

Appendix C
(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

**The Book of Proverbs:
Its Structure, Design and Teaching**

[Editor's note: The following is a condensed, edited version of Appendix Two, "The Book of Proverbs: Its Structure, Design and Teaching," taken from Ernest Martin's book, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 483-492. Reprinted in edited form with permission.]

The proverbial statements of the book of Proverbs are actually *parables* designed to illustrate moral, social or spiritual principles. Some are more like "dark sayings" that are quite puzzling. To say the least, there is often *more* to the proverb than what first meets the eye.

The first six verses of the book tell us that proverbs are to give wisdom, instruction, understanding, judgment, discretion, counsel, etc.—and that the wise reader will listen to the "words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (Proverbs 1:6).

In addition to Solomon's own proverbs, the book of Proverbs is a compilation of wise sayings associated with numerous "wise men" who lived long *before* Solomon. For example, the sons of Zerah—Ethan, Heman, Chalcol, and Darda (I Kings 4:31; I Chron. 2:6)—were four "wise men" (or ancient philosophers) who lived in Egypt when Joseph was in power. Other "wise men" were those "of the east country" (verse 30). Joseph himself was considered especially wise by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:39), and Job was well-known for his wisdom (Job 1:1).

The Bible says that proverbs were "sought out" and "set in order" by Solomon (Eccl. 12:9). Solomon himself "spoke three thousand proverbs" (I Kings 4:32)—yet the book contains only 915 verses, and some proverbs take up several verses. Apparently Solomon was quite selective in compiling the volume so that it would contain only the *best* of many "wise men." Also, the phrase "set in order" shows that the book was not arranged haphazardly. Indeed, we find that there are *seven* organized divisions in the book of Proverbs.

Division I	Proverbs 1:7 to 9:18
Division II	"The Proverbs of Solomon"—Proverbs 10:1 to 22:16
Division III	"The words of the wise [ones]"—Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22
Division IV	"These also belong to the wise [ones]"—Proverbs 24:23 to 24:34
Division V	"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out"—Proverbs 25:1 to 29:27
Division VI	"The words of Agar the son of Jakeh"—Proverbs 30
Division VII	"The words of King Lemuel"—Proverbs 31

Each division has a theme which helps identify the author and explain why the proverbs were arranged in a particular fashion.

Division I: In Chapter one, the first six verses are an introduction. The very first "proverb" is found in verse seven: "The **fear of the LORD** is the beginning of knowledge, *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). This sets the theme of the first division—and for all of Proverbs. "The fear of the LORD"—which is the Old Testament way of saying, "Have faith and trust in God"—is the very start of wisdom. And what is the next step to wisdom? "My son, **hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother**, for they *shall be* an ornament of grace to your head and chains of honor around your neck" (verses 8-9).

As to the author of this division, we are not told precisely; but there are some hints. This first division speaks about "strange women" or *wanton* women (Prov. 2:16-18; 5:3-6; 5:15-20; 6:24-35; 7:5-23; 9:13-18), and of the early "wise men" of Israel. Joseph was noted for his refraining from an adulterous union with the wife of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (Gen. 39) and is described as being "discreet and wise" (Gen. 41:39). Since he lived in Egypt at the same time as the sons of Zerah (I Kings 4:31), it could be that Joseph was the main author of this first

division, or helped to compose it with the sons of Zerah. Note that many of the proverbs in the first division are “dark sayings” which need “interpretation” (Prov. 1:6). It was Joseph who was able to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams in a judicious way (Gen. 41:25-32)—and he recognized that the sun, moon and eleven stars in his own dream represented his father, his mother and his eleven brothers (Gen. 37:5-11).

The main subject of this division is *wisdom* (1:20; 2:2, 6-7, 10; 3:13, 19, 21; 4:5, 7; 5:1; 7:4; 8:1, 12, 14; 9:1)—personified as a *woman*; *understanding* is also feminine (7:4-5). Perhaps there is a hidden meaning. Zion is called a *she* in Psalm 46:5; Israel and Judah are called *daughters* (Ezek. 23). The New Testament body of believers is called the *wife* of Christ (Rev. 19:7). But we find that Babylon, Nineveh, and the evil system condemned in the book of Revelation are also called “women” (Rev. 17:5; Nahum 2:10; 3:4; Zephaniah 2:13-15; Micah 5:6). The proverbs of Division I are directed to “my son”—who is to set his affection on *wisdom* and *understanding* (both expressed in the feminine) and to stay away from the “strange woman.”

In addition to warnings against physical sexual immorality, these “dark sayings” are intended to show the people of Israel to *stay away* from the alluring false “women” of Babylon, Nineveh and the great harlot of Revelation—and to cling to the “true women” of *wisdom* and *understanding*.

