

Notes on Proverbs

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Introduction

TITLE

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible translates into English as "The Proverbs of Solomon, the Son of David, King in Israel" (cf. 1:1). The Greek Septuagint called this book "Proverbs of Solomon." The Latin Vulgate named it "The Book of Proverbs."¹ Translators of English Bibles place Proverbs among the poetic books (Psalms—Song of Solomon), whereas in the Hebrew Bible it is found among the "Writings" (Heb. Kethuvim), the third and final major section.

There is some debate about whether 1:1 is the title of the whole book or just the title of the first major section (chs. 1—9). The first view has in its favor the fact that the Hebrew Bible took the verse as the title of the book. According to this view the references to Solomon in 1:1 are an indication that he was the primary author of the proverbs in the book.² The second view is that 1:1 simply introduces the first major section of the book.³ The support for this view is that some succeeding sections begin with a similar caption (cf. 10:1; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1). However, chapters 1 through 9 do not contain "proverbs" as such, but longer wisdom speeches. In either case, the book got its title from the proverbs that it contains. The whole book is a book of proverbs and wise sayings, so the title is appropriate.

WRITER

Proverbs claims to be a collection of the wise sayings of several different individuals. Only Proverbs and Psalms in the Old Testament claim composite authorship for themselves. Solomon originated or collected most of the proverbs (10:1—22:16 and chs.

¹The Septuagint translation was completed about 250 B.C. and the Vulgate about A.D. 390.

²See Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs*, p. 22.

³See Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 328, who believed that 22:17 also contains a heading.

25—29 definitely, and probably chs. 1—9 as well).¹ Unnamed wise men (sages) wrote other parts (22:17—24:34 definitely, and possibly chs. 1—9). Hezekiah's men copied some of Solomon's proverbs and added them to this collection (chs. 25—29). Agur and King Lemuel produced chapters 30 and 31 respectively. We do not know who the sages were who wrote 22:17 through 24:34, nor do we know the names of the men whom King Hezekiah instructed to compile some of Solomon's sayings. Agur and Lemuel are unknown to us also, though Lemuel seems to have been a non-Israelite monarch.²

Some of the proverbs appear to have been copied from, or at least influenced by, earlier ancient Near Eastern books of wisdom.³

"... whatever the Spirit of God inspired the ancient writers to include became a part of the Word of the Lord. Such inclusions then took on a new and greater meaning when they formed part of Scripture; in a word, they became authoritative and binding, part of the communication of the divine will."⁴

"The opinion ... of R. [Rabbi] Jonathan, that Solomon first composed the Canticles, then the Proverbs, and last of all Ecclesiastes, inasmuch as the first corresponds with the spring-time of youth, the second with the wisdom of manhood, and the third with the disappointment of old age, is founded on the supposition of the unity of the book and of its Solomonic authorship."⁵

DATE

Solomon reigned from 971 to 931 B.C. and Hezekiah from 715 to 686 B.C.⁶ We do not know when the sages, Agur, or Lemuel lived. The earliest the Book of Proverbs could have been in its final form was in Hezekiah's day, but it may have reached this stage later

¹See Andrew E. Steinmann, "Proverbs 1—9 as a Solomonic Composition," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):659-74.

²See my comments on 31:1.

³See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 123-25; W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 15; Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 17-23; Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," in *Psalms-Song of Songs*, vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 883-86; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, pp. 290-94; Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, pp. 42-56.

⁴Murphy, pp. 885-86.

⁵Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, 1:1-2.

⁶Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 75, 78.

than that. We have no way to know. The contents of the book could have been in existence in Solomon's lifetime, though not assembled into the collection we know as the Book of Proverbs.

According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon "spoke" (Heb. *dbr*) 3,000 proverbs. The Book of Proverbs only contains a total of 800 proverbs.¹ That Solomon "spoke" or "uttered" them does not necessarily mean that he "composed" (NRSV) them.² Probably the proverbs of Solomon recorded in the Book of Proverbs are ones that he collected, some of which he may have composed but others of which he obtained from other sources.³

"It will be seen that many of the ideas and themes in the book of Proverbs also appear in other, especially Egyptian, wisdom writings. This should not be understood to mean that Israel's sages borrowed such ideas wholesale from the didactic literature of the surrounding cultures; rather, a common approach to observing the order of the cosmos led biblical and nonbiblical wisdom writers to many of the same conclusions."⁴

"There are more than two dozen documents of 'instructions' deriving from ancient Egypt across three millennia that have been preserved and translated, as well as several proverbial collections from ancient Mesopotamia and Canaan."⁵

GENRE

"Knowledge of the genre [type of literature] is essential to the interpretation."⁶

"As we look at the contents of Proverbs, we see more than one type of genre in the book. For instance, we immediately sense a difference

¹Delitzsch, 1:1.

²NRSV refers to *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.

³See Longman, pp. 23-25.

⁴David L. Adams, "Proverbs," in *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, p. 887.

⁵Richard L. Schultz, "Proverbs," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, p. 460. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 135, counted 40 works of instructional wisdom.

⁶Hubbard, p. 45.

between chaps. 1—9 and 10—31. The former is made up of discourses or speeches, while the latter are closer to what we call proverbs in English."¹

Proverbs are a distinctive genre. They are a particular kind of figure of speech.² The Hebrew word translated "proverb" (*masal*) essentially means a comparison. However, through usage it came to mean any profound pronouncement, including: maxims, observations, sermons (e.g., ch. 5), even wisecracks (cf. Ezek. 18:2), and revelations from God (cf. Ps. 49:4).³ Etymologically, the English word means "in place of (i.e., for) words." A proverb is usually a succinct statement that stands in place of a long explanation and expresses a truth about reality.

"The word *Mashal* from which the word *Proverbs* is derived denotes a simple, self-evident truth, expressed in a short, pointed sentence, designed to 'arrest attention, awaken responsive thought, and remain fixed in memory.'"⁴

"The proverb, understood broadly, is a short, pithy saying that offers advice or an observation on the world. E. I. Gordon defines it more specifically as a 'short familiar saying, expressing some well-known truth or common fact of experience,' and he cites Cervantes' memorable definition that a proverb is a 'short sentence founded on long experience.'"⁵

"Proverbs express ideas commonly accepted as true."⁶

As mentioned above, the English word "proverb" is a translation of the Hebrew word *masal*, meaning "resemblance." Proverbs are statements that paint a small word picture of what life is like or should be like. Thus a proverb is a snapshot of life. However, as with every snapshot, a proverb does not always represent what life always looks like. One picture does not capture everything. A good proverb, like a good snapshot, captures what is typical.

¹Longman, p. 30.

²See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 328-33.

³For word studies of *masal*, see Allen H. Godbey, "The Hebrew *Masal*," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 39:2 (January 1923):89-108; and A. S. Herbert, "The 'Parable' (*Masal*) in the Old Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954):180-96.

⁴Sanford C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, p. 275. He did not identify the source of his quotation.

⁵Longman, pp. 54-55. His quotation is from Edmund I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 1959 ed., p. 1.

⁶Longman, p. 31.

There are exceptions to the proverbs. They are not always true, but they are usually true. They represent life accurately, but not completely. Visualize a photograph of a waterfall. It accurately represents a typical waterfall, but it does not picture every feature of every waterfall, even every waterfall in the locale where the picture was taken. Some waterfalls look quite different, though all waterfalls share certain things in common that this picture shows.

"... in my opinion, Ecclesiastes and Job function in part as a canonical corrective to an overreading of the book of Proverbs. They quash any presumption that one invariably and immediately receives rewards for good behavior and punishments for bad behavior."¹

Proverbs are a form of literature (genre) that is essentially different from promises. One of the common mistakes that many Christians make when they read the proverbs is to take them as promises. Some are promises as well as proverbs, when the proverb expresses a truth that is *always* consistent, but it is important to be able to distinguish a proverb from a promise. Promises are straightforward statements of assurance that guarantee that stated effects will inevitably follow. Some promises are conditional, and others are unconditional. Proverbs and promises are really different forms of expression, and different types of literature.

"It is inappropriate to treat the proverbs of this book as promises. They are theological and pragmatic principles."²

"Christians are often confused and sometimes discouraged in their attempt to apply the proverbs. The confusion usually stems from misunderstanding the character of the proverbs. They are often treated as inviolable laws or infallible promises when they should be understood as universal but not inflexible principles."³

"Because the proverbs of Solomon are Scripture, it is supposed that God himself will guarantee the performance of every proverb. This has put a strain on many Christians' faith when they have 'claimed God's promises in prayer,' holding up some proverb to God. When the exceptional or the unusual occurs, they then think God has failed to fulfill his promise. However, proverbs in Solomon's collection are not promises made by

¹Ibid., p. 62.

²C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, p. 162. See also Longman, p. 85

³Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Moses to Malachi*, p. 302.

God, but are guides which are to direct people in living successful and productive lives."¹

Let me try to clarify the difference between a proverb and a promise. If you were driving along a country road, for example, and saw a huge, long shed with the word "chickens" over the doorway, you would probably conclude that chickens were inside. If you got out of your car, walked over to the shed, and looked in, you would probably see hundreds of white, feathery, clucking chickens. But if your traveling companion said, "Those aren't chickens; they're pigs," you would say he was crazy. That is what many Christians say when they look into the book labeled "Proverbs." They say, "Those aren't proverbs; they're promises."

Take another example: Proverbs 3:5 and 6. This is a proverb with a very high degree of probability because it repeats a truth that God guarantees as absolutely true elsewhere in Scripture. In almost every book of the Bible, we have evidence that those who trust in the LORD wholeheartedly, and do not rely on themselves alone, receive guidance from Him (e.g., Gal. 5:16). This is such an obvious truth that when we read it in Proverbs, we should know that it is a proverb that expresses something that is consistently true. It also expresses what God promises elsewhere in His Word. This means that interpreting the proverbs accurately requires some knowledge of what God has promised elsewhere in His Word. This is the correlation step in Bible study: comparing Scripture with Scripture.

When reading the proverbs ask yourself: "Is this a promise elsewhere in Scripture?" If so, the proverb expresses an observation that is consistently true. We might say that some proverbs have a higher degree of accuracy than others.

This distinction between proverbs and promises raises some questions. If the proverbs are not 100 percent reliable as statements, and they are Scripture, is Scripture less than 100 percent reliable? No, because a proverb does not claim to be 100 percent reliable. It only claims to be a safe guide to what usually happens. They are snapshots of life, not statements claiming to reflect what life invariably looks like. And they are a safe guide, because they express what usually happens in life.

Another question is: "Are we disobeying Scripture and sinning if we do not follow a proverb?" For example, some proverbs say that we should not countersign a loan with a stranger. If we do that, are we sinning? No, the proverbs are not commands. They are revelations of what will usually follow if we do certain things. We may choose to

¹William E. Mouser Jr., *Walking in Wisdom*, pp. 13-14.

countersign with a stranger under certain circumstances, but the proverbs warn us about what we can normally expect to happen in most cases if we do. Another example is going into debt. It is not a sin to go into debt, but it is unwise in most cases, as some of the proverbs say.

"Name it and claim it" theology has greatly influenced many Christians to treat the proverbs as promises, as has the general failure to distinguish proverbs as a unique genre.

"Didactic Wisdom, the [larger] genre to which Proverbs belongs, is almost always cast as the words of a father to his son. The didactic books [of the ancient Near East] formulate some teachings as observations in the third person and others as admonitions in the second person, but both types aim at inculcating right attitudes and behavior. The teachings are not revelation and are never spoken by a god (except when the teacher is Pharaoh). With a few exceptions in Ben Sira, gods are never quoted or addressed in the body of the works. In content, the advice is both religious and worldly, but the focus is on successful and worthy behavior in mundane affairs. The advice is always directed to individuals, not a national grouping. It shows little interest in affairs of state, except when the pupil happens to be the king, in which case the national concerns belong to his personal realm of activity. Didactic writings are composed of short proverbs and of somewhat longer maxims on a single theme."¹

"Fundamental to the proverbial form [genre] is the fact that it bears a truth that has been tested by time."²

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

One characteristic feature of the proverbs is that the editor of a given collection of proverbs has "chain-linked" similar or related proverbs into groups or series of proverbs. Thus there are frequently series of proverbs that in some way tie together. Sometimes the link is the subject (e.g., the fool, 26:1-12; the sluggard, 26:13-16; the gossip, 26:20-

¹Fox, p. 18. "Ben Sira" refers to the Hebrew apocryphal book *Ecclesiasticus*, also called *The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*.

²Bullock, p. 156.

22; the malicious, 26:23-28). At other times the link is an idea, a Hebrew word, or even a Hebrew letter.¹

"Proverbs by their nature are like individual pearls. Though they may be strung together, each one represents a self-contained thought. The unity of the book lies in its common reverence for wisdom, not in a logically ordered discourse."²

Another characteristic feature of this book is that repetition of proverbs within the book, and even within collections of proverbs within the book, is not uncommon. In some cases, whole proverbs are repeated in exactly the same words (e.g., 14:12 and 16:25). Sometimes a proverb reappears with only a slight change in wording (e.g., 10:1 and 15:20). Some proverbs are almost identical in form but somewhat different in meaning (e.g., 10:2 and 11:4). In some cases, only the first line is the same or similar (e.g., 10:15 and 18:11). In others, only the second line is the same or similar (e.g., 10:6 and 10:11). In still others, one of several lines is the same (e.g., 11:13 and 20:19).³ This phenomenon is in keeping with the nature of a collection or anthology of wise sayings. They bear repeating. Where there is a change, it is for a purpose, namely, to express a slightly different point, or for variety of expression.

"In its basic form, the proverb is an ancient saying that takes wisdom and endows it with youthful vigor. In a few, piquant phrases the proverb capsulizes a practical idea or truth in such a way as to lift the commonplace to a new level of mental consciousness. It reweaves the threadbare idea and shows the ordinary to be quite extraordinary."⁴

"To read straight through a few chapters of Proverbs is like trying to have a conversation with someone who always replies with a one-liner."⁵

"The Book of Proverbs has always been regarded as containing the concentrated deposit of ancient Israelite morality."⁶

"The book cannot be said to be a religious book, but rather one of practical wisdom and instruction. It, however, does not ignore religion

¹Delitzsch usually identified these links in his commentary where this phenomenon occurs.

²Hanna, p. 302.

³Delitzsch, 1:24.

⁴John J. Collins, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, p. 13.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 74.

and frequent appeals are made to man's relation to Deity or to the values to be found in a proper relationship with Him."¹

Richard Trench, commenting on proverbs in general, believed that a proverb always has four characteristics: shortness, sense, salt, and popularity.²

In addition to proverbs of various lengths, this book also contains narrative material. Most scholars recognize that Proverbs is a book of poetry and didactic (that is, instructive, in contrast to speculative) wisdom literature.

"Poetry has three major characteristics: terseness, parallelism, and intense use of imagery. There are also a number of what might be called secondary poetical devices."³

"We're living in the 'information age,' but we certainly aren't living in the 'age of wisdom.' Many people who are wizards with their computers seem to be amateurs when it comes to making a success out of their lives. Computers can store data and obey signals, but they can't give us the ability to use that knowledge wisely. What's needed today is wisdom."⁴

"The Book of Proverbs is about godly wisdom, how to get it and how to use it. It's about priorities and principles, not get-rich-quick schemes or success formulas. It tells you, not how to make a living, but how to be skillful in the lost art of making a life."⁵

"Proverbs' guiding belief is that the human intellect—wisdom—founded on fear of God and tutored in traditional teachings, is the prime virtue of character, and as such is the necessary (and almost sufficient) means for creating a life of success—materially, physically, socially, and morally."⁶

It has been said that the sum total of human information currently doubles approximately every year and a half. In view of this, T. S. Eliot's questions are more appropriate today than when he wrote them:

¹Yoder, p. 277.

²Richard Trench, *On the Lessons in Proverbs*, pp. 15-16.

³Longman, p. 33. See also p. 36.

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Skillful*, p. 7.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Fox, p. 3.

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"¹

"The final value of the Book of Proverbs is its revelation of the application of wisdom to all sorts and conditions of people, and to the ordinary affairs of human life."²

"THE BOOK OF PROVERBS opens a window to a realm of ancient Israelite experience little seen elsewhere in the [Hebrew] Bible: everyday life. Proverbs guides individuals (not the nation) in how to do what is wise in their day-to-day lives. It teaches the attitudes and courses of actions that are right, just, and pious, and the ways of behavior that facilitate and strengthen personal relationships, the forms of communication and commerce that make the life of the community congenial and secure, and the types of prudence and industry that help one achieve financial security."³

"Proverbs convey wisdom for living by making comparisons or contrasts. By their nature proverbs bring together experience and insight, life and light. Life is carefully observed, thoughtfully analyzed, evaluated by experience, and lessons are distilled resulting in a principle (proverb). That proverb in turn when applied back to life brings improvement and excellence."⁴

"God is never quoted or addressed [in the book]. It [the book] never had a role in the ritual life of Israel, in neither temple nor synagogue. In fact, it never was, and still is not, a subject of deliberate study in the rabbinic academies. With the exception of a few passages, it treats everyday life, not the grand affairs of state, history, cult [religious ritual], or law. It gives guidance in challenges we all face: how to get along with people, how to be a good and decent person, how to make the right choices in personal and business affairs, how to win God's favor and avoid disaster—all issues of great importance, but still modest and prosaic ones."⁵

¹T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, p. 147.

²G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 226.

³Michael V. Fox, "Proverbs," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1437.

⁴Hanna, p. 294.

⁵Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 7.

"The open public character of biblical wisdom, as depicted throughout the book of Proverbs, contrasts with the esoteric and hidden wisdom of later gnostic religious traditions, according to which wisdom was available only to a few spiritual elite."¹

FORMS

Three things mark biblical poetry, and these are frequent in the proverbs: terseness, imagery, and parallelism.² *Terseness*, or conciseness, is observable in Proverbs in its aphorisms (compact formulations of a truth) that are also epigrams (concise, wise, witty, and sometimes paradoxical sayings). *Imagery* is figurative language that is suggestive and brief. Some important figures of speech in Proverbs are: simile, metaphor, allegory, anthropomorphisms, anthropomorphisms, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, litotes, and irony.³ *Parallelism* characterizes Hebrew poetry, in contrast to rhyme and meter, which characterize English poetry. Parallelism in Proverbs refers to the correspondence between two parts of one proverb. Sometimes sounds or syllables are parallel, but most often ideas are.

Scholars have identified several types of parallelism in Proverbs. The basic types are: synonymous (in which the parallel lines share almost the same thought in different words; e.g., 1:8; 19:29), antithetic (in which the thought of the second line is the opposite of the first; e.g., 3:33; 13:9), and synthetic (in which the second line expands or adds a thought to that of the first line; e.g., 3:12; 20:2). Other types of parallelism are: integral (in which the second line completes the thought of the first line; e.g., 11:31), comparative (in which comparison is drawn between the ethical point and what is common in nature and everyday life; e.g., 15:17; 26:3; 26:8), and emblematic (in which comparison is drawn between the ethical point and an object or objects that the writer uses as a symbol or symbols; e.g., 27:15). Both of the latter forms (comparative and emblematic parallelism) have also been called parabolic parallelism.⁴

"According to the traditional terminology in use since the time of Lowth, these bicola [in chapter 2] show 'synonymous parallelism,' but more recent nomenclature has moved away from this label as misleading. The

¹Adams, p. 898.

²Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1—15*, p. 38.

³See *ibid.*, pp. 39-41, for definitions and examples of each of these.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:7-8.

second colon of each bicolon does more than restate what is said in the first; instead, it takes it further."¹

In addition, there are sayings, which include comparisons (e.g., 3:35), numerical sayings (e.g., 30:18), admonitions (e.g., 3:1b-2), and prohibitions (e.g., 1:15-16). Rhetorical questions (e.g., 6:27), calls to attention (e.g., 5:1), reflections on experiences (e.g., 4:3-9), accounts of personal observations (e.g., 7:6-23), beatitudes (e.g., 3:13-14), and allegories or extended metaphors (e.g., 5:15-23) are also literary forms that the writer(s) used.²

Another way to describe the form of the proverbs is according to the number of their lines. The most common is the distich, or two-line proverb. There are also three, four, five, six, seven, and eight-line parables: the tristich, tetrastich, etc.³

Some of the proverbs simply describe life as it is; they help the reader view life realistically. Most of them go beyond mere observation and advocate a certain action, either implicitly or explicitly; they advocate morality. Some contrast what is good with what is better, so the reader can make value judgments and act accordingly. Some appear in alphabetical lists, evidently to express fullness of thought and/or as an aid to memorization.⁴

OUTLINE

- I. Collection 1: Discourses on wisdom chs. 1—9
 - A. Introduction to the book 1:1-7
 1. The title of the book 1:1
 2. The purposes of the book 1:2-6
 3. The thesis of the book 1:7
 - B. Instruction for young people 1:8—8:36
 1. Warning against consorting with sinners 1:8-19

¹Longman, p. 117. "Lowth" refers to Bishop Robert Lowth (1710-1787), Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, who pioneered the study of Hebrew poetry.

²David A. Hubbard, *Proverbs*, pp. 16-21.

³For more information on introductory matters, including title, text and versions, structure, ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, authorship, forms of proverbs, theology, and bibliography, see Waltke, 1-170.

⁴See also Hubbard, pp. 16-28, for six helpful guidelines to the interpretation and proclamation of the proverbs.

2. Wisdom's appeal 1:20-33
 3. Wisdom as a treasure ch. 2
 4. Divine promises and human obligations 3:1-12
 5. The value of wisdom 3:13-35
 6. Teaching the love of wisdom 4:1-9
 7. The two paths 4:10-19
 8. The importance of persistence 4:20-27
 9. Warnings against unfaithfulness in marriage ch. 5
 10. Other dangerous temptations 6:1-19
 11. The folly of adultery 6:20-35
 12. The lure of adultery ch. 7
 13. The function of wisdom ch. 8
- C. Wisdom and folly contrasted ch. 9
1. Wisdom's feast 9:1-6
 2. The open or closed mind 9:7-12
 3. Folly's feast 9:13-18
- II. Collection 2: Solomon's couplets expressing wisdom 10:1—22:16
- A. The marks of wise living chs. 10—15
1. Things that produce profit 10:1-14
 2. Things of true value 10:15-32
 3. Wise living in various contexts 11:1-15
 4. Wise investments 11:16-31
 5. The value of righteousness 12:1-12
 6. Avoiding trouble 12:13-28
 7. Fruits of wise living ch. 13
 8. Further advice for wise living chs. 14—15
- B. How to please God 16:1—22:16
1. Trusting God ch. 16
 2. Peacemakers and troublemakers ch. 17
 3. Friendship and folly ch. 18
 4. Further advice for pleasing God 19:1—22:16
- III. Collection 3: Thirty sayings of the wise 22:17—24:22
- A. Introduction to the 30 sayings 22:17-21
- B. The 30 sayings 22:22—24:22

- IV. Collection 4: Six more sayings of the wise 24:23-34
- V. Collection 5: Solomon's maxims expressing wisdom chs. 25—29
 - A. Introduction of the later Solomonic collection 25:1
 - B. Instructive analogies 25:2—27:22
 - 1. Wise and foolish conduct 25:2-28
 - 2. Fools and folly ch. 26
 - 3. Virtues and vices 27:1-22
 - C. A discourse on prudence 27:23-27
 - D. Instructive contrasts chs. 28—29
- VI. Collection 6: The wisdom of Agur ch. 30
 - A. The introduction of Agur 30:1
 - B. Wisdom about God 30:2-9
 - C. Wisdom about life 30:10-33
- VII. Collection 7: The wisdom of Lemuel ch. 31
 - A. The introduction of Lemuel 31:1
 - B. The wise king 31:2-9
 - C. The wise woman 31:10-31

MESSAGE

The Book of Proverbs contains little history. It is mainly didactic; it is a book of explicit instruction. Like the other Old Testament wisdom books (Job and Ecclesiastes), it does not contain references to Israel's laws, rituals, sacrifices, or ceremonies. It deals with philosophy primarily. A philosopher is, by definition, a lover of wisdom. Proverbs is a book that focuses primarily on wisdom, as do Job and Ecclesiastes. In this sense these books are philosophical.

There is a fundamental difference between the philosophy that we find in these books and all other philosophy. Other philosophies begin with a question. Hebrew philosophy begins with an affirmation. Its basic affirmation is that God exists. Therefore, we can know ultimate truth only by divine revelation.

To many people the Book of Proverbs seems to be a grab-bag of wise sayings that lacks any system or order. Nevertheless, in one sense, this is the most carefully organized of all the books of the Old Testament.

The first verse is its "title page." Verses 2 through 7 are its "preface," which contains an explanation of the purpose of the book, the method of the Author, and the fundamental assertion of the book (in v. 7). Then follow three parts of the "body" of the book: First, there are discourses in defense and application of the fundamental assertion or thesis (1:8—ch. 9). Then there are proverbs that Solomon collected and arranged to provide wisdom (chs. 10—24). Next there are additional wise words from Solomon that other people collected after Solomon died (chs. 25—29). An "appendix" that contains specific words of wisdom by two other sages, Agur and Lemuel, concludes the book (chs. 30—31).¹

Proverbs is one of the most timeless Old Testament books. That is, the reader needs very little knowledge of ancient Hebrew life and culture to understand and appreciate it. We can understand the contents fairly easily and can apply them directly to modern life. Our problem is not so much understanding as applying the proverbs.

Consider first the fundamental thesis, and then observe how the application of that declaration unfolds in the chapters that follow:

The fundamental affirmation is the deepest insight in Hebrew philosophy. It appears in 1:7: "The fear of the LORD [Yahweh] is the beginning of knowledge."² There is a presupposition in this statement. It is that God is the storehouse of wisdom. We can only find wisdom in God ultimately. This presupposition underlies all of what we read in Job and Ecclesiastes, as well as in Proverbs. Furthermore, the Hebrews assumed that God expressed His wisdom in all His works and in all His ways. They believed that all natural phenomena revealed God's wisdom. Wherever they looked, they saw God: on land, at sea, in the earth, or in the sky. We can see that viewpoint clearly in Genesis 1:1 (cf. John 14:6).

This fundamental affirmation also contains an inevitable deduction: If wisdom is perfect in God, then wisdom in man consists of the fear of God. A person is wise to the extent that he or she apprehends and fears God. The "fear" of God does not mean a dread that results in hiding from God. It is rather an emotional recognition of God. That is the kind of fear that produces holy character and righteous conduct. Intellectual apprehension of God precedes this emotional recognition, and volitional submission to God's will follows it. When a person comes to have emotional recognition of God, he or she comes to the

¹See also Delitzsch, 1:6.

²Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the NASB (*The New American Standard Bible*), 2020 ed., unless otherwise indicated.

condition for being wise—not that in so doing he or she becomes wise. We can begin to be wise only when we come into proper relation to God as ultimate Wisdom.

Beginning with 1:8 and continuing to the end of the book, what we have is the application of that fundamental affirmation to the various situations and circumstances of life.

Consider what God revealed here in the three spheres of life dealt with in the book: the home, friendship, and the world. In the home, the child must learn wisdom. In friendship, the youth must apply wisdom. In the world, the adult must demonstrate wisdom.¹

The first sphere is that of the home (cf. 1:8-9). God did not teach the responsibility of the father and mother here, but He took for granted that they would instruct their children. The child needs to hear parental instruction in order to live in the fear of the LORD. Young children cannot grasp abstract concepts. For them God is incarnate in father and mother. Fathers and mothers reflect the image of God to their children. Both parents are necessary to reveal God to the child fully. Children see some of God's characteristics in the mother's attitudes and actions (cf. Matt. 23:37). They see other aspects of God's character in the father. Parents do not have to try to teach their young child systematic theology. They just need to live in the fear of God themselves, and their child will learn what he or she needs to learn about God for that stage of his or her life—just by observing mom and dad. For example, when small children see their parents loving one another, it prepares them to understand God's love. I do not mean to exclude verbal instruction. My point is that young children learn wisdom by observing their parents as well as by listening to them. We all exert influence in two ways: with our words and with our works (actions), and actions speak louder than words.

The second sphere of life is friendship (cf. 1:10-19). The day must come when the child, in the natural process of development, moves out into a wider circle of experience than home life.

The Bible presents two duties that children have to their parents. When the child's sphere of life is his home, he is to obey his parents. However, that duty does not continue forever. When he moves into the larger sphere of life outside the home, his duty is to honor his parents. This duty does continue forever.

When a child enters this second stage of life, guided at first by parental council, but then finally on his or her own, wisdom gives important instruction (cf. 1:10). He should avoid

¹See John D. Frame, *Personality*, for helpful insights into the various stages of human development.

certain friendships. He should beware of people who seek to make friends with him because they have selfish interests and unscrupulous motives. There are many warnings in Proverbs against people who are not true friends. There is no more important stage in a young person's development than when he or she begins to choose companions. Then, and from then on, he or she must follow the wisdom that comes from the fear of the LORD. The youth must submit to the LORD's wisdom, having learned that in the home, to succeed in the larger arenas of life. The choice of a mate is one of these companion decisions. Parents should help their children with these choices and guide them in valuing the qualities to look for in a mate.

The third stage of life is the world, symbolized in Proverbs by the street, the gates, and the city (cf. 1:20-33; chs. 2—9).

The first word of warning to the youth who leaves home to enter the world on his own is: Beware of the evil way of those who do not fear the LORD (1:20-32). Wisdom does not say withdraw from the world. Wisdom says remember the fate of those who forget and disregard God. There is also a gracious promise for those in this stage of life (cf. 1:33). Wisdom promises that those who live in the fear of the LORD will be quiet and safe, even in the turmoil of the world. It is clear how important preparation is for living in this sphere of life. Children must learn to take God into account in the home, and then in their friendships, before they launch out into the world. This instruction is what really prepares them for life.

The series of discourses in Proverbs that begin with "My son" represent the voice of home sounding in the youth's ears, the youth who has left home and is living in the world (chs. 2—7). The father tells his son how his father instructed him in wisdom, and how this enabled him to live successfully in the world. Then specific warnings follow, concerning impurity, laziness, bad companions, and adultery. As the young man attains more responsibility in life, wisdom comes to him again, with instruction concerning how he can avoid the pitfalls of that stage of his life (ch. 8). The discourses close with a contrast in which Solomon personified Wisdom and Folly as two women (ch. 9). One is a woman of virtue and beauty, and the other is a woman of vice and ugliness. Solomon contrasted the value and victory of wisdom with the disaster and defeat of folly. He contrasted the wisdom of fearing God with the folly of forgetting God. The writers of the proverbs were not naive; they did not assume that proper parental instruction would inevitably produce wise children. They had much to say about foolish children (and adults) who disregard wise advice.

I would summarize the message of Proverbs as follows: The person who learns the fear of God (i.e., to take God into consideration) in every sphere of life, will be successful, but

those who disregard God will fail. Fearing God means taking God into account, being aware of His reality and presence, and making decisions in view of His existence and revelations.

The precepts urging a life of wisdom center on 3:1 through 10. This passage concentrates on that subject. Proverbs 3:5 and 6 give some of the best advice anyone ever gave. The practice of wisdom centers on 8:32 through 36. The power for living a life of wisdom centers on 1:8 (cf. James 1:5; 3:17; Col. 2:3).¹

Reading one chapter of Proverbs with one's children every day for a month—31 chapters in 31 days—can have a powerful influence for good on a child. It did in my case as a child growing up.

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:41-55.

Exposition

I. COLLECTION 1: DISCOURSES ON WISDOM CHS. 1—9

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of at least seven separate groups of proverbs. There are two groups that Solomon spoke and/or wrote (probably chs. 1—9 and definitely 10:1—22:16).

"Incentives to wise living and illustrations of what that entails—these two themes are the point and counterpoint of the first nine chapters, where bright encouragement and dark warning find artful interplay."¹

"The literary units of Part I [chs. 1—9] are of two types: 'lectures' and, interlaced among them, 'interludes.' The lectures are father to son discourses, the interludes are, for the most part, reflections on wisdom."²

The table below shows Fox's literary units:

Prologue 1:1-7	
Lectures	Interludes
Avoid gangs 1:8-19	
	Wisdom's warning 1:20-33
The path to wisdom ch. 2	
The wisdom of piety 3:1-12	
	In praise of wisdom 3:13-20
The wisdom of honesty 3:21-35	
Loving wisdom, hating evil 4:1-9	
The right path 4:10-19	
The straight path 4:20-27	
Another man's wife and one's own ch. 5	

¹Hubbard, p. 44.

²Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 44.

	Four epigrams on folly and evil 6:1-19
Adultery kills 6:20-35	
Beware of seducers ch. 7	
	Wisdom's self-praise ch. 8
	Two banquets ch. 9

"Those who read David's psalms, especially those towards the latter end, would be tempted to think that religion is all rapture and consists in nothing but the ecstasies and transports of devotion; and doubtless there is a time for them; but, while we are on earth we have a life to live in the flesh, must have a conversation in the world, and into that we must now be taught to carry our religion, which is a rational thing, and very serviceable to the government of human life, to make the face shine before men, in a prudent, honest, useful conversation, and to make the heart burn towards God in holy and pious affections."¹

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK 1:1-7

These verses set forth the title, the five purposes, and the thesis of the Book of Proverbs. Far from being a hodgepodge of miscellaneous sayings, the book gives evidence of careful organization in this opening segment.

1. The title of the book 1:1

Verse one introduces both the book as a whole and chapters 1 through 9 in particular.

