A scenic mountain landscape with a lake and a sunburst through clouds. The sun is low in the sky, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The mountains are rugged and rocky, with some green vegetation. The lake is calm and reflects the sky. The foreground is filled with green grass and yellow flowers.

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

P R O V E R B S



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INTRODUCTION

In English translations, Proverbs can be a difficult book to study. Apart from some longer sections early in the book, much of it appears at first glance to be a random collection of disconnected sayings. But in the original Hebrew, there are connections to a larger context. In this study, we will strive to show this larger context.

AUTHORSHIP

Proverbs, like Psalms, is a collection of writings. As the greatest contributor to Psalms was King David, the greatest contributor to Proverbs was his son Solomon. Conservative Bible scholars believe Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in his middle age, and Ecclesiastes in his final years.

Other parts of Proverbs include a collection of sayings from wise people that Solomon gathered together and organized, and writings of Agur the son of Jakeh, King Lemuel, and an unknown author.

PURPOSE

The greater part of Proverbs teaches us how to gain wisdom for faith and life through the revelations God has given us. Another part was written to provide training for kings.

OUTLINE

For the purposes of this study, we will divide Proverbs into an introduction and eight sections.

Introduction (1:1–7)

1. Extended Discourses on Wisdom (1:8–9:18)
2. Solomon's Proverbs (10:1–22:16)
3. The Words of Wise People (22:17–24:22)
4. More Words of Wise People (24:23–34)
5. Solomon's Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah's Men (25:1–29:27)
6. Agur's Proverbs (30:1–33)
7. King Lemuel's Proverbs (31:1–9)
8. A Poem about an Ideal Wife (31:10–31)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION—PROVERBS 1:1–7

The introduction first identifies the author of Proverbs, then the purpose for which he wrote this book, and finally the way readers like you and me can use it.

Read 1:1–6.

Solomon clearly identifies himself as the author. In verses 2–6, he uncovers some of his purposes in writing:

- v. 2—how to understand wise sayings or proverbs
- v. 3—to know how to deal wisely with others
- v. 4—for the simple and youth to gain prudence and learning
- v. 5—to let the wise and understanding increase in learning and guidance
- v. 6—how to understand wise sayings or proverbs

Q 1: Which of these purposes is most appealing to you personally? Which might you recommend to a friend?

- The beauty of this list is it shows that no one is too simple or too knowledgeable to gain something from reading God’s revealed wisdom in this book. Everyone should find something of value for his or her life, and interesting to his or her mind. Each of these are imminently practical for a Christian who wants to live a fulfilling, God-pleasing life.

Read 1:7.

This can be considered the first proverb—the fear of the Lord is our guide to reading and the key to understanding all of the proverbs; we must start with our relationship to God.

Q 2: What does it mean to you to fear the Lord?

- It is much deeper than being afraid of God like a criminal hates and fears police officers. This is the loving respect a child feels for his or her parents. We fear God’s wrath—that is, we love and respect God so much we fear disappointing Him or making Him angry by the things we do or say. Luther described it this way, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things” (explanation of the First Commandment, Small Catechism).

EXTENDED DISCOURSES ON WISDOM—PROVERBS 1:8–9:18

In this extended section, Solomon writes fourteen discourses about wisdom. He begins many of them by speaking to his “son,” showing they are especially good advice for young men and women who will face temptation as they grow toward adulthood.

Read 1:8–19.

Q 3: What temptation is Solomon warning against in this section? How does he expose the attractiveness of this temptation? How does he reveal the devastation that falls upon those who fall into this sin?

- Solomon is warning his “son” against recklessly engaging in evil acts without giving thought to consequences. The attractiveness behind this temptation lies in the sinners who are enticing us in verse 10. These are peers who seem to offer friendship and camaraderie. The devastation is that those who do such evil will in time suffer from the very evil they plan to do to others. As Jesus said, “All who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

Solomon follows this word of advice with a poem that personifies godly wisdom and shows the peril of turning from God’s wisdom.

Read 1:20–33.

Q 4: How does Solomon portray wisdom? How does this poem show the advantages of living by God’s wisdom?

- Solomon portrays wisdom as a woman crying out in the streets reproving fools who are living without considering God’s judgment. The poem graphically illustrates the calamity that will befall those who ignore God’s wise counsel, and promises security and lack of dread for those who listen to her and do what she says.

