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Proverbs Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of the Book of Proverbs, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of wisdom and how it extends beyond mere intellect to include moral and spiritual aspects. The book's author, King Solomon, was known for his wisdom, but also made moral mistakes that sometimes neutralized the impact of his advice. The fear of God is essential for true wisdom, which is a gift from God that can guide various aspects of life, ranging from finances to psychological well-being. Ultimately, Jesus embodies the ultimate expression of God's wisdom, which offers guidance for living a fulfilling life.

Transcript

♪ Alright, tonight we're going to be looking at the Book of Proverbs. And I don't know how anyone couldn't think of Proverbs as one of the most delightful books of the Bible to read. Of course, there are some subjects that might be more important, like reading about the life of Jesus in Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John, or some people like Romans better than any other books.

Some go for the Book of Revelation or other prophetic books. The Book of Proverbs, however, is just so full of wit and wisdom and pith, and reading it can only enrich your life, but in a different way. The Book of Proverbs is not a book of prophecy, and it's not a book of narration of history.

The majority of the Old Testament, and frankly, the majority of the New Testament, both, are historical narrative. The Gospels and the Book of Acts occupy far more than half of the New Testament pages, and they're all historical narrative. In the Old Testament, you have historical narrative all the way up through the Book of Esther, which we've actually covered here, all those books in various meetings in this building in the past, and those are, they occupy far more than half of the Old Testament.

So the Old Testament's largely a history book. A lot of people think of the Bible as a book of rules and regulations. There's some in there, but it's really a story.

It's a story about how God created things and how he worked to redeem those who've gone wrong, essentially by sending Jesus. Now, in addition to the historical narrative,

there are books that are divine revelation, especially prophetic books. Now, some might say, well, I think the historical books are divine revelation, too.

Well, a person's welcome to think so, but they don't claim to be. They claim to be a record of events that happened, recorded by people who either saw them themselves or who got the information from people who did see them themselves. So they're like reliable historical accounts.

They don't claim that the author got some special revelation when he was writing. Certainly, the authors in the Bible's historical books don't make that claim. The prophets do.

The prophets claim that they are getting things directly from God that you would not otherwise know. No one could observe it. Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him, but he has revealed them by his spirit, Paul said.

So there are things that people would never know, but which they can know because of God's revelation. And that's what prophetic books are. Now, when we come to the book of Proverbs, we're not talking about a historical book or a prophetic book.

We're not talking about something that is necessarily given by divine revelation, although most of the Proverbs are written by Solomon. And while he'd never claimed divine revelation for his Proverbs, we do know that at the beginning of his life as the king of Israel, when David, his father, died and Solomon became king. Just at the time of Solomon's inauguration as king, God appeared to him in a vision and said, ask anything you want from me and I'll give it to you.

And Solomon said, well, I'm young. I've got a big task here to govern a nation. I need wisdom.

I need discernment. I need you to help me to do this because I'm not wise enough. And this at one time was, of course, it was a humble request, acknowledging his own need.

But it was also a modest request in the sense that he wasn't asking for riches. I mean, if God is sort of like in Aladdin's lamp, you know, the genie comes, you've got three wishes. What do you want? Most people would ask for very selfish things.

If God comes to you and says, ask anything you want, I'll give it to you. You might say, well, I'd like to have. How about if I could own, you know, a continent or something like that, you know? And so there are people who would ask more selfishly.

And God says, since you asked for wisdom and you didn't ask for riches or for fame or for the victory over all your enemies, but you've just asked for something that I actually also value, I'm going to give you that. I'm going to give you that as well as what you didn't

ask for. I'm going to make you rich.

I'm going to make you famous. I'm going to give you a piece. Your enemies will never attack you.

And I'm going to make you the wisest man there is. That whole conversation between him and God, of course, took place and is recorded in First Kings, Chapter three, verses 10 through 13. Now, even though, therefore, what Solomon wrote is never said to be directly a revelation that God gave him, the wisdom that is expressed in what he wrote is a gift from God.

That is God. That's why his works belong in the Bible, not because he was a prophet. He was not a prophet.

But he was divinely inspired as a wise man. That is, the inspiration he had was resident in him wisdom, which, by the way, later in his life, he did not do well. He actually drifted away from God and he started making decisions that were not very wise.

And we have to assume he wrote the best wisdom books that he wrote at those times when he was doing well and that he really did have the wisdom that God gave him. But Solomon is the one who wrote most of the Proverbs. I say most of them because Chapter 30 and 31 have the names of other persons as their sources.

Chapter 30 is written by somebody named Agur, a man who's otherwise unknown to us. And then Chapter 31 is said to be the prophecy of King Lemuel. Now, nobody knows who King Lemuel was.

There's no known king, certainly no king of Israel or Judah named King Lemuel. And as far as we know, in the land surrounding Israel, we don't know of any King Lemuel. There's some who have speculated that Lemuel was simply a nickname for Solomon.

We don't know. But anyway, the last chapter was written by somebody who identifies himself as Lemuel. And he said it's actually a prophecy that his mother gave him.

So that would be maybe the only chapter in Proverbs that claims to be prophetically inspired. Now, the book of Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes, also written by Solomon, and the book of Song of Solomon, which those three books were written by Solomon, belong to a genre of literature called wisdom literature. The Jews had other books of wisdom literature that aren't in our Bible, and it was a popular kind of literature among the Jews.