What is a proverb? The English word "proverb" is the translation of the Hebrew noun *masal*. The verb form of this Hebrew word means "to rule." The idea is that the proverbs, and this book, are to help rule life and conduct. *Masal* also has the meaning of "resemblance." A parable is a resemblance. Many proverbs are concentrated parables. The English word "proverb" means a brief saying that says much in little space. It comes from the Latin *pro verba* meaning "for (in place of) words."

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 734.

"A proverb is a wise saying in which a few words are chosen instead of many, with a design to condense wisdom into a brief form both to aid memory and stimulate study."¹

Another definition of a proverb is: a short statement that encapsulates a longer explanation.

"By calling the proverbs *mesalim* ... the author-editor is implicitly asserting that these sayings are validated not only by their source (a wise man) but also by their use: They are current in public wisdom."²

2. The purposes of the book 1:2-6

"The Book of Proverbs has two purposes: to give moral skillfulness and to give mental discernment. The first purpose is developed in vv. 3-4; then, after a parenthetical exhortation in v. 5, the second purpose is developed in v. 6."³

Another writer observed five purposes of the book in the five purpose clauses in verses 2 through 6:

"(1) To learn wisdom and moral instruction. (2) To discern wise counsel. (3) To receive moral instruction in skillful living, in righteousness, justice, and equity. (4) To impart shrewdness to the morally naive, and a discerning plan to the young person ... (5) To discern the meaning of a proverb and a parable, the sayings of the wise and their riddles."⁴

"The [overall] purpose of all these sections [all the sections of the book] is the inculcation of certain cardinal social virtues, such as industry, thrift, discretion, truthfulness, honesty, chastity, kindness, forgiveness, warning against the corresponding vices, and praise of wisdom as the guiding principle of life."⁵

¹A. T. Pearson, quoted in J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 3:130.

²Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 55.

³Ross, p. 904.

⁴Hanna, p. 299. Italics omitted.

⁵Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, p. vii.

This book claims to offer wisdom (Heb. *hokmah*) to the reader. The words "wise" and "wisdom" occur about 125 times in Proverbs. It is this wisdom that the Apostle Paul commanded Christians to walk in (cf. Eph. 5:15).

Wisdom is "God's fixed order for life, an order opposed to chaos and death."¹

"No longer can wisdom be defined simplistically as 'the practical application of knowledge.' Instead wisdom must be thought of as a broad, theological concept denoting a fixed, righteous order to which the wise man submits his life."²

"'Wisdom' (*hokmah*) basically means 'skill.'"³

"... wisdom means being skillful and successful in one's relationships and responsibilities. It involves observing and following the Creator's principles of order in the moral universe."⁴

"It isn't enough simply to be educated and have knowledge, as important as education is. We also need wisdom, which is the ability to use knowledge. Wise men and women have the competence to grasp the meaning of a situation and understand what to do and how to do it in the right way at the right time."⁵

"The pages of history are filled with the names of brilliant and gifted people who were *smart* enough to become rich and famous but not *wise* enough to make a successful and satisfying life. Before his death, one of the world's richest men said that he would have given all his wealth to make one of his six marriages succeed. It's one thing to make a living, but quite something else to make a life."⁶

¹Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):234

²*Ibid.*, p, 238.

³Ross, p. 904.

⁴Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 232.

⁵Wiersbe, pp. 10-11.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 12.

"When a man knows the right and does the right he is a wise man. It is the wedding of knowing and doing—it is the junction of the good and the true."¹

This is not to say that everyone who submits to God will be able to make equally wise decisions in life. Some Christians, for example, demonstrate more wisdom than others. This is another sense in which Proverbs uses the word "wisdom." Nevertheless, essentially, wisdom is a proper or skillful orientation toward God.²

"Proverbial wisdom is characterized by short, pithy statements; but the speculative wisdom, such as Ecclesiastes or Job, uses lengthy monologues and dialogues to probe the meaning of life, the problem of good and evil, and the relationship between God and people."³

The key words in verses 2 through 4 have the following meanings:

Verse	Word	Meaning
2a	Wisdom	Skillfulness
2a	Instruction	Teaching, direction
2b	Discern	Distinguish
2b	Understanding	Perception
3a	Behavior	Conduct
3b	Righteousness	Right behavior
3b	Justice	Fairness
3b	Integrity	Moral consistency
4a	Prudence	Sensibility in practical matters
4a	Naive	Inexperienced, gullible
4b	Knowledge	Understanding

¹Paul E. Larsen, *Wise Up and Live*, p. 4.

²For a study of the subject of wisdom as Proverbs uses it, including the shades of meaning that the 11 Hebrew synonyms provide, see Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 28-38; Kidner, pp. 36-38; and Zuck, pp. 209-19, 232-38. Several commentaries contain helpful topical indexes to the proverbs, e.g., Ross, pp. 897-903; W. G. Plaut, *Book of Proverbs*, pp. 333-36; Kidner, pp. 31-56; Longman, pp. 549-78.

³Ross, p. 883. Cf. *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Wisdom Literature," by D. A. Hubbard, pp. 1334-35.

4b	Discretion	Thoughtfulness, tact
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"'Prudence' describes one's ability to use reason, in context under the fear of God, to navigate the problems of life. Prudence carefully considers a situation before rushing in. It implies coolheadedness."¹

"In these ... words we have the description of a well-rounded character, and it is important to remember that the study and practice of God's truth alone can produce it."²

"'Listen' is one of the most frequent verbs in the wisdom vocabulary; it denotes an active listening, an obedience."³

Indeed, to "listen" in Proverbs is to obey.

Another purpose of the book is to solve riddles: thought-provoking problems about life. The riddles in view (v. 6) are any puzzles that are unclear and need interpreting, not just what we call riddles today (cf. Num. 12:8; Judg. 14:12; 1 Kings 10:1; Ezek. 17:2; Hab. 2:6).⁴

Verses 2 through 6 set forth four objectives: God gave us these proverbs to impart an intimate acquaintance with wisdom and discipline (v. 2a) and to impart understanding of wisdom sayings (vv. 2b, 6). He also wanted to impart moral insight (v. 3) and to identify the intended recipients of wisdom (v. 4).⁵

"The Book of Proverbs was not intended to be read as an exhaustive book of right actions but as a selective example of godly wisdom."⁶

3. The thesis of the book 1:7

This verse enjoys almost universal recognition as the key statement not only in Proverbs but in all the wisdom literature of the Bible (cf. 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Eccles. 12:13). Some people think of it as the motto of the book, others the foundational

¹Longman, p. 97.

²H. A. Ironside, *Notes on the Book of Proverbs*, p. 15.

³Murphy, p. 4.

⁴See Harry Torcszyner, "The Riddle in the Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924):125-49.

⁵John E. Johnson, "An Analysis of Proverbs 1:1-7," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:576 (October-December 1987):425-28.

⁶John H. Sailhamer, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Fall 1991):247.

principle, others the major premise, or something similar. The verse contains a positive statement followed by its negative corollary.

The "fear of the LORD" occurs at least 18 times in Proverbs (1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2, 26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 31:30). "Fear" includes not only a correct way of thinking about God but a correct relationship with God. It is an affectionate reverence that results in humbly bowing to God's will. It is a desire not to sin against Him, because His wrath is so awful and His love is so awesome. But the connotation of real fear, not just reverential trust, is also present in "the fear of the LORD."¹

"[The fear of Yahweh] is reverential subordination to the All-directing, and ... to the One God, the Creator and Governor of the world ..."²

"The non-Israelite instructional texts throughout the ancient Near East also frequently note the value of revering the gods, but only Israelite wisdom ascribes to 'the fear of the LORD' a central role for acquiring wisdom and achieving God-pleasing behavior."³

"One properly fears Yahweh because he is the most powerful being in the universe. Only fools would not be afraid of a being who has the power of life and death over them. Such persons do not understand their place in the cosmos and thus do not know how to act in the world. All other wisdom builds on this point, and there is no wisdom without it."⁴

"Beginning" does not mean that the fear of the LORD is where one starts learning wisdom, but then he or she can move away from it—like moving away from the starting line in a race. Rather, the fear of the LORD is the controlling principle, the foundation, on which one must build a life of wisdom. It is "the first step to the attainment of knowledge."⁵

"In other words, the proper understanding of all things comes ultimately only to those in a right relationship with the Lord."⁶

¹Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 70.

²Delitzsch, 1:58. See Murphy, pp. 254-68, for an extended excursus on the fear of the LORD.

³Schultz, p. 461.

⁴Longman, p. 104.

⁵Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 67.

⁶Adams, p. 888.

"True knowledge begins with an acknowledgment that everything is created and sustained by God and that he is the one who imparts knowledge not only through revelation but also through experience, observation, and reason."¹

"What the alphabet is to reading, notes to reading music, and numerals to mathematics, the fear of the LORD is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book."²

"Fools" here (Heb. 'ewilim) mean the morally perverse, not just the mentally ignorant. They disregard God and His will (cf. Ps. 14:1).

"Instruction" is teaching and direction that is designed to produce good character. Even though many unbelievers have acquired much information without the fear of God, true wisdom rests on a relationship to God that revelation supports. We can learn the really important lessons in life only by taking into account what God has revealed in His Word. Here "instruction" and "wisdom" are virtual synonyms (cf. 9:10; Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10).³

Other ancient Near Eastern countries produced wisdom literature in addition to what we have in our Old Testament.⁴ However, the wisdom literature outside Israel did not contain advice to look to a personal relationship with a divine being as essential to obtaining wisdom. The references to fearing the LORD in Proverbs, including 1:7, are unique and make this book distinctive and theologically relevant. The demand for faith in God underlies the whole book. Only in a right relationship to the true and living God can one enter into God's foreordained, righteous order for life and find true success and happiness in life (cf. Ps. 1). The fool despises God's revealed order for life and the instruction that would lead him or her into it (v. 7b).

The Hebrews believed that people could acquire knowledge in three ways: One way was through observing nature and human behavior. Another way was by drawing analogies

¹Longman, p. 101.

²Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 181.

³See Murphy, p. 5.

⁴See, for example, Cullen I. K. Story, "The Book of Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945):319-37; Giovanni Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (May 1976):45; Gordon, 1969 ed., pp. 24, 152; W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, pp. 92, 97, 222; James M. Lindenberger, "The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1974); Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, pp. 28-61; and Waltke, *The Book ...*, pp. 28-31.

between traditional beliefs (e.g., creeds) and reality. A third way was through an encounter with the transcendent God.¹

This explains why some atheists behave wisely and flourish in life. They observe human behavior and nature and learn from these sources how to live effectively. And they compare traditional beliefs with reality and learn from these what works well and what does not.

"This is an imposing preface to the book. It is also quite unusual in that no other biblical work begins with a statement of purpose as clear as this."²

B. INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 1:8—8:36

"Each lecture has three major constituents: exordium [a call to pay attention with motivation to do so], lesson, and conclusion."³

The two ways (paths, worldviews) introduced in 1:7 stretch out before the reader (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). In this section Solomon spoke to his son, guiding him into God's way. "My son" was and is a customary way of addressing a disciple, either one's literal son or someone else.

"It ["my son" as a form of address] derives from the idea that parents are primarily responsible for moral instruction (Prov 4:3-4; Deut 6:7)."⁴

The frequent recurrence of the phrase "my son" in this part of Proverbs indicates that the instruction especially suited a young or younger person. This person's life lay in front of him, and he faced major decisions that would set the course of his life from then on. Though the whole Book of Proverbs gives help to youths, chapters 1 through 7 address them specifically and can be of particular benefit to them.

The instruction that follows was originally the type of counsel that a courtier father gave his son or sons in his home. This seems to have been a traditional form of ancient Near Eastern education, especially among the ruling classes. In Israel, the father had primary

¹James L. Crenshaw, "The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature," *Word & World* 7:3 (Summer 1986):247-52.

²Murphy, p. 5. 1 John 1:1-4 may be the exception.

³Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 45.

⁴Ross, p. 907.

responsibility for the training of his children.¹ This instruction did not replace a formal education but supplemented it.

In Egypt, for example, "The authors of the [wisdom] 'teachings' do not present themselves as priests and prophets. They appear as aged officials at the end of active and successful careers, desirous to let their children profit by their experience."²

Earlier, Akkadian officials evidently practiced the same custom.

"The advice given in the section 'My son' can have had relevance for very few people. ... This suggests that we are to construe the text as being in the form of admonitions of some worthy to his son who will succeed him as vizier [high official] to the ruler."³

Other evidence exists that it was common throughout the ancient Near East for high officials to pass on this special instruction to their heirs. In Proverbs, we have the record of what Solomon evidently told his son Rehoboam, and probably also his other sons.

"... the Book of Proverbs has a definite masculine focus because in the ancient Jewish society daughters usually weren't educated for the affairs of life. Most of them were kept secluded and prepared for marriage and motherhood. For the most part, when you read 'man' in Proverbs, interpret it generically and read 'person,' whether male or female. Proverbs isn't a sexist book, but it was written in the context of a strongly male-oriented society."⁴

In the teaching that follows there is advice for many situations that a king and his officials would encounter and have to deal with effectively. These matters included the administration of justice, leadership, proper behavior, as well as urban and agricultural matters. Consequently there seems to be no reason to take these references to "my son" as anything other than what they appear at face value to be (cf. Gen. 18:19; Exod. 12:24; Deut. 4:9-11).

¹Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p 112.

²Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 60. Cf. William Kelly Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Egypt*, p. 54; cf. pp. 178-79; James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 12.

³Lambert, p. 96.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 172, n. 1.

In some parts of the ancient world the mother shared the duty of instructing the son with the father (cf. 1:8; 4:3; 6:20; 31:1, 26). And undoubtedly every good mother would impart words of wisdom to her son occasionally.¹

"Here the father and mother are placed on exactly the same footing as teachers of their children. ... The phraseology of these sentences corresponds almost exactly to that of their Egyptian counterparts ... and this throws into greater relief the one feature which is entirely unique in them: the mention of the mother. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this feature is an example of the adaptation of the Egyptian tradition to the peculiar situation in which the Israelite instructions were composed: a domestic situation in which the father and mother together shared the responsibility for the education of the child."²

Archaeologists have found most of the documents that contain extrabiblical instruction of the "my son" type in the ruins of excavated scribal schools. This suggests that even though the teaching took place in the home, the teachers preserved their instructions in writing, with a view to sharing them with people outside the family circle. This suggests that what we have in Proverbs is not atypical. Probably when Solomon recorded his counsel to his son, he adapted it to a more general reading audience, namely, all the people of Israel. Eventually a larger audience profited from it.

"The principles articulated throughout the book are as helpful for living the Christian life as they were for providing guidance to the ancient theocratic community of Israel."³

1. Warning against consorting with sinners 1:8-19

This section begins with a plea to hear the warning that follows (v. 8) with a promise that heeding it will be good for the youth (v. 9). Each of the lecture sections in this book begins with a similar exhortation to "listen."

"That both parents are mentioned [v. 8] is a tribute to the prominent role of Israel's mothers. We find no similar reference to mother as teacher in Babylonian or Egyptian wisdom literature."⁴

¹See Kidner, pp. 49-52, for a subject study on the family in Proverbs.

²R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, p. 42.

³Eugene H. Merrill, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 482.

⁴Hubbard, p. 49.

"It should be emphasized that 'my son' is not to be taken in a gender exclusive sense."¹

"Proverbs considers chastisement [calling a person to account for his deeds, making him responsible] a vital component of moral education."²

The warning itself appears twice (vv. 10, 15). A description of how the dangerous appeal will come (vv. 11-12) follows the first admonition to not heed it (v. 10). Three reasons for ignoring it (vv. 16-18) follow the repetition of the warning (v. 15). The final verse is a conclusion (v. 19; cf. Job 8:13).

"The wording of ver. 16 [cf. 6:17b, 18b; Isa. 59:7a] is founded on the immorality of the conduct of the enticer; that of 17 on the audaciousness of the seduction as such, and now [in v. 18] on the self-destruction which the robber and murderer bring upon themselves ..."³

"Avoid the beginnings of sin (ch. 4:14; Ps. 1:1; 119:101)."⁴

Joseph responded wisely when Potiphar's wife tempted him (Gen. 39:7-13).

In this pericope (section of verses) the wise way (following the moral law in general, vv. 8-9) does not have the personal appeal, or the excitement and hope of power, that the unwise way does (vv. 10-19). Its only reward is goodness, as opposed to acceptance by one's peers.

"The Bible is the basic textbook in the home. It was once the basic textbook in the educational system, but even if that were still true, the Bible in the school can't replace the Bible in the home. I note that many modern parents sacrifice time and money to help their children excel in music, sports, and social activities; I trust they're even more concerned that their children excel in knowing and obeying the Word of God."⁵

"The fact that this alarm of the dangers of bad company is the first specific warning sounded in Proverbs suggests that folly is not just an individual matter but a social one as well. We travel in groups—whether they are our social friends, our service club, our prayer partners, our

¹Murphy, p. 12.

²Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 81.

³Delitzsch, 1:66.

⁴Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 460.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 104.

tennis set, our business colleagues, or our street gang. What we become is determined in some significant measure by the company we keep."¹

Verse 19 articulates the point of the comparison. The Hebrew word translated "gain" implies a money-grabbing attitude (cf. 15:27).

2. Wisdom's appeal 1:20-33

Fox called this section the first "interlude" in his literary analysis of chapters 1 through 9.²

"After the teacher of wisdom has warned his disciples against the allurements of self-destroying sin, whose beastly demoniacal nature culminates in murder and robbery, he introduces Wisdom herself saying how by enticing promises and deterring threatenings she calls the simple and the perverse to repentance. Wisdom is here personified, *i.e.* represented as a person. But this personification presupposes, that to the poet wisdom is more than a property and quality of human subjectivity: she is to him as a divine power, existing independently, to submit to which is the happiness of men, and to reject which is their destruction. And also to the public appearance of wisdom, as it is here represented, there must be present objective reality, without which the power of conviction departs from the figure."³

"There are four 'women' in the book of Proverbs. Most conspicuous is Woman Wisdom (1:20-33; 3:13-20; 4:5-9; 7:4; 8:1-36; 9:1-6); her opposite number is Woman Folly (9:13-18); further, there is the woman who is one's marriage partner (5:15-19); and finally, the 'Stranger' (2:16-19; 5:1-14, 20; 6:24-32 (35); 7:25-27)."⁴

This is one of several passages in Proverbs where the writer personified wisdom. Her call comes to people in the market, in the hustle and bustle of life, not in the seclusion of the home or sanctuary (cf. v. 8).⁵

¹Hubbard, p. 50.

²See the chart in the opening section of my comments on these chapters above.

³Delitzsch, 1:67.

⁴Murphy, p. 278.

⁵See Phyllis Trible, "Wisdom Builds a Poem: The Architecture of Proverbs 1:20-33," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975):509-18.

"... she [Woman Wisdom] is the personification of Yahweh's wisdom and thus stands for God himself."¹

"Wisdom is not secretive, confining herself to a coterie [clique] of initiates. Quite the contrary, she roams about the busiest parts of the city, demanding attention. Not even study or learning is a precondition for Wisdom's assistance; one need merely respond to her clarion [loud and clear] summons. This means that no one can excuse folly by pleading ignorance of Wisdom's demands."²

"To whom does Wisdom speak? To three classes of sinners: the simple ones, the scorers (scoffers, mockers, NIV), and the fools (v. 22).³ The *simple* are naive people who believe anything (14:15) but examine nothing. They're gullible and easily led astray. *Scorers* think they know everything (21:24) and laugh at the things that are really important. While the simple one has a blank look on his face, the scorer wears a sneer. *Fools* are people who are ignorant of truth because they're dull and stubborn. Their problem isn't a low IQ or poor education; their problem is a lack of spiritual desire to seek and find God's wisdom. Fools enjoy their foolishness but don't know how foolish they are! The outlook of fools is purely materialistic and humanistic. They hate knowledge and have no interest in things eternal."⁴

It is clear here that people have a choice about which way they will go. Their lives are to a large measure the result of their choices.

"Choices—the wise teachers bring us back to that familiar theme: the choice between wise behavior and foolish, between righteous conduct and wicked, has consequences that boggle the mind."⁵

Doing evangelism in prisons has taught me that there are many people in prison who are there because they made bad choices, not because they are bad people.

¹Longman, p. 111.

²Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 96.

³NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 26. See also E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, pp. 310-14. NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

⁵Hubbard, p. 319.

Verses 23 through 28 are, strangely enough, the verses that God used to convict Harry A. Ironside, at the age of 14, of his need for salvation.¹

Wisdom laughs at the fool's calamity (v. 26), not because she is hard-hearted but because it is so absurd to choose folly (v. 26).²

"The figure of laughing reveals the absurdity of choosing a foolish way of life and being totally unprepared for disaster."³

The fool is one by his own fault, not by fate (vv. 30-31).⁴

Verses 32 and 33 contrast the ultimate destruction of the unresponsive with the peaceful condition of the responsive. Delitzsch noted a similarity between the addresses of Wisdom in Proverbs and the addresses of Jesus in John's Gospel.⁵ Other writers have compared this address with Jeremiah 7 and 20.

"Lady Wisdom's first discourse deals with people's attitudes rather than deeds. ... Other interludes will emphasize the right stance; this one seeks to scare us away from the wrong one."⁶

3. Wisdom as a treasure ch. 2

Chapter 2 is a discourse that sets forth the blessings that wisdom confers. It encourages "earnest striving after wisdom as the way to the fear of God and to virtue."⁷ In the previous two sections (1:8-19 and 1:20-33), the sage warned and threatened. Now his admonition becomes positive, and he shows the blessings that come from pursuing the way of wisdom. He did this by interweaving conditions and promises.

"What is implicit in all of Proverbs, chapter 2 makes brightly explicit: Wisdom comes from God and no one can enjoy it who does not choose God's paths."⁸

¹E. Schuyler English, *H. A. Ironside: Ordained of the Lord*, p. 38.

²See Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 29, 38-43, for discussion of the six Hebrew words for "folly" used in Proverbs.

³Ross, p. 910.

⁴Kidner, p. 60.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:71.

⁶Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 105.

⁷Delitzsch, 1:75.

⁸Hubbard, p. 60.

However, some people choose God's paths even though they reject God and so demonstrate some wisdom.

"The intensity of the appeal matches the intensity of the speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy."¹

The difficulty of obtaining wisdom 2:1-5

Even though Wisdom wants people to adopt her (1:20-33) she is hard to obtain. Wisdom is not a power inherent in man, but something that God gives. The person who wants her has to work hard for her (v. 3). If understanding does not come easily, one should work harder to obtain it.² He or she must start with revelation, and study it diligently, in order to obtain spiritual rather than merely academic wisdom. The "fear of the LORD" emphasizes awe, and the "knowledge of God" stresses intimacy (v. 5).³

"Wisdom both begins with fear of God (1:7; 9:10) and leads to it."⁴

"If you want wisdom, you must listen to God attentively (Matt. 13:9), obey Him humbly (John 7:17), ask Him sincerely (James 1:5), and seek Him diligently (Isa. 55:6-7), the way a miner searches for silver and gold. Obtaining spiritual wisdom isn't a once-a-week hobby, it is the daily discipline of a lifetime. But in this age of microwave ovens, fast foods, digests, and numerous 'made easy' books, many people are out of the habit of daily investing time and energy in digging deep into Scripture and learning wisdom from the Lord. Thanks to television, their attention span is brief; thanks to religious entertainment that passes for worship, their spiritual appetite is feeble and spiritual knowledge isn't 'pleasant to [their] soul' (Prov. 2:10). It's no wonder fewer and fewer people 'take time to be holy' and more and more people fall prey to the enemies that lurk along the way."⁵

The giver of wisdom 2:6-9

The searcher for wisdom will find what God gives when he or she searches divine revelation (v. 6).

¹Murphy, p. 15.

²See Julius H. Greenstone, *Proverbs with Commentary*, p. 17.

³For a synthesis of what the Book of Proverbs reveals about God, see Zuck, pp. 238-39.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 111.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 36. Paragraph division omitted.

"One must strive for the goal, but also realize that wisdom remains a divine gift."¹

The knowledge of how to live comes with the knowledge of God (v. 7). The success in view is correct behavior (vv. 7-9). Lovers of wisdom are godly (v. 8, Heb. *hasidim*, loyal "sons of the covenant").

This is another passage in which we can see the difference between Hebrew wisdom literature and that of other ancient nations. Solomon identified Yahweh as the source of wisdom. Only through relationship with Him can a person be truly wise and experience the blessings of wisdom.

The fruit of moral integrity 2:10-22

Wisdom safeguards a person morally. The first part of this pericope shows how God protects the wise (vv. 10-11; cf. vv. 7b-8). "Discretion" (v. 11) is the ability to act wisely, and "understanding" is the ability to make wise choices. Here is more personification.

The last part of the pericope presents the temptations one can overcome as he or she seeks wisdom (vv. 12-15 and 16-19). When a person submits himself or herself to God and gains wisdom, the ways of the wicked will lose some of their attractiveness. The wise person will see that the adventuress who promises thrills is offering something she cannot deliver, except in the most immediate sensual sense.

The evil "person" is one enemy (v. 12), and the strange "woman" is another (v. 16). The "strange" woman (v. 16) is one "outside the circle of his [a man's] proper relations, that is, a harlot or an adulteress."² The word "strange" does not necessarily mean that she is a foreigner. Probably she is a stranger to the conventions of Israel's corporate life.³ Several commentators have argued for her being another man's wife.⁴

"Prostitution was partly sanctioned in the cultus of the Midianites, Syrians, and other nations neighbouring to Israel, and thus was regarded as nothing less than customary. In Israel, on the contrary, the law (Deut. xxiii. 18f.) forbade it under a penalty, and therefore it was chiefly practiced by foreign women (xxiii. 27 ...) ..."⁵

¹Murphy, pp. 15-16.

²Toy, p. 46.

³William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, p. 285.

⁴E.g., Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 118, 139-41; Adams, p. 890; Tewoldemedhin Habtu, "Proverbs," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, p. 777.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:81.

"If the evil man uses *perverse* words to snare the unwary [v. 12], the adulteress uses *flattering* words. Someone has said that flattery isn't communication, it is manipulation; it's people telling us things about ourselves that we enjoy hearing and wish were true."¹

"The strange woman's allure lies less in her looks (mentioned only in 6.25) than in her words (5.3; 6.24; 7.5, 21; Cf. 22.14)."²

The "covenant" she has left (v. 17) seems to refer to her own marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14), rather than to the covenant law that prohibited adultery (Exod. 20:14).³ The "land" (vv. 21-22) is probably the Promised Land of Canaan. Another view is that it is the whole earth.⁴

This chapter, like the previous one, ends by contrasting the ends of the wicked and the righteous (vv. 21-22; cf. 1:32-33). It is a long poem that appeals to the reader to pursue wisdom—and then identifies the benefits of following wisdom. Chapter 2 emphasizes moral stability as a fruit of wisdom.

"One must seek wisdom, but when one finds it, one realizes that it was not because of the effort, but because it was a gift of God."⁵

4. Divine promises and human obligations 3:1-12

This section of text is mainly about peace as a benefit of wise living, but it concludes with another appeal to seek wisdom. Whereas the wisdom speech in chapter 2 warned mainly of external attacks, this one, in chapter 3, focuses more on the internal attacks that come from within oneself.

"This chapter is one of the most excellent in all this book, both for argument to persuade us to be religious and for directions therein."⁶

The fruit of peace 3:1-10

"The foregoing Mashal discourse seeks to guard youth against ruinous companionship; this points out to them more particularly the relation

¹Wiersbe, p. 37.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1442.

³Ross, p. 914; Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 120-21.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵Longman, p. 150.

⁶Henry, p. 737.

toward God and man, which alone can make them truly happy, vers. 1-4."¹

"To 'forget' (*sakah*) [v. 1] ... usually refers not to the natural slippage of memory (as in Prov 31:7) but to willful neglect and diversion of attention (as in Prov 2:17). This latter sense is clear when God threatens to 'forget' something, as in Hos 4:6, 'And I, for my part, will forget your sons.'"²

The trust of the wise son (vv. 5-6) comes from heeding sound teaching (vv. 1-4), and it leads to confident obedience (vv. 7-9).

The Hebrew word for "teaching" (v. 1, *torah*) often translates as "law" or, more fundamentally, "instruction" or "direction." Here the context suggests that the teachings of the parents are in view rather than the Mosaic Law, though in Israel their instruction would presumably have rested on the Mosaic Law.

"Where it [*torah*] occurs unqualified (28:9; 29:18) it is clearly the divine law (it is also the Jewish term for the Pentateuch); but *my law*, 'thy mother's law' (1:8), *etc.*, refer to the present maxims and to the home teachings, based indeed on the law, but not identical with it."³

Verse 3 pictures devotion to kindness and truth (cf. Deut. 6:8-9, which says that God's law should receive the same devotion). "Kindness" translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, which refers to faithfulness to obligations that arise from a relationship.⁴ "Truth" (Heb. *'emet*) refers to what one can rely on because it is stable.⁵ Together these Hebrew words may form a hendiadys and could be rendered "true kindness" or "faithful love." "Favor" (v. 4) connotes success (cf. Ps. 111:10).

"Verse 4 may have influenced the wording of Luke's summary of Jesus' growth to maturity ... ([Luke] 2:52)."⁶

"Trust" and "lean" (v. 5) are very close in meaning. Trusting means to put oneself wholly at the mercy of another (cf. Jer. 12:5b; Ps. 22:9b). Leaning is not just reclining against something but relying on it totally for support (cf. 28:26).⁷

¹Delitzsch, 1:83.

²Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 142.

³Kidner, p. 63.

⁴Ross, p. 916. Cf. Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p. 55.

⁵Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, p. 167.

⁶Hubbard, p. 71.

⁷Delitzsch, 1:87.

"In the final analysis all government, all economics, all currency and banking, all institutions and all marriages, all relationships between people, are fundamentally governed by trust. Without trust, society deteriorates into paranoia, the feeling that everybody is out to get you."¹

"There are two sides to the matter of trust. There is the decision of trust and the habit of trust. The first is called 'commitment;' the second is called 'trust.' Trust follows commitment, not always right away, but it begins there. In the middle of our fears we make a *decision* to trust. This does not immediately bring the *habit* of trust, but if we will muster the courage to commit our way to God we shall soon learn to trust."²

"Acknowledge" (v. 6) means to be aware of and have fellowship with God, not just to "tip one's hat" to Him. It includes obeying God's moral will as He has revealed it. The promise (v. 6b) means that God will make the course of such a person's life truly successful in God's eyes. This is a promise as well as a proverb, and it refers to the totality of one's life experience. It does not guarantee that one will never make mistakes. David exemplified this proverb when he sought the LORD for guidance after Saul's death (2 Sam. 2:1).

How can we tell if a proverb is a promise as well as a proverb? We can do so by consulting the rest of Scripture. If a proverb expresses a truth promised elsewhere in Scripture, we know that we can rely on it being absolutely trustworthy. A proverb is by definition a saying that accurately represents what is usually true, not what is true without exception. For example, the proverb "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" teaches that eating fruit regularly will help keep you healthy. It is not a promise that if you will eat an apple every day you will never get sick and have to go to a doctor. Proverbs are slices of life that picture what life is usually like.

In the case of 3:5 and 6, we have the repetition of a promise made numerous times in Scripture that people who trust God will experience His guidance through life (cf. Heb. 11; et al.).³ In our attempt to handle accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), we must carefully distinguish proverbs that restate promises from those that do not and are only proverbs. Failure to distinguish proverbs from promises has led to confusion and disappointment for many readers of this book.

¹Larsen, p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³See V. Raymond Edman, *He Leadeth Me*, for devotional comments on 32 passages that promise God's guidance.

"The individual proverbs must be interpreted and applied within the context of the whole book and, indeed, of the whole Bible. They are not divine promises for the here and now, but true observations that time will bear out."¹

Verses 7 through 10 suggest some of the ways that God will reward the commitment of verses 5 and 6. Verse 7a gives the converse of verse 5a, and 7b restates 6a (cf. Rom. 12:16). This explains what the act of acknowledging God in all one's ways looks like.

"No wise man is ever arrogant."²

Verse 8 describes personal invigoration poetically.

"Scripture often uses the physical body to describe inner spiritual or psychical feelings."³

Verse 9 applies the principle of acknowledging God to the financial side of life.

"To 'know' God in our financial 'ways' is to see that these honour Him."⁴

"The tragedy with many people is not that they don't claim to have God in their lives, but that, while they claim to have Him, they still don't trust Him. The most significant telltale symptom of this lack of trust is that they never get around to honoring the Lord with their substance. We've got to make sure that the family has security; and we don't add to the security by whopping [*sic* chopping?] off a hunk of it and putting it in the offering plate, unless we really believe that *God* is our security."⁵

The prospect of material reward (v. 10) was a promise to the godly Israelite (cf. Deut. 28:1-14; Mal. 3:10). "New wine" (v. 10) refers to grape juice before fermentation.⁶ Christians should recognize this verse as a proverb, rather than a promise, since the Lord has revealed that as Christians, we should expect persecution for our faith more than material prosperity (2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 12:1-11).

¹Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 276.

²Larsen, p. 25.

³Ross, p. 917. Cf. A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, pp. 67-68.

⁴Kidner, p. 64.

⁵Larsen, p. 31.

⁶Murphy, p. 21.