Now Solomon writes his second discourse about wisdom. Here he presents two paths—one leading to life, the other to death.

Read chapter 2.

Q 5: What is the key to choosing the right path in life as Solomon lays out these two paths?

- Without the wisdom of God’s Word, we will invariably choose the wrong path, the path that leads to Satan and eternal death. Satan has a way of making sins that first appall us begin to look interesting, then acceptable, then a source of sinful delight. Solomon first warns us here about the adulteress—he will discuss her more clearly in coming passages.

Now we read Solomon's third discourse about wisdom. Here, he focuses our eyes on honoring the Lord and keeping our eyes fixed on Him.

Read 3:1–20.

Q 6: Why does Solomon advise us, “do not lean on your own understanding” (3:5) and “be not wise in your own eyes” (3:7)?

- True wisdom for this life (and the next) comes only from God our loving Father. Our reason has been completely deluded by our sinful nature. The life of faith is very foreign to our sinful human way of thinking. Only the Holy Spirit can work through God's Word to open our eyes to see and comprehend the wisdom of faith and living to God's glory and our neighbor's benefit.

Now we read Solomon's fourth discourse about wisdom. Here he focuses on our human relationships—the contents of the Second Table of the Ten Commandments.

Read 3:21–35.

Q 7: What does Solomon reveal about the devastation our sins cause to our human relationships when he writes, “Do not plan evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you” (3:29)?

- The phrase “dwells trustingly beside you” indicates a wonderful, peaceful, healthy relationship between us and our neighbor. Doing evil to them will destroy that relationship and open us up to all kinds of discord, strife, wrath, and jealousy, which make life difficult and unpleasant.

Now Solomon shifts from speaking to his “son” (singular) and talks to his “sons” (plural). He passes along some words his father David taught him when he was Bathsheba's only living child. (David and Bathsheba's first son grew sick and died in 2 Samuel 12. Solomon was born after that.)

Read 4:1–9.

Q 8: What wise teachings do you remember your parents passing on to you?

- The answers will certainly vary, but true, godly wisdom is like a family treasure passed on from generation to generation.

Now we read Solomon's fifth discourse about wisdom. Here, he speaks to his grown child, reminding him of the lessons he taught him as a child.

Read 4:10–19.

Q 9: What shift does Solomon make in his reasoning that can guide us in speaking to our grown children?

- Solomon reminds his son of those things he taught him as a child, but then talks to him like an adult—showing him examples of people

who disregarded that godly wisdom and brought bitter heartbreak upon themselves and their loved ones. We can do that with our grown children by recognizing their freedom to live as they choose, but making clear the two paths (righteousness and evil) as we share anecdotes from our own youth or those of people we knew or people in the news who break God's commandments and suffer the consequences.

Now we read Solomon's sixth discourse about wisdom. Here, he encourages his son to serve and honor God with the parts of his body.

Read 4:20–27.

Q 10: Solomon mentions our eyes, our heart, our mouths, and our feet. How does mentioning body parts like this help in our struggle against evil?

- Solomon reminds us that no one can make us sin. And no matter how strong the temptation may be, God gives us the strength to say no. All we have to do is turn our eyes away, close our mouths, set our hearts on something else, or turn our feet in a different direction. That gives us strength against sin's power. But we still need God's Word to empower our minds to shun evil and seek good.

Now we read Solomon's seventh discourse about wisdom. Here, he takes on the temptations of adultery and sexual sin.

Read chapter 5.

Q 11: Why is it important to recognize the very powerful lure and attraction of temptations—especially sexual ones?

- We often downplay the great pull and tug these temptations have on our sinful desires. We need to be honest about that with ourselves and our children or friends. We have to arm ourselves so we won't be shocked at how strong the undertow is. Then we can see these temptations for what they are, take them seriously, and be mindful of the devastating result of committing these sins.

Q 12: Why do you think Solomon graphically describes the devastation caused by giving in to the adulteress's seduction?

- This very sobering warning puts everything in perspective and shows that the momentary joy of surrendering to the temptation is not worth the lifetime of heartache and devastation it will cause.

Now we read Solomon's eighth discourse about wisdom. Here he talks about things that threaten living by God's Word.

Read 6:1–19.

Q 13: Solomon warns particularly about getting caught up in someone else's "get rich quick" schemes. What is so dangerous about that?