The ones that are in the Bible are really books that are there because Solomon wrote them and because God inspired him to be very wise. There are others written by authors for whom no such claims exist. That is, it's not claimed that God inspired them, but they are nonetheless, they're in, for example, the Apocrypha, the Old Testament books that

the Catholic Bible has that we don't have in our Protestant Bibles.

But they were written by Jews, not Catholics. They were written by Jews between the time of the Old Testament and the New. Most of you know, I think, that by the time the Old Testament closed, it was still going to be another 400 years before Jesus came.

And during that 400 years, the Jews wrote lots of books. They weren't inspired because their authors were not prophets or inspired people. But that doesn't mean they weren't any good.

Their books have value, but they're not the word of God. And among those books in the Apocrypha, the Jews had written Ecclesiasticus, which sounds an awful lot like our book Ecclesiastes. It's a different word, a different book.

Ecclesiasticus actually is also called the Wisdom of Syrac. And then there's another book called the Wisdom of Solomon, which was not really Solomon's book. It's in the intertestamental period after God was no longer inspiring prophets to write it before Jesus came.

A number of Jews wrote books, and they claimed to be famous people, like Solomon or like some of the prophets. The Book of Enoch appeared at that time, too. And Enoch had died thousands of years - or not died, but left the earth thousands of years earlier.

So there's a lot of uninspired books that the Jews wrote that assumed as the author's pen name somebody famous. And the Wisdom of Solomon is one of those apocryphal books that claims to be written by Solomon. But those books, while they're not perhaps as reliable as those books that Solomon wrote, still are of the wisdom literature genre.

Now, wisdom literature is different than prophetic literature or historical narrative. It is - and it only claims to be - wisdom. Now, what is wisdom? Well, we know that wisdom is a very important thing.

God says that we should seek wisdom. In fact, in the Book of Proverbs, it says you should seek wisdom more than you'd seek gold or silver or rubies. That the chief thing to have is wisdom.

Even in the New Testament, it says that we should walk in wisdom toward those who are outside. And it says even that Christ has become our wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1.30. And Jesus said at the end of his Sermon on the Mount, Whoever hears these sayings of mine and observes them and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. And, of course, it withstood the storms that came.

But the man who hears my sayings and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. And obviously when the storms came, it capsized. So, wisdom is a very important thing.

And even following what Jesus said, he said it's a wise thing to do. Now, what do we mean by wise? What is wisdom? There are wise people who are not Christians. Although, if they know about Christ and reject him, it's a very foolish thing to do.

But there are people who have a lot of common sense. And really common sense is wisdom. There's, of course, exceptional wisdom.

One of the gifts of the Spirit that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12 is a gift of the word of wisdom where somebody apparently receives insight into what to do, which no one else in the room would have thought of without the Holy Spirit bringing it to their mind. But what wisdom actually is is very simple to define. Wisdom is the equality of being able to discern what goals are to be pursued and what route is the most likely route to reach those goals.

That is to say, if you want to have, if you want to retire comfortably, someone might say, well, the wise thing to do would be to start making some provision for that one way or another. A retirement account of some kind, some investments, maybe real estate investments so you have rent coming in, something so that you can retire comfortably. Now, the fact that you want to retire comfortably is usually considered to be a positive goal.

But there are people who will never retire comfortably because they didn't have the wisdom to take steps that would lead to that goal. Wisdom is simply knowing how to get there from here. It's not something that necessarily requires divine revelation or divine inspiration, though God has, of course, in the case of Solomon, inspired him to be a very wise man.

But there were other wise people in the Old Testament who actually gave counsel to kings. There was one man named Ahithophel, who is a counselor of David. And he was only there because he was a wise man.

Wise, the Jewish people really appreciated wise men as well as prophets. But prophets and wise men were different. A prophet would give you an inspired oracle directly from God.

A wise man would just give you advice. But he was so wise that his advice was of great value. And so, especially when you, perhaps a king wanted to go to war, he had to consult his counselor.

Solomon himself says, with much counsel, make war. From wise people, obviously. David had a counselor named Ahithophel, who was evil enough to turn against David.

So that when Absalom, David's son, sought to overthrow David and even wanted to kill him, Ahithophel stayed with Absalom and betrayed David. But we're told in the story of Ahithophel that in his day, people who came to him for counsel, for advice, came away

feeling that this man was, talking to him and asking him something was as good as asking the oracle of God, meaning a prophet. That is to say, his answers were almost as reliable as if he had gotten them by direct inspiration.

Now, there's no suggestion that he did get them by direct inspiration. He was just very wise. And if you want counsel, it's great to have a word from the Lord, from a prophet.

But if you can't have that, it was considered just about as good to ask Ahithophel because he saw things very clearly. He saw things so clearly, in fact, that when Absalom did not take his counsel and made a more foolish choice, Ahithophel knew that Absalom was going to lose this war. And Ahithophel, knowing that he would then, when David would come back, kill him as a traitor, he went home and hanged himself to spare himself that.

That was wise. He could foresee things. A wise man can look down the road and foresee things that others aren't seeing.

In fact, in Proverbs, it says, a wise man foresees the evil and hides himself or takes precautions about it. But the foolish just goes on, clueless, and suffers for it. Actually, that proverb was found twice in the book of Proverbs, so it's apparently considered to be an important point.