"Prosperity, gratitude, and charity are an indivisible triad of experiences in biblical thought, and notably in Proverbs (see chs. 11 and 25)."¹

The importance of continuing to seek wisdom 3:11-12

Even though the price one has to pay for wisdom (i.e., life within the will of God) includes submitting to God's discipline (vv. 11-12), it is worth it (vv. 13-20). "Loathe" (v. 11b) means to shrink back from (cf. Heb. 12:5-6). Rejecting with the will and recoiling emotionally are opposite actions from trusting (v. 5). God's discipline may not produce all that God desires if we respond to it improperly (cf. Job 5:17).

"There is not for the Book of Job a more suitable motto than this tetrastich, which expresses its fundamental thought, that there is a being chastened and tried by suffering which has as its motive the love of God, and which does not exclude sonship. One may say that ver. 11 expresses the problem of the Book of Job, and ver. 12 its solution."²

5. The value of wisdom 3:13-35

Michael Fox divided this section into two parts: an interlude (vv. 13-20) and a lecture (vv. 21-35).³

An interlude 3:13-20

"Sages reserve the laudatory exclamation *blessed* ('*asre* [v. 13]) for people who experience life optimally, as the Creator intended."⁴

Verse 13 reminds one of Jesus' parables of the treasure hid in the field and the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44-46). "Profit" (v. 14) means wisdom itself, not the profit that wisdom yields.⁵ Long life, riches, and honor (v. 16) were the rewards that God promised the godly under the Old Covenant (cf. Ps. 16:11). The tree of life figure (v. 18) implies that wisdom is the source and sustainer of a long and beneficial life (cf. v. 16; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4).

"The *tree of life* was a widespread ancient Near Eastern mythological symbol, which is especially popular in Mesopotamian palace reliefs. It

¹Hubbard, p. 74.

²Delitzsch, 1:90.

³Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 44.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 256.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:92.

represented a divine source of well-being and life, sometimes meaning eternal life. In Prov., the symbol has lost its mythological connections and is a metaphor for a source of life and health."¹

The point of this pericope is that by pursuing the way of wisdom, a person can obtain the best things that God has to offer him or her (cf. Ps. 1).

"It's good to have the things money can buy, provided you don't lose the things money can't buy. What good is an expensive house if there's no happy home within it? Happiness, pleasantness, and peace aren't the guaranteed by-products of financial success, but they are guaranteed to the person who lives by God's wisdom. Wisdom becomes a 'tree of life' to the believer who takes hold of her, and this is a foretaste of heaven (Rev. 22:1-2)."²

A lecture 3:21-35

In these verses we can see the quality of love in the wise son.

"The general theme of the Lecture is the importance of honesty in social relations."³

"To so take hold of what God has revealed as to have it control the heart and life, is what is continually insisted on in this most practical of all books [cf. vv. 21-24]."⁴

The figure of the "foot" not stumbling (v. 23) alludes to a minor mishap.⁵

Verses 27 through 30 deal with neighborliness. The situation in view in verses 27 and 28 is one in which someone owes money, not one in which giving is an act of charity (cf. Lev. 19:13). The point is: pay your debts promptly.

"'*Tomorrow* [v. 28],¹ whether in Hebrew, Arabic or Spanish (*mañana*), can be a ploy of infinite postponement."⁶

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1443. See Ralph Marcus, "The Tree of Life in Proverbs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 62 (1943):117-20; and Adams, p. 892.

²Wiersbe, p. 40.

³Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1443.

⁴Ironside, p. 44.

⁵Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 163.

⁶Hubbard, p. 78.

Verses 29 and 30 are other illustrations, in addition to verses 27 and 28, of what it means to love one's neighbor. We could apply verse 30 by taking it as a warning against hauling someone into court on flimsy accusations.¹

"When neighbors become threats to each other, we can say with accuracy and regret, 'There goes the neighborhood.'"²

"The Book of Proverbs is the best manual you'll find on people skills, because it was given to us by the God who made us, the God who can teach us what we need to know about human relationships, whether it's marriage, the family, the neighborhood, the job, or our wider circle of friends and acquaintances. If we learn and practice God's wisdom as presented in Proverbs, we'll find ourselves improving in people skills and enjoying life much more."³

Verses 31 through 35 warn against the temptation to resort to violence when we deal with neighbors (cf. 1 Kings 21:1-24; Ps. 37; 73). One must decide if he or she wants to be repulsive to God or be His intimate friend (v. 32). That is the issue in choosing the ways of the wicked or those of the upright.

"The curse [v. 33] is not merely a deprivation of external goods which render life happy, and the blessing is not merely the fullness of external possessions; the central-point of the curse lies in continuous disquiet of conscience, and that of the blessing in the happy consciousness that God is with us, in soul-rest and peace which is certain of the grace and goodness of God."⁴

James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 quote the Septuagint version of verse 34. Verse 35 probably means that fools display dishonor because that is what they get for their choices—in contrast to the wise, who get honor.

"... the clusters of synonyms [in vv. 33-35, and elsewhere in Proverbs] reinforce and augment each other. Their power is in the buildup of intensity effected by their repetition rather than in the meaning of the individual terms."⁵

¹McKane, p. 300.

²Hubbard, p. 79.

³Wiersbe, p. 97. See Kidner, pp. 44-46, for a subject study on the friend.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:102.

⁵Hubbard, p. 80.

6. Teaching the love of wisdom 4:1-9

"This chapter is comprised of three discourses on the value of wisdom, each including the motifs of instruction, exhortation, command, and motivation."¹

"That chain of tradition linking the wisdom of the generations is the basic theme of this fourth wisdom speech [i.e., chapter 4]. ... This chapter shows us a wise parent at work."²

The first section of verses in this chapter shows how parents can pass along the love of wisdom: mainly by personal influence. Solomon's instruction here was very positive. Rather than saying: Don't do this and that! which he did elsewhere (cf. 3:27-31), he wanted his sons (and perhaps grandsons) to realize that by heeding his counsel they could find the best life possible. This father structured formal times of instruction for his sons. His is not a bad example for other fathers to follow.

The Hebrew word translated "instruction" (v. 2) can also mean "law" (cf. 3:1). Normally those who keep God's commandments live (v. 4), but there are exceptions.³ Nonetheless this is good motivation. One writer paraphrased verse 7a as follows: "What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but decision. Do you want it? Come and get it."⁴ The second half of this verse probably means: Be willing to part with anything else you may have in order to get understanding. The first step in becoming wise ("the beginning of wisdom") is deciding to seek wisdom.

"Wisdom is not a once-and-for-all decision; it is a process. It is not 'once wise; always wise.' One could lose one's wisdom unless it was 'guarded' [v. 6]."⁵

A "garland of grace" (i.e., a graceful or attractive garland, v. 9) is one that adorns the wearer and is attractive to others.⁶

"... what is truly distinctive here [in this speech] is the appeal to tradition [vv. 3-4]."⁷

¹Ross, p. 922.

²Hubbard, pp. 81, 82.

³R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes*, p. 52.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵Longman, p. 150.

⁶Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 175-76.

⁷Longman, p. 148.

7. The two paths 4:10-19

In verses 10 through 19 two paths again lie before the youth: the way of wisdom (vv. 10-13) and the way of folly ("the path of the wicked"; vv. 14-17; cf. Ps. 1).¹

"The path is the life journey ..."²

The basic admonition in this section is: Avoid violence that harms others!

The way of wisdom 4:10-13

"The years of your life will be many" (v. 10) means more than just having a long life. It also means enjoying life.³ "The way of wisdom" (v. 11) is the way that leads to wisdom (cf. Job 3:23). "Upright" paths (v. 11) are straightforward ways of behaving, morally and practically. God's way is the best route to take through life (cf. Matt. 7:13-14). It offers the fewest potholes, detours, and dangers. God's commands are similar to the lines on modern highways. They help travelers stay on the proper part of the road so that they do not have accidents but, instead, arrive safely at the right destination.

"The road metaphor does not depict life from the cradle to the grave, but the road to eternal life versus the road to eternal death."⁴

"Wisdom is not gained by a onetime decision, but a decision followed by a lifetime of discipline. It is a rigorous endeavor, involving study as well as self-control, especially in light of the apparent rewards from going on the easier path of the wicked. But wisdom is worth the pursuit because it leads to life."⁵

The way of folly 4:14-17

One writer restated verses 14 and 15 as follows:

"Don't take the first step, for you may not be master of your destiny thereafter."⁶

¹See Norman C. Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1—9," *Interpretation* 26:2 (April 1972):131-57, for a study of "the way" as a nuclear symbol in this section of Proverbs; and Daniel P. Bricker, "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in Proverbs," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:4 (December 1995):501-17.

²Longman, p. 121.

³Delitzsch, 1:109.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 289.

⁵Longman, p. 152.

⁶Plaut, p. 69.

"The true pilot may not know every rock or reef, but his wisdom consists in taking the safe channel: so the Christian need not make himself aware of all the evils of the day. He is to simply take the safe path ..."¹

A person can become as zealous for evil as for good. However, this is upside down morality (v. 16; cf. Rom. 14:21). Another writer commented on verses 16 and 17 in these words:

"How sick to find peace only at the price of another man's misfortune!"²

A summary comparison 4:18-19

This section closes with another summary comparison (cf. 1:32-33; 2:21-22; 3:35). "The full day" (v. 18) is midday, when the day is at its clearest and brightest.³

"With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely we are the most favored of all creatures."⁴

The main opposing elements set in contrast in verses 10 through 19 alternate between safety and danger, and between certainty and uncertainty.

8. The importance of persistence 4:20-27

The last pericope of this chapter emphasizes the importance of persisting in the good practices that will lead to life. The basic admonition in this section is: Avoid dishonesty (from within: "your heart," vv. 21, 23; cf. Ps. 119:11)! Success usually comes to those who keep concentrating on and perfecting the basics in their work. Our temptation is to leave these when we become adequately proficient at them and move on to things that we find more interesting and exciting. These verses give the reader a checkup on his or her condition.

Advocates of the "prosperity gospel," who teach that it is never God's will for believers to experience sickness or poverty, appeal to verses 20 through 22 as support for their position (along with Exod. 15:26; 23:25; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 33:24; Jer. 30:17; Matt. 4:23; 10:1; Mark 16:16-18; Luke 6:17-19; Acts 5:16 and 10:38). The Book of Job and the past earthly

¹Ironside, p. 51.

²Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice*, p. 47.

³Delitzsch, 1:113.

⁴Tozer, p. 70.

career of Jesus are two lessons, among many in Scripture, that prove this view is incorrect.¹

"By using ears, eyes, and heart, the teacher is exhorting the whole person to receive the traditions."²

"The list of nouns in verses 20-27 is a lesson in the anatomy of discipleship."³

"It is the heart controlled by Scripture that assures a walk in the truth."⁴

"Heart" (vv. 21, 23) usually means "mind" (3:3; 6:32a; 7:7b; et al.), but it has a much broader meaning that includes the emotions (15:15, 30), the will (11:20; 14:14), and even the whole inner person (3:5).⁵ Longman equated it with "character or core personality."⁶ Here the affections are particularly in view. Verse 23, in conjunction with verses 20 through 22, helps us see that the life in view is not some prize that one gains all at once. It is rather a growing spiritual vitality that empowers the wise person and enables him or her to reach out and help others effectively (cf. Mark 7:15-23; Luke 6:45; John 4:14 and especially 7:38). One's words (v. 24) reflect his or her heart's affections.

"The heart must be guarded more zealously than anything else—not to protect it but to govern it, lest it utter inappropriate words."⁷

We must be single-minded in our pursuit of wisdom (v. 25; cf. Ps. 101:3; 119:37).

"In biblical literature, 'straight' is a common metaphor for correct behavior."⁸

We must also give attention to practical planning so that we end up taking the steps that we need to take in order to arrive at our intended destination (vv. 26-27; cf. Heb. 12:13).

¹For a critique of this movement, see Ken L. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.

²Ross, p. 925.

³Hubbard, p. 88.

⁴Ironside, p. 53. Cf. Ps. 119:2.

⁵See. Murphy, p. 28; and R. J. Bouffier, "The Heart in the Proverbs of Solomon," *The Bible Today* 52 (1971):249-51.

⁶Longman, p. 154.

⁷Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 185.

⁸Idem, "Proverbs," p. 1445.

"We must remove all that can become a moral hindrance or a dangerous obstacle in our life-course, in order that we may make right steps with our feet ..."1

"It is remarkable that God is never mentioned in this fervent appeal 'to walk the walk.' But the tone is as urgent as in the speeches of Moses or the prophets. There is no question but that the figure of God/the Lord lurks behind these chapters."2

9. Warnings against unfaithfulness in marriage ch. 5

Chapters 5 through 7 all deal with the consequences of sexual sins: eventual disappointment (ch. 5), gradual destruction (ch. 6), and ultimate death (ch. 7).³ Chapter 5 first reveals the unseen ugliness that lies behind the attractive seductress (vv. 1-6). Then it clarifies the price of unfaithfulness (vv. 7-14). Finally it extols the wisdom of marital fidelity (vv. 15-23).

The danger of seduction 5:1-6

The "lips" (words) of the youth (v. 2) contrast with those of the seductress (v. 3), which in turn contrast with the previously mentioned words of Wisdom and the fatherly teacher of wisdom. Knowing what is right and being able to articulate that with one's lips is really a protection against the power of the seductress's speech (vv. 1-6). The temptress comes with words that are sweet (flattering) and smooth (delightful, v. 3).⁴ Nevertheless, if swallowed, they make the person tempted by them feel bitter (ashamed) and wounded (hurt, v. 4). Even flirting produces this effect sometimes.

"The latter [wormwood, v. 4] is commonly identified with *Artemisia absinthium*, and it not only has a bitter taste, but part of it can also be deadly if ingested. So, instead of being sweet like honey, she is really bitter (and deadly), like wormwood."⁵

"There is an old saying, 'Honey is sweet, but the bee stings'; and this lady has a sting in her tail."⁶

¹Delitzsch, 1:117.

²Murphy, p. 29.

³Wiersbe, p. 48.

⁴M. Dahood, "Honey That Drips. Notes on Proverbs 5:2-3," *Biblica* 54 (1973):65-66.

⁵Longman, p. 159.

⁶Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs*, p. 63.

Typically the seductress will lead a person down a path that takes him to death and the grave (v. 5), though one can experience a living death as a result of following her too. She has no concern with living a truly worthwhile life but only with gaining some immediate physical and emotional thrill (v. 6).

"God created sex not only for reproduction but also for enjoyment, and he didn't put the 'marriage wall' around sex to *rob* us of pleasure but to *increase* pleasure and *protect* it."¹

The price of unfaithfulness 5:7-14

The price of unfaithfulness is so high that it is foolish to pay it. Therefore one is wise to avoid tempting himself or herself by continuing to admire the "merchandise." Most marital infidelity occurs because the parties involved continue to spend time together. Here Solomon advised avoiding the company of a temptress (cf. Gen. 39:10; 2 Tim. 2:22; Matt. 5:28-29).

"Avoid the slightest temptation."²

The price of unfaithfulness is not just physical disease (v. 11b), though that may be part of it in many cases, but total personal ruin. Infidelity dissipates all of one's powers (v. 9a). Others will exploit the unfaithful one (vv. 9b-10), he will hate himself (vv. 11-13), and he will quite possibly suffer ruin in his community (v. 14). Verse 9 would fit a situation involving blackmail, a not uncommon accompaniment to marital unfaithfulness.

"Although sexual immorality today may not lead to slavery, it still leads to alimony, child support, broken homes, hurt, jealousy, lonely people, and venereal disease."³

"The use of both 'flesh' and 'body' [v. 11] underscores the fact that the whole body is exhausted."⁴

"... his flesh is consumed away, for sensuality and vexation have worked together to undermine his health."⁵

¹Wiersbe, p. 48.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 462.

³Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 313.

⁴Ross, p. 928.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:124.

The importance of fidelity 5:15-23

Verses 15 through 23 point out a better way, namely, fidelity to one's marriage partner. Strict faithfulness need not result in unhappiness or failure to experience what is best in life, as the world likes to try to make us think. Rather, it guards us from the heartbreak and tragedy that accompany promiscuity. The figures of a cistern and a well (v. 15) refer to one's wife (cf. Song of Sol. 4:15), who satisfies desire, like water from one of these containers satisfies thirst. This verse is not recommending drinking one's urine for medicinal purposes, as some have thought.¹

"The contrast between the harlot's honey that goes bitter (vv. 3-4) and the wife's water that stays sweet ("running [water," v. 15, NIV]) is the point of the whole chapter."²

"One drinks water to quench his thirst; here drinking is a figure of the satisfaction of conjugal love ... [cf. 1 Cor. 7:9]."³

The Hebrew text permits taking verse 16 as a positive statement (e.g., "Let your springs overflow ...") rather than as a question. This is how some translations read (e.g., AV, CEV, NEB).⁴ The meaning of verses 17 and 18 then becomes: "The influence of the faithful man (His 'springs') become a blessing to others."⁵ Another, more probable, view is that the springs and streams in view belong to the man being warned, who might share them with a woman of the street.⁶ This is how some other translations read (e.g., NASB, NIV, TNIV, NRSV, NKJV, NET2, ESV, HCSB).⁷

"... the wife is viewed not as child-bearer but as pleasure-giver."⁸

Some interpreters take "your fountain" (v. 18) as a figure for one's wife and her offspring of children.⁹ Fox understood the "springs" (v. 16) to be one's offspring, and the

¹See *The Book of Unusual Knowledge*, p. 569.

²Hubbard, p. 94.

³Delitzsch, 1:127.

⁴AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, CEV to *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*, and NEB to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

⁵Kidner, p. 70.

⁶Ross, 929; Hubbard, p. 94.

⁷TNIV refers to *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*, NKJV to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, NET2 to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed., ESV to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, and HCSB to *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

⁸Toy, p. 114.

⁹E.g., Delitzsch, 1:130.

"fountain" one's wife's womb.¹ "Doe" and "goat" (v. 19) are common Semitic figures for females, on account of their beautiful limbs and dark eyes.²

The erotic language of verses 19 and 20 may be surprising, but it shows that God approves sexual joy in marriage, and it is a preventive measure against unfaithfulness (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5, 9; Heb. 13:4). A man can either be "exhilarated" (v. 19, i.e., sexually stimulated, also translated "intoxicating" in 20:1 and Isa. 28:7) by his wife or by another woman. The same Hebrew word translated "exhilarated," *shagah*, which means to swerve, meander, or reel, reads "go astray" in verse 23b. Fascination with a "stranger" (v. 17) destroys two loves: love for one's spouse, and love of Wisdom.³

"... if the young man is not *captivated* [Heb. *shagah*] by his wife but becomes *captivated* with a stranger in sinful acts, then his own iniquities will *captivate* him; and he will be led to ruin."⁴

"We don't really understand the meaning of the phrase 'God is love' (1 John 4:8) until we understand that life is fundamentally relationships. And plenitude of relationship is fullness of life. Paucity of relationship is impoverishment of life."⁵

"Lack of discipline" (RSV, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, NET2, ESV, NEB) or "self-control" (CEV, v. 23a) is better than "lack of instruction" (NASB, AV, NKJV).⁶ The issue is self-discipline empowered by God's Spirit. People usually do not become unfaithful to their spouses because they do not *know* better but because they do not *choose* better.⁷

"The young man, with the rest of our male species through the centuries, is exhorted not just to a steely willed commitment or to a paternal pride but also to a single-hearted, impassioned affection for his bride."⁸

"Impurity of conduct may seem to be of silken texture in its enticement. It becomes a hard and unyielding cable when it binds the life in slavery."⁹

¹Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, pp. 200-1.

²Delitzsch, 1:131.

³Murphy, p. 33.

⁴Ross, p. 931.

⁵Larsen, p. 39.

⁶RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*.

⁷See Zuck, pp. 239-43, for a summary of the revelation concerning man in Proverbs.

⁸Hubbard, p. 94.

⁹G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 281.

"There is no 'free love'—only free exploitation."¹

10. Other dangerous temptations 6:1-19

Solomon singled out a few more serious mistakes to avoid in addition to marital unfaithfulness. These include assuming liability for the debts of others (vv. 1-5), being lazy (vv. 6-11), being untruthful (vv. 12-15), and seven other practices that need no clarification (vv. 16-19).

The advice in this section provides a good example of what prudence is. A prudent person is one who is capable of exercising sound judgment in practical matters. He or she is cautious and discreet in conduct, is careful, and is sensible. We often describe a prudent person by saying that he or she has common sense. A prudent person can foresee the consequences of possible actions and behaves accordingly. Godly (wise) people can be prudent because God's revelation helps them see the usual consequences of their actions before they commit them. This is largely what the Book of Proverbs helps us do.

"Guarantor" (v. 1) means "security," in the sense of taking on another person's obligations as one's own—like when a person co-signs a note to pay another person's loan. Paul offered to pay Onesimus' past debts, but not his future ones (Phile. 18-19). "Neighbor" and "stranger" (v. 1) together mean anyone; these two kinds of people are not the only ones in view. This is a figure of speech called a merism, in which two extremes represent the whole. Solomon strongly counseled avoidance of this obligation. If one finds himself in it already, he should do everything he can to get himself out of it—before he discovers that he is in even worse trouble (v. 3). The writer did not command his son never to become surety for his neighbor; he told him what to do if he had already done this, so that he could escape the consequences that typically follow such an act.

"Don't sleep on it; get the thing straightened out."²

The reader is not disobeying God if he or she becomes surety for a stranger, but this proverb warns of the possible consequences and gives advice about how to avoid them.

Verses 6 through 11 warn against laziness (cf. 24:33-34).³

¹Larsen, p. 45.

²J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 3:24.

³See Kidner, pp. 42-43, for a subject study on the sluggard.

"Improvvidence [showing no foresight] is not faith; it is the grossest presumption to act the part of the sluggard and then to expect divine provision in the hour of need. In this as in all else sowing follows reaping [cf. 13:6]."¹

"Hard work ought to be the normal routine of us who serve a carpenter-Christ, who follow the lead of a tentmaker-apostle, and who call ourselves children of a Father who is still working (John 5:17)."²

A "drifter" (v. 11) is a highwayman, namely, a robber.³

"The vagabond here is not an indigent begging for alms, but is a potentially dangerous armed wanderer."⁴

"In that society there were no technological controls or government social programs to serve as a safety net against poverty."⁵

The person in view in verses 12 through 15 is one who, for the amusement it gives him or her, causes other people to experience inconvenience or suffering. A simple joke is different from joking at someone else's expense: joking that hurts someone else. The latter practice is what Solomon urged his son to avoid. He called such a mischievous prankster "worthless" and "wicked" (v. 12). "Worthless" is literally "of Beliel," a word that became a name for Satan (2 Cor. 6:15). "Winks" (v. 13) is better translated "squints," and "squinting the eyes was considered a symptom of hostile thoughts [cf. Ps. 35:19]."⁶

"*Shuffling* ["signals," lit. scrapes] the feet was probably considered symptomatic of an unquiet soul. *Pointing the finger* seems to be a sign of derision (Isa. 58:9)."⁷

The list in verses 16 through 19 repeats some of what Solomon mentioned earlier. It may have been one whole proverb that he added because it carried on the idea of other temptations to avoid. The phrase "six ... seven" (v. 16) implies that this list is not exhaustive of what God hates, though it is explicit (cf. Deut. 16:22; Ps. 45:7; Eccles. 3:8;

¹Ironside, p. 64.

²Hubbard, p. 101.

³Toy, p. 125.

⁴Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1447.

⁵R. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 31.

⁶Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 220.

⁷Idem, "Proverbs," p. 1447.

Rev. 2:6).¹ These seven practices deal with attitude (v. 17a), thought (18a), speech (17b, 19a), action (17c, 18b), and influence (19b).

"The numerical pattern—'six ... seven'—plays several roles: (1) it aids memory by numbering the items in a list; (2) it encourages recitation or repetition of the items by making a game, almost a riddle, of the text; (3) it thrusts into bold relief the final item, here the seventh, as the climax and center of the list ..."²

"Have you ever noticed that there is far more said throughout the Bible about the abuse of the tongue [v. 17b] than is said about the abuse of alcohol?"³

For what God loves, compare Isaiah 66:2.

11. The folly of adultery 6:20-35

This extended warning against one of life's most destructive practices is classic. We can profit from reading it frequently.

Verses 20 through 23 indicate the start of a new section and stress again the importance of the precepts that follow. "Walk," "sleep," and "awake" (v. 22) picture life in its totality (cf. Deut. 6:7; 11:19). To "walk" means to habitually act. Solomon regarded the instruction that he was giving as an expression of God's Law (cf. v. 23; Ps. 119:105). Commenting on verses 20 through 23, Paul Larsen wrote the following:

"Get hung up in your relationships with your parents and you'll never get in a right relationship with yourself."⁴

The immoral act begins with the lustful look (v. 25; cf. 2 Sam. 11:2). The warning is against coveting (cf. Exod. 20:17; Matt. 5:28). That is the place to weed out the temptation: when it is still small.

"Playing with temptation is only the heart reaching out after sin."⁵

¹Toy, p. 127.

²Hubbard, p. 103.

³McGee, 3:26.

⁴Larsen, p. 67.

⁵Ross, p. 937.

"Again are we reminded that it is the heart which must be kept or guarded if the feet would be preserved from forbidden paths."¹

"Nothing feeds adultery like fantasy. Imagination, savoring in the soul the delights of an unlawful partner, is the fuel by which immorality is fired."²

"... the ordinary harlot is after subsistence, will deprive a man of his money, but not ruin him; the unchaste married woman brings on him destructive social (and possibly legal) punishment."³

In verses 27 through 29 we have a series of physical analogies designed to illustrate spiritual cause and effect. Adultery brings inescapable punishment. One may contain a fire (v. 27) at first, but others will discover it if it continues to burn. "His clothes" (v. 27) may imply outward reputation, namely, what others see. "Clothes" are sometimes used figuratively this way in Scripture. "Touches her" (v. 29) is probably a euphemism for sexual intimacy (cf. Gen. 20:6; 1 Cor. 7:1).

"'But sex is a normal desire, given to us by God,' some people argue. 'Therefore, we have every right to use it, even if we're not married. It's like eating: If you're hungry, God gave you food to eat; if you're lonely, God gave you sex to enjoy.' Some of the people in the Corinthian church used this argument to defend their sinful ways: 'Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods' (1 Cor. 6:13, NKJV). But Paul made it clear that the believer's body belonged to God and that the presence of a desire wasn't the same as the privilege to satisfy that desire (vv. 12-20)."⁴

Verses 30 through 35 draw another kind of comparison. Adultery is a practice good people look down on because it is never necessary. It is always the product of lack of self-control. It is this lack of self-restraint that seems to be the reason that an unfaithful husband should not be a church elder (1 Tim. 5:6). According to the comparison in these verses, adultery is a greater sin than stealing.

"One does not contemn [*sic*] a man who is a thief through poverty, he is pitied; while the adulterer goes to ruin under all circumstances of

¹Ironside, p. 69.

²Hubbard, p. 107.

³Toy, p. 137. Cf. Murphy, p. 39.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 54.

contempt and scorn. And: theft may be made good, and that abundantly; but adultery and its consequences are irreparable."¹

"The picture of the adulterer as social outcast may seem greatly overdrawn. If so, the adjustment that must be made is to say that in any *healthy* society such an act is social suicide."²

Also, Hebrew poetry sometimes employs hyperbole. An evidence of the use of hyperbole here is in verse 31: "he must repay seven times as much." The Mosaic Law required less compensation than sevenfold.

"The lesson [of verses 20 through 35] presents a single and cohesive argument whose main point is the inevitability of the adulterer's punishment: do not imagine that you can evade punishment for adultery, though it is the most secretive of sins. The warning is blunt: Keep away from a man's wife, or he'll beat the hell out of you, maybe kill you."³

12. The lure of adultery ch. 7

This chapter dramatizes the arguments that Solomon advanced in the previous section (6:20-35). He told a story that illustrates his point.

"The need for sexual discipline, the need to say 'no' to offers of physical intimacy outside of marriage, is the dominant theme in the wisdom speeches of Proverbs 1—9. In chapter 7, it occupies the entire speech and centers in the peculiar temptations offered to the leaders in commerce and government which the young men of Proverbs were being trained to become."⁴

The prologue (vv. 1-5) again urges the adoption of this advice, not just the reception of it. The "apple" (pupil) of the eye (v. 2) is its most sensitive part (cf. Deut. 32:10).

"'Sister' [v. 4] is here not a reference to a sibling, but rather a romantic designation similar to its use in Song [of Solomon] 4:9. It is now well

¹Delitzsch, 1:154.

²Kidner, pp. 74-75.

³Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 237. Paragraph division omitted.

⁴Hubbard, pp. 109-10.

established that the use of 'sister' as a term of endearment between an intimate couple was common in the Near East, particularly in Egypt."¹

Verse 5 repeats 2:16 verbatim, except for one word in Hebrew.

Verses 6 through 9 describe the victim of temptation as one who has not adopted Solomon's counsel. In Israelite culture, the person viewing what was going on in the street would often have done so from a second story window, since the lower story would typically have lacked windows as a precaution against theft.² The youth is "naive" (v. 7), showing lack of wisdom. He is foolish either innocently or deliberately.

Verses 10 through 12 picture the sexual huntress on the prowl for sensual gratification, preying on anyone foolish enough to encourage her.

"As is well known, the 'foot' is not infrequently a euphemism for genitalia. ... Thus, the assertion that her feet do not rest at home (v. 11b), but rather that she has a 'foot' in the street and a 'foot' in the public squares, may have double meaning and suggest that she has taken her sexual desire from the private sphere of marriage to the public areas."³

"The first step in coming to maturity is to develop a concept of deferred satisfaction."⁴

"Woe to the marriage whose partners cannot find values in their home and must constantly seek outside stimulation!"⁵

Verses 13 through 21 show this evil woman's tactics: sensual assault (v. 13), justification of her intent (v. 14), flattery (v. 15), visualization of delight (through eyes and nose, vv. 16-17), proposition (v. 18), and reassurance of safety (vv. 19-20). We should probably favor the NASB marginal reading of verse 14: "Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me." The idea is that the woman had made a peace offering and had some of the food that was her portion of the offering at her house, where she needed to eat it—with someone else.

"Having made these offerings earlier, she now has meat available for a festive meal, which the youth can join in. The sexual implications of the

¹Longman, p. 187.

²Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 371.

³Longman, p. 189.

⁴Larsen, p. 50.

⁵Plaut, p. 102.

invitation will soon be unmistakable, but at this point, the boy may believe—or allow himself to believe—that he is being invited to innocent feasting."¹

"Her refrigerator is full, as we would say."²

Some peace offerings followed the end of a vow (i.e., votive offerings). This seems to have been what is in view here. This woman appears to be indulging herself after a period of self-sacrifice, like some people who fast during Lent do at the end of that season.

"Since the woman could not eat the sacrificial meat in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:19-20), she may also be implying that she is not menstruating and is thus sexually available. We may wonder why this would matter to either party, since they are involved in a sin incomparably worse than violation of ritual purity. But people may be punctilious in ritual and taboo while shabby in ethics."³

It is quite clear that this woman knew exactly what she wanted.

Verses 22 and 23 portray "the kill" with two figures: a dumb ox led to slaughter, and a foolish criminal led to prison. Evidently the youth hesitated, but then "suddenly" (v. 22) yielded. Sin leads to death (cf. Rom. 6:23; James 1:15). Along the same line of thought, Solomon looked at the end result of the youth's action, not its immediate effect.

"Stupid animals see no connection between traps and death, and morally stupid people see no connection between their sin and death (cf. 1:17-18; Hos. 7:11)."⁴

"Such a story as this would serve the lewd profane poets of our age to make a play of, and the harlot with them would be the heroine; nothing would be so entertaining to the audience, as her arts of beguiling the young gentleman. Her conquests would be celebrated as the triumphs of wit and love, and the comedy would conclude very pleasantly; and every

¹Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 245.

²R. Laird Harris, "Proverbs," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 563.

³Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 246.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 384.

young men [*sic* man] that saw it acted would covet to be so picked up.
Thus *fools make a mock at sin.*"¹

In the epilogue to this story (vv. 24-27), Solomon advised a three-fold defense against this temptation: First, guard your heart (v. 25a). We are in danger when we begin to desire and long for an adulterous affair. Fantasizing such an affair is one symptom that we are in this danger zone. Second, guard your body (v. 25b). Do not go near or stay near someone who may want an adulterous affair. Third, guard your future (vv. 26-27). Think seriously about the consequences of having an adulterous affair before you get involved.

"A man's life is not destroyed in one instant; it is taken from him gradually as he enters into a course of life that will leave him as another victim of the wages of sin."²

13. The function of wisdom ch. 8

Chapter 8 is an apology (defense) of wisdom. The sage returned to the figure of Wisdom that he used at the beginning of this part of Proverbs (1:20).

"In loftiness and grandeur this speech rises from the pages of Proverbs like the Jungfrau over Interlaken or Rainier above Puget Sound. It is the summit of Old Testament discipleship, inviting all who see it to mount the slopes of righteousness and justice, goodness and mercy, and from there to see life as God intended in those days when He called creation into being and shaped humankind in His own image. Wisdom laughed for joy when He did, and all who truly seek her by fearing God are promised a share in that pristine happiness."³

"The young man has been examining the literature of the different colleges; and the school of wisdom and the school of fools are bidding for his application. In this chapter it is wisdom that sends out an invitation to him with a note of urgency. Pressure is put upon the young man now. The school bell is going to ring before long, and they [both] want this young man enrolled."⁴

¹Henry, pp. 744-45.