- In youth, it is very easy to covet our parents' standard of living—forgetting that it took them twenty years of scraping, saving, and working hard to get to where they are now. It is far better for ourselves, and our spouse or future spouse, to learn to live with contentment and trust the Lord. Besides, we should look to the Lord's providence for our financial security—not our own ingenuity or that of someone else.

Now we read Solomon's ninth discourse about wisdom. Here, he returns to the topic of adultery.

Read 6:20–35.

Q 14: For a third time, Solomon warns against adultery. What does it say about this sin that the Holy Spirit inspired him to address this particular temptation so diligently and frequently?

- St. Paul taught, “every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Few temptations have the overwhelming pull as sexual sins because of the hormones that rage through our bodies in our youth. By experience, Solomon knew the hold of that temptation—having been born of a relationship that began by adultery between his mother, Bathseba, and his father, David. Then add to that the many foreign marriages he had (700 wives and 300 concubines). Solomon certainly didn't enjoy God's gift of marriage and sexuality as the Lord intended—he knew the tension and conflict.

Now we read Solomon's tenth and final discourse about wisdom. Here he closes with an extended description of a foolish young man caught up in adultery.

Read chapter 7.

Q 15: Look carefully at the pacing in Solomon's account. What makes verses 22–23 so powerful?

- Solomon has spent twelve verses carefully crafting his story to show the attractiveness of the adulteress, the lure of the sin. He built the anticipation that filled the heart of the young man. Then in two short verses, he abruptly points out how he turned off his mind, ignored his parents' instruction, and plunged himself into death—like an ox being led to slaughter, a stag or wild deer caught fast, or a bird rushing into a trap.

Now Solomon writes a second poem about wisdom. We read the first in 1:20–33. In contrast to the adulteress crying out to lure the hapless young man into her clutches, we see wisdom portrayed as a good and virtuous woman crying out on the heights and at the crossroads where people are getting on with their lives.

Read chapter 8.

Q 16: In what way do you see the eternal Christ in verses 22–36?

- John 1:3 tells us, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” This personification of wisdom fits very closely to the role of God’s eternal Son in creating the world. We also know He delights in the Father, in the Father’s works, and in mankind—whom He delighted in enough to take on our human nature, live among us, and lay down His life on the cross for our salvation.

Solomon concludes the first section of his book with a third poem about wisdom. Again, wisdom is personified as a woman who prepares a house with a rich feast for all who answer her invitation to become wise. But at the same time, a second woman personifying folly calls out to the same simpleminded, luring them to their eternal death.

Read chapter 9.

Q 17: In what ways is wisdom’s invitation similar to Jesus’ parables about the wedding feast and the invitations in Matthew 22:2–4?

- In both cases (Proverbs and Matthew), servants are sent to announce that the feast is ready and invite everyone along the highways and byways to come and celebrate. Those who reject the invitation end up suffering the devastation of God’s judgment.

SOLOMON'S PROVERBS— PROVERBS 10:1–22:16

In the previous chapters, Solomon wrote a series of poems and addresses encouraging his readers to turn from sin and folly to embrace wisdom and the fear of the Lord. In this next section (twelve and a half chapters long), Solomon's proverbs demonstrate what wisdom and folly look like in practice. They are gathered like a loosely connected collection rather than the poems and addresses we read before.

In this connection, you will usually notice that each verse contains one proverb. Each of these proverbs consists of two linked phrases or ideas. Sometimes these phrases contrast each other (wisdom vs. folly). At other times, the second phrase intensifies the first phrase.

The first verses discuss the material blessings that can come from honest, diligent work.

Read 10:1–5.

Solomon is careful to encourage us to work with care and skill. At the same time, he reminds us not to deceive ourselves into thinking everything relies on our efforts—we need to trust our heavenly Father to provide our daily bread.

Q 18: How does Solomon remind us to work diligently but not fear that our labor may not be enough to provide for our families?

- The third proverb (v. 3) reminds us that God watches over us to provide our needs and those of our family, so we need not fear that our labors may not be enough or that a bad economy, drought, or famine may ruin us.

The next proverbs encourage us to choose our words with great care.

Read 10:6–23.

Words are so easy to say and so impossible to take back. Solomon would not agree with the old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me!" He counsels us to guard our tongues and consider carefully every word we say.

