

Contents

1	The Call of Wisdom—December 27–January 2 —————	6
2	From Ears to Feet—January 3–9 —————	14
3	A Matter of Life and Death—January 10–16 —————	22
4	Divine Wisdom—January 17–23 —————	30
5	The Blessings of the Righteous—January 24–30 —————	38
6	What You Get Is Not What You See—January 31–February 6 ——	46
7	Dealing With Fights—February 7–13 —————	56
8	Words of Wisdom—February 14–20 —————	64
9	Words of Truth—February 21–27 —————	72
10	Behind the Mask—February 28–March 6 —————	80
11	Living by Faith—March 7–13 —————	88
12	The Humility of the Wise—March 14–20 —————	96
13	Women and Wine—March 21–27 —————	104

Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

Principal Contributor
Jacques B. Doukhan

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Wendy Marcum

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Design
Justinen Creative Group

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Words of the Wise

While many books of the Bible are filled with deep spiritual and theological truths, the book of Proverbs is filled with practical and down-to-earth advice for daily living.

Brief, well-balanced, poetic, salty, and often humorous, the proverbs are universal, are easy to memorize, and make their points well, sometimes even more efficiently than do eloquent speeches and rigorous argumentation.

For instance, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (*Prov. 6:6, NKJV*). Or: “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman” (*Prov. 21:19*). Or: “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you” (*Prov. 25:21, 22, NIV*). Who is going to forget those types of images?

The book of Proverbs is a witness to the wisdom that had been accumulated over generations. Its human authors are referred to as King Solomon (*Prov. 1:1–9:18, 10:1–22:16, Proverbs 25–29*); as nonidentified “wise men” from the ancient Near Eastern world (*Prov. 22:17–24:22, 24:23–34*); and as the non-Israelite Agur (*Prov. 30:1–33*). The book even acknowledges King Hezekiah’s editorial contributions (*Prov. 25:1*). In some cases, too, the book reflects ancient Near Eastern texts, especially those from ancient Egypt.

Yet the book of Proverbs *is* the Word of God, because it was under divine

inspiration that the authors pulled their materials together. Although God is rarely explicitly mentioned in the texts, He is always present: wherever we are in the marketplace, or as we speak, eat, drink, work, buy, sell, socialize, and love, the Lord is there. The God of Proverbs is not just the God of a religious person, whether a priest or a worshiper in the pew. Godliness is here put into working clothes.

The book of Proverbs also teaches about what it means *to fear God* (*Prov. 1:7, 31:30*), not just in church but as we go about our daily lives, because the way we live speaks louder than the way we preach, pray, or even sacrifice (*Prov. 28:9, 15:8*).

In Proverbs, “wisdom” is revealed when you acknowledge the Lord “in all your ways” (*Prov. 3:6, NKJV*); that is, wisdom is living in faith and in obedience; it’s about what it means to be human before the God of Creation.

From the book of Proverbs we will learn how to be wise, but concretely, in practical ways. The book answers such questions as *What and how should I teach my children? How can I be happy and successful? Why do I have money problems? How can I get a promotion in my job? How can I resist sexual temptations? How should I cope with my anger or my tongue?*

Finally, wisdom isn’t necessarily intellectual might. On the contrary, the one who is sure of his or her brainpower is in the most danger of playing the fool, because even the smartest person knows so little. One may think of oneself as already wise and therefore as having no need to seek more knowledge. The prerequisite for wisdom is, instead, to be humble, to feel our need and then to ask for wisdom.

Proverbs is deep and rich, and it deals with many topics. Given the limitations of space, we’ve had to pick and choose which material we could cover. We can’t cover it all, but all that we have is, indeed, worthy of our prayerful study.

The book of Proverbs is a witness to the wisdom that had been accumulated over generations.

Jacques B. Doukhan is professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis and director of the Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. A French citizen (born in Algeria), Doukhan has a doctorate in Hebrew from the University of Strasbourg and a doctor of theology degree from Andrews University.

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