A wise man can actually see down the road, okay, what's the trajectory of things? Where is this going? I can sort of put two and two together and figure it out, and it's going to end up right over there. And that's a place that's kind of, I want to avoid that, or I want to be prepared for that. I can see, I mean, a person, like I mentioned, being prepared for retirement.

I mean, this particular point is not made in Proverbs, but it's a good example in our modern times of wisdom. That a wise man foresees that I'm not always going to be healthy, I mean, unless I die young in an accident or something, or some kind of tragedy. But if I live out my normal years, there will be a time when I just can't keep working like I do now.

And therefore, I'd better prepare for the time when I can't. Solomon did actually say something along those lines in Proverbs. He said, go to the ant, you sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.

In the summer, she gathers food because the winter's coming, and then she has plenty. The idea is she foresees, of course, she doesn't really, but she acts like she's wise. God put it instinctively here.

Ant is not rational, so it doesn't really think these things through. But it behaves in a way that'd be wise for people to behave. That you know there's a time coming, winter's coming, when there's not going to be so much food.

You're not going to have the same amount of ability to go out and bring in goods. So what does the ant do? It stores up food. And so he's basically saying, you know, you should learn a lesson from that.

The ant's wise enough to know that the current conditions of prosperity may not always last. In fact, Aesop's Fables has the story of the ant and the grasshopper. And the ant in Aesop's Fable, which is of course a pagan story, but the ant is gathering food in the summer, and the grasshopper's just hanging around having fun.

Because it doesn't have any sense that a time will come when it's not summer anymore. The ant prepares itself for the winter. The grasshopper does not.

And in the fable, the ant of course survives the winter, and the grasshopper does not. And so that's what wisdom is. It's looking ahead saying, okay, do I want to be alive? What are the dangers between now and then? What's likely to occur that I should be prepared for? And making preparation, that's a function.

Not the only function, but that's a function of wisdom. And Solomon identifies that as such. So, in other words, you don't need a special word from God to know those kinds of things.

If you're smart, if you've got common sense. The fact is, many people don't have common sense. And Solomon often identifies people as fools because they don't have the wisdom to do what a person with common sense would know to do.

And Solomon had a lot of common sense. He made some moral mistakes, and when he made the moral mistakes, it kind of, what should we say, neutralized the impact of his wisdom. He was probably still making choices that were wise from a worldly standpoint.

But when a person doesn't take God into consideration, they're missing an important point. And that's the thing. I said wisdom is the ability to recognize what a desired goal is, and then to recognize what the most likely path is to reach that goal.

Now, some people are not wise enough to even know what a desirable goal is. All they want to do is get rich, but they don't want to be ready to meet God. That's not wise.

And they just don't follow the behavior that would reach goals that a wise man would choose. But Proverbs also gives us information about what goals someone should choose because a wise man chooses desirable and worthy goals. A foolish person, all they want to do is party this weekend.

They're not thinking further ahead. They're not thinking whether that's going to enhance their life long term. And so wisdom is, in a sense, common sense.

And Solomon had common sense on steroids. He could really see clearly. I mean, the

famous story in the Bible to illustrate his wisdom was when he had to adjudicate a conflict between two women, prostitutes actually.

Both of them had had babies about the same time, and they lived in the same house, the same brothel, I guess. And one of them in her sleep had accidentally rolled over and smothered her baby that was in bed with her. So she snuck her dead baby into the arms of the other sleeping woman and took the live baby from her.

Well, when the woman woke up with the dead baby and knew it wasn't hers, she says, hey, wait a minute, that's my baby you've got. And the others said, no, that's my baby, yours died. And they couldn't solve it, so they took it to the king.

In those days, I guess the kingdoms were small enough the king could actually hear the cases personally. At least the ones really hard to solve. How do you solve? How do you know who's lying? Somebody's lying here, and they both know who's lying, but the judge doesn't know who's lying.

One is lying about the baby being hers, and the other one knows that that one's lying. But Solomon doesn't know who's lying. No one knows.

This is a court case that no one could solve as long as both of them, you know, stick to their story. You can't do a DNA test to see whose baby it is. They couldn't do that back then.

So how do you figure it out? So I got a solution. Let's just cut the baby in two. We can't solve this.

Let's just cut the baby to each of you can have half. That's easy. And what's interesting is the woman who had stolen the baby from the other said, yeah, that's a good solution, which is something that obviously no mother would say.

Which is how Solomon wisely got the woman who's lying to reveal her colors and who she was. The other woman who was the real mother said, no, let her have the baby. I don't need the baby.

Keep the baby alive. I mean, that was obviously a mother's heart. So, I mean, Solomon, by making that suggestion, revealed the secret hearts of these women.

And, you know, maybe that takes a lot of wisdom to figure that out. How would a judge know how to solve this between them? And that particular case, which is recorded in First Kings, it says his fame for his wisdom went abroad. A woman from Arabia, the Queen of Sheba, came up to see him, and she tested him with hard questions.

And she was impressed as he answered every hard question, every hard riddle or whatever that she had not been able to answer. And her wise men couldn't answer.

Solomon could answer easily.

She was breathtaking, breathless. She says, it takes my breath away, she said. I heard that you were a great king and very wise, but half of it wasn't told me, she said.

And so this is the fame of Solomon. Now, in his lifetime, the Bible says in First Kings 4 that he wrote 3,000 proverbs. Now, we don't have 3,000 proverbs in the Book of Proverbs.