Q 19: Select one proverb that has special meaning to you. Explain that meaning.

- Answers will vary, but this exercise will help bring out the wisdom and application of these proverbs.

The next proverbs remind us that we will face challenges and storms in life, but faith, fear of the Lord, and wisdom will give us stability and peace.

Read 10:24–32.

Solomon was not an idealist, nor was he deceived by his great wealth and

riches. He knew that life in a creation ruined by sin was often difficult and painful. Read a few chapters of Ecclesiastes and you will see the conclusion he reached regarding life in this sinful world.

Q 20: Read the proverbs/verses that show the Lord at work carrying His faithful people through the difficulties of life.

- Verses 27 and 29 show God at work protecting His people. Verses 24–25, 27–28, and 30–32 show the result of God’s protection in the lives of His people.

The next proverbs track the effects of righteousness and wickedness in the public sphere.

Read 11:1–11.

Solomon was aware of the suffering in his kingdom that came from the selfish, sinful actions of the ungodly. At the same time, he knew what a blessing his righteous subjects were to their neighbors and his entire kingdom.

Q 21: How do these proverbs illustrate what Jesus said about being salt and light to the earth in Matthew 5:13–16?

- Honesty and integrity should mark the way we speak and do business in our community. Having first been loved by Christ Jesus, we now show that love to our neighbors. In a dark and selfish world, our good works do not go unnoticed.

The next proverbs contrast the generosity of believers to the selfish hoarding of unbelievers.

Read 11:12–12:28.

Solomon was no fool. He knew it seems wise to our sinful natures to hoard our possessions for fear that we will have nothing. But true wisdom is knowing that our God and Father is the mighty Creator and Sustainer of all things. When we open our hands generously to meet the needs of our neighbors, we can have confidence that God will open His hand to provide all our needs.

Q 22: What enables Christians to be generous and share so freely with others?

- God has promised to provide us each day our daily bread. Confident and secure in His providence, we can look outside our needs and those of our families to see and help meet the needs of our neighbor.

The next proverbs speak about how a wise son lives.

Read 13:1–15:19.

Solomon has wise words for both parents and children. When parents raise their children in the wisdom of godly fear and faith, we are fulfilling God’s will and giving the world one of the greatest gifts we can—godly members of the next generation. Proverbs 13:24 is a very familiar passage. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”

Q 23: What extremes must we be careful to avoid when responding to our children's sins?

- On the one hand, we want to avoid being overly strict or demanding perfection from our children. We can easily give our children the impression that the only way to please their heavenly Father is through works and avoiding sin—rather than repentance and faith. But being too lenient leads them away from repentance, encourages them to despise their Savior since they don't see any sins they need saved from, and teaches our children to indulge their desires and plunge themselves into ruin and despair.

Q 24: How does our external discipline teach our children self-discipline?

- Our children's sinful nature tempts them to do whatever feels good (as does our own sinful nature). We must teach them to say no to those desires so they can prosper in life and avoid the pitfalls of following destructive sinful desires. Over time, our loving discipline can sink into their own minds and hearts. If we have been instructing them while disciplining them, they will be able to see both the benefit of following God's way and the pitfalls of turning to folly.

The next proverbs teach us to examine how we live our lives in relation to God and to our neighbors.

Read 15:20–17:6.

Solomon shows us that no one lives in isolation from God or from other people. Every good or evil choice we make sends ripples throughout society for good or for ill. God leads us to repent of our sins, and through His forgiveness in Jesus Christ, enables us to make good choices and live for His glory and the benefit of our neighbors. Proverbs 16:3 teaches us “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.”

Q 25: What does it mean to commit our work to the Lord?

- This passage does not promise a blank check—like one of the three wishes a legendary genie might grant when freed from a bottle. Committing our work to the Lord means that we submit our will beneath the Lord's perfect, heavenly will. In humility and childlike faith, we want God to guide us on the path He knows is best, so we begin our work asking Him to accomplish His will and guide what happens as a result of the work we undertake.

The next proverbs warn about the consequences of being a fool and the grief that brings to others.

Read 17:7–19:12.

Solomon speaks a painful truth in 17:25.

Q 26: Discuss the heartache you have seen foolish children bring to their parents.

