

Chapter 23: Proverbs

Key Terms

- corpus: a collection of related writings
- wisdom and poetic literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
- retribution principle: the idea that there is a one-to-one correlation between one's actions and rewards
- proverb: short, pithy statement that captures a basic truth
- instructional literature: literature meant to provide instruction and guidance
- sage: a wise person who taught others

Key Ideas

- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
- The way of wisdom leads to life.
- A proverb illustrates a general principle, not a promise.
- Wisdom leads to an understanding of the retribution principle.

Chapter Summary

Proverbs contains eight collections of wise sayings, ascribed to Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel. The book also mentions the editorial work of Hezekiah's scribes, indicating that the book probably reached its final form sometime in the sixth century BC. Instructional wisdom was concerned with the three centers for teaching: the family/clan, the royal court, and the scribal schools. Hebrew wisdom literature developed during the united monarchy under Solomon and the divided monarchy under Hezekiah.

The purpose of Proverbs is to preserve wisdom for succeeding generations. The book is divided into discourse, collections of proverbs, and appendices, though these writings are not arranged systematically. Hebrew wisdom literature, unlike that of its neighbors, acknowledges only one God: Yahweh. The book emphasizes the close association of the fear of Yahweh with the knowledge of God. Because Yahweh is the source of wisdom, only those who know God can be wise. The blessings of the way of righteousness come when a proper relationship with Yahweh results in proper action toward one's neighbor. Proverbs has much to say about appropriate speech, as well as appropriate male-female relationships.