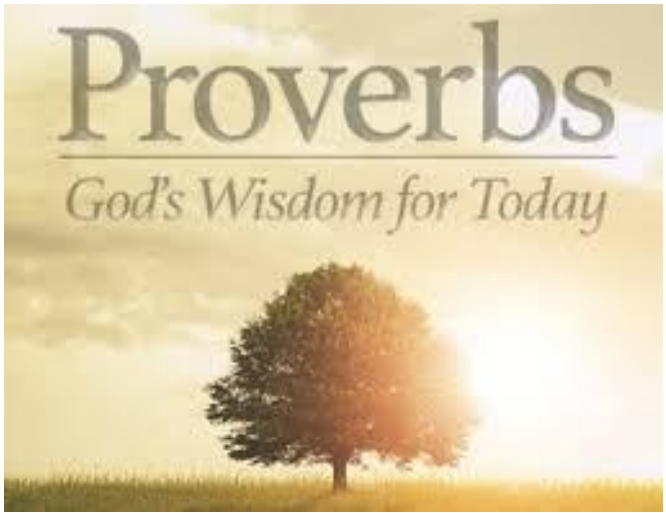
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Proverbs from a Messianic Perspective

To Ruth Johnson, my grandmother. If the word wisdom could be bound up in one person, it would be her. Never harsh, always loving, she would continually give me wise advice, if not by her words, then by her actions. Such a brave, wise woman. I was fortunate to know her.



The Wisdom Literature: The Bible supplies evidence that three classes of teachers existed in ancient Isra'el. They are mentioned in Jeremiah 18:18: Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the Torah by the priest will not cease, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says (18:18). And in Ezeki'el 7:26: They will look in vain for a vision from the prophets. They will receive no teaching from the priests and no counsel from the elders. The priest had the duty of providing the community with instruction (Torah) in the practices of religion, in the narrower meaning of the term (Malachi 2:7) the function of the prophet was to communicate to the people the divine word or vision which he received from YHVH, and in additionthere were the wise or the elders who imparted counsel, guidance in the secular affairs of life.

What especially differentiate the wise or the elders from the other two

was the absence of divine authority. The priest's responsibility was to adhere, and make the people adhere, strictly to the God-revealed code which regulated the national worship; the prophet claimed to speak in the name of God, but the wise taught what they believed to be true and right. They never presumed to insert "and ADONAI says . . ." in their messages. They sought the godly life and taught their disciples what this consisted of.

If, however, the wise lacked the seal of unquestionable authority possessed by the priest and the prophet, the authorization for the validity of their teaching was its harmony with the principles of Torah and prophecy. In no way did they regard themselves as hostile to the other classes of teacher, but rather as supplementing their instruction. They found it possible to establish closer contact with the masses, especially the youth, and were the means of translating into concrete and specific terms the way of life spoken of in the Torah. If they specifically deal with what we should call secular life, it is always within the orbit of religion, recognizing that no sharp dividing line exists in Judaism between the secular and the religious. The identification of the two in their [thinking] is emphasized in the maxim which may be considered the distinctive motto of these teachers: **The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of knowledge.** As there is a literature of priests and of prophets, so is there a literature of these wise men. It has been given the title: Wisdom Literature. Three works of this category are incorporated in the biblical Canon: **Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.**

The book of Proverbs: No selection of the Wisdom Literature so distinctly illustrates its characteristics as **Proverbs**. Its main contents formulate rules of practical ethics, [or a blueprint for living], which was a special concern of the wise. In it are also found discourses on moral philosophy which typify the discussions addressed by these teachers to their students. The personal note is often struck by the affectionate words of **my son**, so that we gain the impression of being in the presence of **[a father]** and listening to **his** words of advice and pleading.

The book presents unmistakable evidence of not being one continuous work, but rather, as we might expect from the character of its material, the compilation of a number of documents. The clearly marked divisions are: **I.** The purpose of **Proverbs** (**to see link click Ai – The Fear of ADONAI is**

the Beginning of Wisdom), **giving the title and the motto of the book; II. followed by the first collection of proverbs** (see **Aj – Proverbs to the Youth**). **III. Then a second collection of proverbs** (see **Bq – The First Collection of Solomon's Proverbs**); **IV. followed by Thirty Sayings of the Wise** (see **Cy – Thirty Sayings of the Wise**). **V. The third collection of proverbs begins with an editorial note: These are more Proverbs of Solomon, which were copied by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah (25:1 BSB)** (see **Df – Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah's Men**). **VI. Proverbs the sayings of Agur** (see **Dt – The Sayings of Agur**) **and VII. the sayings of King Lemuel** (see **Dw – The Sayings of King Lemuel**).