- Answers will vary, but they show the truth in Solomon's words. At the same time, they cause us to look back on our own relationships with our parents to see when we made their lives hard and bitter by the things we did or said. If you still have a good relationship with your parents, thank God and them for their forgiveness. If your relationship is strained, bring it to God in prayer, then pick up the phone to call home.

The next proverbs speak about the ruin fools bring upon themselves and others, and they remind us that God sets limits on the lives of all people—both wise and foolish.

Read 19:13–22:16.

Solomon gives us a fearful reminder in Proverbs 21:12, “The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; He throws the wicked down to ruin.” We believers don't always live in this realization, but God is with us always, watching over us. It can be easy to assume that God watches over the godly and ignores the ungodly who ignore Him. But Solomon teaches us our Lord is also carefully observing the ungodly who ignore Him and living their lives without Him.

Q 27: How can this realization give us greater concern for our neighbors and underline the importance of sharing the Gospel with them?

- If we convince ourselves that God is ignoring those who reject Him, then it is easy to forget about the wrath of God that is building against them for every sin and blasphemy they commit. But if we look at the cross of Jesus and there see the wrath of God in action through Jesus' sufferings and afflictions, we will be more likely to see the necessity and desperation to share the Gospel with our neighbors.

THE WORDS OF WISE PEOPLE— PROVERBS 22:17–24:22

Solomon did not rely upon his own wisdom for the Book of Proverbs. He also collected wise sayings from other people and arranged them. He teaches us to listen to the wisdom of others—especially those who are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Read 22:17–21.

Q 28: Name some people whose wise counsel has guided your life.

- Answers will vary. We expect parents, pastors, teachers, and coaches to be mentioned by many. For others, it could be a boss or mentor from work. The point is to recognize and give God thanks for other people who care enough to share their experiences and help us along our path—especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The next section of wise sayings teaches us how to live with our neighbor. Notice the balance these sayings strike between how to treat the poor and how to conduct yourself in the presence of the wealthy and powerful.

Read 22:22–23:14.

Q 29: Why is God mentioned twice in the words regarding how we treat the poor (“LORD” in 22:23 and “Redeemer” in 23:11), but not at all in the way we treat the wealthy or powerful?

- Fear and respect comes more naturally in relation to those in higher positions or stations in life. But it is easy to disregard those who are lower in status than we are. The Lord reminds us not to show partiality—for however we treat the poor, that is how we are treating Christ Jesus (see Matthew 25:40).

The sayings in this next section are those of a father to his son. They play on the natural desire of a child to please his or her father. We draw great encouragement when we know it pleases our heavenly Father when we obey His Word—that is, trusting in His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Read 23:15–24:22.

Q 30: How does 23:15 relate to the words of God the Father at Jesus’ Baptism (Matthew 3:17) and at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:5)?

- In both verses, the voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” It means God the Father was delighted in the way His Son, Jesus, lived His life and showed the world how He felt about His Father.

Q 31: How do the following sayings help us build off of Jesus' life of obedience?

- The following sayings encourage us to keep the fear of God as our focus, not trying to please sinners and get ahead in this life. We may pass up some of the short-term advantages sin can bring in this life, but by God's grace through faith for Christ's sake, we will inherit an eternity of bliss in God's presence.

MORE WORDS OF WISE PEOPLE— PROVERBS 24:23–34

This last section of proverbs or wise sayings of other people provides three points of comparison and contrast. The first speaks of judges and other officials who must administer justice on God's behalf (vv. 23–25)—as well as witnesses who must speak the truth (v. 28). The second teaches us how to respond to people rightly (v. 26) rather than wrongly (v. 29). The third point in this section contrasts constructive labor (v. 27) with a neglect of labor (vv. 30–34).

Read 24:23–34.

These sayings give sound advice, especially to observe the way people around us live their lives. Think about the consequences of their actions and decisions, and learn lessons for our own living as God's Word guides and enlightens us.

Q 32: What lessons have you learned in life by observing how others live their lives?

- Answers will vary. Some learn from the mistakes made by their parents, siblings, friends, or acquaintances. It is wise to recognize the pitfalls sin places in our path and avoid the sinful mistakes other people make. It also demonstrates the wisdom of God's Ten Commandments, which teach us to safely navigate the minefield of devastating temptations.