²Ross, p. 942.

³Hubbard, p. 118.

⁴McGee, 3:30.

The argument of this section develops as follows: Wisdom would be every person's guide (vv. 1-5; cf. Gal. 5:18, 22-23). She is morality's partner (vv. 6-13), the key to success (vv. 14-21), the principle of creation (vv. 22-31), and the one essential necessity of life (vv. 32-36). Chapter 8 contains the longest sustained personification in the Bible.¹

Wisdom as guide 8:1-5

By personifying wisdom—capitalized Wisdom—Solomon was able to illustrate two things about it in these verses, both of which concern the guidance that is available in wisdom (understanding, insight): Wisdom is available everywhere (vv. 2-3) and to anyone (v. 5). It does not take a superior intellect to be wise in the biblical sense, because wisdom involves choices.

Wisdom and morality 8:6-13

Wisdom and godliness are practically synonymous (cf. 1:7). Verse 9 means that the person who already has walked down Wisdom's path for some distance can appreciate the moral rightness of Wisdom better than someone who has not (cf. Phil. 4:8).

"What the verse says is not that Wisdom's words are clear, intelligible, simple to the instructed, but that they commend themselves as true ..."²

"The simplicity of integrity is the profundity of wisdom. ... Integrity is the moral dimension that separates wisdom from intelligence, learning and cleverness."³

True Wisdom is resourceful and discreet (v. 13). This pericope speaks of the essential excellence of wisdom.

Wisdom and success 8:14-21

Wisdom is the key to many material and immaterial benefits, but mostly the latter type. She rewards those who seek her (vv. 17-21).

"What does it mean in practice to seek wisdom? First of all, one must give attention to the words of one's teacher and of other sages."⁴

¹Merrill, p. 490.

²Toy, p. 163.

³Larsen, p. 73.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 1—9*, p. 276.

Wisdom is better than gold (v. 19) in two senses: the wise man is able to earn gold, but he is able to use wisdom to do more than he can with gold. Yet Wisdom is available only to those who seek her. Unlike gold, wisdom is not something one can inherit.

Wisdom and creation 8:22-31

"This passage has had an extensive history of influence on theological thought. In Jewish thought, wisdom here is understood as the Torah. In Christian thought it is sometimes understood as the pre-incarnate Son of God. As Jesus is the fulfillment of the Torah (Matt. 5:17), both are possible."¹

As Creator, the LORD counted Wisdom most important. Wisdom is older than the universe, and she was essential in its creation. Nothing came into existence without Wisdom: divine wisdom.

"... Wisdom is not God, but is God's; she has personal existence in the Logos of the N. T., but is not herself the Logos ..."²

Wisdom leads to joy because creation produces joy (vv. 30-31), both for the Creator and for the creature. God made and did nothing without Wisdom. Therefore it is very important that we obtain her. That is the point.

"What has the voice of wisdom to say concerning the integration debate in Christian counseling? The wisdom literature of the Old Testament invites the study of human nature, behavior, and change from sources outside the canon of Scripture as well as in Scripture itself. Wisdom also exemplifies the use of methods that neither emerge exegetically from the Bible nor utilize the words of Scripture itself. Even when Scripture is used, wisdom often dictates which texts are most appropriate for a given situation and how application needs to take shape. At the same time, wise counselors recognize that the Bible is the only perfect authority for guiding faith and practice. Since the essence of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, a heart of adoration and submission to God is the foundation for skillful living, especially in the face of life's most severe experiences. Not

¹Adams, p. 898.

²Delitzsch, 1:183.

only in counseling, but in all aspects of life, wisdom calls for a deeper reverence for God in conforming one's life to the Creator's design."¹

"The beginning" (v. 22) probably refers to the beginning of God's creative work (Gen. 1), since that is what Solomon described in the verses that follow.² Wisdom always existed as an attribute of God.³ Verse 30 pictures Wisdom as God's constant and intimate companion. Since she is that, we should value her highly. Another interpretation is that wisdom was with God like a child that He was caring for.⁴ One writer concluded that Wisdom is a link or bond between the Creator and His creation.⁵

"A startling view of creation this is. Not a struggle among the gods for mastery of the cosmos, as the Babylonians saw it, not an ageless, gray, grim quest for survival by adaptation as atheistic evolution views it, but high comedy applauded and enhanced by wisdom herself."⁶

The appeal to gain wisdom 8:32-36

On the basis of all that precedes, Solomon exhorted his sons to live by his words and thereby gain wisdom. Again, Wisdom leads to life, but those who lack wisdom speed up their death.

"... wisdom and life are more closely associated than any other concepts in Proverbs; the goal of wisdom is life, e.g., 4:13, 23; 10:17."⁷

"Many have equated wisdom in this chapter with Jesus Christ. This connection works only so far as Jesus reveals the nature of God the Father, including his wisdom, just as Proverbs presents the personification of the attribute. Jesus' claims included wisdom (Matt 12:42) and a unique knowledge of God (Matt 11:25-27). He even personified wisdom in a way

¹John W. Hilber, "Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:620 (October-December 1998):422.

²See Hans-Jürgen Hermission, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 43-47, 54-55; Ángel M. Rodríguez, "Genesis and Creation in the Wisdom Literature," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, pp. 241-52.

³William A. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961):142.

⁴Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1451.

⁵R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation: The 'AMON of Proverbs VIII 30," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960):211-23.

⁶Hubbard, p. 126.

⁷Murphy, p. 54.

that was similar to Proverbs (Matt 11:19; Luke 11:49). Paul saw the fulfillment of wisdom in Christ (Col 1:15-20; 2:3) and affirmed that Christ became our wisdom in the Crucifixion (1 Cor 1:24, 30). So the bold personification of wisdom in Proverbs certainly provides a solid foundation for the revelation of divine wisdom in Christ. But because wisdom appears to be a creation of God in 8:22-31, it is unlikely that wisdom here is Jesus Christ."¹

C. WISDOM AND FOLLY CONTRASTED CH. 9

"Like the last movement of a sonata or symphony, this final chapter of the wisdom speeches recapitulates the major motifs of chapters 1—8."²

This chapter contrasts wisdom and folly in a very symmetrical structure; verses 1 through 6 correspond to verses 13 through 18 remarkably. This chiasmic arrangement of presentation (in which concepts are repeated in reverse order in the same or a modified form) sets off the central verses (vv. 7-12) as the most important in the chapter. Both Wisdom and Folly invite the youth to seek them. These two rival invitations bring this section of Proverbs to a climax. The youth (and the reader) must now make a decision: Which one will he or she follow?

1. Wisdom's feast 9:1-6

The parallel between Wisdom's invitation and the one Jesus Christ extended to everyone to come to His feast illustrates the connection between wisdom and responding positively to God's Word (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24).

The "seven pillars" (v. 1) may picture a typical banquet pavilion. They may be an allusion to the cosmos (cf. 8:22-31) that God made in seven days. Some of the ancients envisioned the world as resting on seven pillars (cf. Job 38:6).³ I prefer this view. Other theories are that they stand for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2).⁴ Possibly the seven pillars refer to seven sections of text in

¹Ross, p. 943. For the view that the wisdom in view here is Christ, see Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*, 2:2:19-20; or McGee, 3:33-34.

²Hubbard, p. 131.

³Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1451.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:197-98.

chapters 2 through 7.¹ Possibly they refer to the teachings of chapters 1 through 8.² "Seven" to the Jews indicated perfection. "Seven" could also mean "sufficiency," or it may mean "many."³

"Both Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly make their claim from this spot ["the tops of the heights of the city," v. 3] (cf. v. 14). The highest place in an ancient city would have been occupied by a palace or temple, or both, and thus both wisdom and folly claim divine authority to govern mankind's actions."⁴

Wisdom's invitation (v. 5) sounds like a gospel invitation (cf. John 6:51, 55). The parallel between wisdom and walking in God's ways (godliness) is again clear in this pericope.

2. The open or closed mind 9:7-12

People do not usually live or die because of only one decision. They develop a pattern of life that ends in either death or life. This section helps us see the outcome of these styles of life. If a person is open to God and teachable, he will become wise, but if he does not accept this instruction and closes his mind, he becomes a fool.

The person who tries to help a fool by correcting him will get no honor from the fool. The fool's folly has closed his mind to correction (vv. 7-8; cf. Matt. 13:12-16). In contrast, a wise person will continue learning from God all of his or her life (v. 9; cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).

"... there are some people who are constitutionally unable to learn wisdom. Wisdom requires the right attitude, namely the fear of God. See 1.7."⁵

"The less a man knows, as a rule, the more he thinks he knows. The more he really does know, the more he realizes his ignorance and his limitations."⁶

Verse 10 restates 1:7. The wise life equals the righteous life (vv. 9-11).

¹Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*, pp. 9-14.

²Murphy, p. 59.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 464.

⁴Adams, p. 899.

⁵Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1452.

⁶Ironside, p. 89.

"Briefly, fear [v. 10] is neither mere respect nor utter terror. It is something between the two."¹

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."²

Verse 11 recalls 3:2.

"Until we take seriously the wrath of God, we shall not really be solaced [comforted] by the love of God."³

Verse 12 is a strong statement of individual responsibility. It stresses that the person himself or herself is the ultimate loser or winner in his or her decision to choose Wisdom or Folly (v. 12).⁴

"Verse 12 reminds us that the Lord wants to build godly character into our lives, and we can't borrow character from others or give our character to them. This is an individual matter that involves individual decisions. Belonging to a fine family, attending a faithful church, or studying in an excellent school can't guarantee the building of our character. Character is built on decisions, and bad decisions will create bad character."⁵

3. Folly's feast 9:13-18

Verses 1 through 6 personify wisdom in the figure of a lady preparing a feast and issuing invitations. Verses 13 through 18 personify folly in the guise of a harlot doing the same thing. The contrasts between these sections are full of subtle differences. Verses 4 and 16 are almost identical invitations. The end of this book contains another picture of a wise woman (31:10-31).⁶

In view of what God has revealed so far about wisdom, any person can determine just how wise or how foolish he or she may be. This is not a mystery. It has little to do with intelligence but everything to do with commitment. If a person recognizes divine revelation as such, and decides to understand it, submits to it, and lives by it the best he

¹Longman, p. 219.

²A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 9.

³Larsen, p. 93.

⁴See Rick W. Byargeon, "The Structure and Significance of Prov 9:7-12," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:3 (September 1997):367-75.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 32.

⁶See Murphy, pp. 277-87, for an excursus on Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly.

can, he is wise. On the other hand, if he rejects God's Word and decides to live his life with no regard to what God has said, he is a fool.

II. COLLECTION 2: SOLOMON'S COUPLETS EXPRESSING WISDOM 10:1—22:16

Chapters 1 through 9, as we have seen, contain discourses (instructive speeches) that someone, probably Solomon, wrote urging his son to choose the way of wisdom for his life. However, Kidner believed that if Solomon had written the first nine chapters, 10:1 would read, "These also are proverbs of Solomon."¹ At 10:1, we begin the part of the book that sets forth what "the wise way" is in a variety of life situations. We move now from instructive speeches to wisdom sayings. These are two different kinds of literature.²

"The mode of service is not *table d'hôte* [a meal offered at a fixed price with few if any choices] but *a la carte* [a meal offered as separate items], brief, detached snacks of wisdom, like a vast buffet of *hors d'oeuvres* [small appetizing dishes]."³

"Until now the book of Proverbs has been identifying the truly wise man. From this point on, it will describe how such a man should conduct his life from day to day. This logical topical order appears in many New Testament epistles, where the saved person is first identified, and then the daily life he should live is described [e.g., Rom. 1—5 and 6—8; Eph. 1—3 and 4—6]."⁴

"The main thought is that moral goodness and industry bring prosperity, and wickedness and indolence adversity ..."⁵

There are 184 maxims in chapters 10 through 15, and 191 in chapters 16 through 22, for a total of 375.⁶ A maxim is a succinct or concise saying that has some proven truth to it: a general rule, a principle, or a truth. This group of sayings represents only a few of the 3,000 proverbs that Solomon "spoke" (1 Kings 4:32). Waltke wrote that the Book of Proverbs contains a total of 930 sayings.⁷

¹Kidner, p. 22.

²Hubbard, p. 43.

³Ibid., p. 141.

⁴Irving L. Jensen, *Proverbs*, p. 64.

⁵Toy, p. 196.

⁶Jensen, p. 65.

⁷Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. xxi.

Most of the proverbs in this section are one verse long and contain two lines each; they are couplets. The second line normally compares, contrasts, or completes the idea expressed in the first line. This is Hebrew parallelism. In chapters 10 through 15, most of the couplets contain antithetic parallelism. The key word is "but." In chapters 16 through 22, there are more synonymous parallelisms marked by the conjunction "and." There are also sentences in which the second line continues the thought of the first line (e.g., 14:26). Some couplets contain comparisons in which the relative value of two things is set forth (e.g., 11:31). Some contain a statement in the first line followed by an explanation in the second line (e.g., 20:2).¹

Is there any logic to the arrangement of these seemingly unrelated proverbs? In some places there is a general association of ideas, and in some places there is a recurring key word (e.g., "king" in 16:12-15, and "Yahweh" in 16:1-7). But many of these couplets have no logical connection with what immediately precedes or follows in the context. This anthology (collection) style is typical of other ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.

"There is simply no consensus on the subunits that allegedly were put together in the present form of the book."²

"A proverb is like a jewel, and the book of Proverbs is like a heap of jewels. Indeed, it is a heap of different *kinds* of jewels. Is it really such a loss if they are not all laid out in pretty, symmetric designs or divided into neat little piles?"³

"The absence of a systematic arrangement is due to the traditional character of the contents. There is no need of a closely knit argument; striking images, incisive wording are all that is required to give a fresh appeal to the truth of familiar viewpoints."⁴

"It is also surprising to find lofty precepts mixed with more 'trivial' apothegms [sayings]. Of course, this is a misconception based on the modern-day viewpoint of life. From the sages' perspective each proverb is an expression of 'wisdom,' which is ... the fixed order of reality. Viewed from this perspective no sentence is trivial ..."⁵

¹For further discussion, see R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, pp. 57-59.

²Murphy, p. 68.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 481.

⁴Frankfort, p. 61. See also Longman, pp. 15-16, 40.

⁵Waltke, "The Book ...," p. 226.

Why did the Holy Spirit not arrange these proverbs topically so that we could study all of them that deal with one subject together? Perhaps He did so because the method He chose is "a course of education in the life of wisdom."¹

"As we read Proverbs chapter by chapter, the Spirit of God has the freedom to teach us about many subjects, and we never know from day to day which topic we'll need the most. Just as the Bible itself isn't arranged like a systematic theology, neither is Proverbs. What Solomon wrote is more like a kaleidoscope than a stained-glass window: We never know what the next pattern will be."²

In his commentary Hubbard organized his comments on the proverbs in 10:1 through 26:16 topically. The topics that he selected are as follows: wisdom, work, generosity, rashness, honesty, kindness to animals, violence, hope, the fear of the LORD, self-control, prudent speech, prayer, the LORD's eyes, the king's face, family ties, friendly bonds, peace in society, purity in speech, open ears, full hands, firm hands, fair scales, rewards of conduct, pride, cautious conduct, and justice.³ This list demonstrates the variety of subjects dealt with in this section of the book.

Chuck Swindoll offered 13 subject studies: Living beyond the daily grind of human viewpoint, disobedience, shallowness, worry, an unguarded heart, biblical illiteracy, a troubled heart, an uncontrolled tongue (two studies), discontentment, lustful temptations, procrastination, and domestic disharmony.⁴

Many of the following proverbs explain what various types of people characteristically do, or what usually happens to them.

"Our conduct, whether wise or foolish, has ultimate consequences. That is the major theme of Proverbs, and notably of 10:1—22:16. ... The importance of choice is highlighted first in the freedom to make sound decisions which Israel's wise always assumed. Neither wisdom nor folly was a predetermined, inevitable choice for them. No one was predestined to either. Each human being had the opportunity and obligation to make that choice personally."⁵

¹Kidner, p. 22.

²Wiersbe, p. 16. See also p. 59.

³Hubbard, pp. 141-356.

⁴Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Part I*, pp. 155-242.

⁵Hubbard, p. 143.

Ironside provided one or more biblical illustrations of almost all of the proverbs in chapters 10 through 29. I have referred to many of these in the exposition that follows, as well as adding illustrations of my own.

A. MARKS OF WISE LIVING CHS. 10—15

Solomon advocated choosing things that benefit and things that have true and lasting value. He pictured wise living in a variety of contexts. He urged making wise investments, valuing righteousness, and avoiding trouble. He also pointed out the fruits of wise living and concluded this section of the book with further advice for wise living.

1. Things that produce profit 10:1-14

10:1 The title "The proverbs of Solomon" probably describes the material between 10:1 and 22:17.¹

"It is uncertain whether this phrase ["The proverbs of Solomon"] intends to suggest that Solomon wrote these aphorisms, that he collected them, or simply that they are of the style or type associated with him."²

Solomon is an example of a wise son in whom his father David and his mother Bathsheba surely delighted (cf. 1 Chron. 22:11-13; 2 Chron. 1:7-12). Esau, on the other hand, was unwise and proved to be a source of sorrow to both of his parents (cf. Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46).

10:2 At face value both statements in this verse may seem untrue. The solution to this puzzling proverb, as well as the solution to many that follow, lies in remembering that Solomon had the whole course of a life in view, not just the immediate consequences of an act or condition. The righteous escape death in that they have greater true riches as God's beneficiaries than the wicked, simply because they are righteous, regardless of their financial condition (cf. 11:4).

"In the context of Proverbs deliverance from death has nothing to do with personal immortality beyond death."³

¹Murphy, p. 72.

²Adams, p. 900.

³Murphy, p. 73.

Noah is an example of a righteous man who literally escaped death by flood because of his righteousness (cf. Gen. 6:8-9). Mordecai's righteousness delivered him from death (Esth. 6), whereas Haman died in spite of his wealth because of his unrighteousness (Esth. 7).

10:3 The righteous will not lack what is most important in life, though they may lack food. Conversely, God will not meet the deepest cravings of the wicked, because they have rejected His ways (cf. 13:25). The first part of this verse was certainly true of Joseph.

"The wicked are condemned to live forever with their unfulfilled, and so sterile, desires, which cannot be transformed into practical attainment."¹

"The triumphant song of Habakkuk (3:17-19) fitly illustrates the first clause, and the fate of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) the second."²

10:4 This proverb and the next show how one person succeeds and another fails. They contrast the "lazy" and the "diligent" (cf. 12:24, 27; 19:15). The Apostle Paul warned the Thessalonians about being lazy (2 Thess. 3:7-12), and Ruth is a good example of how diligence often leads to riches (Ruth 2:2, 19). Abraham was a diligent semi-nomad and became wealthy, but Lot, who chose the comforts of city life, ended up living as a homeless person in a cave.

10:5 This proverb brings to mind the song "Work, for the night is coming."³ The Apostle Paul is an example of one who redeemed the time that he had and put it to good use (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58), while Demas quit too soon (2 Tim. 4:10).

10:6 The righteous typically receive "blessings" from God and other people in this life. Again, Ruth is a prime example. The wicked, on the other hand, conceal violence within themselves, and sorrow will cover their faces. An example of this is wicked Haman. Samuel and Saul also illustrate this proverb, positively and negatively.

¹McKane, p. 426.

²Ironside, p. 95.

³Words by Annie L. Coghill (1836-1907) and tune by Lowell Mason (1792-1872).

"Verse 6a modulates the preceding praise of diligence: It is not hard work alone, but also—and more essentially—righteousness that brings blessings."¹

10:7 In contrast to the previous proverb, this one tells how the righteous and the wicked will fare after death. How "blessed" is the "memory" of our Lord, and how cursed is the name of Judas Iscariot.

"There follows now [beginning with verse 8] a series of proverbs in which reference to sins of the mouth and their contrary prevails."²

10:8 Wise Nebuchadnezzar received correction from God, but foolish Belshazzar babbled on and was destroyed (Dan. 5:18-23).

"The implication is that they [the foolish], unlike the wise, have not grasped the commands, and therefore what they say will rebound negatively on them."³

10:9 Joseph is a classic example of the first line (Gen. 40—41), and Ziba, Mephibosheth's deceptive servant, illustrates the second (2 Sam. 16:1-4; 19:24-27). A modern form of this proverb is: Honesty is the best policy.

10:10 The winking eye is a clue to insincere speech or behavior.

"Winking with the eye, from time immemorial, has been construed as giving the lie to what the lips utter."⁴

"The dog that bites is not always the dog that barks."⁵

The kiss of Judas Iscariot was a similar deceptive sign (Matt. 26:47-49). As a tiny gesture, a wink can do greater damage than many larger overt acts. Similarly, the words of a fool, like Nabal (1 Sam. 25), though few, will result in his or her own destruction eventually. However the power of words is greater than that of "shifty signs."⁶

"The more closely people live together the more necessary it is to keep short emotional accounts by sharing feelings,

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 514.

²Delitzsch, 1:214.

³Longman, p. 233.

⁴Ironside, p. 98.

⁵Henry, p. 749.

⁶Ross, p. 954.

clearing the air of misunderstandings, and gently letting each other know how each feels. Any short-term conflict sparked by such caring confrontation can be the prelude to long-term peacemaking, a disposition that has the Master's own stamp of approval as a hallmark of the children of God (Matt. 5:9)."¹

10:11 The "mouth" of righteous Samuel proved to be "a fountain of life" for the nation of Israel, but the mouth of hypocritical King Saul concealed "violence" that could not be contained.

"Do you know what a word of encouragement is? It's a strength infusion."²

10:12 Doeg the Edomite exemplified "hatred" that stirred up "strife" in his dealings with David (1 Sam. 22:9-19). Jesus covered Peter's sins of denying his Lord, rather than magnifying them (John 21:15-17). Peter quoted the last line of this proverb in 1 Peter 4:8.

"Hatred of one's neighbor, which is of itself an evil, has further this bad effect, that it calls forth hatred, and thus stirreth up strife, feuds, factions, for it incites man against man (cf. ... Job iii. 8); on the contrary, love covers not merely little errors, but also greater sins of every kind ... viz. by pardoning them, concealing them, excusing them, if possible, with mitigating circumstances, or restraining them before they are executed. All this lies in the covering."³

"Like a stubborn dog, hatred digs up every possible bone of contention, worries it with relish, parades it around in its snarling snout, and drops it messily on the carpet where it causes nothing but consternation. Love, on the other hand, like a prudent squirrel, hides the morsels of scandal

¹Hubbard, p. 181.

²Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 754.

³Delitzsch, 1:217.

in a secret place where the light of exposure never reaches."¹

10:13 "Discerning" is literally "heart," which in Proverbs refers to the core personality or character. Solomon is a good example of a discerning person who spoke words of wisdom. His son Rehoboam illustrates the second line. He suffered greatly because he failed to listen to wise advice and instead chose to follow foolish counsel.

"The words of the wise display discernment, are uttered at the right time, and provide good advice. Such utterance is contrasted with the only language that a fool can understand—physical force."²

10:14 Timothy was one who received instruction in the Scriptures from his youth and retained it (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Elymas the magician came to ruin because he foolishly tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the truth (Acts 13:6-11).

"Whereas the wise '*store up knowledge*,' guarding it like an investment that will pay them regular dividends, the foolish mouth is close to '*destruction*' (see 14:3) as though it held a lighted cherry bomb between the lips."³

2. Things of true value 10:15-32

10:15 Even though wealth is not most important, it still can result in financial security—and its absence can result in poverty. So people should not despise it. Jesus illustrated the extremes of the rich and the poor with His story about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

10:16 Abel and Job are examples of the "wages of the righteous" leading to life (Gen. 4:4; Job 42:10-16), and Cain is an example of the "income of the wicked" resulting in punishment (Gen. 4:9-13). In New Testament terms: "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6; cf. Rom. 6:23).

¹Hubbard, p. 265.

²Murphy, p. 74.

³Hubbard, p. 222.

- 10:17 King David followed Abigail's "instruction" and flourished (1 Sam. 25:35). King Saul rejected Samuel's reproof and perished (1 Sam. 15:23).
- 10:18 Laban's "hatred" of Jacob led him to lie about Jacob's possessions (Gen. 31:43), and Nabal acted foolishly in spreading "slander" about David (1 Sam. 25:10; cf. Lev. 19:16-17). Jeremiah's accusers also foolishly slandered him (Jer. 37:11-15).
- 10:19 When we speak too much, we do wrong in an area where we should not go. This can happen in private as well as public speech (cf. Eccles. 5:1-7; James 3:1-12). Some people do wrong when they engage in inappropriate transparency. We should only share our lives with people to the degree that they have committed themselves to us. Job erred when he claimed to be more righteous than he really was (Job 31).
- "God detests speech-related vices (e.g., lying, slander, false witness) because they denigrate [belittle] individuals whom he has created and disrupt and destroy life within the covenantal community."¹
- "Prudent speech begins with restraint in communication (10:19-20; 12:23; 13:3; 15:2, 28; 17:27-28)."²
- 10:20 The "tongue" and the "heart" are closely related, the latter controlling the former.
- "The tongue of the just bespeaks a heart in subjection to God."³
- Contrast the tongue of Simon Peter with the heart of Simon Magus (Acts 8:14-24).
- "We use silver-tongued to describe eloquence, a gift of gab polished to a high gloss of rhetoric. The biblical teachers knew better: They knew that integrity, tact, kindness, and encouragement were what made speech truly sterling—

¹Schultz, p. 465.

²Hubbard, p. 218.

³Ironside, p. 104.

not just the ability to string words together in artistic sentences."¹

10:21 Samuel and Saul illustrate this proverb. Samuel's words ("lips") profited many in Israel (1 Sam. 3:19), but Saul died because he lacked "understanding" about his need to depend on the LORD (1 Sam. 15:23).

10:22 The meaning of this proverb is not that God literally "adds no sorrow" to His blessings that enrich people, but that, along with the blessing of prosperity, He also provides a joyful, peaceful mind (cf. Ps. 127:1-2).² Habakkuk and Paul learned this lesson (Hab. 3:17-19; Phil. 4:11-13).

"A 'blessing,' when bestowed by God, is not a verbal benediction, but rather a favorable attitude toward the recipient along with the benefits (also called 'blessings') that flow from this relationship."³

10:23 Just as doing wickedness is a "sport" to the fool, so doing something wise is a sport to a "person of understanding." Both enjoy what they do. The pleasure does not come from what is done, but from the attitude of the person doing it.

"The point is the moral bankruptcy of the fool, who takes his wrongdoing as lightly as a joke. This hardened cynicism is contrasted with the attitude of the intelligent person, for whom wisdom is the joy and delight ..."⁴

Balaam evidently enjoyed counseling the Moabites to seduce the Israelites to sin (Num. 31:16), but Phinehas delighted in protecting God's holiness by executing sinful Zimri and Cozbi (Num. 25).

10:24 King Saul's imminent doom, which he feared, did not deter him from plunging ahead into war (1 Sam. 31), whereas Job's "desire" for vindication and blessing came to pass (was "granted") after long waiting (Job 42).

¹Hubbard, p. 230.

²Delitzsch, 1:223; Murphy, p. 75.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 524.

⁴Murphy, p. 75.

"The lawless, however bold his appearance, has ever a gnawing fear at his heart of impending calamity. ... The desire of the righteous will as surely be granted—even blessing forevermore."¹

10:25 This proverb restates the thought of the preceding one. God sometimes sends calamitous judgment to remove the wicked from the scene, but the righteous remain (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). This proved true when Daniel's accusers tried to have him killed but ended up dying themselves (Dan. 6:4-24).

Solomon evidently had major divine judgments in view since, in the short view, the righteous frequently perish in tragic "accidents." The judgment of Israel and the nations when Jesus Christ returns to the earth at His Second Advent will be times when the wicked will perish, but the righteous will enter His millennial kingdom (Matt. 25:31-34).

10:26 This is a good example of a parabolic (or emblematic) proverb.² A sluggard is similar to "vinegar to the teeth" and "smoke to the eyes." Acidic vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and smoke stings the eyes. Likewise, sending someone on a mission who has little will for it will prove exceedingly irritating to the one who sent him. In Jesus' parable of the minas, the slave who did nothing with what was entrusted to him is a good example of what this parable pictures (Luke 19:20-26). Sluggards do not make good messengers of Christ.

"Our dependence on others in societies where division of labor is a way of life proves most frustrating when those we count on for an important assignment—plumbers, electricians, administrative assistants, or stockbrokers—fail to do their work on schedule."³

The following four proverbs all contrast the righteous and the wicked in the present and in the future.

10:27 Normally a person who fears the LORD lives longer, and a person who does not, lives a shorter life (cf. Rom. 6:23). Though there are many exceptions,

¹Ironside, pp. 106-7.

²See "Forms" in the Introduction to the exposition above.

³Hubbard, p. 160.

this proverb is true *as a proverb*, not as a promise. Since God's will is to bless people (John 3:16), those who live in harmony with His will normally experience His blessings, one of which is an extension of life here and now (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:2). Eternal destiny is not in view here. A survey of Israel's kings shows that the godly among them generally ruled and lived longer than the ungodly, with some exceptions.

10:28 What the righteous person hopes for will come to pass, and he or she will be happy. But what the wicked hopes for will not come to pass, and he or she will be disappointed and sorrowful. This is true because these people hope for different things, and God controls these things. Jeremiah and King Zedekiah illustrate the two hopes and the two outcomes (Jer. 38—39). Jeremiah was not happy that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, but he was happy that God faithfully fulfilled the prophecies that He had given him. Wicked King Zedekiah's hope was that Jerusalem would not fall, but it did, and he was disappointed.

10:29 "The way of the LORD" is the way in which God directs people to walk (cf. Ps. 143:8; et al.). It is "a stronghold for the upright" because God guards those who walk in His ways. It is "ruin to the workers of injustice" because they refuse to walk in it and are, therefore, vulnerable to many troubles. Again, Jeremiah and Zedekiah provide examples.

10:30 The righteous person will never be permanently or ultimately shaken, though he or she may experience hardships and setbacks. But the wicked will not experience God's blessing in the end. Dwelling in the land of promise was the wandering Israelite's hope of eventual divine blessing. The alternative was exile from the land.

"In general, the proverb means that the righteous fearlessly maintains the position he takes; which, on the contrary, all they who have no hold on God lose also their outward position."¹

"A host of testimony-bearers on each side come up to confirm the solemn truths here enumerated so pithily [in verses 27-30]. Cain and Abel; Noah and the antediluvian world; Abraham and his idolatrous kin; Isaac and Ishmael;

¹Delitzsch, 1:228.

Jacob and Esau; Joseph and his accusers; all in the first book of the Bible, with a vast number throughout the remaining books, witness the great contrast which the testimony of experience in all ages has but confirmed."¹

The final two proverbs in this chapter both deal with speech.

10:31 The words of wisdom that flow from "the mouth of the righteous" person reflect God's revelations and perspective. The words of the wicked are twisted ("perverted") and inconsistent, because he or she does not consistently adopt God's viewpoint on reality (cf. v. 13). The end is that those words will fail to ring true, which Solomon likened to having one's tongue "cut out." The writers of Scripture illustrate the first line, and the false prophets and teachers the second.

10:32 Speech indicates character. "Fitting" (NIV) is better than "acceptable," and "perverted" means "inappropriate."

"'Perverse' is the opposite of acceptable. It means saying things in deliberately distorted, backward, or upside-down ways. Lying, cursing, slandering, and misleading would be its most common forms."²

The words of the young prophet from Judah were from God and straight, but those of the old prophet from Bethel were perverse (1 Kings 13:1-32).

3. Wise living in various contexts 11:1-15

"... there is one overarching topic that will be constantly appearing especially in the next four or five chapters, and that is the just/wicked contrast. It is roughly as frequent as the contrast between the wise and the foolish."³

Things that are abhorrent to Yahweh concern much of chapter 11, especially verses 1 through 21.

¹Ironside, pp. 108-9.

²Hubbard, p. 229.

³Murphy, p. 77.

"The next three proverbs treat of honesty, discretion, and innocence or dove-like simplicity:"¹

11:1 The same proverb, with slight variation, appears again in 20:23 (cf. 12:22; 15:8; 16:11; 20:10).

"By nicking off a bit of the balance stone when measuring grain, a merchant could inflate the payment he was receiving, and by using a heavier stone when measuring the silver, he could make the payment seem less than it was really worth. The stability of commerce depends on reliable weights."²

"A deceitful balance indicates lack of uprightness in heart."³

"Honest measures are a symbol of God's standards in all regards. He demands honesty of humans, and he himself gives just recompense."⁴

The promise of Zaccheus—to restore anything that he had inappropriately taken fourfold—should cause offenders of this proverb to blush (cf. Luke 19:8).

11:2 A proud person refuses to accept instruction from God, which, if he or she would follow it, would result in his or her receiving honor. The humble take God's advice, and that is their wisdom.⁵ Pride goes before a fall. King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson the hard way (Dan. 4).

"The wicked invite pride to come as their guest, but, like an inseparable twin, disgrace comes along with her as an uninvited guest."⁶

11:3 When a person determines to walk in God's ways, he or she can count on God's Spirit to provide guidance and direction (cf. Ps. 32:7-8). Obadiah is a

¹Delitzsch, 1:229.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1455.

³Ironside, p. 110.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 530.

⁵See Plaut, p. 136.