Division II: The next thirteen chapters are short proverbial statements made exclusively by King Solomon—“**The proverbs of Solomon**” (Prov. 10:1). While Division I dealt with wisdom, understanding, faithfulness and duty to God, this second division focuses on human relationships—the most important of which is that of children and parents. Thus, the division begins: “**A wise son makes a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.**”

Division III: This is one of the most interesting sections in the book of Proverbs—which actually begins in the middle of chapter 22. Proverbs 22:17-21 form an introduction, with the title—“the words of the wise ones”—coming from verse 17: “Bow down your ear, and **hear the words of the wise [ones]**, and apply your heart to my knowledge; for *it is* a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; if all of them are ready on your lips, so that your trust may be in the LORD; I have made known to you this day, even to you. Have I not written to you excellent things in counsels and knowledge that I might make you know the sureness of the words of truth, so that you might bring back the words of truth to those who send you?”

There are actually *thirty* parts to this division, which continues through Proverbs 24:22. The phrase “have I not written to you excellent things” (22:20) is rendered in many modern translations as “have I not written **thirty** sayings for you”—thus verifying the structure of the section.

Interestingly, an ancient Egyptian document in the British Museum is a parallel to Division III of Proverbs. It is called the “Instruction of Amen-em-opet.” While the Egyptian version differs in some respects from Proverbs, there is no doubt that the two documents are related. And the Egyptian version is composed of *thirty* parts.

While the date of the Egyptian text is disputed, it may go back to a time before Solomon. It could well be that the text was a product of the time when Joseph and the sons of Zerah were in Egypt documenting many of the wise sayings of the past. It is well within reason that many of these early philosophical works of the Israelites (while they were in Egypt) or of other wise men could have been maintained for long periods among the Egyptians. This would mean that the book of Proverbs is truly an international collection of wise sayings from a number of ancient philosophers and sages of the past.

Division IV: This section begins, “**These things are for the wise [ones]**” (24:23). With only twelve verses (23-34), the short division focuses on work and interpersonal relationships.

Division V: This section was designed to show how a *king* should properly conduct himself. Hezekiah, a righteous king of Judah in the eighth century BC, was intent in learning the wisdom of Solomon concerning leadership. It was he who ordered his scribes to collect some of the most important proverbs of Solomon which pertained to rulership. The result is this fifth division (25:1-29:27) which begins, “**These are also proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.**”

Notice how often these passages mention “king,” “prince” or “ruler”—while covering how to make judgments between people and how to be wise and honest. The division ends with a warning for all rulers who have to render judgment: “**Many seek the ruler’s favor but every man’s judgment comes from the LORD**” (29:26).

Division VI: This section—chapter 30—is the literary work of an unknown person called Agur: “**The words of Agur the son of Jakeh.**” An agnostic, Agur had great difficulty in believing that a loving and wise God existed—though he was compelled to admit that God must exist because of the marvels of creation (verses 2-6).

Agur noted that the animal world seemed to act according to a definite order, but mankind did not. Humans were haughty, they stole, were full of vanity, sensuous and foolish. And who did Agur consider the most stupid of all? It was himself: “**Surely I am more like an animal than any man, and do not have the understanding of man**” (verse 2). In anguish, it is as if Agur were asking, “**Where is God in all this?**” (verse 4, paraphrased). The chapter (and division) ends without Agur finding the answer to his quest. His agnosticism was not cured, though he *knew* there was a God.

Division VII: The last division—chapter 31—was written by an unknown king called Lemuel: “**The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him**” (31:1).

This Lemuel—which some believe was another name for Solomon—became so distraught with life in the end of his days that he was driven to drink (31:2-9). This could well describe Solomon in his final years (Eccl. 12:1-7). Solomon blamed his downfall on the many foreign women that he had in his harem (Eccl. 7:26-29)—but the problem was that they were the *wrong kind* of women for a righteous ruler of Israel. If Lemuel is a cipher for Solomon, it might help to explain why the last part of this division (22 verses in length) describes the perfect and honest woman—the type Solomon never found (31:10-31).

Summary: The primary reason for God inspiring the compilation of the book of Proverbs was to show how one can and should “rule” his life. Proverbs was arranged by a ruler himself, King Solomon. If Joseph was the author of Division I—and perhaps instrumental in composing Division III—he did so as a ruler in Egypt. Also, it was King Hezekiah who copied out proverbs to help him show justice to his people. Lemuel was a king, and Agur appears to have been someone in authority. Proverbs is indeed a book designed for those who *rule*—or, more importantly, for those who wish to rule their *own* lives.