SOLOMON'S PROVERBS COPIED BY HEZEKIAH'S MEN—PROVERBS 25:1–29:27

King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18–20) had his advisors study the writings of Solomon to glean some wise tips for kings and others who would serve in the courts of kings. The advisors gathered these sayings and arranged them. Sadly, apart from one of his descendants (Josiah), all his other offspring who ruled in Judah failed to follow this sound advice.

Read 25:1–27.

Q 33: Paul quoted Proverbs 25:21–22 in Romans 12:20. What does this passage teach us?

- Just like Jesus, we are to pray for our enemies and do good to those who mistreat us. If we repay them with evil, we are just escalating the cycle of sin and violence. But if we respond in kindness and love, they will have no excuse for continuing to hate and mistreat us. We hope they will see our undeserved gentleness and love and be moved by a guilty conscience (like burning coals on their head) and respond in repentance and faith and we will gain a friend. If not, then they will fall under God's judgment.

The next parables transcribed by King Hezekiah's advisors deal with fools and their folly.

Read 25:28–27:4.

Q 34: Most of these proverbs are Law oriented. Where does the Gospel come in?

- First, for a reader to understand the folly of the foolish, he or she must be enlightened by the Gospel. That is, recognizing and repenting of our own sin and folly, the Gospel makes us wise to salvation and casts the Law of God in a new light—the third use, which places the Law as a guide for our lives and conduct. Through that Law, we understand the seemingly irrational thoughts and actions of the fool, and we know how to reach out to the fool with the Law and saving Gospel.

Now the advisors of King Hezekiah present us with a group of Solomon's proverbs that address how to deal with family, friends, and other people.

Read 27:5–22.

A commonly used proverb is 27:17, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”

Q 35: Describe some relationships that have been particularly helpful to you. What are some relationships you would have been better without?

- This proverb is often used to describe two people who make each other wiser by sharing what they know—especially when each person’s strengths can help improve the other’s weaknesses. The point is that every human relationship can bring reciprocal advantages to both people involved in that relationship. Every relationship has the potential to improve the life of each—but if a person is bent on evil and folly and refuses to listen to our Christian witness, it might be wisest for us to limit our exposure lest we be tempted to turn against God.

King Hezekiah’s advisors turn again to the proverbs of Solomon that teach kings and advisors how to lead. In this section, he stresses the importance of integrity in our dealings with others. He argues that poverty with integrity is better than riches with deceit.

Read 27:23–28:11.

Proverbs 28:8 teaches an important lesson to all of us. “Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.”

Q 36: What is wrong with using interest and profit to multiply our wealth?

- “Interest and profit” are somewhat misleading English translations of the original Hebrew. Genuine and honest business practices are fine as long as they don’t take advantage of people. But Solomon is speaking of two sinful practices used by Israelite merchants and leaders of old to steal wealth from the poor and disadvantaged. “Interest” here means “usury,” which is offering loans with exorbitant interest rates, and “profit” here means “price gouging.”
- But notice the justice of God. Though people plot and scheme to get their hands on the wealth of the poor and socially vulnerable people, in the end, God distributes that wealth to those in need. This is an especially important reminder for kings, rulers, and other people of high station who may be tempted to take advantage of the subjects who are at their mercy.

This next section advises kings and other leaders to beware of associating with wicked people. As you read these proverbs, note how even in this life God is watching over all of us, and those who resort to wickedness will not prosper.

Read 28:12–28.

Q 37: What lesson do you take from Proverbs 28:13?

- If we try to cover or hide our sins to prosper in this lifetime, then even here on earth we will not end up prospering. The key to enjoying a good life here on earth and hereafter in heaven is to openly confess our sins to God—and abandon them. That is an important part of repentance. We don't need only to confess our sins; we need also to abandon the practice of those sins.

The next selection of Proverbs arranged by King Hezekiah's advisors warns that wicked people endanger a kingdom. This is wise counsel for kings and leaders. But it is also sound wisdom for us. We need to be careful how close we let ungodly friends get into our inner circle of friends.

Read 29:1–15.

Verse 1 warns against stubbornly clinging to our sins, rejecting the Lord's discipline, and continuing in unrepentance.

Q 38: In the spiritual sense, what does it mean “will suddenly be broken beyond healing”?

- Solomon is talking about Judgment Day and hell beyond. He wants us to know there will definitely be a day when mercy and grace have passed and those who reject Jesus Christ will not have a second chance.