⁶Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 483.

positive example (1 Kings 18:3-4), and King Ahab a negative one (1 Kings 21:25).

11:4 Riches do not profit in the day of God's wrath (cf. 10:2; Job 21:30; Ezek. 7:19; Zeph. 1:18).¹ The rich man in Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus discovered this to be true (Luke 16:19-31). Noah is an example of the truth that "righteousness rescues from death."

Verses 5 through 11 all contrast the righteous and the wicked. Retribution is in view (cf. Gal. 6:7).

11:5 The person who deals with his or her sins appropriately will sail through life with few major troubles, generally speaking. However, the wickedness of the wicked will cause him or her to stumble and "fall." Joseph and his hateful brothers are examples of these two lifestyles.

11:6 This proverb is very similar to the preceding one. A righteous person's "righteousness" will deliver him or her when that person is accused of some wrongdoing, because his or her reputation will incline the accusers to assume the best of him or her. However, a greedy person will discover that his or her treachery in acquiring what he or she covets ensnares him or her. Esther gained the favor of her husband by her previous behavior, whereas Haman's greed for glory doomed him.

11:7 Because the wicked live for the here and now, when they die, what they hoped to obtain vanishes ("will perish"). The same is true for another kind of wicked man: he who relies on his own strength ("hope of strong people"), rather than on the LORD. The rich fool in Jesus' parable is a case in point (Luke 12:20). So is Haman in the Book of Esther.

11:8 Here are some translations of this difficult verse: "The righteous are rescued from trouble, but it [trouble] falls on the wicked instead" (TNIV). "A righteous man is rescued from disaster, and the wicked man plunges into it" (NEB). "Trouble goes right past the LORD's people and strikes the wicked" (CEV). The meaning is not that the wicked finally go to the "place" reserved for them—forever. Neither is it that the wicked replace the righteous.

¹Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 67.

The LORD delivered the Israelites through the Red Sea, but He drowned the Egyptian soldiers in it (Exod. 14). Haman was hanged on the gallows that he built to hang his enemy: Mordecai (Esth. 8). Daniel was delivered from the lions' den, but his accusers perished there (Dan. 6). An angel rescued Peter from prison, and an angel killed Herod Antipas I, who had imprisoned Peter (Acts 12).

11:9 Potiphar's wife sought to destroy Joseph, but through his true knowledge of God, Joseph obtained deliverance (Gen. 39).

"Three proverbs follow relating to the nature of city and national life, and between them two against mockery and backbiting:"¹

11:10 As frequently in the proverbs, "the city" represents the state (by metonymy): national life. When things went well for righteous David, Israel rejoiced (cf. 2 Sam. 19:14). When wicked Abimelech died, Israel also rejoiced (Judg. 9:50-57).

11:11 David's uprightness led to the establishment of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-10), but the words of the last four ungodly kings of Judah resulted in its overthrow and demise (2 Kings 24—25).

"Henrietta Mears used to say, 'God made the country, man made the city, but the devil made the small town.'"²

11:12 "Despises" means "belittles" (RSV). Shimei's cursing of David illustrates the first line of this proverb, and David's restrained response illustrates the second (2 Sam. 16:5-14).

"There will be times when you will find folk are actually cursing you, maligning your character. Just keep quiet. The Lord will take care of it, as He took care of this situation with David."³

11:13 Telling stories about people and incidents can too often result in revealing secret information (cf. 20:19; Lev. 19:16). Paul alerted Timothy to the tendency among younger widows to do this (1 Tim. 5:13). A person worthy of trust, on the other hand, does not share everything that he or

¹Delitzsch, 1:235.

²Larsen, p. 113.

³McGee, 3:41.

she knows. Jesus advocated loving, private confrontation rather than gossip (Matt. 18:15).

11:14 One example of this proverb is the early Christians, who sought the counsel of others in Jerusalem when differences of opinion arose (Acts 15). The importance of seeking "guidance" from "counselors" is emphasized in the proverbs repeatedly (cf. 15:22; 20:18; 24:6).

"... in general it is found to be true that it is better with a people when they are governed according to the laws and conclusions which have resulted from the careful deliberation of many competent and authorized men, than when their fate is entrusted unconditionally to one or to a few."¹

"To depend entirely upon one's own judgment is the height of folly."²

"We stand too close to the canvas to see the whole picture and we bring so much emotional fog to our decisions that what we do see is blurred."³

11:15 We have heard the advice of this proverb before (cf. 6:1-5). Here Solomon expressed the truth concisely. It is very dangerous to take another's debts on oneself: to be a "guarantor." There may be occasions when one might choose to do so, but this often proves costly. Take, for example, our Lord's willingness to assume humanity's debt for sin upon Himself. It cost Him His life.

4. Wise investments 11:16-31

11:16 The truth of the first line of this proverb is observable in the story of Abigail (1 Sam. 25). As strength of character enabled her to attain "honor" from David and his men, so strength of body enables a person to retain his or her wealth when others would seize it. Ruth is another good example of line one.

¹Delitzsch, 1:237-38.

²Ironside, p. 119.

³Hubbard, p. 147.

"One of the greatest virtues is to be freed of possessiveness."¹

David himself is an example of the second line, when some jealous soldiers threatened him (1 Sam. 30). The point of the comparison seems to be that strength can come from both spiritual and physical might.

11:17 It might seem that the "merciful" person does himself harm, and the "cruel" person does himself good. But according to this proverb the opposite is true (cf. Matt. 5:3-12). Isaac exemplifies the first type of person in this distich (Gen. 26), and Joab the second (1 Kings 2:5-6).

Sin and righteousness contrast again in verses 18 through 21.

11:18 The wicked sows wickedness and reaps what he does not expect: "deceptive wages" (cf. Rom. 6:23; 7:11), namely, divine punishment rather than blessing. The righteous, on the other hand, "sows righteousness" and reaps what he sows: blessing (cf. Gal. 6:7). The former reward is often deceptive and disappointing, but the latter is truly satisfying. Haman reaped a bitter harvest for his wicked sowing, whereas Jesus received nothing but glory for His sowing.

11:19 The abundant quality of "life" is in view in this proverb (cf. John 10:10), not just the possession of physical life. In their conflict, King Hezekiah attained life, while King Sennacherib brought about "his own death" (2 Chron. 32).

"Since life and death result from moral choices, righteousness must be pursued. ... 'Life' and 'death' describe the vicissitudes [reversals] of this life but can also refer to beyond the grave."²

11:20 A "perverse" person is one who persists in pursuing evil, even though he or she knows how it will end. A "blameless" person is not necessarily sinless, but he or she deals with sin appropriately. God hates the former and loves the latter. King Saul was perverse, and King David was blameless.

¹*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1046.

²Ross, p. 963.

- 11:21 The evildoer himself will experience punishment, whereas the "descendants of the righteous" will continue to benefit from their ancestor's godliness, and "will be rescued" from some of God's judgment (cf. Exod. 20:5-6). Cain and Seth are cases in point (Gen. 4).
- 11:22 This is another parabolic (or emblematic) proverb. A beautiful and valuable "gold ring" is just as inconsistent in a swine's snout as is a beautiful woman if she lacks the quality of behaving or speaking in such a way as to avoid causing offense or revealing private information ("discretion"). The negative quality cancels out the positive one. Jezebel fits this picture.
- "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful face on an empty head."¹
- "As one looks at a pig and sees only the gold ring, so is a man who is so enamored by a woman's physical beauty that he does not recognize her lack of discretion."²
- "Beauty without wisdom is the height of incongruity; see also Prov 31:30."³
- "If the thought of the contrast be carried out a little, it will be recognized that the swine will speedily destroy the luster of the gold, and so a woman lacking discretion will surely destroy her own beauty."⁴
- "This may be applied to anything which is externally attractive but intrinsically of low value."⁵
- 11:23 The "righteous" desire "only" what is "good." Thus what they desire is well pleasing to God and is attainable. Conversely, the "wicked" desire only what is bad, so what they desire is not pleasing to Him, and what they desire draws His "wrath" (cf. 10:28). Contrast Jeremiah (Jer. 17:16) and King Zedekiah (Jer. 34:1-3).

¹Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, p. 845.

²Longman, p. 261.

³Murphy, p. 83.

⁴Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 283.

⁵Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1456.

"Three proverbs regarding giving which is not loss but gain [follow]."¹

11:24 Ironically, the possessions of the generous giver ("one who scatters") typically increase, even though he gives many of them away. But the possessions of the selfish person normally decrease, even though he retains ("withholds") them. Generosity usually brings a blessing (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6).

"A penny saved may be a penny squandered. The Lord did not learn mathematics from *Poor Richard's Almanac* [which says: "A penny saved is a penny earned."]. ... 'Scatters' here means distributing widely, generously, perhaps brashly, and paying little attention to where the beneficence goes."²

"The point of this parable is that we should not admire the rich or despise the poor, because sometimes deeds and efforts do not produce the expected reward."³

The church at Philippi received commendation for its sacrificial generosity (Phil. 4:10-19). Nabal is a classic example of greed and self-occupation (1 Sam. 25:10-11, 38).

11:25 The synonymous parallelism of this proverb commends "generous" giving. The Apostle Paul urged the Corinthian church along these lines (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6-7).

11:26 The antithetic parallelism of this proverb contrasts the outcomes of stinginess and generosity. If one has what others need and does not give it to them, they "will curse him." But if he distributes it, even at a cost, others will bless him.

Joseph blessed the world of his day by providing food for the people, and the people blessed him for it (Gen. 47:25). Nehemiah made personal sacrifices for the welfare of his fellow Israelites (Neh. 5:14), as did Paul for the Christians whom he served (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). Our Lord likewise gave His all, and millions of people ever since have blessed Him

¹Delitzsch, 1:245.

²Hubbard, p. 167.

³Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1456.

for it. One wonders if the Apostle John had this proverb in mind when he wrote about sharing what one has with others in need (1 John 3:17).

Nabal, on the other hand, brought a curse on himself by refusing to share what he had with David's men (1 Sam. 25:38).

McGee applied this proverb to withholding and distributing the Word of God.¹

11:27 Those who pursue what is "good" are really on the road to gaining "favor" with others. Caleb is an example (Josh. 14:6-13). Conversely, those who pursue "evil" will find that it "will come to" them. Adoni-bezek is a case in point (Judg. 1:5-7). People typically get what they look for, either for good or for evil.

11:28 This is one of many warnings about the folly of trusting in riches for happiness, security, and status (cf. Mark 10:23, 25; Luke 18:24; 1 Tim. 6:10, 17). Remember the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21).

"The genuine riches are moral—not material. It is the righteous—not the moneyed man—who is truly wealthy. See the blessed man of Psa. 1 [cf. Jer. 17:7-8]."²

11:29 Troubling one's "house" probably refers to leaving a bad example for those coming after to follow. King Jeroboam I troubled the house of Israel and bequeathed a hollow kingdom to his nation (1 Kings 12). "Wind" here probably represents being left with nothing, something that cannot be grasped (27:16; Job 15:2; Eccles. 1:14, 17; Isa. 26:18; Jer. 5:13; Mic. 2:11). It may also imply something bad and destructive such as the dreaded *sirocco* (cf. v. 17; Josh. 7:26). W. M. Thomson described this terrible wind:

"The air becomes loaded with fine dust, which it whirls in rainless clouds hither and thither at its own wild will; it rushes down every gorge, bowing and breaking the trees, and tugging at each individual leaf; it growls round the houses, romps and runs riot with your clothes, and flies away with your hat; nor is there any escape from its impertinence. The eyes inflame, the lips blister, and the moisture of the body evaporates under the ceaseless

¹McGee, 3:43.

²Ironside, p. 127.

application of this persecuting wind; you become languid, nervous, irritable, and despairing."¹

The foolish man who mismanages his accounts may have to sell himself as a servant to the wise person who is a better manager. An example would be a person who gets too far in debt and has to sell all his possessions to pay off his creditors (cf. Luke 12:57-59). King Belshazzar became servant to Daniel (Dan. 5), as did Festus to Paul (Acts 25), in a spiritual sense.

"Incompetence of any kind leads to slavery."²

11:30 A righteous person exercises a life-giving influence. Furthermore, a wise person wins others to wisdom. That is, he or she captures others with his or her ideas or influence (cf. 2 Sam. 15:6).³ While it is true that evangelistic soul-winning is wise work, soul-winning is not all that this verse is talking about. The idea here is that wise people influence others to follow the way of wisdom, which includes turning to God for salvation (cf. Matt. 4:19).⁴

This is another proverb in which the emblem (or symbol) of the "tree of life" illustrates something else that is a source of life (cf. 3:18; 13:12; 15:4; Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). The figure may derive from the fact that a hungry traveler would find the fruit on a fruit tree, that he or she passed, to be the source of nourishment and a sustainer of his or her life. Just as a fruit tree sustains life, so righteousness sustains and promotes life. This is a parabolic proverb. Perhaps the Apostle Paul is the great example of someone whose righteous life became a source of spiritual nourishment for generations after him, though all the biblical prophets and apostles accomplished the same thing.

11:31 If God rewards the righteous with blessings in this life, and He does, "how much more" will He repay wicked sinners before they die. No one sins with impunity. God judges every sin. While ungodly people may appear to prosper and live carefree lives, they do not experience the blessing of

¹W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:454.

²Murphy, p. 84.

³See Daniel C. Snell, "'Taking Souls' in Proverbs 11:30," *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983):362-65.

⁴See also Lee M. Fields, "Proverbs 11:30: Soul-Winning or Wise Living?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):517-35.

fellowship with God, which is the greatest blessing human beings can enjoy (cf. Phil. 3:7-11). Job is an example of a righteous man who experienced great reward before he died, as did Abraham, David, Paul, and a host of others. Several of the wicked kings of Israel and Judah illustrate the alternative. Peter quoted this proverb (1 Pet. 4:18).¹

5. The value of righteousness 12:1-12

Wisdom and justice feature in verses 1 through 3.²

12:1 The person who loves instruction ("discipline") will demonstrate this by willingly putting himself or herself in the place of a learner. Young King Josiah did this (2 Chron. 34). But the person who does not want knowledge ("hates rebuke") will reject information that corrects his or her false opinions and guards him or her from future mistakes and false steps. This person's unteachableness will thus show his or her stupidity (cf. 10:17). The Pharaoh of the Exodus was such a person (Exod. 10:28).

12:2 Many examples of the truth of this clear proverb come to mind, but Hushai and Ahithophel are outstanding ones (2 Sam. 16:15-23; 17:23).

12:3 A person, like a tree, whose "root" goes down into "wickedness," will find that he or she will not be able to remain upright when the winds of adversity blow hard. But a righteous person, whose "root" is anchored in God, will endure the storms of life (cf. 10:25; Matt. 7:24-27). King Saul and King David contrast in these respects.

"We now place together vers. 4-12. One proverb concerning the housewife forms the beginning of this group, and four regarding the management of the house and business form the conclusion."³

12:4 An "excellent" or virtuous wife is one in whom all noble qualities shine (cf. 31:10-31; Ruth 3:11). Such a partner brings glory to her husband, like a "crown" brings glory to one's head. Sarah was such an asset to Abraham (Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:1-6). But the wife who brings shame on her husband makes it difficult for him to stand. Job's wife was a liability to him (Job 2:9-10), as was King Ahab's wife, Jezebel.

¹See J. Barr, "b'rs—molis: Prov. 11:31 and 1 Pet. 4:18," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 20 (1975):149-64.

²Murphy, p. 89.

³Delitzsch, 1:252.

- 12:5 One of the marks of a righteous person is that his or her "thoughts" are fair and unprejudiced ("just"). But the lawless person advocates deception (cf. 1:11, 16). Note the close connection in this proverb between a person's thoughts and his or her speech. David and Absalom are contrasting examples of the truth of this proverb (2 Sam. 15:1-18).
- 12:6 The words of the wicked, particularly their false accusations, are an ambush, but the words of the upright are straightforward and sincere (cf. 1:18).¹ Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar's words contrast with Elihu's in the Book of Job.
- 12:7 The wicked pass off the scene without leaving a lasting legacy—like houses washed away by hurricanes and floodwaters. But the righteous leave a legacy for good that outlasts them. David's dynasty ("house") continued, and will continue forever, whereas the "wicked" heads of the various dynasties in the Northern Kingdom of Israel were fairly quickly "overthrown" and replaced.
- 12:8 People "praised" Gideon for his "insight" (Judg. 7), but they "despised" Abimelech for his "perverse mind" (Judg. 9).

"Even among natural men wisdom is a commendation, while a vain and foolish spirit but exposes to contempt. The world can appreciate sobriety and spiritual intelligence, though it may refuse or even persecute it. But to pretend to either, while bereft of both, is to draw forth the disgust of all reasonable men."²

- 12:9 Another translation of this proverb is: "Better is a man of humble standing who works for himself than one who plays the great man but lacks bread" (RSV; cf. 15:17).

"The point seems to be that some people live beyond their means in a vain show ... whereas, if they lived modestly, they could have some of the conveniences of life, e.g., a servant."³

¹Cf. Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 73.

²Ironside, p. 133.

³Ross, p. 969.

"According to the sage, reality is more important than appearances."¹

King Herod Agrippa I lived the high life and died a horrible death (Acts 12:1-23). Barnabas and Paul, on the other hand, sacrificed to spread Christianity and enjoyed the hospitality and friendship of many saints (Acts 12:25).

12:10 The compassion of a righteous person extends even to how he treats his animals, because that is consistent with his character (cf. Deut. 25:4). But even the goodness (best side, "compassion") of the wicked is flawed by cruelty. Jacob's dealings with his children, flocks, and herds demonstrated his righteousness (Gen. 33:13-14). Balaam's wicked character is reflected in how he dealt with his donkey (Num. 22:23-31).

12:11 Industriousness pays off. Hard-working Jacob left Paddan-aram a rich man (Gen. 31:26-43). King Rehoboam is an example of one who foolishly pursued vain things and came to ruin (1 Kings 12).

12:12 The contrast in this proverb again appears to be between two kinds of people. The wicked want to gain from the work of other evil people (e.g., skimming money off the top of a gambling operation). On the other hand, the righteous are content to earn wages from their own honest toil.²

Felix left Paul in custody in order to appease the unbelieving Jews, hoping that he would profit from them (Acts 24:27). Ruth was willing to work hard, and profited financially and matrimonially.

6. Avoiding trouble 12:13-28

Most of the proverbs in this section deal with speech (vv. 13-20, 22-23, 25). Murphy wrote that about 20 percent of the proverbs in chapters 10 through 29 deal with speech.³

12:13 An evil person who tells lies usually gets tripped up ("ensnared"), because his lies become known eventually. But a righteous person does not tell lies, so he escapes such trouble (cf. 29:6).

¹Longman, p. 273.

²Cf. Toy, pp. 249-50; Ross, p. 970.

³Murphy, p. 258.

Satan, the father of lies, will end up in the lake of fire, because God knows his lies and will punish him for them (cf. John 8:44; Rev. 20:10). Jesus did not tell lies (cf. John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22). Much of the trouble that He experienced was due to the sinfulness of other people (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:2; 3:5; 4:10; Rev. 1:5).

12:14 The man in view in the first line of this proverb is a righteous person. Because good words normally flow from the mouths of good people, those words will result in good things coming back to the righteous speaker. Caleb and Joshua, who voted to trust God and move ahead into the Promised Land, received God's blessing of entering it, in spite of the discouragement of the majority of spies. The ten spies illustrate the second line.

"How we behave will in large measure dictate how we are treated. Reaping and sowing are social as well as agricultural patterns."¹

12:15 Nabal (whose name means "fool") thought that his harsh treatment of David was justified, because he did not listen to his own servants (1 Sam. 25:17). David's response to Nabal's wife, Abigail, was proper, because he listened to her (1 Sam. 25:34). Other proverbs also warn of self-deception (e.g., 14:12; 16:2; 21:2).

"The seers distrusted merely personal opinion, and this is shown in many sayings about being 'wise in one's own eyes': Prov 3:7; 26:12."²

12:16 A "prudent" person "ignores an insult" (RSV) by concealing his dishonor. The insult is dishonor to himself or herself. A fool's reaction is "like an injured animal and so his opponent knows that he has been wounded."³ The point is that a fool brings dishonor on himself and becomes vulnerable by making a big deal out of some insult that he receives (cf. 29:11). Nabal illustrates the first line, and David the second (1 Sam. 25).

"... he is a fool who, if some injury is done to him, immediately shows his vexation in a passionate manner;

¹Hubbard, p. 228.

²Murphy, p. 91.

³McKane, p. 442.

while, on the contrary, the prudent man maintains silence as to the dishonor that is done to him, and represses his displeasure, so as not to increase his vexation to his own injury."¹

My father used to advise me to "Eat your smoke," by which he meant: If you feel like you're burning up on the inside because someone has said or done something that dishonored you, stuff it! Many people get into trouble because they make a big deal out of being disrespected ("dissed").

The following six proverbs deal with speaking the truth and telling lies.

12:17 The point seems to be that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34, NKJV). Good people usually tell the "truth," but wicked people often speak lies ("deceit"). Upright Joseph told his father the truth (Gen. 37:2), but Joseph's wicked brothers lied to their father (Gen. 37:31-33).

12:18 Thoughtless or critical speech can wound others (cf. Ps. 57:4). Doeg the Edomite's words fueled King Saul's hatred of David (1 Sam. 22:9). A wise person does not cause harm by reckless talk but instead "brings healing" with his or her words. Barnabas' words effectively reduced the suspicions of the early Christians concerning their former enemy: Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:27).

"The sage is not primarily interested in winning debates, and he avoids speech which creates bitterness and erects barriers between himself and others."²

"The wisdom teachers felt that the fewer words the better [cf. 10:14; 13:3, 16; 17:27-28]."³

Transparently sharing one's faults or weaknesses can wound the speaker. Transparent sharing is good, but we must practice it wisely.⁴

¹Delitzsch, 1:260.

²McKane, p. 446.

³Longman, p. 276.

⁴See my comments on 10:19.

12:19 The person who speaks the truth will have long-lasting effects for good, and he or she typically endures, whereas the person who tells lies will not usually last as long.

"A trustworthy reputation is part of honesty's payoff."¹

Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah illustrate the truth of this proverb positively and negatively (Jer. 28).

12:20 A desire to deceive lies in the heart of those who stir up ("devise," plot) "evil," but "joy" will fill the hearts of those who promote "peace." Absalom used deception to stir up evil in Israel (2 Sam. 13:22-28), but David promoted peaceful conditions. The joy evident in so many of his psalms is the proof of that.

12:21 Wicked people's lives are typically full of trouble. This verse, which is a bit hyperbolic, is ultimately true when one considers what happens to people after death, though the writer of Proverbs' perspective was primarily earthbound. Contrast the testimony of Paul at the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:7) with that of Jacob (Gen. 47:9).

"... decent people do not have frequent trouble of their own making ..."²

"The rigid application of this law was the mainstay of Job's comforters; but taken rightly, it is a stimulating truth as valid for Paul (Rom. 8:28 with 36, 37) as for Joseph (Gn. 50:20)—cheaply held in prosperity, precious in adversity."³

12:22 "Lying qualifies as one of the most destructive speech vices throughout the ancient Near East."⁴

The serpent's lies in the Garden of Eden doomed humanity, but God the Father could say of His truthful Son: "Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Contrast also Nehemiah and Sanballat (Neh. 6:5-9).

"When words can't be trusted, then society starts to fall apart. Contracts are useless, promises are vain, the judicial

¹Hubbard, p. 184.

²Ross, p. 972.

³Kidner, p. 98.

⁴Schultz, p. 466.

system becomes a farce, and all personal relationships are suspect."¹

"In the long run, we stand at risk from many things: sexual immorality, unbridled violence, chemical addiction, savage greed, external attack. It may be that none of them poses a greater threat to what we are as a people, called to live in covenant with the Lord God and each other, than our compulsive failure to tell the truth."²

12:23 A prudent person does not always air his knowledge, but a fool typically says more than he or she should (cf. Eccles. 5:2). Nehemiah prayed to the LORD before he ventured to address his king (Neh. 1—2). But Peter boasted of his devotion to Jesus without realizing how shallow it was (Matt. 26:33; cf. John 13:8).

"In sizing up people as potential participants in the life of Fuller Seminary, whether as administrators or trustees, I carefully observed their patterns of speech. Obviously, what they said needed to make sense. But I watched for much more than that. Did they wait their turn? Did they step on the lines of others? Did they have a need for the last word? Did they try to top everyone else's stories? Did they sound off in their areas of incompetence? Could they say, 'I don't know'? Did they repeat themselves badly or wander aimlessly through their subject matter? Persons with these and other verbal liabilities do not usually make it to my team. They are not sensitive enough, not succinct enough, not modest enough, and not gracious enough to work well with others. They waste time, hurt feelings, and shatter morale. They, with the rest of us, need to sit longer at the wise teachers' feet and learn that restraint in communication is essential to prudent speech."³

¹Wiersbe, p. 118.

²Hubbard, p. 188.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.

"We take verses 24-28 together as a group. In these verses the subject is the means of rising (in the world), and the two ways, the one of which leads to error, and the other to life."¹

12:24 "Diligent" workers will normally be promoted to positions of greater power and authority, but slackers will be demoted to positions of less responsibility ("put to forced labor," or be given less responsible work).

"This term [forced labor] refers to the practice of *corvée*, a system of taxation (or slavery) by means of conscripted labor. Under this system men were typically forced to work on royal or other public projects for a specified period of time, often one to three months. This practice was employed throughout the ancient Near East at various times and places, but was especially common in Egypt [cf. 2 Sam. 20:24; 1 Kings 5:13-14; 9:15-21; 12:3-15, 18]."²

There are exceptions to this proverb now (as there are to many of the proverbs), but it will prove to be truer in the future, when the diligent will rule with Christ (Luke 19:11-27).³

"Knavery is the way to slavery."⁴

Gideon and Barak are positive examples (Judg. 6:11-12; 4:4-9). Solomon promoted Jeroboam because he observed that "the young man was industrious" (1 Kings 11:28).

12:25 If a person is anxious about something, he will feel weighed down. But any word of encouragement lightens one's load ("makes it [the heart] glad"). Therefore we should seek to be encouragers, like Barnabas (Acts 4:36), rather than doom and gloom distributors, like Israel's ten unbelieving spies (Num. 13—14). This is one of many proverbs that simply makes a psychological observation without giving an explicit command.

"We people of God, commissioned to develop prudent tongues, would do well to study, sweat, pray, and bleed

¹Delitzsch, 1:264-65.

²Adams, p. 904.

³McGee, 3:45.

⁴Henry, p. 755.

over our methods of telling people what is both utterly necessary and bitterly painful."¹

12:26 The antecedent of "them" is "the wicked" (plural).² "Righteous" people seek to be a positive help ("a guide") to those around them, like Nathan helped David (2 Sam. 12:1-14). The wicked, on the other hand, try to gain an advantage by misdirecting others, like Elymas the sorcerer did to Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:8). But the trouble that the wicked seek to cause often comes back on them.

"... the just provides proper direction, whereas the wicked leads himself and others into trouble."³

12:27 The "lazy person" does not finish his projects. For example, he does not roast and eat the game that he has hunted. He thereby throws away his chances for something better by quitting too soon. But the person who has mastered diligence and finishes his task has a precious tool at his disposal, namely, perseverance. The servant who hid his talent in the ground illustrates the first line (Matt. 25:25), and Ruth illustrates the second line.

"I recall hearing some of my student friends say at seminary graduation, 'Thank the Lord, no more Greek and Hebrew!' They had spent several years learning to use the Bible languages, and now they were selling their valuable language tools and thereby wasting their gains."⁴

12:28 "The NIV translates the final phrase ('there is no death') as 'immortality,' implying that the horizon of the sage extends beyond one's present earthly existence, a perspective perhaps reflected in 15:24; 23:18; 24:14 as well. Most interpreters, however, understand 12:28 as referring simply to the avoidance of a premature death through wise living. But one should note that ancient Israel's neighbors generally shared a strong belief in the afterlife,

¹Hubbard, p. 230.

²Cf. J. A. Emerton, "A Note in Proverbs 12:26," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964):191-93.

³Murphy, p. 92.

⁴Wiersbe, pp. 64-65.

and their burial preparations and procedures reflected that conviction ..."¹

"If we compare with this, xiv. 32*b*, it is obvious that the Chokma [Wisdom] begins ... to break through the limits of this present life, and to announce a life beyond the reach of death."²

Noah is perhaps the greatest example of someone who prolonged his life and avoided death by being righteous (Gen. 6—9). But this truth applies to all the righteous. Righteous conduct tends to result in a longer life, whereas wicked behavior often shortens it. There are many exceptions to this proverb, but it still provides a reliable picture of how things usually turn out.

7. Fruits of wise living ch. 13

13:1 King Solomon was "a wise son" who accepted "his father's discipline" (or paid attention to his father's instruction), at least during his younger years (1 Kings 2). King Rehoboam did not accept wise counsel. King Jehoiakim was a scoffer who did not listen to the rebukes of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:21).

"It is part of true wisdom to own that the more experienced may save me much by instructing me as a result of what has been learned of a road already trodden, and which to me is all new ground. The self-confident scorner will pass on, indifferent to the words of the wise, to learn for himself by bitter experience of the snares and pitfalls he might have been saved from, had he been humble enough to accept counsel from those competent to teach."³

Two more proverbs, this one and the next, deal with speech.

13:2 A person's good words can produce many good things, but treacherous people prefer violence. For example, Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost brought salvation to thousands (Acts 2:41), but King

¹Schultz, p. 466.

²Delitzsch, 1:269.

³Ironside, p. 143.

Rehoboam's treacherous response to his people's request resulted in a violent revolution (1 Kings 12).

"Violence may be simply defined: the deliberate, willful effort to inflict harm on others by whatever means are available."¹

13:3 The caution advocated in this parable applies to inappropriate transparency as well as verbose (longwinded) communication. Both can bring ruin to the speaker. Shimei unwisely vented his distaste for David, and he eventually lost his life for being so outspoken (2 Sam. 16:5-8; 1 Kings 2:8-9, 44-46). Solomon, in contrast, did not speak out against his critics, and as a result his throne was established (cf. 1 Kings 1:52).

13:4 The "soul" here, as often in Scripture, stands for the whole person (cf. Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 9:56; Rom. 13:1; 1 Thess. 5:23; James 1:21; 5:20).

"The slothful wishes and dreams of prosperity and abundance ... but his desire remains unsatisfied, since the object is not gained but only lost by doing nothing; the industrious gain, and that richly, what the slothful wishes for, but in vain."²

"... fatness ["prosperous"], originally the sign of animal and vegetable health and vigor, is used as [a] general symbol of prosperity."³

Among several biblical examples, David's son Amnon, who desired his half-sister Tamar, but did nothing to secure her as his wife, and only let his frustrated passion build up until he raped her, comes to mind (2 Sam. 13). Boaz, on the other hand, models a "diligent" person, who increased his wealth and even acquired a bride through hard work and integrity (Ruth 4). Ezra (Ezra 7:10) and the returned captives (Hag. 1:2-6) also illustrate the second half of this proverb.

13:5 Another characteristic that marks the righteous person is his or her typical truthfulness. Samuel, even as a boy, told Eli the truth, even though

¹Hubbard, p. 191.

²Delitzsch, 1:272.

³Toy, p. 262.

it would have been convenient for him not to do so (1 Sam. 3:15-18). The second half of the verse means that a wicked person causes a bad odor and shame. Disgusting and shameful Queen Athaliah comes to mind (2 Kings 11).

- 13:6 In this proverb Solomon personified righteousness and wickedness. "Righteousness" acts like a guard to protect the person of integrity. In other words, the righteous person's character wards off those who would seek to destroy him. Because Nehemiah was a man of integrity, his people did not believe the lies that his enemies were spreading about him (Neh. 4). Conversely, "Wickedness" sabotages the sinner. Joab was eventually executed because his wicked murders caught up with him (2 Sam. 3:27; 20:10; 1 Kings 2:5).

The following two proverbs deal with money.

- 13:7 This proverb testifies to the universal tendency toward hypocrisy. For example, the poor man "pretends to be rich" so that people will honor and respect him, and the rich man "pretends to be poor"—or at least poorer than he is—so that others will not attack him and take his riches. The Laodicean Christians claimed to be rich (materially), but really they were poor (spiritually; Rev. 3:17). The Gibeonites claimed to be poor, but really they were rich (Josh. 9). This proverb is another observation on life, but it carries the implication that we should be discerning when we hear the claims that people make, especially regarding their finances.

"Posing (*'one who makes himself rich'*) as a possessor of wealth may deceive the community and demean those who have labored diligently for what they have. Worse still, it pretends to enjoy God's blessing of which wealth was viewed as evidence. Feigning poverty to mask the possession of *'great riches'* is equally contemptible. It provides an excuse for miserliness not generosity; it mocks those who are truly poor; it signals ingratitude to the Lord who has made wealth possible."¹

¹Hubbard, p. 303.

"This remark on human character derides phonies and indirectly warns the reader against pretense and pretension."¹

Of course, some rich people choose to appear less wealthy than they really are out of modesty, not necessarily only to avoid being robbed and/or as an excuse for miserliness. But this proverb is addressing pretense, not modesty.

13:8 The idea in this contrast may be that a rich man may lose his money by having to buy himself out of trouble. A poor man is not the target of robbers and kidnappers because he has little money. The more money a person has the more financial obligations become his, but a poor man is free of these distractions. Money creates differences.