Might be close to 1,000 of them, probably around 900 and something in the Book of Proverbs. Not all of them are his, though, so we have definitely less than 3,000 of his proverbs. He also wrote 1,000 songs, and we only have one of those recorded in the Song of Solomons, sometimes called the Song of Songs.

But Solomon was a writer and speaker of wisdom, and there's just something in the Middle Eastern culture and tastes. People like to see someone solve a problem, solve a riddle. You know, Samson took delight in puzzling the Philistines by posing a riddle to them.

He said, out of the strong came something sweet, and out of the eater came something to eat. What am I talking about? The Philistines didn't have anyone who could figure out that. That's a riddle.

That's a typical Middle Eastern riddle. You say something that's enigmatic, someone's trying to, how do you make sense of that? Well, we know because we read in the Book of Judges that he had, prior to that, I think a day earlier, he'd killed a lion. And the next day he found bees in the carcass of the lion, and so he had taken some honey from the carcass of the lion.

So he said, out of the strong came something sweet, out of the eater came something to eat. Now, that's a typical kind of riddle. Now, probably Solomon could have figured it out.

How? I don't know, but he was wiser than anybody. There were riddles like that that were popularly raised. I mean, our riddles are usually humorous.

Riddles in our culture are usually another kind of a joke. It has a funny punchline and so forth. But in those days, a riddle was just something that was hard to solve.

A puzzle, so to speak. And so a wise person could solve these mysteries, these puzzles. And Solomon was famous for that.

Now, he wasn't the only one who was, but he was the best. It says about him in 1 Kings 4.31, it says that he was so wise, he was wiser than Ethan, Haman, Calico, and Dardot. Now, we have no idea who Ethan, Haman, Calico, and Dardot were, except that they obviously were very well reputed for being wise men.

They are the standard by which Solomon was judged to be superior. There were wise men. I mentioned Ahithophel.

There was also Hushai. There were even wise women who were consulted. There was a city called the City of Abel, mentioned in 2 Samuel 20:18. It is said that there was a time in the past where this city, Abel, people who wanted to solve problems would say, let's go inquire at the City of Abel.

Apparently, it was a city full of wise people who could resolve enigmas and solve mysteries and give good counsel. Wisdom was a very valued thing in the ancient Near East. And there was a person in 2 Samuel 14 who's described as a wise woman of Tekoa.

Job actually hired her because she was cunning and wise. She was from a city called Tekoa and he hired her to do an impersonation of a woman who had lost her sons and to fool David. But he went looking for someone who had a reputation of being a wise woman.

There were wise women, wise men, and Solomon was thought to be the wisest of all. But to understand wisdom, he collected the sayings in the Book of Proverbs. Now, the Book of Job was also a book of wisdom.

It is considered wisdom literature. Probably not written by Solomon like the other wisdom books in the Bible are in the Old Testament. Though some have speculated that Solomon might even be the author of Job since Job does not claim for itself any particular author.

And there's been much speculation about it. Some think that Solomon might have written Job because Job is, although we know the story of Job, the story is really found in two chapters at the beginning and a few verses at the end. But it's 42 chapters long.

You've got almost 40 chapters that are basically a debate among Middle Eastern wise men of whom Job was one. Job was a Middle Eastern wise man and he had three friends and a younger person who showed up who are all considered to be wise men. And we have their philosophies and so forth.

The wise man was like a philosopher. In the case of Job, of course, they're trying to figure out why is Job suffering. Our philosophy is that God doesn't let people suffer great tragedies if they're not bad people.

But we never knew Job to be a bad person. So what's up with that? And so the philosophers are trying to deal with it. Just like modern philosophers, one of the biggest enigmas they try to solve is why is there evil? And especially if you believe there's a God who's all good and a God who's all powerful.

Well, if he's all powerful, he wouldn't, he could stop evil. And if he is all good, he'd want to. So why is an all good and all powerful God allowing there to be evil? That's one of the

major philosophical conundrums today.

And it was in Job's day. These guys in Job were discussing that problem from a philosopher's point of view. And these were wise men who were the ones you'd probably go to to hear them speculate about these things and try to answer these riddles.

So we have these various books of wisdom. And scholars refer to this kind of literature in the Bible as wisdom literature. Because it essentially deals with issues of life that require some reflection, some analysis, and some foresight, by which one can receive good counsel.

Now, I want to say that some people feel that the only way to really know what God wants you to do would be to find a scripture that is like a command of God and do what he said. Or, in the case of people who believe in such things today, get it from a prophet. There are prophets in the church in Corinth, for example, that Paul mentions.

Agabus the prophet was in the city of Antioch. And there were prophets in the church, and perhaps there are today. But a prophet, of course, has to get a direct revelation from God.

The scriptures where they have given us instructions were written by people who had such revelations. And therefore, the commands of scripture do reveal to us the mind of God. We can get counsel from the scripture, therefore.

The psalmist said in Psalm 119, your words, they are my counselors. Meaning the scriptures, your statutes, your commandments are my counselors. Well, if you need counsel, if you need direction, if you're trying to figure out what you should do next and what God wants you to do, if you have a scripture telling you what he wants you to do, you're in luck.

Look no further. If the scripture doesn't address the matter, let's just say you're trying to decide, I'm thinking about getting married. Actually, I've got more than one option here.

There's three different women that I could pursue and possibly win. God, what do you want me to do? There's no scripture that can tell you the name of the one you're supposed to marry. It's not written in there.