This final section of Solomon's proverbs arranged by King Hezekiah's advisors gives some final advice for kings and leaders.

Read 29:16–27.

Two proverbs stand out: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe” (v. 25) and “An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked” (v. 27).

Q 39: How does Peter's denial of our Lord bear out the first of these proverbs?

- Jesus had warned Peter and the other disciples: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). If we fear the threats of people—especially unbelievers—we will be kept from doing that which God wants us to do. We can even be tempted to abandon the faith. We need instead to fear and trust our God, knowing that even the harm people might want to do to us is under God's control.

Q 40: What does the proverb in 29:27 tell us about trying to find agreement with the unbelieving culture around us?

- The unbelieving world hates God and His laws and His ways. There is no compromise they are willing to make—so any agreement we reach with them can only come from us compromising and surrendering our God-given values to accommodate to their ungodly standards. We have to recognize that love of this world is hatred toward God and vice versa. But in the end, God will hold the field and thrust sin and all evildoers out of His new heavens and the new earth.

AGUR'S PROVERBS—PROVERBS

30:1–33

We are not sure of the identity of Agur. Most likely, he was an otherwise unknown Israelite. We can divide his writings (chapter 30) into two parts. The first deals with the spiritual kingdom known as the Church; the second deals with the earthly estates of the family and the government.

Read 30:1–10.

Agur starts with a fascinating confession. He has tried to acquire wisdom through studying Solomon's proverbs, but because of his sinful nature, he cannot and remains a fool. Right away, he brings some questions to his readers in case they think they have succeeded where he failed. (They actually sound strangely similar to the questions God asked of Job in Job 38–41.) Instead, he tells us where true wisdom is to be found—in God and in His Son.

Q 41: What is significant about 30:4?

- Agur bears witness to God creating the world, and His Son whom He promised to send as Savior to fallen humanity—and the One who will return to restore the heavens and the earth.

Now Agur turns to the earthly estates of family and civil government that God put in place to provide and protect us in this earthly life.

Read 30:11–33.

Verse 17 is a stark proverb that speaks about the honor God commands children to give their parents, “The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.”

Q 42: Why does this proverb use such dire consequences for this sin?

- According to the Law, children who despised their parents were to be put to death (see Exodus 21:17). This is because God established godly parents to represent Himself. When the foundation of the family is removed, society crumbles.

KING LEMUEL'S PROVERBS— PROVERBS 31:1–9

In this section, a king named Lemuel passes along three pieces of advice he received from his mother. She warned him to avoid sexual promiscuity (31:3), gave him advice regarding the proper use and avoidance of alcohol (31:4–7), and urged him to ensure that the defenseless received justice (31:8–9).

Read 31:1–9.

Lemuel's mother took her God-given responsibility as his mother and spiritual teacher seriously. We see something similar in Timothy's mother and grandmother (see 2 Timothy 1:5)

Q 43: Why is it so important for Christian parents to be actively involved in their children's spiritual upbringing?

- God entrusted parents with this responsibility. Just as we would not dream of raising our children without an awareness of the physical dangers they face in life and trying to prepare them to avoid the danger, we should do the same with their spiritual health and life.

A POEM ABOUT AN IDEAL WIFE— PROVERBS 31:10–31

The author of this beloved poem is unknown. But it follows the acrostic pattern similar to many psalms and other biblical writings. In acrostic poetry, each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet—like our ABCs (see Psalm 119).