I tend to agree with those interpreters who take this proverb as implying that there is an advantage to having riches. The rich person can use his wealth to deliver him, but the poor man cannot buy himself out of trouble, since his means are limited.²

"The destitute person ... does not listen to the rebuke threatening him with loss of property because he lacks the means to save himself."³

David used the booty that he captured in war to put him in the good graces of the elders of Judah (1 Sam. 30:26-31). The crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda evidently could not hire anyone to help him into the pool because he was poor (John 5:1-7).

"The three following proverbs in vers. 9-11 have at least this in common, that the two concluding words of each correspond with one another almost rhythmically [in Hebrew]."⁴

13:9 "Light" is a common metaphor of something good that proceeds from a source (e.g., as life-giving light shines from the sun; cf. 6:23). In this case, the "light" probably represents all the good things that proceed from the righteous person, or the righteous person himself. These good things can

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 563.

²E.g., McKane, p. 458.

³Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 559.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:275.

be thought to go out rejoicing because of their beneficial effects, or as the NASB margin reads, the light "shines brightly." David was such a "lamp" to Israel, and his life had a life-giving influence on the nation (cf. 1 Kings 15:4-5). However, the "lamp" (the source of benefits) of the wicked "goes out," because it is not fueled with God's blessing. Jesus' parable of the ten virgins also referred to lamps that shone brightly and lamps that went out (Matt. 25:1-13).

13:10 This proverb contrasts those who proceed on the basis of their own wisdom, such as it is, with those who seek the "counsel" of others before making important decisions. The result of the former conduct is "strife," and the result of the latter is "wisdom." Much strife can be avoided by seeking the counsel of others, rather than simply proceeding to do what appears at first glance to be the right course of action.

"Those that are humble and peaceable will ask and take advice, will consult their own consciences, their Bibles, their ministers, their friends, to preserve quietness and prevent quarrels."¹

King Jehoshaphat was successful as long as he sought and followed the advice of his mentor, Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:2; 2 Chron. 24:22, 25). As far as we know, Judas Iscariot did not consult with any of the other disciples before betraying Jesus.

13:11 "Wealth obtained from nothing [i.e., fraud, NASB margin]" would be money gotten improperly or illegally. This kind of income dwindles in that, though it is "easy come," it is also "easy go." Wealth accumulated by consistent hard work tends to increase.

"This is a warning against wild speculation."²

Haggai's hearers had been working hard, but they could not manage to hold onto what they earned; their pockets seemed to have holes in them (Hag. 1:6). The reason was that they were robbing God (Hag. 1:9). Laban cheated Jacob and lost much of his wealth, while Jacob, on the other hand, worked hard for Laban and accumulated a fortune (Gen. 29—31).

¹Henry, p. 756. Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 564.

²Ross, p. 977.

13:12 When we "hope" for something for a long time, and it never materializes, the normal human response is to feel disappointed and depressed ("heart sick"). But when we hope for something and then get it, we feel rejuvenated and invigorated, like a "tree" full "of life." This is another psychological observation about life. Job illustrates both of these responses—before and after his encounter with God.

"The ever unsatisfied longing of a hungry soul results in faintness of spirit and sickness of heart. Such is the *hopeless* hope of the Christ-less. How blessed the contrast in the case of the Christian!"¹

The following three proverbs all deal with one's response to God's instruction.

13:13 "The word" in the first line of this proverb must refer to God's Word, in view of the second line, where the synonym is "the commandment." God, who gives the Word, will demand payment from those who despise it. Saul and Jonah despised God's commandments, and they paid a stiff penalty. But God will reward those who fear (respect, yield to, and obey) His Word (cf. Isa. 66:2). Abraham and Daniel are good examples of this truth.

13:14 The "teaching [or law] of the wise" refreshes, invigorates, and prolongs life, like water from a "fountain" does physically. This proverb is designed to turn others aside from those practices that ensnare people and lead to death (cf. 1:8-19; 14:27). Ezra's teaching of the Mosaic Law resulted in a spiritually refreshing revival after a remnant of Israelites returned from the Babylonian Exile (Neh. 8:1-8).

This is a good example of an integral distich, in which the second line completes the thought of the first line.

13:15 A "good understanding," of precisely what, produces favor? Evidently the Word and will of God. The way of wisdom is in view, considering line two. Those who follow God's instruction usually receive favorable treatment from others. Granted, following God's will can result in persecution, but normally it draws a positive response from other people. Joseph followed God's will, and he received a positive response from many people. In contrast, those who treacherously try to find a better way on their own

¹Ironside, p. 148.

discover that their journey becomes difficult, as the Pharaoh of the Exodus did.

13:16 A prudent person bases his or her actions on information ("knowledge"), not feelings. Fools do not behave that way, and so demonstrate their folly. For example, Moses led the Israelites as he did because God told him what to do, and he did it (e.g., Lev. 8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36; et al). Korah and his company demonstrated their folly by presuming that Moses had exalted himself to leadership (Num. 16:1-3).

"... as the merchant unrolls and spreads out his wares in order to commend them, so the fool does with his foolery, which he had enveloped, *i.e.* had the greatest interest to keep concealed within himself—he is puffed up therewith."¹

"The proverb contrasts the thoughtfulness that characterizes the actions of the clever with the impetuosity of the fool who blurts out folly."²

13:17 The contrast in this proverb is between an untrustworthy ("wicked") and a trustworthy ("faithful") messenger. The former will run afoul of trouble, while the latter will facilitate "healing" in relationships. Good communication is essential to good relationships. Biblical examples might include Jonah (before his repentance) negatively, and Phoebe positively, who evidently carried Paul's Epistle to the Romans to Rome (Rom. 16:1-2).

13:18 The "discipline" of following instruction is in view in this proverb. Poverty and shame will come to those who consider it beneath them to pay attention to instruction. But the person who willingly and humbly accepts correction ("rebuke") will receive honor. The Israelites who survived the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 586 B.C. asked Jeremiah what God's will for them was, but when he told them what it was, they refused to follow it, and they perished (Jer. 42). Jeremiah himself is a positive example, because he followed the Lord's instructions to him, even though doing so involved great difficulty, and he enjoyed God's protection and blessing.

¹Delitzsch, 1:281.

²Murphy, p. 97.

13:19 Even though it is pleasant (satisfying) to hope patiently for a long time for something better, and then finally see it happen, a fool will not do that. Fools characteristically do not patiently wait for better things. They only want to continue in evil in order to gain immediate gratification. King Hezekiah lived to rejoice in the fulfillment of God's promise to deliver the Judahites from King Sennacherib (2 Kings 18—19). But King Rehoboam refused to follow good advice, and then pursued a course of evil to his death (1 Kings 12).

"In spite of the sweetness of good desires accomplished,
fools will not forsake evil to attain it."¹

13:20 Outcomes are contrasted again in this proverb, as in the previous one. The result of making friends with, and keeping company with, wise people is that one becomes wiser himself. But the result of spending a lot of time with (being a "companion of") "fools," is that "harm" eventually befalls him (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). Paul's fellow missionaries demonstrated wisdom that they learned in part from keeping company with him (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). King Jehoshaphat got into trouble for keeping too close company with wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 22).

13:21 "Adversity" (personified here) is seen as chasing after "sinners." It inevitably follows them and dogs their heels. But God will reward "the righteous" "with prosperity." This is typically what happens in life, though there are exceptions. Solomon's viewpoint, throughout the proverbs, was primarily life before death.

13:22 The "inheritance" that "a good person leaves" to his grandchildren is an honorable reputation and a good example, at least. Money is not necessarily involved. Cecil Rhodes is reported to have said that the worst thing parents can do for their children is to leave them a lot of money. He evidently believed that everyone should have to learn to make his or her own money, rather than living off what someone else had made.² However, the second line of this proverb intimates that "wealth" is at least part of the inheritance that was in the mind of Solomon. David left a godly legacy by which all of the succeeding kings of Judah were measured

¹T. T. Perowne, *The Proverbs*, p. 103.

²Seneca, Socrates, and Goethe agreed. See "Inheritance" in *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, p. 293, for their comments on this subject.

(1 Kings 11:4; et al). He also left Solomon great wealth, which proved to be a mixed blessing.

What "the sinner" considers his treasure, however, quickly passes into hands better able to use it properly—after he dies! For example, creditors often take possession of what the wicked dead man owed them, and the wicked man's reputation soon disintegrates. Such was the fate of wicked King Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:24-30) and many others of Israel's evil kings who did not receive honorable burials.

13:23 The LORD provides "abundant food" in the uncultivated farmland of the poor, but sometimes they cannot obtain it because tyrants sweep it away through "injustice." Though a poor man may have opportunity, the more powerful may snatch it from him. This climactic (or integral) proverb is a word of warning: Opportunity by itself does not guarantee success, even when taken advantage of diligently. Wicked Queen Jezebel stole Naboth's vineyard and had him put to death, through no fault of his own (1 Kings 21).

"Proverbs is often accused of a rather callous view of poverty. As we have seen, the book does make a connection between poverty and laziness, but it would be wrong to conclude that the sages thought that all struggle was the result of some foolish behavior. Though it is a comparatively minor theme, a proverb like 13:23 indicates awareness that poverty is sometimes the result of actions beyond a person's control and may be caused by the evil intentions of another ..."¹

13:24 Solomon linked love with "discipline," and he linked hate with failure to discipline ("withholds his rod") in this proverb. The popular childish viewpoint is that hate is the source of discipline, and true love grants unbridled freedom. It is harsh or excessive discipline that is wrong. Eli failed to discipline his sons, and God punished him for his neglect (1 Sam. 3:13). Abraham provides a positive example of a loving parent (Gen. 18:19).

¹Longman, pp. 574-75.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child.' This common maxim (a one-size-fits-all approach to child discipline) is often wrongly attributed to the Bible. (This maxim comes from a poem written by Samuel Butler in 1664.) In reality the book of Proverbs, when taken as a whole, encourages its readers to use multiple levels of discipline ranging from pointing out improper behavior to the use of corporal punishment."¹

"Ancient wisdom commended child beating with some zeal. ... Proverbs does not go that far."²

"Corporal discipline using a rigid staff (also mentioned in 19:25, 29; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3; 29:15) was viewed in the ancient Near East not as child abuse but as a protective demonstration of parental love. ... The passing on of cultural values took place primarily in the home and thus was the parents' responsibility."³

"The proverb simply commends bodily chastisement as a means of training; details are left to the judgment of parents ..."⁴

"The sage would understand reluctance to apply discipline, whether physical or verbal, to be child neglect and child abuse."⁵

13:25 This proverb illustrates well the difference between a proverb and a promise. It expresses a condition that is generally true in this life, all other things being equal. However, God never promised that He would keep every righteous person from starving to death (cf. Matt. 6:33; Lev. 26). David's statement that he had never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread (Ps. 37:25) was a personal testimony, not a guarantee that God will always provide all the physical needs of all the righteous.

¹Paul D. Wegner, "Discipline in the Book of Proverbs: 'To Spank or Not To Spank?'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:4 (December 2005):715-32. See also Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 574.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 571.

³Schultz, pp. 466-67.

⁴Toy, p. 278.

⁵Longman, p. 292.

A righteous person will be satisfied with what he "has," be it much or little, because he accepts it as God's will for him, like the Apostle Paul did (Phil. 4:11). But the wicked are never satisfied, and always want more, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:12).

8. Further advice for wise living chs. 14—15

These proverbs are more difficult to group together under a general heading because there are fewer common ideas that tie them together.

"The three proverbs 1-3 form a beautiful *trifolium*: wise management [*sic*], God-fearing conduct, and wise silence, with their threefold contraries."¹

14:1 This verse makes better sense if for "house" we read "household." Either translation is legitimate.

"A wise mother can, if her husband be dead or neglectful of his duty, always keep the house together; but if the house-wife has neither understanding nor good-will for her calling, then the best will of the house-father cannot hinder the dissolution of the house ..."²

Moses' mother built her family (Exod. 2), as did wise Hannah (1 Sam. 1—2). But foolish Queen Jezebel fatally wounded Ahab's dynasty (2 Kings 9), and Queen Athaliah tore down the house of Judah (2 Kings 11; 2 Chron. 22:2-3).

14:2 Samuel illustrates the first line of this proverb (1 Sam. 12), and King Saul the second (1 Sam. 15:22).

"It is the life that proves whether one is really walking before God or not. The testimony of the lips, if contradicted by the behavior, is of little worth. The one who fears the Lord will be characterized by godliness and faithfulness."³

¹Delitzsch, 1:288.

²*Ibid.*, 1:289.

³Ironside, p. 156.

"To understand the fear of Yahweh is to know it not as a fleeting emotion or a passing notion but as a habit, a straight walk."¹

14:3 The idea is that a fool's words often become the instrument by which he suffers ("a rod for his back"). In contrast, "the lips [words] of the wise" have no such detrimental effect on them, because they speak wisely. The antecedent of "them" (3b) is "the wise" (plural).

"Words come back to roost."²

"What people say has a great bearing on how they are received."³

The foolish Amalekite, who claimed that he had killed King Saul, died for his boast (2 Sam. 1), whereas Ahimaaz, the wise messenger who brought David news of Absalom's death, won the king's favor (2 Sam. 18:19-33). Goliath's boast and David's reply also illustrate this proverb (1 Sam. 17:41-49).

14:4 A farmer might think that a clean manger is more desirable than a dirty one. So if he decides to buy no oxen, he could keep his manger clean. But this would be a mistake, because sometimes minor sacrifices have to be made in order to attain greater benefits. In this case, having a productive ox far outweighs having a clean crib.

"When one invests intelligently in his sources of income, as illustrated by strong oxen, the benefits far exceed the cost."⁴

"It is cause for lamentation to notice the readiness with which assemblies sometimes resort to getting rid of troublesome saints, thus cutting off much increase and blessing which might have ensued had patience and grace but been exercised."⁵

¹Hubbard, p. 200.

²Kidner, p. 106.

³Ross, p. 983.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...*, p. 586.

⁵Ironside, p. 158.

An example of this truth in Israel's history was when the other tribes almost annihilated the tribe of Benjamin in a misguided attempt at discipline (Judg. 20:35-38; 21:1-3).

14:5 This is one of the more easily understood proverbs. Paul before Festus and Agrippa illustrates a "trustworthy witness" (Acts 26:25), whereas Peter in the high priest's courtyard illustrates a "false witness" (Luke 22:55-62).

The following four proverbs deal with fools and folly.

14:6 Someone who scoffs at the truth often finds it difficult to find the truth. Pilate said, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), but he did not receive a reply from "The Truth" personified: Jesus Christ. Daniel, on the other hand, developed the habit of receiving and yielding to the truth that God revealed to him, and so was entrusted with more truth.

14:7 Solomon counseled not spending much time with fools, because they do not impart knowledge, and one's own speech can degenerate as a result. King Saul had this detrimental effect on the soldiers who stayed with him: They continued to oppose David unreasonably.

"When it becomes evident that a man is bent on folly, with no concern about righteousness, it is best to leave him to himself. To argue or reason with such a one is useless. It is defiling to the wise, and but gratifying to the pride of the fool. 'From such turn away [2 Tim. 3:5].'"¹

"Sometimes the only way we have of reproofing wicked discourse is by leaving the company and going out of the hearing of it."²

14:8 One characteristic of a wise, prudent person is that he considers his conduct ("understand[s] his way") and regulates it carefully. One characteristic that identifies a fool as such is that he relies on deception to get ahead.

"The wisdom of the truly shrewd lies not so much in cleverness and tactical talents as in self-awareness. He is

¹Ibid., p. 161.

²Henry, p. 757.

able to assess his own behavior and realize where it leads. The point is that if one wants to be clever, he will think before acting."¹

Nehemiah is an example of the former individual. And Hananiah, Jeremiah's adversary, is a model of the latter (Jer. 28).

14:9 It is foolish to "mock at sin"—to make light of it—because sin is deceptive and leads to destruction and death (Rom. 6:23). This is what the remnant of Judahites did who fled to Egypt after Jerusalem's destruction, after they heard God's word through Jeremiah (Jer. 44:15-19). The "upright," in contrast, enjoy favor ("goodwill") with God and man. Righteous Abraham is a good illustration of this truth. The point of the proverb seems to be: Do not laugh about sin, or treat it as unimportant, but live an upright life so that you can enjoy God's favor and man's approval.

14:10 Hannah is an outstanding example of a person who had deep personal sorrow that was not understood (1 Sam. 1). Our Lord Jesus is perhaps even a better example (Luke 22:39-46; cf. Isa. 53:3). This proverb should help us to realize that it is natural for everyone to harbor deep sorrow (the heart's "own bitterness") and deep "joy" at the same time. But a "stranger" cannot enter into those emotions and share them.

"This psychological observation recognizes that ultimately there are certain feelings, both joyous and sorrowful, that cannot be communicated, no matter how much sympathy and understanding may be present. It does not deny that one can identify to some extent with another's sorrows and joys, but it does imply that such sensitivity has its limits."²

"Every heart has its secret of joy or sorrow that no other ever shares. Hidden deep down from the sight of the nearest and the dearest are, often, griefs too deep for utterance, or joys too great for words."³

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 575.

²Murphy, p. 104.

³Ironside, p. 162.

- 14:11 This proverb contrasts the fate of all that the "house" and the "tent" represent—in the cases of the sinful and the righteous. Destruction will befall the life of the wicked, but prosperity will mark the life of the upright. Saul is a classic example of the former, and David the latter.
- 14:12 Without the additional light of divine revelation we might conclude that any number of courses of action will lead to good ends ("a way which seems right"). Nevertheless, God's Word helps us to see the end of some of these paths so that we can avoid them. Salvation by works is one example of this. Following this path will lead to *eternal* "death." But the scope of this proverb includes all kinds of decisions that we are called upon to make. Someone once told me, "I was climbing the ladder of success, but then I discovered that it was leaning against the wrong wall."
- "This is a verse which should be applied to the cults and 'isms.' They sound so reasonable and so nice and so attractive."¹
- This proverb warns that apparently good roads may prove fatal to the moral life (cf. 7:27; 16:25; Matt. 7:13-14), because they lead to some bad end. Judas Iscariot discovered, too late, that what appeared to him to be an easy way to collect a few extra pieces of silver was, in fact, a road of no return (Matt. 27:5). In his case, as is true of many others, his path led to physical death (cf. Rom. 6:23; 8:13; 1 Cor. 11:29-30; James 1:15; 5:20).
- 14:13 Ironically, a person may laugh but be hurting inside. Likewise, a person may think he is having a good time, but his "joy" (sensual, or worldly joy) may bring him grief eventually ("the end of joy," both its ending in grief, and its ending in duration). Appearances are often deceiving, as we learned also in the preceding proverb. Queen Esther participated in a festive banquet, but her heart was breaking over the fate of her people (Esth. 5:4-8; 7:1-4). Haman was having a good time, until he learned that his hatred for the Jews was going to kill him (Esth. 7:5-9).
- Several proverbs that follow deal with various kinds of fools, cleverness, and folly (vv. 14-19).
- 14:14 The Prodigal Son had a "wayward heart," but he eventually got fed up with the lifestyle that his wayward heart led him into (Luke 15:19). In

¹McGee, 3:50.

contrast, the Apostle Paul ended his written ministry by expressing satisfaction with how he had lived his life (2 Tim. 4:7).

"... *backslider* [AV] conveys the wrong impression of an apostate, one who declines from or abandons his own previous position of moral right; the Hebrew expression here ["one with a wayward heart"] implies simply non-adherence to the right."¹

- 14:15 Since a naive person tends to believe everything, one should learn to listen and evaluate what one hears and sees critically. Joseph seems to have been a bit naive as a boy in that he failed to appreciate the depth of his brothers' hatred for him (Gen. 37). A prudent person, on the other hand, evaluates information carefully and does not walk into a trap. Nehemiah did this well when his enemies sought to divert him from his building project (Neh. 6). Sometimes we need to test before we trust.²
- 14:16 Caution is the better part of wisdom, and the wise person, having anticipated danger, will turn away from evil people who create danger, as Nehemiah did (Neh. 6:1-4). The foolish person, in contrast, relies too much on his own instincts and presumed wisdom, becomes "careless," and frequently gets hurt. Abner lost his life because he foolishly failed to anticipate the danger that Joab posed (2 Sam. 3:28, 33).
- 14:17 Jephthah acted "foolishly" by making a rash vow, failing to consider beforehand what might happen if he returned from battle victorious (Judg. 11:30-34). The people of Judah hated evil King Jehoram because of his wickedness (2 Chron. 21:19).
- 14:18 A "naive" person often gets into trouble, so one should take pains to be well informed. Haman lost his life because he apparently did not know that Esther was a Jewess (Esth. 8:1-6). Conversely, "knowledge" acts like a crown on the head of the "sensible," and they typically experience exaltation rather than humiliation. Mordecai understood what was going on, saved the Jews, and received great honor (Esth. 4:13; 10:3).
- 14:19 Jacob's "evil" sons eventually bowed down before their "good" brother, Joseph (Gen. 42:6; 43:26, 28). Their action symbolized the victory of

¹Toy, p. 290.

²Henry, p. 758.

Joseph's goodness over their wickedness, though they did not realize this when they first bowed. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man also illustrates this proverb (Luke 16:19-31). One day every knee will bow to the King of Kings (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10).

"In the gates of a city of righteous people, justice is done and the wicked are humbled."¹

"Three proverbs [follow: vv. 20 through 22] on the hatred of men:"²

14:20 "Poor" people are the targets of much hatred, for various reasons. Sometimes people hate them because they think the reason they are poor is because they refuse to, or cannot, provide for themselves. At other times people hate them because they are an embarrassment to the community. Even those closest to them, who should love and care for them, often hate them. "Neighbor" refers to any person with whom we come in contact, not just someone who may live nearby (cf. Luke 10:31).³ Lazarus, in Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus, suffered because of his poverty (Luke 16:20-25).

"I doubt if a poor rail-splitter like Lincoln could run for the presidency in our day. A candidate has to be rich."⁴

"The rich," on the other hand, find that they have many "friends": people who profess to love them, but show affection only because the rich have the means to help them. I obtained my first automobile when I was in college, and I quickly learned that I had many more "friends" than I had realized: students who wanted rides! A biblical example is wealthy Abraham (Gen. 13:2), whom Abimelech wanted to join in covenant with (Gen. 21:22-34). This line is a warning to the rich to watch out for false friends. Both lines observe that riches create differences in social life.⁵

14:21 Evidently the "neighbor" in view in line one is "poor," in view of line two. Rather than despising or belittling a poor neighbor, one should be "gracious" toward him or her. Doing so will bring joy to both parties.

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 580.

²Delitzsch, 1:304.

³See Toy, p. 293.

⁴McGee, 3:51.

⁵Murphy, p. 105.

Abraham treated his nephew Lot graciously and gave him the choice of whatever part of the Promised Land he wanted for himself (Gen. 13:8-12). The result was ongoing good relations between the two men (Gen. 14:14-15).

"One should regard every human being, especially such as God has placed near to him, as a being having the same origin, as created in the image of God, and of the same lofty destination, and should consider himself as under obligation to love him."¹

"In most cases in Israel, they [neighbors] would reside in the same village as their benefactors and be in day-by-day touch with them. Their needs, therefore, would be well known. They were not the drifters, panhandlers, and street people who knock at the door of city churches and tell us tragic and often false stories of urgent need. Nothing in this list of proverbs [having to do with generosity] suggests that con men are in view."²

14:22 People who plot "evil" deviate from the path of uprightness, and their lives are marked by hatred and deceit. But people who pursue what is "good" usually experience "kindness and truth." King Saul again illustrates the first line, and David the second.

"There now follows a considerable series of proverbs (vers. 23-31) which, with the single exception (ver. 24), have all this in common, that one or two key-words in them begin with m [the Hebrew letter *mem*]."³

14:23 Actually working on a project will produce a "profit," but only talking about it will yield no profit, but "poverty" instead. Nehemiah not only had a great vision for the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, but he went to work and brought his vision to pass. The false teachers that Jude warned about were like clouds without water: They promised great things but failed to deliver them (Jude 12). Visionaries are a dime a dozen. It is those who

¹Delitzsch, 1:304-5.

²Hubbard, p. 165.

³Delitzsch, 1:306.

follow through and go to work to bring their vision to reality that are successful.

14:24 The outcomes of the wise and the foolish are again in view in this proverb.

"The wise are crowned, that is, blessed with wealth (cf. 3:16; 8:18, 21; 15:6; 22:4) because of their diligence (14:23), but foolish conduct results not in blessing but in more folly (cf. v. 18)."¹

Job became a rich man because he was wise, as well as because he was righteous. The "crown" of his wisdom comes out in his speeches. Toward the end of his life, King Saul admitted that he had been a fool (1 Sam. 26:21).

14:25 A person who tells the truth produces good results from what he says—the best possible result being the saving of someone's life who was falsely accused. Esther told the truth and saved her people. A person who lies promotes treachery by leading others astray into false conclusions. Jacob lied and his treachery got his whole family into a heap of trouble (Gen. 27). False witnesses lied and Naboth died (1 Kings 21).

14:26 This is another climactic proverb, as is the following one, in which the second line adds an additional thought to the first. Reverence for the LORD gives a person "confidence," and "his children" enjoy a measure of security ("refuge"), because of their parent's faith. Abraham demonstrated great confidence when he took on the five Mesopotamian kings in battle (Gen. 14), and God blessed Isaac for Abraham's faith (Gen. 26:24).

14:27 Reverence for the LORD also sustains one's whole life, like "a fountain" of water sustains physical life. It will also keep him out of the "snares" that can cause an untimely "death." Caleb and Joshua feared the LORD, so the LORD sustained them, and enabled them to avoid the fate of the rest of their unbelieving generation.

14:28 It is a credit to a ruler when he rules over many people and they prosper and increase, but it is a discredit to him when his people decline in

¹Sid S. Buzzell, "Proverbs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 936. Cf. Toy, p. 296; McKane, p. 466.

number and wealth. This is so because part of a governmental leader's responsibility is to generate prosperity. Godly King Hezekiah saved his people from destruction by the Assyrians (2 Kings 19), but his wicked son Manasseh provoked the LORD to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:1-13). David and Ish-bosheth are other positive examples (2 Sam. 3—4).

14:29 People who do not become angry quickly show "great understanding," like Gideon did (Judg. 7). His patience resulted in victory for the Israelites. But people who are "quick-tempered" often do foolish things, like Samson did (Judg. 15). His impatience led to his own suffering and ultimate death. Contrast too the actions of Micaiah and Zedekiah (1 Kings 22:24-25).

14:30 A "tranquil heart" at peace with God promotes good health, but a heart full of "jealousy," that is in turmoil, weakens a person like rotten bones. Modern science has attested the truth of this proverb: Stress shortens life, but tranquility lengthens it. Moses' relationship with God was tranquil because he trusted and obeyed the LORD, even though the Israelites were a source of some stress in his life. He lived an unusually long time (Deut. 34:7). Jealous Absalom, on the other hand, experienced much stress and died prematurely (2 Sam. 18:14-15).

14:31 Wealthy Jezebel dishonored God in the way that she treated Naboth, who was poor in comparison to her (1 Kings 21:1-10). But wealthy David honored God in the way that he treated relatively poor Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9).

"So seriously does biblical faith take the doctrine of God's image in man as a gift of divine creation that acts done to a human being are as weighty as though done to God [cf. Matt. 25:40, 45]. Scarcely any idea has more power than this to change life radically."¹

"To deal hardly with those in poverty is to reproach God who made both rich and poor, and whose inscrutable wisdom permits some to be in affliction, while others have more than heart can wish. He who honors God will view the needy as left to test the hearts of those in more comfortable circumstances, and will value the privilege of

¹Hubbard, p. 170.

ministering to them as far as able, thus showing them the kindness of God."¹

"Loving evangelism is the foremost road out of poverty."²

- 14:32 The evil "wrongdoing" that the wicked do eventually catches up with them and brings them down. Balaam is an example (Num. 23:10; 31:8). But the righteous have nothing to fear when they die, because they trust in God who is their "refuge." Consider how Stephen died (Acts 7:59-60).
- 14:33 A suggested paraphrase of this verse is: "A wise man does not parade his knowledge; a fool does."³ Fools may have knowledge, but not biblical wisdom. A slightly different interpretation is that the intelligent behavior of an understanding person manifests the "wisdom" in his heart, but the senseless behavior of fools reveals what is in their hearts.⁴ Solomon was humble in his early years as king (1 Kings 3:3-9), and he became famous for his wisdom. But Adonijah's pride showed that he was a fool (1 Kings 1—2).
- 14:34 World history has proved the truth of this proverb repeatedly, but the great biblical example of it is the history of Israel, especially during the monarchy. When good kings and righteous conduct ("righteousness") prevailed, Israel flourished. But when bad kings led the people into "sin," judgment followed.
- 14:35 People who serve those over them by behaving "wisely" obtain the "favor" of their masters, which often takes the form of rewards of various kinds. Joseph and Daniel are outstanding examples of this truth. Conversely, those who prove unfaithful to their bosses by acting "shamefully" incur disfavor and punishment ("anger"). Haman was such an unfaithful servant of King Artaxerxes.

"Surprising the boss or letting her down in public is not a trait appreciated in modern business or political life either."⁵

¹Ironside, p. 172. Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 584.

²Larsen, p. 174.

³Kidner, pp. 111-12.

⁴Ironside, p. 173.

⁵Hubbard, p. 253.

In this fourteenth chapter "... twelve of the thirty-five verses deal with wisdom/folly. Here also 'king' sayings make their first appearance. There are several psychological observations: vv 10, 13, 30."¹

Proverbs dealing with the influence of human speech occupy much of chapter 15 (vv. 1, 2, 4, 7, 23, 26, 28). Also, the antithetical parallelisms begin to diminish. Nine of the proverbs are "Yahweh sayings."²

15:1 Gideon's "gentle answer" to the angry men of Ephraim illustrates the first line of this understandable proverb, and Jephthah's "harsh words" to the same men illustrate the second (Judg. 8:1-3; 12:1-6). Abigail and Nabal are other examples positively and negatively.

"Fit speech is calming to those on the brink of anger."³

"... hard arguments do best with soft words."⁴

"It is considered unmanly by many not to resent an insult, and to allow wrathful words to pass unchallenged; but it takes far more true character to meet an angry man in quietness of spirit, and to return cool, calm words for heated, hasty ones, than it does to give railing for railing, or malice for malice. The latter bespeaks a man who does not yet know how to rule his spirit; the former, one who has his personal feelings in subjection."⁵

15:2 The contrast here is not between the quantity of words that the wise and the fool utter. It is the fact that the wise person considers what he says before he says it, but the fool does not. Consequently what the wise person says is "pleasant" and what the fool says is "foolishness." The wise person knows when to speak and when to keep quiet, but the fool speaks even when he should not.

A slightly different interpretation follows:

¹Murphy, p. 108.

²Ibid., p. 111.

³Hubbard, p. 225.

⁴Henry, p. 759.

⁵Ironside, p. 175.

"The wise do not merely speak the truth bluntly; they give it elegant form. ... The knowledge, the substance of wisdom, is already there, and the wise man employs rhetorical skills in conveying it. Fools just vomit up their nonsense."¹

Joseph restrained his words to his brothers until just the right time (Gen. 42—45). The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to correct certain teachers of the Mosaic Law in Ephesus who did not really understand what they were teaching (1 Tim. 1:3-7).

"When you summarize what Proverbs teaches about human speech, you end up with four important propositions: (1) speech is an awesome gift from God; (2) speech can be used to do good; (3) speech can be used to do evil; and, (4) only God can help us use speech to do good."²

15:3 Since God sees everything, we should live our lives aware that He is watching us and will deal with us according to what He sees. David was aware of the LORD's all-seeing "eyes," and asked Him to search his life and expose anything that displeased Him (Ps. 139:23-24).

"This universal inspection, this omniscience of God, has an alarming but also a comforting side."³

15:4 "Soothing" words can heal and sustain life, like a fruit tree. But words used inappropriately can have the opposite effect: They can wound, "crush the spirit," and discourage. Abraham's words to Lot had a healing effect in their relationship (Gen. 13:8), but Sheba's words to David wounded the king and caused friction (2 Sam. 20).

"... no product of modern technology—not the computer, not the fax machine, not the magnetic price scanner—has rendered obsolete a single saying in the Proverbs. Speech has as much power to help or hurt today as it ever had. It

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 589.

²Wiersbe, p. 111.

³Delitzsch, 1:317.

lies so close to the center of human life that it is still the most important art for each of us to master."¹

15:5 The young person who does not appreciate being disciplined by his or her parent is a fool, because discipline aims to help and improve. The youth who understands that parental discipline is for his or her welfare is prudent (i.e., "sensible," acting with thought for the future). Isaac submitted to Abraham's discipline (Gen. 22:7-8), but Jacob rebelled against Isaac (Gen. 27:18-19).

"Next to fear of the Lord, honor of parents may well be the sages' [who wrote Proverbs] highest value [cf. v. 20; 10:1; 17:2, 6, 21, 25; 19:13, 26; 20:20; 27:11, 28:7; 29:3]."²

15:6 Much "wealth" of many kinds—not necessarily just money—is "in the house[hold] of the righteous." For example, there will be peace, love, and joy, for starters—riches that money cannot buy, but which are more important than money. And it is these riches that God provides. Job's family seems to have enjoyed many kinds of riches before and after his ordeal (Job 1; 42). "But trouble" will fill the house ("is in the income") of "the wicked." Achan found this to be true (Josh. 7:19-26).