Maybe you can hope for a prophet to come and prophesy to you. But frankly, I've seen people prophesy about, you know, these two should be married and it often has not worked out well. I don't really trust everybody who claims to be a prophet, although there, I believe there is true prophecy.

There's also false prophecy. So, you know, not everyone would be so fortunate to get a true prophet like, you know, Elijah or somebody or Samuel saying this is the person God chose of you. That'd be great.

How do you decide then if you don't have a scripture to tell you and you don't have a prophetic word? Well, use common sense, frankly. And this doesn't sound very spiritual. People think that's not very spiritual.

I want to get something from God. Well, you did get something from God. You're born of what's called a brain.

No other species of living thing has one. The brain inside your head is the most complex organization of matter known in the universe. The brain you have is far more complicated and capable than a supercomputer.

And computers, of course, took thousands of years for people to figure out how to make. And they still haven't made a computer that can do what a human brain can do. They're working on this artificial intelligence.

But to really equal the human brain, it's going to have to be more than intelligence. It's going to have to be self-conscious. Can a machine be conscious of itself? How could a machine have consciousness? You know, it can do mathematical calculations.

It can sort between options about things. But it can only do what it's been programmed to do. It doesn't think for itself.

It doesn't even know it's there. A computer doesn't know it exists. But your brain does.

Your brain is something that I don't think people will ever be able to duplicate. It's the most wonderful physical object created by God. Now, like all created objects, it has a purpose.

And the purpose is to do what it does best, and that is think. And thinking is a process that's rational and reasonable and logical. And if a person does things that are illogical or unreasonable or irrational, they're not using their brain right.

And God gave the brain for us to be able to figure out what God wants us to do in many cases. If we don't have a prophetic word from someone, we don't have a scripture telling us what to do, but we have to make a decision about something, well, you got your brain. But the best use of your brain is to rationally and wisely analyze where it is you're trying to go and what road gets you there most directly with the fewest obstacles.

That's wisdom. Wisdom thinks those things through. And the Proverbs are examples of the distillation of that kind of wisdom into short sayings.

One of the things that makes Proverbs charming and fun to read is it's made up primarily, there are some exceptions, but for the most part, the book is made up of short, pithy aphorisms, little sayings, usually just two lines, maybe four lines, in which they say volumes. They take some wisdom and they distill it into a short saying,

sometimes a humorous one. There's a lot of wit in the Proverbs, but they're not all funny.

They can be very serious. But what they are is taking some great, wise concept and distilling it into a little saying. And in the book of Proverbs, there are a few chapters where a thought is carried out through many verses in a row, even a whole chapter, but the middle part and the greater part of the book of Proverbs is just miscellaneous.

Proverbs, miscellaneous, these little short statements, each of them containing more wisdom than you'd think would be found in such short things. Now, this is something that I think most people find very entertaining because sometimes they are stated in an entertaining way and sometimes not. There's a place where Solomon says, it's better to dwell in the corner of a house than in a wide house with a brawling woman, a woman who's going to argue with you all the time.

Better live in the corner of a house. There's another proverb that said, it's better to dwell on the housetop than in the house with a brawling woman. And another proverb says, it's better to dwell in the wilderness than in a house with a brawling woman.

When I ran my school in Oregon, I had students, we went through the Bible every year with these students and we'd get feedback from them. One of the students said he was reading that two of these statements were found in one chapter in Proverbs. He said, I know what's happening.

He says, he says he was riding, Solomon was sitting at his riding desk and trying to ride. His wife was standing and nagging him and, and, you know, heck, you know, giving him trouble. And he wrote, he picked up his writing stuff.

He went up to the top of the house to get away from her. He wrote, it's better to dwell on the top of a house than in a house with a broad with a brawling woman. But she came up after him and she was there pestering him there too.

So he picked up his stuff and went out in the wilderness. So better to live in the wilderness than in a house with a brawling woman. Now, I don't know that that's really the scenario, but honestly, maybe some women might not think that's a very funny thing, but I think a woman and a man can all recognize that there are people, both men and women who are difficult to get along to.

By the way, Solomon did say some negative things about some women, but only about bad women. He also said some of those flattering things about good women. He said that he that finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

He said an evil woman tears down her house with her own hands, but a wise woman is a crown to her husband. Of course, that famous poem at the very end of Proverbs 22 verses long is about the virtuous woman and describes womanhood in the most glowing terms. So Solomon has good things to say about good women and bad things to say

about bad women.

But he's an equal opportunity critic. He says some very bad things about bad men. In fact, the majority of his Proverbs are spoken of in the masculine when he talks about fools and wise.

He contrasts wise people and foolish people. Now, because these are actually written in poetry, they don't rhyme. And so we might not recognize them as poetry because in English poetry is usually supposed to rhyme.

In Hebrew literature, poetry is characterized by repetition, repetition of the same thought more than one way. Now, but the thought can be expressed as a contrast. He could say a wise man does such and such, but a fool does.

And that's the opposite thing. I mentioned earlier, the wise man foresees the evil and takes precautions, but the fool passes on clueless and suffers for it. That's a typical parallelism.

It's a parallel of contrast. The wise man does this, the fool does the opposite thing. Lots of the Proverbs have that particular contrasting kind of parallelism.

Others have the parallel is saying the same thing essentially twice in two different ways. And there's other ways they parallel. Not every case of a verse in Hebrew poetry will have such parallelism, but it's the most common feature in Hebrew poetry, not only in the Book of Proverbs, but in Psalms.