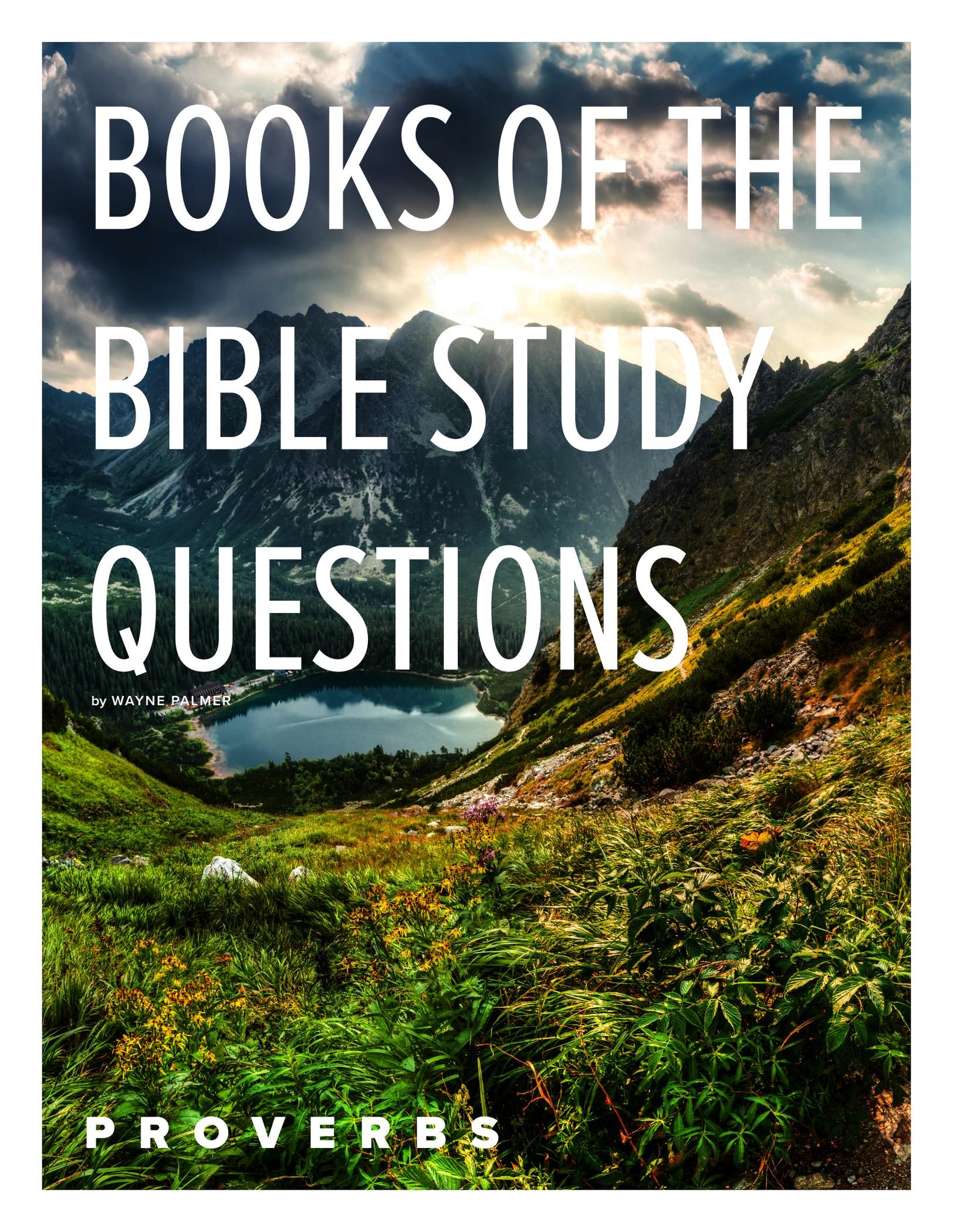
Read 31:10–31.

This poem begins with a Hebrew phrase translated “an excellent wife” (31:10). The same Hebrew phrase, when used of a man, is “a man of valor.” Used of David’s fighting men, it describes men who have strong faith in God, do good deeds for God’s people, and have the ability to serve as soldiers.

The Hebrew phrase used here indicates a woman who has strong faith in God, firm moral values, does good deeds vigilantly, and is able to teach divine wisdom—that is, share her faith. It is fitting that it is placed here following the sound advice of King Lemuel’s godly mother.

Q 44: What is the significance of this poem not including a physical description of this wife?

- Unlike the Shulammitte, the wife of Solomon in Song of Solomon, no description of the bride’s great beauty is given here. This poem provides an example that every Christian woman can aspire to—no matter whether she inherited beautiful features or not. She can have strong faith (not of her own doing, but by attending weekly worship, reading and studying the Scriptures, and regularly receiving the Sacrament); practice doing good according to the Ten Commandments as the Spirit empowers her; and work diligently to improve and master her skills and accomplish great things for her Lord, her family, and her church.

A scenic mountain landscape with a lake and a sunburst through clouds. The sun is low in the sky, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The mountains are rugged and rocky, with some green vegetation. The lake is calm and reflects the sky. The foreground is filled with green grass and yellow flowers.

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

P R O V E R B S