Author and Date: The initial passage (1:1-7) has the appearance of being written by the hand of the compiler as a foreword to the book as a whole. The last two chapters, which bear signs of the later stages of the Hebrew language and differ in style and contents from the rest, are undoubtedly an addendum. The question then begs, what reliance can be placed upon the belief that Solomon wrote the bulk of the chapters? A rabbinic teaching asserts that the Israelite king wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in middle-age, and Ecclesiastes towards the end of his life (Midrash Shir ha-Shirim I:1 and 10). The tradition that Solomon was renowned for his wisdom is attested to in the life of Solomon (see **Av – Happy is the One Who Finds Wisdom**). **We are specifically told that Solomon composed some 3,000 proverbs. We also read of the elders who had served Solomon during his lifetime. Those elders undoubtedly had the benefit of Solomon's own wisdom (First Kings 10:8). There is, consequently, the belief that the book of Proverbs may, at least, have had its beginnings in the reign of Solomon and embodies material composed by the king and his wise men. It seems plausible, therefore, that Proverbs is not work of one author, but a collection of ethical writings originating from the age of Solomon, first edited during Hezekiah's time, and issued in its final form with the combination of additional writings at a later date, perhaps by the Sopherim, the scribes who succeeded Ezra** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**).

Characteristics: To polish commonplaces and give them a new luster; to express in a few words the obvious principle of conduct, and to give clear thoughts an even clearer expression; to illuminate dimmer impressions and bring their faint rays into focus; to delve beneath the surface of

consciousness to new veins of precious ore, to name, discover, and bring to light latent and unnamed experience; and finally to embody the central truths of life in the breadth and terseness of memorable phrases – all these are the opportunities of the author. And to take advantage he must be a thinker, an accurate observer, a profound moralist, a psychologist, and an artist as well.

The sages who impart their doctrines in this book do not stand on a lofty height and preach impracticable ideals. On the contrary, their attempt is to step down to a level which is easily accessible by the majority of people [you might say, putting the cookies on the bottom shelf, so they are easy to get to]**. Nor do they deal in vague abstractions, but apply the test of common sense and verifiable experience. They believe in the fundamental idea that the morally defective and willfully perverted stand in their own light, deny themselves the real joys of living, bring avoidable troubles upon their own head and, though they may at times have a temporary triumph, ultimately fall. On the other hand, to conduct oneself in the light of wisdom means to get the best out of life, discover the sources of strength which will assure final victory over the calamity and evil of this world and become a blessing to oneself and society. Such, reduced to its simplest terms, is the message of these wise men of Isra'el.**

Lastly, two outstanding features of their teaching must be noted. First, naturally, being Hebrews, they use the Hebrew language. Wisdom, or morality is defined as the fear of ADONAI (1:7); the highest excellence of character in the ideal woman is similarly described as a woman who fears ADONAI (31:30) and the same would apply to the ideal man; a favorite term for an unethical act or a vicious person is an abomination to ADONAI (3:32, 6:16, 11:1, etc). Sin is rebellion against God's will and mankind is accountable to Him for their deeds. Thus, God's curse is in the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous (3:33).

Nevertheless, no passage is addressed exclusively to the Hebrew. The tone of the book is strikingly universal throughout. The word Isra'el only occurs once, in 1:1 introducing the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Isra'el. But the Hebrew word *adam,* meaning man, occurs thirty-three times. Its teaching is applicable to all men and women everywhere and is true of life generally and not of any particular people or country. The book of Proverbs is the Hebrew handbook offered to all travelers

along the road of life.

Secondly, the fullness of outlook is indeed remarkable. No phase of human relationship seems to be overlooked. The king on his throne, the tradesman in his store and the farmer in the field, husband, wife, and child all receive wholesome instruction and encouragement. Advice is tendered on the treatment of friends, the poor, the rearing of children, the snares which lurk in the path of youth, the perils of overconfidence and selfishness by standing in the place of others. These and other possibilities provide occasion for wise counsel, based upon the central doctrine that wisdom is a tree of life for those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed (3:18).