And frankly, in the prophets too, who mostly wrote in poetry. And so you'll find this repetition of the same thought, you know, twice, sometimes three times in something that's poetic. And so these literary forms are good for us to be aware of.

Now, I want to let you know, I want to survey the book, but I want to point out some of the things, first of all, that the book says about wisdom. Now, the book is an example of wisdom. It's called Wisdom Literature.

But in the course of being wisdom, it basically extols wisdom. It says that wisdom is a good thing. And actually, wisdom itself is sometimes the subject, the focus of the subject on it.

And this would be especially true of the first eight chapters. In the eighth chapter, wisdom is personified as a woman. And she makes all these claims that you'd think it was God talking or Jesus talking.

And sometimes people have concluded that wisdom personified in chapter eight of Proverbs is really supposed to be Jesus. Because almost everything that wisdom says, you could imagine Jesus saying it. And not only that chapter, but beginning in chapter

one.

I mean, let me show you an example. You can certainly picture Jesus saying this. He says, and this is actually wisdom speaking, which in the chapter is personified as a woman.

If you look at Proverbs 120, wisdom calls aloud outside. She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses at the opening of the gates of the city.

She speaks her words. How long you simple ones? Will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning and fools hate knowledge. Now, see, here's these are like parallelism here.

Simple ones love simplicity. Scorners delight in scorning. Fools hate knowledge.

These are guys saying the same thing three times. That's typical of poetry. She says in verse 23, turn at my reproof.

Surely I will pour out my spirit on you. I will make my words known to you because I have called you and you refuse. I've stretched out my hand and no one regarded because you disdained all my counsel and would have none of my reproof.

I mean, this business about pouring my spirit out on you and make my words known to you. It sounds like Jesus could be saying that. And he does say things like that.

And remember in 1 Corinthians 1 30, Paul says Christ has become unto us wisdom. And so it's very tempting. And maybe it's a temptation we should yield to.

To think of wisdom as sort of Christ before his incarnation. The difference being that it's I think what we can say is Christ is the embodiment of wisdom. And wisdom is depicted as a woman here is a personification of wisdom.

That is in Proverbs, wisdom is depicted as if it was a person. It's personified. Wisdom is personified here.

In Christ, wisdom is incarnate. And so if someone said, but wait, Christ is a man and wisdom is here compared to a woman. Why the female? It's just very typical when speaking about concepts that are not really people.

To a ship is usually spoken of as a she, you know. The mother land, you know, your homeland is your motherland. Mother Earth.

I mean things that are not really people, don't really have gender, literarily have often been spoken of in the feminine. Hurricanes used to be always given female names until feminists decided that was not very flattering. So now they alternately name them male or female names.

But for decades or centuries, they named hurricanes after female names. Not because, not trying to say something negative about women. It's just a convention of speech that when you talk about a concept or something that's not really human, and you're personifying it, usually it's normal to do so with feminine pronouns and so forth.

And so that was typical. Also, there's another reason I think that wisdom is personified as a female. Because Solomon is writing these proverbs to his son.

Which son, we don't know. His oldest son was Rehoboam who became king after him. And if he wrote these words to Rehoboam, unfortunately they were wasted on him.

Because Rehoboam did not become wise. But Solomon, when he himself was wise, wanted to try to pass along wisdom to his son. And he himself said that he had gotten it from his own father, David.

You see him saying that, for example, at the... Where does he first say he got it from his father? Chapter 4, verses 3 through 9. Solomon says, When I was my father's son, and his father, by the way, was David, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me and said to me, Let your heart retain my words, keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding. Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

Do not forsake her, meaning wisdom, and she will preserve you. Love her and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom.

And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her and she will promote you. She will bring you honor.

When you embrace her, she will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will deliver to you. Now, you could actually imagine this being speaking about an actual woman. Pick the right woman and she'll exalt you, she'll put a crown of grace on your head, she'll bring you honor, she'll promote you.

It sounds like he's talking about a real woman, but he's made it very clear he's talking about wisdom. And he is talking to his son, and so I'm thinking, one of the functions of using a feminine personification of wisdom is that his young son was, like Solomon himself, attracted to women. And there's a fair bit in the first six chapters, especially of Proverbs, of warnings about the wrong kind of woman, the foolish woman.

And she's usually depicted as a prostitute or someone who's cheating on her husband, an immoral woman. And she's, in a sense, certainly he's warning about the wrong kind of woman, but in a sense the foolish woman is a personification of foolishness herself. And basically saying, since you're a young man and you're drawn to women, let me tell you the woman to really go after is wisdom.

Pursue wisdom, like a man pursues a woman. Pursue wisdom. She's worth getting.

She's more value than wealth. Now, in chapter 2 and verse 6, he says, Now, you see, therefore, wisdom is a form of divine guidance. If you are being foolish, you're ignoring something that God has given you as a guidance.

You're not being wise. Out of God's mouth come wisdom. It's a gift from God because he is a rational God.

By the way, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the only God that has intelligence at all. You know, the idols of the heathen had no intelligence. One thing that sets God apart from everything else before he made man is that he's rational.

And he speaks rationally. He speaks wisely. What he says makes sense.

And therefore, of course, the rational God gives wisdom to his creatures who are to be his children. And so, when we have wisdom, and when we follow wisdom, what's implied here in chapter 2, verse 6, is we're following God's insights. The Lord gives wisdom.

