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BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK

**PONDERING
THE
PROVERBS**

by

Donald Hunt

Paraphrase By Kenneth Taylor

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

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College Press Publishing Company

Second Printing - 1977
Third Printing - 1983

Printed and Bound in the
United States of America

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International Standard Book Number: 0-89900-018-5

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INTRODUCTION

“Who wants to read an ‘Introduction’ to a book, especially to a commentary?” Nearly nobody. They are considered necessary for the studious but “too dry” for the average reader. May I ask, “Who, then, wants to write an ‘Introduction’ if nearly nobody is going to read it?” Well, maybe we can make this ‘Introduction’ different so it will be interesting both to write and to read. And shouldn’t an ‘Introduction’ to such an interesting book as Proverbs be interestingly written?

As a book Proverbs is vastly different from the other books of the Bible. Nearly two-thirds of the 915 verses is devoted to short, pithy sayings (many great “memory verses”) rather than extended, connected material. When Fred Smith was editing “The Plea”, a magazine with small-size pages filled with sayings, poems, and short articles (a boon to those putting out “church bulletins”), in his readers’ response column was one from O. L. Mankamyer: “You are putting out a good paper, but it is like reading the dictionary: it is always changing subjects.” And Proverbs might be likened to a dictionary in that it (1) it is a very important book; and (2) it is always changing subjects. However, the first 9 chapters are extended material on wisdom, and there are also other sections especially devoted to subjects toward the end of the book.

As the first verse of Proverbs indicates, its authorship is attributed to Solomon. At just what stage of his life he compiled it, we cannot be sure, but we suppose that since he was a famous proverb collector and learner (I Kings 4:32), it was probably toward the latter part of his life. Yet since in his old age his idolatrous wives turned away his heart from worshipping Jehovah (I Kings 11:4), it seems that we should not place its composition too close to that period of declension, or that which he had just written did him no good. We would, therefore, think it was probably written when he was younger—possibly in the height of his health and vigor.

Chapters 25-29 contain proverbs that King Hezekiah’s men were inspired to add to Solomon’s writings. Chapter 30 is said to be the words of one “Agur”. Chapter 31 contains some words of one “King Lemuel” which his mother taught him. Besides these clear notations, some think “the words of the wise” in 22:17 indicate that from there to the end of Chapter 24 is another section. The word “also” in 24:23 might so indicate.

Since Solomon is speaking to his son throughout the first 9 chapters, the material is in the "first person" grammatically (as is the material in 30:1-9, 18:20 and 31:1-9). But the big section of the "sayings" (all the rest of the book) is mostly in the "third person".

Proverbs' value to us who live in the Christian Age is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is basically non-dispensational wisdom.

When given the writing assignment, we were asked to write on the level of a sophomore in Bible training. This pleased me because I did not want to take all of the time (between 3 and 4 years of composition) and spend all of this effort to write a dry, boring book that would be consulted by a mere handful of dry intellectuals when I could hopefully write something that would be read by and appreciated by many more.

We have broken the material up into more or less 10 to 12 verse sections—about the length that might be covered in a Sunday morning or mid-week class. Each section begins with the "Text (from the American Standard version), is followed by "Study Questions" (which are meant to be answered before going to the helps of this book), then the "Paraphrase" (from "Living Bible" which in reality is not strictly a translation and should not be looked upon nor used as another version but as a "paraphrase" or the author's own rewording of the text—his own interpretation put into present-day expressions, making it somewhat of a small, concise commentary within this book), and the "Comments" by your present writer (which contains the heart of what your author can contribute to your understanding of this book), and finally the "Test Questions" (which cover both the "Text" and the "Comments"). "Noticeable Groupings" within the chapter is found at the end of Chapters 10-29 (the chapters that lend themselves to such—you should find some good use for the "Groupings" material proportionate to the time you spend studying through them).

Your author has employed many cross-references within his comments as he has always had a great interest in tying the Scriptures together. He has also quoted from earlier commentaries where they seemed to say it better than he thought he could, and to give you the value of others who have studied and written.

When asked to include a "Subject Index", your author was pleased, for he had several years ago spent a full year of work cataloging the book of Proverbs, and thus it took only five recent

weeks to make use of that previous work and to pass on to you something that has many study, teaching, and sermonic possibilities. Please give some time to the "Index" from these standpoints.

The noted and respected Thomas Campbell believed that Proverbs contained so much material that would help a person through life that he had his children memorize the entire book. His children had more time on their hands than ours as they lived before public-school days, but at the same time all parents would be wise to go through Proverbs and compile a list of those verses they would like their children to memorize. We have selected and included 52 such as a starter for those of every age to memorize.

Your writer's special interest in the book of Proverbs began when having completed his formal education for the ministry he began working his own way through the Bible. In time he came to the "Poetic" section of the Old Testament on which he spent an estimated five years of special study. At first I was attracted by some of the witty sayings and comparisons in Proverbs (like 26:17: "He that passeth by, and vexeth himself with strife belong not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears"). Then I began using various Proverbs in my messages. A lady who attended one of our Sacramento Gatherings about that time (back in the 1950's) said, "I'm going to have to study into the book of Proverbs. I didn't know that that book was so good." In the 1960's I wrote a book entitled, "Simple, Stimulating Studies in the Proverbs," which contains full-length studies (with only Proverb Scriptures used) on the following important subjects: "The Place of Wisdom"; "The Human Tongue;" "Lazy People;" "The Cry of the Needy;" "The Problem of Pride;" "Anger Outlawed;" "Riches Discussed;" "Fools Considered;" "Lascivious Conduct;" "View of God;" "The Fear of the Lord;" "Correction;" "Parenthood;" "Two Kinds of Wives;" "Psychological Outlook;" "Things Abominable;" "Things Preferable;" and "Honor as a Goal".

Since writing that book invitations have come to teach "Proverbs" in various camps, then the year of special index-work (previously mentioned) and then came the invitation to write this book for you. In receiving this invitation, I felt somewhat like David when offered King Saul's daughter Michael in marriage, "Seemeth it to you a light thing to be the king's son-in-law?" (I Sam. 18:23). And I say, "Seemeth it you a light thing to be chosen from all the possible writers to write

this commentary?" And while writing it, the additional thought has occurred that it is not known that any previous "Restoration" writer has ever compiled a "Commentary on Proverbs".

"When does a busy man find the time to write a commentary like this," one might ask. Usually in those early-morning hours when many others are still asleep. Most of the special research work, note-making, and actual writing have been done before breakfast. Rising at 5:00 a.m. (often at 4:00 a.m. down the "home-stretch"), he has studied and written before the rest of the family was up at 6:00 a.m. and before he became otherwise involved with the duties and thoughts of the day. He can well understand the same value placed upon this fresh part of the day by Alexander Campbell, Albert Barnes, and others who have written.

Though the "Introduction" is always in the front of a book, it is customarily the last thing written. That is as it should be, for one needs to have the material written before attempting to introduce it to his readers. In closing, a favorite Proverb again comes to mind that usually has at the completion of each school year of teaching, at the completion of meetings and large-scale rallies, and at the completion of various church building and home-remodeling projects with which I have been associated. At the end of this 3 to 4 year project, now in its last sentence, I agree, "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul" (Prov. 13:19).

Ottumwa, Iowa, February 6, 1974