Parallelism: **Proverbs** is written entirely in poetic style. The predominant structure feature of Hebrew poetry is so-called poetic parallelism. Usually the two poetic lines in a verse have a parallel relationship. Therefore, Hebrew poetry does not rhyme, but there is a kind of "thought-rhyme" in which the second line echoes the first, but in a variety of ways. Many **proverbs** have been regarded as using one of **three main types of parallelism**, and this remains a helpful place to start.[1]

In **synonymous parallelism**, the terms or units of thought in one line are paralleled by similar terms or units of thought in the second line. Sometimes every unit in one line is matched in the next line (for example **1:2** and **2:11**). This is called complete **synonymous parallelism**. Other times only some of the units in one line are matched in the next line (for example in **1:9** the words **they will be** are not matched in the second line. This is called incomplete synonymous parallelism. In most synonymous parallelism, the second line is merely conveying a similar idea to the first, with only a slight variation. **Proverbs 18:15** is a good example. **The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.**

In **antithetical parallelism** one line is the opposite of or contrasts with the other line (for example **10:1** and **11:1**). Most of the verses in **Chapters 10** to **15** are antithetical. It is often expressed by the conjunction **but**, as in **13:6**. **Godliness guards the path of the righteous, but wickedness undermines the sinner (13:6).**

In **synthetic parallelism** the second line simply continues the thought of the first line. Sometimes the second line gives a result of the first line (for example **3:6** and

16:3), and other times the second line describes something in the first line (for example **6:12** and **15:3**). Sometimes one lives gives preference over what is referred to in the other line. There are nineteen such **better . . . than** verses **(12:9; 15:16-17; 16:8, 16, 19, 32; 17:1** and **12; 19:1** and **22; 21:9** and **19; 22:1; 25:7** and **24; 27:5** and **10; 28:6). How much worse** or **how much more** is another kind of parallelism **(11:31; 15:11; 17:7; 19:7** and **10; 21:27).** But generally, synthetic parallelism is found when the second line is neither expressing the same idea, nor contrasting the truth, but rather developing the idea of the first line into a fuller one by taking one step further. **Proverbs 19:14** is a good example. **A house and wealth are inherited from ancestors, but a sensible wife is from God (19:14).**

Not all verses in **Proverbs** have two lines. Some have three (for example **1:27; 6:13** and **17; 27:2; 30:20** and **32-33; 31:4)**, and one verse even has six lines **(30:4)**. In the three-line verses, usually the first and second lines are related in some way and the second and third lines are parallel in some way. For example in **27:27** the second line is in synthetic parallelism to the first line, completing the thought, and the third line is in synonym parallelism with the second line. However, all three lines in **1:27** are all in synonymous parallelism.[2]

The **alphabetic acrostic** form is also found in the final poem of **31:10-31** (see **Dz – Wisdom for Women**). Here each of the twenty-two verses begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet and occurs in alphabetical order. While the discussion of parallelism can become very technical, most readers will find that identifying the kind of parallelism used in **a proverb** will help them to read it with more understanding.[3]

Biblical References: In writing **Proverbs**, I have used several different translations. Therefore, I will reference which translation I have used at the end of each verse, or couple of verses. However, sometimes I felt that the best translation was directly from the original language, or the Hebrew text. In those instances I will use the word “Hebrew.” In addition, when I use half of a verse from one translation, and half of a verse from another translation, I will also use the word “Hebrew.”

The use of ADONAI: Long before **Yeshua’s** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God’s** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yod-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**,

Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey, since the ancient manuscripts do not give any vowel sounds, and this remains the rule in most modern **Jewish** settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant. In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His Name**. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His Name** were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no vowels. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*. Therefore, **Jews**, being respectful of the Third Commandment, use these words as replacements. **The Talmud explains, "In the Sanctuary, the Name was pronounced as written; but beyond its confines a substitute Name was employed (Tractate Sotah VII.6).** **God** has only one name, **YHVH**. All **His** other "names" like **ADONAI Elohei-Tzva'ot**, **ADONAI Elohim**, **ADONAI Nissi**, **ADONAI Tzidkenu**, and **ADONAI-Tzva'ot**, merely reflect **His** attributes.

Contrary to what some religious groups say today, no one can say with confidence how to pronounce **God's Name**. The "name" Jehovah, for example, is a made-up word by a Franciscan monk in the dark ages. He took **YHVH**, and inserted vowels between the known letters to invent a new word: **Y**e**H**o**V**a**H**. **Jews** never, NEVER, use this made-up word. The last book of the B'rit Chadashah tells us that when **Yeshua** returns to the earth, **He** will reveal **the Name that no one knew but Himself (Revelation 19:12)**. It seems best to leave this lost pronunciation unresolved until the **Messiah** comes.

The use of TaNaKh: The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "**T**orah"),**N** (for "**N**evi'im," the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old

Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, “the righteous of the TaNaKh,” rather than using Old Testament saints: Messianic synagogues, and the **Jewish** messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a **Jewish** perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, “righteous of **the TaNaKh**.” Therefore, I will be using “the righteous of **the TaNaKh**,” rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.