So if you have it, it's from God. You want guidance from God? Well, wisdom is a form of guidance from God. Prophecy is another.

The written scriptures are another. There's more than one way that God can give wisdom. In fact, look for me, with me, if you would, at Ezekiel 18.

Not 18. It's Jeremiah 18. Sorry.

There's a similar statement in Ezekiel, but I don't remember off the top of my head the reference. But in Jeremiah 18, and verse 18, those that were coming against Jeremiah because he said that God was going to stop speaking to the Jews because of their rebellion, he's going to destroy them. They didn't accept what Jeremiah was saying, and they said, come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah.

For, and this is what they say, the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Now, Jeremiah was saying that God's not going to be speaking to them anymore. He's going to abandon them.

And they say, no, that's not going to happen. We're not going to lose guidance from God. The law is not going to disappear.

The counsel is not going to go disappear from the wise. The prophets are still going to have the word. What they're saying is there's three ways that we recognize God gives guidance.

One is through the written scriptures, the law. One is through the word of the prophets and the other through wisdom. And those are the three ways that God guides, that God

gives direction.

Again, some forms of charismatic inclinations that some people have might make them think using wisdom, that's carnal. You know, I want a word from God. I want a revelation from God.

Well, Proverbs 2, 6 says wisdom is from God. It is a word from God. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

So if you've got knowledge and understanding, wisdom, then that's a word from the Lord. But of course, there are intelligent people and philosophers who are not Christians, but they're missing an important part of wisdom. And that is, Solomon said, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

So if you don't fear the Lord first, then all your reasoning beyond that is not valuable. It's foolishness. Let me just say that logic and certainly rationality follows the patterns of logic.

Otherwise, you mean illogical and irrational. Logic begins with a premise and reasons through a process of analysis to reach a conclusion. In formal logic, which is a branch of philosophy, you have to identify a certain premise and follow logical steps to reach a logical conclusion.

The conclusion is the truth. You reach the truth by reasoning from something you already know to something you don't know. But if you take the steps of logic without error, if you don't embrace any logical flaws or fallacies, if each step is truly a logical and required step in logic, you will reach the truth if you start with a good premise.

Now, many people don't reach the truth. And it is therefore either because they don't reason logically from a good premise, or they do reason logically from a bad premise. You see, if you start with a premise that's not true, you may reason if you say, Okay, the most important thing in life is money.

That's my premise. So I need to reason about how to get more money. Well, or let's put it this way.

Let's say my premise is having a lot of money will make me happy. And therefore, the conclusion is I will be happy if I do certain things which involve getting more money. And so you can logically figure that out.

But once you get all that money, you're not necessarily happy. You haven't reached the right place because you started with a wrong assumption, a wrong premise. If your premise is correct and your logic is flawless, you'll reach the truth.

But people can have bad logic or they can just have bad premises. And people who are

very wise and very logical, non-Christians, can reach, despite their very logical minds, wrong conclusions. They can decide there's not a God.

Or they can reach moral standards that don't make sense to a Christian because they didn't begin with the right premise. The right premise is God is to be feared. God is to be in the equation.

Now, to be feared simply means we recognize that if you get out of sorts with God, you're doing a very foolish thing. I compare the fear of the Lord sometimes with the fear of locomotives, trains. Am I afraid of trains? Well, yes and no, you know.

It's been a long time since I've been afraid of a train. But I do see railroad tracks from time to time that I have to cross. And I really want to look and make sure there's not a train coming.

Because if there is a train, it's a terrifying prospect to have a collision with a train. Because it's bigger than my car, bigger than me. I mean, you know, a very common theme in movies, usually funny movies, is that some guys are trying to escape on one of those hand cars on railroad tracks.

And they're going over a bridge. And suddenly a train's coming at them. And they have to go back really fast.

You know, it's like it makes your heart beat fast. Just the prospect of being out there on that trestle, on a little cart, and here's a train. It's a scary thing.

Trains are scary. But not if you're not on a collision course with them. If you can stand next to the tracks, you can just admire the awesomeness of how they make the earth shake and the sound.

You know, it's awe-inspiring, trains. But you're not afraid of them unless you're on a collision course with them. Same thing with fear of God.

You should be inspired with awe at how great and mighty and holy he is. That's fine. You shouldn't be afraid of God unless you're foolish enough to be on a collision course with him.

I'm not afraid of freeway traffic. I drive in it all the time. But that's because I enter on the right side of the road and merge with traffic at the same speed as the rest of the road.

I keep my relationship with traffic safe. If you want to suggest to me that we should drive twice as fast as the other cars on the freeway or that I should go up an off-ramp to get on the freeway and face oncoming traffic, that would scare me. Am I afraid of traffic? Not as long as I'm in a right relationship with the rest of the traffic.

Being in a wrong relationship with traffic is a very scary thing, and it should be. Any wise

person would fear it. And that's what the fear of the Lord is.

You're not afraid of God if you are in right relationship with him. But if you're doing things that are cross-purposes with God and offensive to God, you better be afraid. Anyone who's not afraid of God in that sense hasn't even started to be smart.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the Bible says. And that's in Proverbs 9.10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. This is why there can be very intelligent, logical, philosophical thinkers, and they come to the wrong conclusion.

They don't start with the fear of the Lord. They start with the wrong premises. And so Proverbs tells us, wisdom is going to be not just logical, it's going to be God-fearing.