15:7 The words of wise people "spread knowledge"—not that they are always uttering profound truths, but they focus on what is edifying. In contrast, foolish people speak much that is useless and vain, which is what occupies their hearts. Paul's words at Paphos illustrate the first line, and Elymas' words there exemplify the second (Acts 13:6-12).

15:8 In one sense, an animal or vegetable sacrifice is more difficult and costly to offer God than a prayer. So one might expect that God would value more highly what cost the offerer more than what cost him little. Nevertheless, the LORD delights more in the simple "prayer of the upright" than in the sacrifices of the wicked. Indeed, the sacrifices, though demanding more of the offerer, are an abomination to Him, because He regards the person, specifically his prayer-oriented relationship with God, more important than his offering.

¹Hubbard, p. 218.

²Ibid., p. 258.

"Sacrifices and prayers are not automatically efficacious, and must be accompanied by ethical behavior; see, e.g., 21.3; 1 Sam 15.22b; Isa. 1.10-17; Amos 5.21-25; Mic. 6.6-8."¹

"God does interior decorating before He can do any exterior decorating. He is not interested in *your* exterior decorating until He has done a job of interior decorating in *your* life."²

Saul offered a sacrifice, but God did not accept it, because "to obey is better than a sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22), and Saul was not obedient when he offered it. Jesus commended the publican, whose simple prayer was acceptable because it sprang from a sincere heart (Luke 18:13).

15:9 This proverb seems to expand on the previous one. Not only are the sacrifices of the wicked abominable to God, but their whole life ("way") is. Likewise, not just the prayers of the upright delight Him, but the whole course of the life of the person "who pursues righteousness" does. David's and Saul's lives contrast in these respects.

15:10 People who have forsaken the path of righteousness do not like to be corrected, especially with strong discipline. Because they do not respond to discipline, such people will eventually perish: "One who hates a rebuke will die." Headstrong people who want to live life their own way, rather than as God has counseled, are headed for trouble and heartache ("severe punishment"). Many a young rebel has found this proverb true the hard way. Absalom certainly did (2 Sam. 13—18).

15:11 This proverb makes its point by arguing from the harder to the easier. Since God is able to see what lies hidden in the netherworld ("Sheol and Abaddon," the grave and the underworld), which seems to us impossibly impenetrable, He is certainly able to see what lies hidden in human "hearts." Thus it is the better part of wisdom to ask God to bring to our attention anything that He sees there that displeases Him, so that we can get it right with Him—like David did (Ps. 139:23-24).

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1460.

²McGee, 3:53.

15:12 This proverb is similar to the one in verse 10, but here the emphasis is on the scoffer's avoidance of those who rebuke him or her. In pride, the scoffer refuses to expose himself or herself to agents of corrective criticism. Instead of truly repenting of his folly, though he professed to repent, King Saul continued to distance himself from David (1 Sam. 29).

"Two psychological observations are wrapped around a wisdom saying [in verses 13-15], with 'heart' as the catch word in all three verses."¹

15:13 A person's "heart" condition affects both his immaterial and material parts, seen in the "joyful heart"/"cheerful face" connection in this verse. Here the "heart" has its typical biblical metaphorical signification as the wellspring of human personality. Haman was joyful and glad of heart until he saw Mordecai (Esth. 5:9). Nehemiah's sad face betrayed his broken spirit (Neh. 2:2).

15:14 Intelligent people seek out more knowledge, but fools seek out foolishness: things of little value.

"Our food has much to do with making us what we are. The same is true of us morally. We become like that on which we feed; and we feed on what our hearts crave. The man of understanding values knowledge, and devotes himself to its pursuit. The fool cares not for that which would build true character and draw him from his evil ways, but feeds on folly and vanity, thus becoming all the time more empty and foolish than before."²

"The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge are life-long occupations—never fully realized in this lifetime."³

"Imitate David (Psa. 119:103, 104), Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16), and Job (chap. 23:12). Do not allow yourself to fall into the ways of the mixed multitude (Num. 11:4-9), who lost their appetite for angels' food by lusting after Egyptian dainties."⁴

¹Murphy, p. 112.

²Ironside, p. 181.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 1053.

⁴Ironside, p. 182.

- 15:15 When afflictions come, we have a "bad day." But a "cheerful heart" can overcome bad feelings. If one's "heart" is right, he can rejoice in spite of adversity. Consider Habakkuk, who rejoiced even though the future looked grim (Hab. 3:17-18). And remember Paul, who rejoiced while in prison (Phil. 3:8-17).
- 15:16 We can fear the LORD or our circumstances. If we choose to fear the LORD, we can be content with "little" else besides His fellowship. If we fear our circumstances, even "great treasure" will not make us happy. Paul learned to rejoice with little or with much, because he found the source of his joy in his relationship with God (Phil. 4:11-12). Haman, on the other hand, possessed much material wealth, but he was miserable because he was the center of his world (Esth. 3:5).¹
- 15:17 This proverb—another "better ... than" saying—is similar to the preceding one, but here it is the presence of either love or hate that determines one's happiness. It is better to have only "vegetables" to eat, if one can have "love" with them, than it is to have the best meat ("a fattened ox"), if one is served "hatred" as its side dish.
- "This proverb draws on the reality that eating meat was not a daily occurrence in the ancient world. A dinner of herbs (vegetables) was daily fare, while a fattened ox was a special occasion or luxury meal, typically employing meat returned to the worshiper after the animal was sacrificed."²
- "The spirit in which a meal is shared is far more important than the kind of food that is eaten; cf. 17:1."³
- David enjoyed simple fare with those who loved him (1 Sam. 21), but he could not stomach a feast at which he was hated (1 Sam. 20).
- 15:18 This is another warning about being "hot-tempered" (cf. 14:17, 29; 29:22). Here the emphasis is on the extreme ramifications of being quick-tempered or slow-tempered: "strife" or peace ("calms"), respectively. Saul and David again illustrate this contrast (1 Sam. 20:30-34; 24:8-22).

¹See Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, pp. 597-98, for an excursus on the "better than" proverbs.

²Adams, p. 907. Bold font omitted.

³Murphy, p. 113.

"A wrathful man is of necessity a proud man; otherwise he would not be so easily stirred by what touches himself. A lowly man will be slow to anger, for he has learned not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, and therefore will not readily resent insults and offences."¹

15:19 A sluggard's pathway through life is beset with many difficulties, dangers, and painful experiences ("a hedge of thorns"). But the pathway of the upright is unhindered and unencumbered by these obstacles ("a highway").

"If God commands, I have simply to obey. He makes Himself responsible to clear the obstacles from my path, or to give me the ability to overcome them."²

Mephibosheth seems to have been sluggish, at least in communicating with David, and his life became complicated as a result (2 Sam. 19:24-30). Peter, after Pentecost, followed the Lord quickly, and God even opened prison doors to allow him to continue to minister (Acts 12:1-11).

15:20 The full thought behind this verse seems to be: "The wise son honors and gladdens his father, the foolish laughs at and saddens his mother."³ The verse may imply that the fool is callous toward his mother.⁴ Proverbs 10:1 is very similar. Taken together, the two lines heighten the warning. Solomon was a joy to David and Bathsheba (cf. 1 Kings 2:1-9), but Adonijah brought his parents grief (1 Kings 1).

Delitzsch believed that the recurrence of the phrase "a wise son makes a father glad," or the equivalent, in 10:1, 13:1, and 15:20, marks the beginning of new sections in the collection of proverbs.⁵ This seems unlikely to me, since there is no other substantial change in form or content from one section to the next.

15:21 A fool finds great delight in worthless and sinful activities, but a person who understands what is worthwhile and meaningful leads a morally and

¹Ironside, p. 183.

²Ibid., p. 184.

³Toy, p. 311.

⁴Kidner, p. 116.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:326.

ethically upright life (cf. 14:16). King Belshazzar feasted while his enemy was at his gates (Dan. 5), but King Hezekiah gave himself to prayer when he was under attack (2 Kings 19:14-19).

15:22 A person who makes his or her plans without asking for advice or comments from other people shows that he or she is excessively self-confident. However, someone who consults others and asks for their opinion shows that he realizes that he may be overlooking some important factors and is not entirely self-confident (cf. 11:14). Peter evidently acted without advice when he chose to compromise with the Jews in the Antioch church (Gal. 2:11-13), whereas Paul received the blessing of the apostles in Jerusalem when he sought their support for his mission to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-10).

"Foolish are the ministers who do not listen to their assistants; dangerous the pastors who do not seek the counsel of their secretaries."¹

15:23 It is not just important to speak the truth. One must also speak appropriately in view of the time, place, and circumstances.² The right thing said at the right time ("a timely word") can be a source of joy and happiness to many people. Such were the words of James at the Jerusalem Counsel (Acts 15:13-21).

15:24 Everyone goes to "Sheol" (the grave) eventually (except believers who experience translation at the Rapture and do not die). However, the wise avoid Sheol as long as they can by being wise. Living wisely tends to prolong life. King Hezekiah found this to be true (2 Kings 20; Isa. 38).

"We may at least say that the language [of this proverb] anticipates what later Scripture will clearly teach about the ultimate destination of the way of life."³

15:25 God typically frustrates what proud people build and take pride in ("the house") to teach them that He is sovereign. King Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson when he lost his mind (Dan. 4). But God also typically guards those who recognize their dependence on Him, such as "the widow," who

¹Hubbard, p. 292.

²See Longman, p. 571.

³Ross, p. 999.

has no one else to turn to for help and who calls on the LORD (cf. Ps. 138:6). Naomi learned this lesson when God provided for her (Ruth 4), as did the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:10-16).

15:26 "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD [v. 8]," but so are their "evil plans"—like Saul's plans to destroy David. "Pleasant words" do not fit with "evil plans," because words express one's plans. In other words, God hates both the plans and the words of the wicked, but He delights in the plans and the words of the upright. The words of the upright are pure in His sight because they spring from a true heart. David's psalms contain pleasant words that pleased God, because they expressed what was in his (relatively) pure heart.

"There is no such thing as 'private thoughts.'"¹

15:27 God forbade giving and receiving "bribes" because a bribe is used to pervert justice (Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; cf. Job 8:3). For example, the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb were bribed to give false information (Matt. 28:11-15). To take a bribe, and by doing so pervert justice, amounts to profiting "illicitly," and it usually leads to trouble for the bribe-taker eventually. Amos rebuked the Israelites of his day for taking bribes (Amos 5:12). The person who refuses ("hates") to participate in bribery will enjoy God's blessing of longer life. Such was the experience of Samuel (1 Sam. 12:3).

"The numerous references to bribes in ancient legal material and correspondence attest to its frequent practice. ... In the book of Proverbs, giving gifts to officials is acceptable, even encouraged (cf. 18:16; 21:14), except when it leads to an unjust end (cf. 17:23). Thus the difference between a gift and a bribe—the same Hebrew words are used for both—is the justice of the end desired or the result achieved."²

15:28 The righteous person is usually more careful with his words ("ponders how to answer"), because he has a higher regard for other people, for the truth, and for God than the unrighteous do. He knows that untruthful and ungracious speech can do much damage. James warned about the

¹*The Nelson ...*, p. 1053.

²Adams, p. 908. Bold font omitted.

powerful effect of words (James 3:1-12). Solomon's wise words to the two harlots who came before him reflect careful thought (1 Kings 3:16-28). But the challenges to Elijah by Ahab's first two captains of 50 soldiers showed little forethought (2 Kings 1:9-16)

- 15:29 The LORD is "far from the wicked" in the sense that He has not promised to come to their aid when they call on Him for help, though He often graciously does so in spite of themselves. But He "hears the prayer of the righteous" in the sense that He responds to them, though only as He sees best (cf. Luke 11:11-13). God stopped answering King Saul's prayers because he refused to do God's will (1 Sam. 28:6). God consistently responded to David's prayers because David sought to carry out His will (1 Sam. 23:2, 4, 11; 2 Sam. 2:1; cf. Josh. 10:12-14).
- 15:30 People with "bright eyes" (happy people) and the "good news" they bring both have a heartwarming effect. Good news also uplifts people. "Bright eyes" in this proverb characterize one who brings "good news," so the eyes can be thought of as bringing gladness to the heart of the hearer. Healthy bones (lit. "fat bones") represented health and prosperity to the Jews (cf. 17:22; 25:25; Gen. 45:27-28; Isa. 52:7-8). So the idea in the second line is that good news promotes health and prosperity. The gospel message has brought salvation to many, and its messengers delight to share it (cf. Isa. 52:7; Acts 16:29-34).
- 15:31 People who pay attention to justified criticism ("life-giving rebuke") that is designed to benefit them are on the path to wisdom (cf. v. 10). Samuel provides an excellent example, even when he was a youth (1 Sam. 3:1-10).
- 15:32 If a person "neglects" or does not submit to "discipline," he is hurting himself. This applies to self-discipline as well as to discipline imposed by others. Conversely, if a person pays attention to corrective discipline ("listens to a rebuke"), rather than resisting or rejecting it, he learns valuable lessons (cf. Heb. 12:4-13). Eli's sons brought ruin on themselves by disregarding their father's rebukes (1 Sam. 2:22-25; 4:11). David submitted to the LORD's discipline of him during Saul's kingship, which proved to be excellent training for when David became king.
- 15:33 The fear of Yahweh is not just the foundation of a wise life (1:7; 9:10). It is also the whole path of wisdom. To fear the LORD amounts to being wise in

one sense, though it is the foundation for wisdom in another (1:7). Job's wisdom rested on his fear of the LORD.

Though 33b presents a universal truth, the humility in the context (33a) is the fear of the LORD. The fear of the LORD is the willingness to humble ourselves before God and to let His Word guide us. Daniel did this excellently.

"True fear is mediated through sound teaching, and a humble ear is its necessary prerequisite."¹

"Our generation so exalts good communication that virtually all the weight for getting the point across rests on the speaker. This is neither fair nor realistic. The learner has a clear obligation as well—an obligation to recognize the need to learn and to do everything possible to aid that learning."²

B. HOW TO PLEASE GOD 16:1—22:16

"Chap. 16 marks a turn in the book. Chaps. 10—15 were long considered (and still are ...) to be a separate collection. The difference in chap. 16 is not only in style, e.g., less antithetical sayings, but also in theological content. It is not that the book previously lacked significant theology, but rather that the sovereign action of the Lord was not emphasized as much as here. And the very beginning is impressive: eight of the first nine verses are YHWH sayings."³

Pleasing God becomes a greater factor in the proverbs that follow (cf. 1 Cor. 7:33; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 John 3:22), whereas those in chapters 10 through 15 had living successfully more in view. Nevertheless, this is only a change in proportion of emphasis. Both ends are present in both sections of the book (chs. 10—15 and 16:1—22:16).

1. Trusting God ch. 16

In this chapter, as noted above, there is a slight change in the form of the proverbs. Solomon expressed the earlier proverbs (chs. 10—15) mainly in antithetical parallelisms,

¹Hubbard, p. 200.

²*Ibid.*, p. 201.

³Murphy, p. 124.

but the proverbs in this section are mainly synonymous and synthetic parallelisms. Instead of the key word being "but" it now becomes "and."

"Prov 16:1-9 is a thematic cluster, whose individual verses are self-contained proverbs. Verse 8 is extraneous and perhaps added later. The unit teaches that God controls human deeds and that this principle must direct one's faith and action."¹

16:1 The meaning of this proverb is similar to that of 16:9. Even though man has freedom to plan, in the end he only fulfills the will of the LORD by what he says. Man plans his words, but what really comes out takes place because God sovereignly controls it (cf. Luke 21:12-15). "Man proposes, God disposes," is a common equivalent saying. God has the last word.

"... when someone is trying to speak before others, the Lord directs the words according to his sovereign will."²

Balaam found that the LORD directed his words in a way that he did not want them to go (Num. 23—24). Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak when they bore witness for Him (Mark 13:11).

"The response of human beings cannot escape divine dominion. Human beings are totally dependent upon him, even though they are at the same time morally responsible agents. The Old Testament thinkers did not attempt to solve that conundrum, which later theologians explored under the theme of freedom of will. The ancients expressed the dilemma, that they must have seen (*pace* Whybray), but they lived with it [cf. Deut. 30:15-19]."³

16:2 Rationalization and self-justification are second nature to fallen humankind, even to those who fear the LORD. But the LORD sees through the smoke screens that we throw up—down to our very motives, which are not always apparent to us. Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden after the Fall, tried to justify themselves, but the LORD weighed their motives (Gen. 3).

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 606.

²Ross, p. 1002.

³Murphy, pp. 119-20.

16:3 When we cast ("commit"; lit. "roll") our "works" and cares on God (1 Pet. 5:7), He will arrange our plans. The AV and RSV have "thoughts" for "plans," but the idea is the same. This proverb stresses the importance of depending on the LORD (cf. 3:5-6). It is a good idea to start each day by praying through what we anticipate happening. When we do that, the LORD will direct our steps so that the plans that He sovereignly approves come to pass (cf. v. 9).

"The admonition *commit to* (*gol 'el*, lit. 'roll to/upon'; cf. Gen 29:3, 8, 10; Ps. 22:8[9], 37:5) connotes a sense of finality; roll it unto the LORD and leave it there."¹

"God is in no sense obligated to do what we want—divine freedom is the central theme of these sayings [about dependence on God]—but we have no hope at all of seeing our plans take shape unless we depend on Him for grace and guidance."²

Nehemiah's habit of praying first, and then working, provides a good model for us. Hannah also comes to mind as one who did this (1 Sam. 1:9-20).

16:4 This proverb states the same truth that is expressed in Exodus 9:16 and Romans 9:22, with regard to the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

"The free actions of men create no situation by which God would be surprised and compelled to something which was not originally intended by Himself. That is what the above proverb says: the wicked also has his place in God's order of the world."³

"The Greeks had a proverb: 'The dice of the gods are loaded.' That is exactly what God is saying in this proverb."⁴

¹Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15—31*, p. 11.

²Hubbard, p. 240.

³Delitzsch, 1:337.

⁴McGee, 3:57.

- 16:5 The Pharaoh of the Exodus is a good example of the truth stated here. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were also "proud" individuals whom the LORD punished.
- 16:6 We do not atone for our own sins by being loving and truthful. This proverb is not a denial of our need for God's atonement. However, we can and should cover (atone for) the mistakes of others lovingly and truthfully (1 Pet. 4:8), even as God covers our sins. What will keep us all away from evil is the fear of Yahweh, as it did Joseph (Gen. 39:9; cf. Acts 24:16).
- "The fear of Jahve is subjection to the God of revelation, and a falling in with the revealed plan of salvation."¹
- 16:7 Daniel is a good example of the truth of this proverb (Dan. 6:4-5). As with most of the proverbs, there are some exceptions to this one. Not every godly person has been completely free of enemies, through no fault of his own (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20; 3:14, 17; 4:15-16, 19). Yet the point remains: When someone pleases the LORD, the LORD makes him pleasing to others (cf. Gal. 6:7).
- 16:8 It is better to live an upright life and have few possessions ("little"), than to be corrupt and have "great income." The reason is that what really matters and satisfies in life is God's approval and fellowship, not the abundance of one's possessions (Luke 12:15). Upright Naboth lived simply but was happy, whereas King Ahab was rich and wicked, and he was miserable (1 Kings 21).
- 16:9 Naomi exemplifies this truth (Ruth 1:21).
- "People frequently think they are having their own way, when in reality the Lord is leading them with 'bit and bridle,' through strange paths, for their discipline and blessing at last [cf. Jer. 10:23]."²

Several proverbs follow that deal with kings (i.e., rulers and leaders; vv. 10-15).

"What is said of the king in these verses generally echoes what is said of God elsewhere. This reflects the notion that the king is God's

¹Delitzsch, 1:339.

²Ironside, p. 196.

- representative and intermediary, especially in dispensing justice and maintaining social order. This reflects the ideal view of kingship found in Psalms 72 and 101."¹
- 16:10 A king's edict becomes law for his people.² His ordinances are the will of God for them (unless he commands contrary to God's revealed will; cf. Acts 4:19-20). Consequently, it is very important that the ruler not err in his judgment.³ Moses, Israel's great law-giver, was careful to do all that the LORD commanded him (Exod. 19:7; et al.).
- 16:11 Commercial justice (equity; fair business practice) is important to God, as well as legal justice (v. 10; cf. 11:1). Laban is notorious for having cheated Jacob many times (Gen. 31:36-42).
- "Read in the context of the cluster of royal proverbs, Prov 16:11 alludes to the king's duty to oversee weights and measures."⁴
- 16:12 It is especially bad for leaders and rulers to be wicked (or "commit wicked acts"), because the very foundation of fairness is doing what is right ("righteousness"). This proverb is a statement of obligation, not fact.⁵ Wicked King Manasseh was responsible for Judah going into captivity, because he was so evil (2 Kings 24:3).
- 16:13 The prophet Nathan spoke what was right when he confronted King David about his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, but the fact that Nathan remained a court prophet indicates that David respected him for doing it (2 Sam. 12).
- 16:14 Anyone who can "appease" the wrath of a leader is "wise," because a leader's wrath can do much damage to many people. Jonathan once pacified King Saul's anger against David (1 Sam. 19:6). Remember also

¹Adams, p. 909.

²See E. W. Davies, "The Meaning of *qesem* in Prv 16:10," *Biblica* 61 (1980):554-56, for the meaning of "divine verdict" (i.e., oracle).

³See W. Lee Humphreys, "The Motif of the Wise Courtier in the Book of Proverbs," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 177-90.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 615.

⁵Ibid.

King Ahasuerus' decree against the Jews, in Esther's day, and how she appealed him (Esth. 8—9).

"... if the king is angry, it is as if a troop of messengers or angels of death went forth to visit with death him against whom the anger is kindled ..."1

16:15 When rulers smile on those under their care, conditions are as beneficial and refreshing as "spring rain." Their favorable attitude promotes life and well-being. The beginning of Solomon's reign was such a period of blessing and prosperity for the Israelites (1 Kings 8:66).

16:16 "Wisdom" and "understanding" are more valuable than "gold" and "silver" (cf. 8:10, 19). People who give their lives to pursue what God considers wise, and to understand what He has revealed, rather than pursuing worldly treasure, live out the truth of this proverb—as Barnabas and Paul did. Daniel was one who pursued divine wisdom and knowledge and became rich (Dan. 5:11). The false "wisdom" that does not begin with the fear of God, and does not depart from evil, is a Satanic counterfeit that should be avoided (cf. Col. 2:8-12).

"Wisdom has inestimable superiority to precious metals because it bestows spiritual virtues along with material benefits (see 3:13-18). Wealth without wisdom is vulgar and greedy and/or may be due to ruthless individualism."2

16:17 The person who purposes to shun evil sets out on a journey that is similar to the person who travels a wide, smooth road ("highway," Heb. *mesillah*, a roadway that has been built up in some way, though not necessarily paved, thus creating a better roadbed than a simple cleared dirt path).3 If he stays faithful to his course, he prolongs ("protects") "his life." The implication is that if he abandons it or deviates from it, he will perish. Daniel is again a good illustration of such a person, as we can see from his youthful commitments and long perseverance (Dan. 1; 6).

16:18 Haman is a classic example of "pride" preceding a fall (Esth. 5:9-14; 7). The Edomites' "haughty spirit" drew Obadiah's prophetic curse (Obad.),

¹Delitzsch, 1:343.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 25.

³Adams, p. 910.

which was fulfilled in time. The Pharaoh of the Exodus, King Ben-hadad, King Sennacherib, King Nebuchadnezzar, and King Herod Agrippa I are also examples of proud rulers who stumbled and were destroyed.

"It is when one sees pride in another that its hideousness is clearly revealed. How often we will complacently tolerate in ourselves what, when we behold it in some one [*sic* someone] else, fills us with disgust."¹

16:19 "It is better to be humble," in God's sight, than to be rich. The reason is that the poor and humble realistically understand their true place in relation to God, but the proud and the rich more often do not. Jesus illustrated this truth with his story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The boasts of Goliath, the arrogance of Absalom, the pride of King Ahab, and the egotism of Haman also illuminate this proverb.

"Poverty and humility are natural allies, and impious pride goes with ill-gotten gain."²

Verses 20 through 24 deal with "the Word," "words," and "wisdom."

16:20 "The word" in view must be the divine word, in view of the parallel reference to "the LORD" in the second line. It is through His Word that God provides guidance to what is truly "good." Paying attention to what God has said implies trust in Him, and that leads to all kinds of blessings. The remarkable obedience of Moses to what God told him to do, and the strong trust in the LORD that Abraham demonstrated, show the truth of this couplet.

16:21 Presumably the "wise in heart" will use "sweetness of speech." That seems to be the thought linking the two lines of this proverb. Two things will be characteristic of such a person: He or she will rightly enjoy a reputation as a discerning person, and his or her words will persuade others. Solomon developed a reputation for being a wise man, which the Queen of Sheba acknowledged (1 Kings 10:6-7). And the Apostle Paul persuaded many people with his speeches (2 Cor. 5:11).

16:22 "Understanding" (good sense) is a resource for life for a wise person. But his "folly" is a resource of harsh and painful discipline for a fool. Thus a

¹Ironside, p. 199.

²McKane, p. 499.

person's wisdom or lack of it determines his or her prospects in life. Proverbs has little that is positive to say about a fool. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's understanding of God and His will proved to be a source of life for them (Dan. 3). King Saul's foolish choices kept resulting in his own sufferings—one after another.

"It is highly unlikely that Solomon would accept the idea that all men are created equal and thus deserve education at government expense."¹

"The wise know they are ignorant, so they keep on learning."²

- 16:23 What is in "the heart of the wise" person affects what he or she says and makes that person's words more influential ("adds persuasiveness"). Deborah's words to Barak illustrate this point (Judg. 4:8-9).
- 16:24 Words that are pleasing to hear are like "sweet" honey to the taste buds. They also have a "healing" effect, in that they calm and settle one down—a condition that is conducive to good health. Abigail's words to David had this effect on him (1 Sam. 25:23-35).
- 16:25 This proverb repeats the one in 14:12, for emphasis, which see.
- 16:26 As the desire for food motivates one to work, so all of one's desires and appetites propel him to productive activity. One might think that "hunger," which is uncomfortable, is a bad thing, but really it has a beneficial effect. Therefore one should not despise what is distasteful (like hunger), because it can lead on to what is good and profitable. Job's trials appeared to him at first to be unbearable, but they had a beneficial outcome.

"It is because of his desire to be satisfied with the fruits of his toil that the laborer pursues his occupation. His appetite craves it of him, and so he presses on in his service. This is as God ordained when the fall had shut man out of the garden of delight, and in the sweat of his face he

¹Alden, p. 129.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1055.

was commanded to eat his bread. Wealth gotten without labor is generally a very dangerous acquisition."¹

The key word "person" (Heb. 'ys, or man) unites verses 27 through 29, and this theme continues in verse 30. These proverbs describe three types of scoundrels: the worthless person (v. 27), the perverse person (v. 28), and the lawless person (vv. 29-30).²

16:27 The person in view here ("a worthless person") is not a whistle-blower, or an investigative reporter who legitimately exposes evil, but one who without reason stirs up mischief for others (cf. 11:13; 17:9). He is like a flamethrower that scorches people by using rabble-rousing words to set fire (cf. James 3:5-6). The unbelieving Jews who ran Paul out of Thessalonica behaved this way (Acts. 17:5-9). In our day, activists for various causes sometimes do this. Their opposites are peacemakers.

16:28 The point of this proverb is similar to the one in the previous verse. Someone who unnecessarily spreads information that causes strife is a twisted person, not an upright person. A "perverse" person is one who turns things upside down. People who pass on untrue information about other people can ruin the most intimate relationships ("close friends" or partners). Gossip and slander can have devastating results (cf. 10:18; Ps. 31:13; 1 Tim. 3:11). Doeg the Edomite told King Saul that he had seen David at Nob, and this led to much strife, ill feeling, and death (1 Sam. 22:9-19).

16:29 Watch out for violent people, who often have "magnetic personalities," because they have the ability to enlist others, who would otherwise not be attracted, to participate in their unworthy plots. King Jehoshaphat erred here when he allied with King Ahab by marriage (2 Chron. 18:1), and again when he became an ally of wicked King Ahaziah (2 Chron. 20:35-37).

16:30 Likewise the winking of the eye, often behind the back of the intended victim, signals that the person winking does not really mean what he is saying but is deceiving and is up to no good (cf. 6:13). Therefore one is wise to note these warning signals and suspect something bad. This proverb advances the thought of the previous one. By offering Jacob the

¹Ironside, p. 201.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 621.

blood-soaked tunic of Joseph, the brothers hinted at Joseph's death (Gen. 37:31-33).

"... the biting of the lips is the action of the deceitful, and denotes scorn, malice, knavery."¹

16:31 Often evil people live to be old and their hair turns white (or "gray"). But characteristically the godly live longer, and when they have white hair, it is as a "crown of glory" on their heads for being righteous (cf. 3:16; 20:29).

"It is not old age in itself that is commended in 16:31. Rather, the focus is on what the grey hair symbolizes, a life lived in righteousness."²

"Riotous living in youth generally means decrepitude in middle age, and premature death. Temperance and righteousness tend to strength of body and length of days."³

Moses and Caleb both received honor for their righteousness in their old age. And we may assume, because of their advanced years, that their hair turned white, though that is unknown for sure (Deut. 34:7; Josh. 14:11).

16:32 It is harder, but "better," to master one's "anger" and rule one's own "spirit," than it is to master many other people. The reason it is harder is that our own desires are frequently stronger than the antagonism that we face from others. The reason it is better is that if one cannot master his or her passions, that one is vulnerable to mastery by others. Jesus demonstrated remarkable self-mastery during His unjust trials, as did Paul during his.

"Behold, a greater than Alexander or Caesar is here."⁴

"A bad temper is often excused on the ground of natural infirmity, but it is rather the evidence of unjudged pride and impatience. 'Learn of Me,' said Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' [Matt. 11:29]. The meek man is not a

¹Delitzsch, 1:350.

²Habtu, p. 797. Bold font omitted.

³Ironside, p. 203.

⁴Henry, p. 763.

spiritless man, but he is slow to anger. He can be righteously stirred when occasion requires, but not when it is his own dignity that is in question. 'Add to patience self-control' [2 Pet. 1:6?] is a word for us all. It is generally a sign of weakness when one allows himself to become angry and excited in the face of opposition."¹

"This is a proverb that is constantly quoted, and very little believed. If men only recognized that there is more valor and heroism in self-control than in doughty [fearless] deeds which others acclaim in song and story, how different our world would be."²

16:33 However, the LORD controls the course of events ultimately, not one's self-mastery (cf. v. 32). Casting lots was a common way to determine the proper course of action to take in ancient times. Often "the lot" was a stone, held in the folds of one's garment above the waist: in the "lap."³ People still seek divine guidance though omens of various kinds. But there is no such thing as chance; God determines how things will turn out. He controls how thrown dice turn up.

We can see this clearly in the story of Jonah, especially where the sailors cast lots to determine who was responsible for the storm (Jonah 1:7; cf. Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; Josh. 7:16-18; 18:10; 1 Sam. 14:41; Acts 1:26). The Book of Esther also records the casting of lots, which turned out in favor of the Jews in spite of Haman's plot.

"God has freedom to use or not use the lot, but He will see to it that His will is done. Thanks to the completion of Scripture, the example of Christ, the witness of the Spirit, and the wisdom of fellow Christians, we have better ways of finding God's will than dropping a marked stone into our laps."⁴

¹Ironside, p. 204.

²Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 284.

³Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 37.

⁴Hubbard, p. 241.

2. Peacemakers and troublemakers ch. 17

17:1 We have heard the wisdom in this proverb before (cf. 15:16-17). Here the point is the same, but the emphasis is on the value of tranquility ("quietness") as opposed to "strife." A simple meal at home is better than "feasting" with a multitude, where there is apt to be turmoil. It is better to live in peace than to party, though there is a time for both (Eccles. 3:4).

"What counts is the mood not the menu."¹

Illustrations abound: God sent Moses out of busy Egypt into the quiet Midianite desert to prepare him for his special task (Exod. 2). Elijah appeared out of nowhere to upset the busy court of Ahab and Jezebel, and then took refuge near a remote brook (1 Kings 17). Daniel had to be summoned from apparently private quarters to appear at Belshazzar's feast with the enemy already at the door (Dan. 5). The Corinthian Christians had turned the Lord's Supper into a feast, but Paul urged them to celebrate it more thoughtfully, and to eat at home (1 Cor. 11:17-22).

"A church can have a lot of meetings, a lot of organization, and a tremendous amount of activity, but all of this may cause a great deal of confusion and frustration."²

17:2 In King Jeroboam I of Israel we have an example of a servant—he was Solomon's servant (1 Kings 11:26)—ruling "over a son": Solomon's son Rehoboam. Jeroboam was able to gain ascendancy over Rehoboam through his wisdom, and Rehoboam is infamous for acting "shamefully" by not following the counsel of his elders. Jeroboam shared in the leadership of his brethren: God's people.

Since a dependable servant—Abraham's servant is another example—is to be preferred over a misbehaving son, we should be careful to give responsibility to people based on their ability rather than their family connections.

17:3 As precious metals are subjected to intense heat in a "furnace," in order to refine impurities out of them, so the LORD subjects His saints to fiery trials in order to free us from the base things of the world and to purify us

¹Ibid., p. 270.

²McGee, 3:58.

