a settled deal among scholars today. They almost all agree that the writers of Proverbs knew about and used these Egyptian texts.

It just goes to show you Proverbs was part of this huge international conversation that was happening about the best way to live a good life. Okay, so let's recap. We've got a book with multiple authors written over centuries with international sources.

So the big question is, who was this for? Who was the target audience for this incredible project? Well, the book itself says it was written for the petty. Now you might see that word translated as simple or naive, but that's totally missing the point. A petty isn't a dumb person.

It's a young person who is wide open, full of curiosity, ambition, and just massive potential. We're talking about the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and builders. So the whole point of Proverbs was to be a handbook for these bright young minds.

It was meant to inspire them, to give them the tools, both moral and practical, to build a successful life and to be a force for good in their society. It's basically a guide for anyone who's ambitious and curious. So when you stop seeing Proverbs as just the words of one wise king and start seeing it for what it is, a 600-year conversation about wisdom that crossed borders and cultures, it changes everything.

It shows us that wisdom isn't something that just gets dictated from on high. It's something we build together, something that's timeless and universal. And that leaves us with a really big question, doesn't it? If this conversation has been going on for thousands of years, what can it teach us today?