Therefore, wisdom in the Bible is not considered to be just a high IQ. You don't have wisdom just because you've got a high IQ, or because you get great math scores, or something like that. Or straight A's in all your classes.

That's not necessarily wisdom that the Bible is talking about. The wisdom that God's talking about says, first of all, you start with a realization that there's a God out there that you really don't want to be on bad terms with. If you don't start there, you may be very logical, but you're not going to reach any destination that you're going to want to be at.

In Proverbs 7 and 8, wisdom is personified as woman speaking. She says, for my mouth will speak truth, wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness, nothing crooked or perverse is in them.

What it's saying is, if you're following wisdom, you're not going to be doing anything unrighteous. You're not going to be doing anything wicked or perverse. Wickedness is an abomination to anyone who has wisdom.

Wisdom hates it. And therefore, it's saying wisdom isn't just being smart in a secular sense. It's got a moral bite to it.

It's got a moral dimension. If you've really started being wise, it's because you fear God. If you really are walking with wisdom, you're going to find wickedness to be an abomination to you.

And following wisdom will always keep you on the road to righteousness. If we're talking about the wisdom of God, the wisdom that we're reading about here in Proverbs. In fact, in Proverbs 21, 30, Solomon says, There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord.

Anything that goes against the Lord is not smart. There's no wisdom in that. So wisdom

in the Bible is not simply intellectual.

It is moral. It is spiritual. It is God-aware.

A person who's not aware of God is just not smart. I often think of some of these atheists like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens or Sam Harris and some of these guys. They're very smart people in many respects.

But they don't fear God. And they reach really crazy conclusions about things. They don't seem crazy to other readers who don't fear God.

But to anyone who knows or fears God, this guy's digging a pit for himself. That is a scary pit to have under you. He's not smart.

That is not smart. And so wisdom is moral and spiritual in nature, according to Proverbs. It's also, as I said, one of the legitimate forms of divine guidance.

When wisdom is speaking in Chapter 8, verses 32 through 35, she says, Now therefore listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways as wisdom's ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors, for whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.

You find wisdom, you'll find favor from the Lord. It's a way that God's mind is known to you when you follow the ways of wisdom because he's wise. He's the, as it says in the New Testament, he's the only wise God.

And so if he's wise, if he is wisdom, if Jesus is wisdom, then for you to follow the ways of wisdom is to follow the ways that please God. It's a form of knowing what God's will is. In just a moment I'm going to give you a break, and we're going to come back, it'll be a short break, we'll come back for another session of the same length.

One thing that is reiterated often in Proverbs is that wisdom is of great value. We already read in chapter 4 that he said his father David told him, pursue wisdom at the cost of everything else, make that your chief pursuit. Maybe that explains why when God came to Solomon after David died and said, ask anything you want, he said, how about wisdom? He apparently was conditioned by his father David to seek that above all things, so perhaps David can be thanked for Solomon having the wisdom to ask for more wisdom, you know, because a foolish man would ask for more selfish things than that.

But there's other Proverbs that make this point. In Proverbs 3, verses 13 through 15, he says, happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding, for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver. Her gain is than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies and all the things that you may desire cannot compare

with her. Wisdom is more valuable than anything else you might desire, he says. In chapter 16 of Proverbs, in the 16th verse, he says, how much better to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding, or to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

So he's basically saying, you know, people usually desire silver and gold. I mean, there's very few things people can't feel they can't get that they want if they have enough silver and gold. And yet, that's not of any value compared to wisdom.

If you get wisdom, you'll be a happier person, you'll be better off. It's more desirable, it's more valuable than money, is what he's saying. A last point that I'm going to give you a break in.

When I give these breaks, you're free to leave, of course, if you want to. That's one reason to give these breaks. But what I'm going to do after the break is go through the Proverbs and point out some of the main lessons and where they are given and what they, and we'll be analyzing the Proverbs a little more.

But this one last point, what I want to finish up here is what Proverbs says about wisdom itself as a subject matter. Then the other part is going to be what Proverbs says about what is wise in various other domains. But this last point is that wisdom of God obtains its highest expression in Jesus Christ.

And I made that point. This is not stated in Proverbs, but it's stated by Paul. 1 Corinthians 1.30 says, But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

So, Jesus said that, or Paul said that Jesus has become wisdom from God. Well, in Proverbs it says wisdom is from God. And he poetically personifies wisdom as if it's a female giving its, you know, making its overtures to fools to become wise, come over to her house, and she'll teach you.

But Jesus is that wisdom become human, incarnate, means made, come into the flesh. And so Jesus has become our wisdom. So everything Jesus said is in accord with wisdom.

Anyone who thinks that following Jesus is not very wise has got backward. Doing anything other than following Jesus is not very wise. Because he said, if you don't do, if you hear my words, you're like a foolish man building your house on sand.

But you're a wise man if you're following my words, and you're like a man building his house on rock. And then I also, that passage is in Matthew 7.24 and 25. Now, at this point we'll break, and we're going to come back and talk about not what Solomon says about wisdom, but what he says about life and living a life according to wisdom in various domains, including finances, relationships, your psychological well-being.

These are all things that are described, real stuff of life, what I call the secular areas of

life. They become divinely informed and divinely blessed by following wisdom that God gives in those areas. So just to give you a five-minute stretch.