(cf. James 1:1-18; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Job is the classic example of this truth (Job; cf. Dan. 3:19-26; Mal. 3:3).

17:4 When a person's heart is evil, he or she readily "listens to" lying "wicked lips" and an evil "destructive tongue." In contrast, when a person's heart is godly, he or she tends to reject untruthful and hateful speech. "Birds of a feather flock together." The wicked Judahites of Jeremiah's day gladly welcomed the false prophets and arrogant priests (Jer. 5:30-31).

17:5 Similarly, God will punish the person who takes pleasure in ("rejoices at") the misfortune of others (cf. 14:21). God promised to punish the Edomites because they rejoiced at the sufferings of the Israelites (Obad. 12-16). Job's friends mocked him even though his poverty was something that God endorsed. By mocking Job, they were virtually criticizing God, because God was ultimately responsible for Job's condition.

"The poor, as a man, and as poor, is the work of God, the creator and governor of all things; thus, he who mocketh the poor, mocketh Him who called him into existence, and appointed him his lowly place."¹

17:6 "Grandchildren" are like a crowning gift to grandparents, assuming they are honorable, which this proverb assumes, otherwise they would not be compared to a "crown." In this proverb Solomon pictured grandchildren gathered around their grandfather like his crown. Likewise sons take pride in their fathers, especially if they are admirable. Both lines encourage honorable behavior. Abraham's numerous grandchildren certainly glorified him as "the father of a multitude" (the meaning of his name; Gen. 17:5), as did Jacob's grandsons: Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Gen. 48:8-22). And one of Solomon's greatest glories was his father David.

Many grandparents have felt like J. Vernon McGee said he felt, undoubtedly with tongue in cheek: "If I had known how wonderful grandchildren can be, I would have had them before I had my children!"²

17:7 A profound utterance ("excellent speech"), spoken by "a fool," is discordant ("not fitting"), because it is out of harmony with his character. Likewise, falsehood spoken by one looked up to is equally repugnant.

¹Delitzsch, 1:355.

²McGee, 3:60.

There should be consistency between character and speech. We cringe when we read that Abraham, "the father of the faithful," lied about his relationship to his wife (Gen. 20:1-13). Observers similarly were bewildered when Saul behaved like a prophet (1 Sam. 10:10-12).

"When Jimmy Carter, as a presidential candidate, promised never to lie to the people, he had grasped the irreplaceable importance of truthfulness as a duty of government."¹

17:8 The owner of the bribe in this proverb is the person who gives it. A bribe is an effective tool. It works like a charm.

"This seems to praise bribes, but it probably describes a course of behavior that seems valuable but is really destructive (14.12; 16.2)."²

This proverb is not advocating bribery, only acknowledging that money talks. The proverb describes reality. We need to be aware of a bribe's powerful influence. God's view of bribery becomes clear in 17:15 and 23.³

"In Proverbs' view, and in the ancient view generally, gifts are illicit only when used to wrong ends (17:23)."⁴

Haman's "gift" to King Artaxerxes effectively won the king's support of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (Esth. 3:7-13).

17:9 When we minimize the mistakes of others, rather than drawing attention to them, we provoke "love" in the heart of the person whom we protect, and perhaps onlookers. God has covered our sins with the blood of Christ, and we love Him for it (1 John 4:19). But if we tell someone's failings to others, we can lose even our closest friends, including the friend who made the mistake (cf. 10:12; 11:13; 25:23). When we do this, we take the part of "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10; i.e., Satan himself). Concealing an offense here does not mean ignoring it but refraining from broadcasting it. Nathan went directly to David with his confrontation; he

¹Hubbard, p. 253.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1464.

³Toy, p. 341.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 628.

did not advertise the king's sins publicly (2 Sam. 12). Sanballat, on the other hand, spread rumors about Nehemiah (Neh. 6).

"Silence is never more golden than when we refuse to make personal capital by gossiping about the failings of a friend."¹

17:10 A wise person stays open to the improvement that can come from correction by others. Abimelech responded wisely to Abraham's rebuke (Gen. 21:25-26), but foolish Herod Antipas I did not accept John the Baptist's correction (Luke 3:19).

"Chastise the fool severely, and he maintains his self-complacency still; but gently reprove a wise man, and he will take it to heart. The one is so thoroughly enamored of his own poor judgment that he can conceive of none more capable than himself. The other realizes his own limitations, in measure at least, and is thankful for advice and correction."²

"Five proverbs of dangerous men against whom one has to be on his guard [follow, in verses 11 through 15]."³

17:11 Almost all of the close to 100 references to a "rebellious" (Heb. *meri*) person in the Old Testament describe one who is willfully defiant against God.⁴ Cain is one example of such a person. The "cruel messenger" that God sends to judge such a person could be his or her ruler, God's representative, or death. In Joab's case the "cruel messenger" was Benaiah, King Solomon's commander-in-chief (1 Kings 2:28-34).

17:12 A foolish person who is acting foolishly ("a fool in his foolishness") is more dangerous than a mother bear that has been robbed of her cubs. So it is wise to avoid such people. Abner learned this lesson the hard way when Joab lashed out against him and killed him (2 Sam. 3:26-27).

¹Hubbard, p. 265.

²Ironside, p. 213.

³Delitzsch, 1:360.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 52.

"Fools are not only a nuisance, they are dangerous."¹

17:13 Jesus taught His disciples to return good for evil (Matt. 5:43-45). But the person who "returns evil for good" can count on evil hounding his household from then on. David experienced this after he returned evil for Uriah's good service.

17:14 Not only should one avoid a raging fool (v. 12), but he or she should not provoke his pent-up anger in the first place. To do so is like digging a small hole in a dam ("letting out water"). It will only lead to a larger hole and greater damage. This proverb counsels avoiding quarrels: little grievances that can easily lead to greater conflicts. David here provides a positive example: He wisely ignored those who repaid his good with evil, and he waited on the LORD (Ps. 38:12-15).

17:15 The crooked judge is particularly in view in this proverb, but the principle applies to all people (cf. Isa. 5:20). Pilate justified Barabbas and condemned Jesus, all the while knowing that what he was doing was unjust (Matt. 27:24-26).

"Justice, at bottom, is not just a matter of custom or culture, of law or regulation, of power or authority. It is an expression of God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. Failure to maintain it—whether in ancient Israel or modern America—is to profane the heavenly Father's hallowed name."²

17:16 The idea here is that it is foolish for a fool to try to buy wisdom when he does not have the sense to comprehend it,³ or does not intend to follow it. Why go to school and pay good money for an education if you do not plan to put into practice what you learn? Foolish Simon Magus senselessly tried to buy the ability to bestow God's free gift of His Spirit (Acts 8:18-19).

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1464.

²Hubbard, p. 247.

³McKane, p. 505.

"It is possible to be educated and to have no heart for truth, for truth has a moral dimension which education cannot provide."¹

17:17 In contrast to the fools in the previous verses, this proverb praises the value of true friends. Jonathan was such a friend to David. The greatest example of this proverb's truth must be the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both "friend" and "brother" to believers.

"A friend rejoices and weeps with you (Rom. 12:15); a relative functions more as a safety net."²

"Foul-weather friends are the only ones worth having. More important to the point of the proverb, they are the only ones worth being. The text is not about gaining a stalwart friend. It is about being one."³

17:18 This is another proverb that warns against the danger of assuming the financial obligations of someone else (cf. 6:1-5; 11:15; 22:26). Reuben and Judah did this for Benjamin (Gen. 42:37; 44:32), and Paul did it for Onesimus (Phile. 18-19), but all of them had counted the cost and were prepared to take the consequences. There are times when assuming the debts of others may be advisable. But if one does this without counting the cost, both immediate and long range, he is a fool.

17:19 By transgressing God's will a person demonstrates that he cares nothing about "strife," because strife will certainly descend on him for his willfulness. Likewise, by elevating himself in pride a person demonstrates that he cares nothing about "destruction," because destruction inevitably falls on the proud. Making "his doorway high" does not mean opening it, but building a higher, more splendid door for the sake of impressing others.⁴ This practice was common in the ancient Near East. Just as a person "who loves wrongdoing" sets himself up for strife, so the person who loves to display his wealth is setting himself up for destruction. His door publicizes his wealth and attracts the interest of burglars. Examples of people who glorified themselves and so brought destruction on

¹Larsen, p. 189.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 57.

³Hubbard, p. 267.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 634.

themselves include Shebna (Isa. 22:15-19), Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:13-19), and Haman (Esther).

Some interpreters take the "doorway" figuratively:

"... the gate is the mouth, and so to make it high is to say lofty things—he brags too much (see 1 Sam 2:3; Prov 18:12; 29:23)."¹

17:20 Again the connection between heart ("mind") and speech ("language") are noted in this proverb. Just as perverted thinking leads to bad ends, so does corrupt talk. We can see both perverted thinking and corrupt talk in King Hanun's response to King David, and the bad consequences that came upon the Ammonites therefrom (2 Sam. 10).

17:21 The "fool" not only brings about his own ruin (v. 20), but he also breaks the hearts of his parents (cf. v. 25). Absalom had this effect on David (2 Sam. 18:33)

17:22 Having spoken of "sorrow" (v. 21), Solomon next spoke of joy (cf. 15:13, 15). Joy in the heart is "good medicine" to the body. Conversely, no joy has a negative effect on one's physical health. Modern science has demonstrated the truth of this proverb. Mental disposition can affect a person's physical health. The writer of Psalm 116 contrasted his different mental states between when he was occupied with himself and with the LORD.

"... the difference between exhilaration and depression depends more on a person's spiritual resources than on his circumstances (cf. Acts 16:25)."²

"God wants us to have a merry heart. He wants us to have a big time! Our fellowship at church should be a place of fun. We should laugh and rejoice and praise God when we go to church."³

17:23 The taking of "a bribe" identifies a "wicked" person for what he is, and it has the potential of perverting justice. The "inside pocket" was a hidden

¹Ross, p. 1019.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 61.

³McGee, 3:61.

pocket, and so this bribe was given secretly. Felix kept Paul in prison for two years hoping that the apostle would give him a bribe, and by doing so he perverted justice (Acts 24:26).

17:24 A person of understanding concentrates on wisdom, but a fool lacks concentration. The fool's mind roams everywhere. Paul warned Timothy about teachers who taught "strange doctrines." They did not concentrate on God's Word but became distracted by "myths and endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:3-4).

"The eyes of the *mebin* [discerning person] are riveted on the teacher, for he is fascinated by her instruction and is a picture of unbroken concentration. The *kesil* [fool] has the wandering eye and the vacant distracted mind, and his condition is expressed by a hyperbole ["the ends of the earth", namely, anywhere]. As a student who is hearing nothing of what his teacher says might let his eyes rove to every corner of the classroom, so the fool who is inattentive to the instruction of Wisdom is said to have his eyes on the ends of the earth."¹

17:25 This proverb is very similar to the one in verse 21, but it adds that grievous distress comes to the parents of "a foolish son." In Israel sons who persisted in stubborn rebellion against their parents were subject to stoning (Deut. 21:18-20). Nadab and Abihu acted like fools when they offered "strange fire" before the LORD, and their father Aaron, and doubtless their mother, grieved over their consequent deaths (Lev. 10).

17:26 It is "not good" to punish a good person ("the righteous") when he or she does not deserve it. Neither is it good to punish blameless leaders ("the noble") for being upright. It is an age-old trick for guilty people to blame the innocent in order to divert blame from themselves. Such behavior is another perversion of justice. Ishmael assassinated Gedaliah, and then massacred 80 men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, in order to conceal his crime (Jer. 41:1-7).

¹McKane, p. 504.

17:27 David demonstrated a person who "withholds his words" and has a "cool spirit" when he refused to react to Shimei's cursing of him, and when he refused to let Abishai take vengeance on Shimei (2 Sam. 16:1-13).

"The first line recommends bridling of the tongue, in contrast to inconsiderate and untimely talk; the second line recommends coldness, *i.e.* equanimity [composure] of spirit, in contrast to passionate heat."¹

"Control of speech is a prime mark of wisdom and understanding. Those who have mastered this art possess a '*calm* [lit., "cool," as in the "cold water" of 25:25] *spirit*'; no steam or smoke obscures their speech. They say what they mean and mean what they say."²

17:28 This proverb advances the thought of the previous one. Not only is it "wise" to restrain one's speech, but other people will consider him wise who does so. Elisha's lack of verbal response, when the sons of the prophets told him that God would remove Elijah from his presence that day, gained Elisha a reputation for wisdom (2 Kings 2:3, 15).

3. Friendship and folly ch. 18

18:1 Evidently the intent of this proverb is: One who separates himself from other people does so because he wants his own way and does not want others to restrain him (cf. Jude 19). Such an approach runs counter to sound wisdom because we all need input from other people in order to make wise decisions. It is unwise to be antisocial in the schismatic sense of that word (*i.e.*, causing division; cf. Gen. 13:11).³ This proverb seems to describe Lot, who evidently separated from Abraham in order to live as he pleased in Sodom.

"... unfriendliness and unreasonableness are inseparable."⁴

¹Delitzsch, 1:372.

²Hubbard, p. 219.

³Toy, p. 354.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 69.

- 18:2 When the fool should be listening and learning from others, he is speaking and trying to impress them with how much he knows. The religious leaders in Jesus' day, for the most part, fit this picture.
- "It is the simpleton who is always babbling."¹
- "A compulsive talker never listens, only pausing to plan what he will say next. Every speech confirms what a fool he is."²
- 18:3 The wicked fool brings the "contempt" of his community on himself by his wickedness, and his contempt for the godly results in his suffering shame and "dishonor." Most people disrespect those who are wicked and have no respect for the godly. Sometimes the LORD judges these people by making them a disgrace (cf. Jer. 24:9; 29:18; Ezek. 5:14; Hos. 12:14). Jeremiah announced that Pashhur would die in captivity for this wickedness (Jer. 20:1-6). He disrespected and taunted Pashhur for his wickedness.
- "Some persons cause happiness wherever they go; others, *whenever* they go."³
- 18:4 Delitzsch considered this proverb an integral distich and commented:
- "... this leads us to consider what depths of thought, what riches of contents, what power of spiritual and moral advancement, may lie in the words of a man."⁴
- Stephen's Spirit-filled speech before his adversaries contained such wise words (Acts 7), as did many of Peter's and Paul's speeches in Acts.
- 18:5 This synthetic proverb warns against giving special favors ("partiality") to the wicked. The converse is to not give the righteous their just deserts. The assumed context is the administration of justice in court. This is one of many proverbs that condemn unwarranted favoritism (cf. James 2:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:21). Pilate showed partiality to guilty Barabbas over guiltless

¹Ironside, p. 223.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1057.

³McGee, 3:62.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:4.

Jesus (Luke 23). Felix and Festus thrust aside innocent Paul to favor the guilty Jews—guilty of falsely accusing Paul (Acts 24—26).

18:6 A fool's words frequently cause strife and violence (cf. v. 7; 26:20-22). The positive alternative to this proverb is in 17:27 (cf. 17:28). Remember the accusations of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Moses (Num. 16).

18:7 Not only do a fool's words cause trouble (v. 6), and can lead to the "ruin" of other people, but they also cause the fool trouble, and they lead to his own "ruin." People who do not respect the LORD's ways often resort to lies to achieve their objectives. But lies have a way of returning to roost and bringing shame, contempt, and judgment on those who tell them. Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter, and to the Holy Spirit, and suffered death for it (Acts 5:1-11). Even if the fool does not lie, his words usually cause him or her trouble, because the fool does not live and speak in the sphere of God's Word, which is ultimate reality.

"This verse is a drastic and dramatic description of the price the fool will have to pay for his unbridled speech: it is a deadly trap; see also vv 20-21."¹

18:8 Gossip is in view in this proverb. Gossip damages other people. Secret information about others is as appealing as delicious food is to some people, and they greedily devour it.

"This phrase ["the innermost parts of the body"] (lit. 'rooms/chambers of the belly') refers to the notion, also common in Egyptian literature, that the belly is the place where thoughts and words are stored before they are spoken."²

The Queen of Sheba could not resist the temptation to visit Solomon, since the gossip that she had heard about him was so fascinating (1 Kings 10:1).

"Since gossip is so highly contagious because the human heart has no resistance to it, the wise quarantine it by not

¹Murphy, p. 135.

²Adams, p. 912.

repeating it (see 16:28; 17:9; 26:20) and by avoiding the company of tale-bearers (20:19)."¹

18:9 The negligent person is as destructive, in his own way, as the deliberately destructive person.

"The latter wastes his goods, the former wastes his time. Both come to poverty, as did the prodigal of Luke 15; and the disobedient son of Matt. 21:30 was clearly on the same road."²

"The lazy and negligent man not only fails to contribute to the work, he impairs and harms it."³

"The verse also applies to someone who is not properly doing a job that needs to be done."⁴

18:10 Here we find the defense against the destroyers of verse 9. The "name" of the LORD is the person of the LORD.

"Throughout the ancient Near East, the name of a god was thought to possess a form of magical power. Knowledge of the god's name, and especially its use in incantations and rituals, was thought to invoke the power of a god through sympathetic magic and thus grant the worshiper a measure of influence over the god. The OT employs similar language but with no trace of magical elements. In the OT, to speak of the 'name' of God is simply to speak of God himself; doing so does not give the one who invokes it any ability to control or manipulate God himself."⁵

Those who seek safety from destroyers can find refuge by turning to Yahweh as their "strong tower." The residents of Thebez found their refuge in their town's physically strong tower when Abimelech attacked them (Judg. 9:50-57).

¹Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 74.

²Ironside, p. 230.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 641.

⁴Habtu, p. 799.

⁵Adams, p. 912.

- 18:11 An alternative refuge now presents itself. "Wealth" does provide some security, but one may falsely imagine that it is a stronger safeguard against calamity than it really is, "as anyone who has faced a terminal illness knows."¹ The rich fool that Jesus described unwisely thought that his wealth guaranteed his safety, but it did not (Luke 12:16-21; cf. James 1:10-11; 5:1-6).
- 18:12 This proverb connects with the preceding one about the rich person who trusts in his or her riches (cf. 16:18a; 15:33b). A "haughty" heart, whether it is trusting in money or anything else but the LORD, is headed for a fall (humiliation). Conversely, the humble, who have a realistic perception of their place in the scheme of things, will be exalted. Having too-high expectations results in disappointment, but having realistic expectations leads to encouraging "honor."
- King Uzziah had too high of an opinion of himself, and the LORD humbled him (2 Chron. 26:16). In contrast, his son King Jotham became mighty because he humbled himself before the LORD (2 Chron. 17:6).
- 18:13 The previous proverb teaches the need to be teachable. This one also illustrates that need. It brings to mind contestants in a quiz program. Sometimes they answer a question too soon, trying to beat their opponents, before they hear the whole question. They not only lose, but they suffer "shame" or embarrassment for proceeding too quickly. The better course is to get all the information one needs before making a decision. David appears to have "jumped the gun" when he concluded that Mephibosheth had been unfaithful to him (2 Sam. 16:1-4; 19:24-30).
- 18:14 The human "spirit," aided by God's Spirit, can endure "sickness," including the soul sickness of disappointment (as in v. 13). A "broken spirit" suggests depression.

"If the spirit is borne down to powerless and helpless passivity, then within the sphere of the human personality there is no other sustaining power that can supply its place."²

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 77.

²Delitzsch, 2:10.

"One's frame of mind has powerful psychosomatic effects."¹

This is one reason that believers are exhorted to "Rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1; 4:4). Nehemiah believed that rejoicing in the LORD was the secret to strength (Neh. 8:10).

18:15 Rather than being overly self-assured (v. 13), the prudently wise person seeks out more ("acquires") "knowledge." He is more impressed with what he does not know than with what he does know. Ezra was such a person, and he looked in the right place for knowledge: the Law of the LORD (Ezra 7:10).

18:16 "Gift" in this proverb is not necessarily a bribe. The Hebrew word here (*mattan*, cf. 15:27; 21:14) is not the same as the one translated "bribe" in 17:8 and 23 (*sohad*). It can be a generous courtesy. *Mattan* means what a person gives to someone else (cf. Gen. 43:11).

"While this is not necessarily a bribe that perverts a judgment, neither is it without influence on the formation of opinion. It is open to abuse, as the 'lobbying' in current affairs in almost every modern country demonstrates."²

"What is encouraged are acts of courtesy and thoughtfulness that pay honor to important persons and mark the donor as a person of taste, breeding, consideration, and tact, worthy of association with the prominent citizens of the land."³

Waltke wrote that *mattan* describes a gift given for selfish reasons to gain an advantage over others, except in 19:6.⁴ But that does not seem to be its meaning in this verse. Therefore it seems legitimate to apply it to one's personal abilities (gifts) that he or she uses in the service of others, as well as to material presents. The Queen of Sheba's liberal giving put her in favor with King Solomon (1 Kings 10).

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1465.

²Murphy, p. 137.

³Hubbard, p. 254.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 81.

"... by liberal giving where duty demands it, and prudence commends it, one does not lose but gains, does not descend but rises; it helps a man over the difficulties of limited, narrow circumstances, gains for him affection, and helps him up from step to step."¹

18:17 This verse is another warning against making premature judgments (cf. v. 13). Get all the facts first. Do not rely on superficial research or limited information. The context here seems to be a judicial setting (cf. v. 5). This is the way things work in court. The prosecutor's "case" may seem strong ("right"), until the defense attorney has his say. Saul thought his case for offering the sacrifices was watertight, until Samuel started cross-examining him (1 Sam. 15:13-14).

"We must remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment."²

18:18 There is, however, a limit to what the judicial process can uncover (v. 17). Casting lots expressed a desire to obtain God's verdict, since He controls the casting of lots (16:33). This is counsel to strong people ("mighty ones"; e.g., soldiers) to settle their internal disputes ("quarrels") by seeking and following God's will, rather than by physical force. It is better to seek God's will, and to do it, than to "settle" disputes with fighting. King Hezekiah resorted to prayer, and the LORD took care of his enemy (2 Kings 19).

18:19 This proverb continues the theme of interpersonal conflicts (v. 18). Even though a barrier may exist between two people who have a close relationship ("brother"), Solomon hinted that restoration of fellowship is possible—albeit very difficult (cf. 17:14). Preceding proverbs advocated humility as a key factor in achieving harmony (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16). The difficulty that David and Absalom faced, when they wanted to restore fellowship, illustrates the truth of this proverb (2 Sam. 14:28).

"No tangles are so hard to straighten out as those in which brethren are concerned who once were knit heart to heart

¹Delitzsch, 2:11.

²Henry, p. 766.

in true affection. To win back a brother who has been offended is more difficult than to subdue a walled city."¹

18:20 The sense of this proverb is that we will have to be content to accept the consequences of what we say. "Satisfied" does not mean happy but filled. Yet "productive speech is satisfying."² We have to live with the consequences of what we say, so we should speak carefully. Jacob had to live with the consequences of what he said to his father when he stole his brother's blessing (Gen. 27—32). Positively, Paul enjoyed much personal satisfaction because of the preaching that he did, as reflected in many statements in his epistles.

"Eating one's own fruit (words) is an oxymoron; in other words, to satisfy one's hunger by what comes out of the mouth is an absurdity. The oxymoron forces the thought that whatever a person dishes out, whether beneficial or harmful, he himself will feed on to full measure through what his audience in return dishes out to him."³

18:21 Not only do we have to live with the consequences of what we say (v. 20), but what we say can have the power of life or death. The antecedent of "it" is "the tongue," and "its fruit" refers to "death and life."

"The 'it' must refer to 'the tongue,' but what does it mean to love the tongue? Perhaps it refers to those who love to hear themselves speak."⁴

This proverb is a warning to the talkative. Much talk will produce death and life, so be prepared for both if you talk a lot. Many words can produce much destruction as well as much blessing.

"Many a one had been his own death by a foul tongue, or the death of others by a false tongue; and, on the contrary, many a one has saved his life by a prudent gentle tongue, and saved the lives of others by intercession for them."⁵

¹Ironside, p. 236.

²Ross, p. 1028.

³Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 85.

⁴Longman, p. 359.

⁵Henry, p. 766.

"Contrast the false teachers of 2 Peter 2 with the ambassadors for Christ of 2 Cor. 5."¹

A new subject begins with 18:22 and goes through 19:7. Waltke called this section "Poverty, Wealth, and Companions."²

"The final three proverbs in this chapter all deal with relationships."³

18:22 The favor the LORD bestows is His blessing.

"The wording, especially in the Heb., strikingly resembles that of 8:35, and so suggests that after wisdom itself, the best of God's blessings is a good wife. 31:10 makes a similar comparison, putting her price, like wisdom's (8:11), above rubies."⁴

Not just any wife is "a good thing" though; only a good wife is (cf. 19:13, 14). Ruth was a model wife who brought great blessing to Boaz (Ruth 4:9-12). The wife described in Proverbs 31:10 through 31 is another good example of a good wife.

18:23 This contrast should be a warning to the rich. Whereas poor people often have to ask for things ("pleadings"), rich people often order others around ("answer defiantly"). Money may tempt people to act inhumanely (cf. James 2:6). Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant pictures both kinds of people that are mentioned in this proverb (Matt. 18:23-35).

18:24 The translation "A person of too many friends comes to ruin" (NASB) is more true to the Hebrew than "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (AV, cf. NKJV). Most modern English translations express the same interpretation as the NASB, though in a wide variety of ways. So this sentence is not an encouragement to be friendly, but it warns of the possibility of false friends.

Is it unwise to have many friends? No, but this proverb warns that if a person has many friends, the possibility is that some of them will be false friends (cf. Jer. 38:22).

¹Ironside, p. 238.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 93.

³Habtu, p. 799.

⁴Kidner, p. 130. Cf. Gen. 2:18.

"The significance of friends is found in their quality, not quantity."¹

Christians have often applied the second part of this verse to Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners (cf. John 15:12-15; Heb. 2:11, 14-18).² While that is certainly appropriate, Solomon's point was that in contrast to false friends (24a), some friends can be more faithful than our closest blood relatives. Such a friend is a true treasure. The good Samaritan was one (Luke 10:29-37), and Abraham's servant also proved to be such a friend (Gen. 24).

4. Further advice for pleasing God 19:1—22:16

As was true in chapters 10 through 15 of this book, this section (16:1—22:16) also becomes more difficult to outline as it progresses, because there are fewer groupings of proverbs.

- 19:1 This is one of two proverbs that contrast a "poor" person who has "integrity" with someone else (cf. 28:6). In this case, the contrast is with a rich fool who speaks lies. The poor man is better off, because God rewards integrity, and the rich fool is really the poorer of the two, because God punishes those who lack integrity and are "perverse in speech." The amount of his material wealth may suggest that the poor man is poor because God is punishing him, and the rich man is rich because God is blessing him. But in this case appearances are deceiving. Job's friends concluded that he must be a great sinner because God had taken away his wealth. But really he was a man of integrity, and God blessed him eventually (Job 42).
- 19:2 Ignorance may be bliss, but it is also dangerous. The second line of this proverb implies that the person making haste ("hurries his footsteps errs") is doing so in order to satisfy his greed. The argument is from the lesser to the greater. Moral ignorance is bad, but deliberate disregard of moral consequences is worse.³

¹Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 97.

²E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 468.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 98.

"Desires ungoverned by good sense propel one to rush in pursuit of their fulfillment. The point of the second line is not so much to condemn haste as to describe a danger: The frenetic [frantic] pursuit of wealth is likely to lead to sin."¹

In the case of David's dealings with Nabal, David was ignorant of the real situation, and God spared him from great sin by sending Abigail to warn him (1 Sam. 25). But later, David deliberately sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, fully knowing that what he was doing was wrong, and God punished him (2 Sam. 11).

19:3 King Uzziah's anger against the priests who rebuked him for burning incense on the altar of incense was really anger against the LORD. The LORD afflicted him with leprosy for his pride (2 Chron. 26:18-23). Jonah also struck out against the LORD in self-will (Jon. 1:3; 4:8-9).

"Instead of repenting of the sins that prompted the LORD to ruin him, the earthbound creature is so convinced that his sinful way of life is right that he storms against the LORD, holding him accountable for not granting what he thought, planned, and willed. His absurd raging against the LORD implies that he experienced ruin before reaching his goal and has recognized his misfortune."²

"Folly corrupts a man's behavior and he suffers the consequences; then he blames God."³

19:4 This proverb is similar to those in 14:20 and 19:7. Wealth attracts many so-called friends, but the "friends" of a poor person are likely to abandon him or her. This is another warning to evaluate your friends (cf. 14:20; 18:24). Job testified that, while he was affluent, many people deferred to him; but when he lost his wealth, those same people despised him (Job 29:21—30:1).

19:5 What one sows he or she will reap, in this life or the next (Gal. 6:7). Even if God does not punish some perjurers and liars before they die, He will

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 648.

²Waltke, *The Book ...31*, pp. 99-100.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 649.

nevertheless do so when they stand before Him at their judgment (Heb. 9:27).

"Though the primary setting is clearly legal, the principle applies to all speech."¹

The prostitute who lied to King Solomon about her son received punishment immediately (1 Kings 3:16-27). Jezebel died a violent death after having unjustly sentenced Naboth to a violent death (1 Kings 21:9-16; 2 Kings 9:10, 30-37). The false witnesses at Jesus' trial evidently escaped punishment temporarily (Matt. 26:59-66). At least, we do not read in Scripture that they were punished.

19:6 The implication of the influence of money continues from the previous verse. A person with a reputation for being "generous" will discover that many appeals for funds will come his way. Some lottery winners have discovered that they have very friendly "relatives" that they never knew existed. The men of Shechem were eager to intermarry with Jacob's family, so they could share Jacob's wealth (Gen. 34:23).

"This saying, like v 4, is sarcastic about friendship that is contaminated by money. Its didactic value lies in putting people on guard against the bogus friend."²

19:7 The first part of this verse is hyperbole (exaggeration to make a point but not meant to be taken literally). The point is that people avoid the poor—their relatives do, and even more, their friends do. Even his overtures of friendship are ineffective (7c). Joseph discovered this to be true after he interpreted the cupbearer's dream. The cupbearer "forgot" Joseph, probably because Joseph was in no position to help the cupbearer further (Gen. 40:23).

A collection of proverbs about wisdom follows through verse 15.

19:8 The person who obtains wisdom will preserve his life ("loves his own soul"), and the person who lives by what God has revealed as being true and real will prosper ("find good"). The Apostle Paul is proof of this proverb. Though he died a martyr's death, probably in his late 50s, he

¹Longman, p. 366.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 650.

lived through many experiences that would have killed most people (2 Cor. 11—12). He died at peace, rejoicing, and fulfilled (2 Tim. 4:7).

19:9 This proverb is almost identical to the one in verse 5. The only difference is that the one in verse 5 ends with a negative statement ("will not escape"), and this one ends with a positive one ("will perish"). There we learned that the perjurer will not escape, and here we learn what his doom will be. Judas Iscariot, who admitted to betraying "innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4), perished shortly thereafter—and forever (Matt. 27:5; John 17:12).

19:10 A life of pleasure and luxury is "not fitting for a fool," because he does not deserve these things. However sometimes fools do live in luxury, at least for a time—like Nabal (1 Sam. 25:2, 25, 37). Similarly, "excellent speech is not fitting for a fool" (17:7, and "honor is not fitting for a fool" (26:1; cf. 30:21-22).

The second line of this proverb presents another type of situation that is out of place: "a slave" ruling "over princes." Whereas this situation does turn out well occasionally, as in the case of Joseph (Gen. 47:14-20), it usually does not, as in the cases of King Jeroboam I (1 Kings 11:26) and King Zimri (1 Kings 16:9-18). Typically slaves are incompetent to rule. The Roman historian Tacitus described the Roman governor Felix (Act. 23:33) as practicing "every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of [a] king with all the instincts of a slave."¹

"In the ancient world, preservation of the existing social order was deemed desirable, while the breakdown of social norms was regarded as evidence of something gone fundamentally wrong with the world."²

19:11 Esau proved to be "slow to anger," and he overlooked Jacob's many offenses against him when he met Jacob returning from Paddan-aram (Gen. 33:4-9).

"An uncontrolled temper, manifested in hasty anger unjudged, bespeaks a man who has never learned, in the school of God, the great lesson of self-government. It is the

¹Tacitus, *The Histories*, 5:9.

²Adams, p. 913.

pompous, conceited pedant [i.e., a person who is excessively concerned with minor details and rules] who cannot overlook an injury done to him, but must vent his wrath upon the offender whenever an occasion presents itself. A man of sound judgment and discretion has learned to pass lightly over offences and seeming insults which would goad the one who is bereft of wisdom to intense indignation [cf. 14:29; 26:21]."¹

19:12 In contrast to those who are slow to anger (v. 11), "kings" can use their power to unleash "wrath" on those whom they do not favor. Conversely, a king's "favor" can result in great blessing. Therefore, this proverb counsels, avoid a ruler's fury and seek his favor (cf. 16:10-14). Joseph's Pharaoh demonstrated his fury against his chief baker and his favor to his chief cupbearer (Gen. 40).

19:13 A "foolish son" and a quarrelsome "wife" both make life miserable for a man. A foolish son destroys his father in the sense that he robs him of love, pleasure, and support (cf. 17:25). The wife who continually contends with her husband turns his home, where he expects to find tranquility, into a place of turmoil so that he cannot find rest. King Manasseh proved to be a foolish son (2 Kings 21:9-16), and Michal, Saul's daughter, is an example of a contentious wife (2 Sam. 6:16-23; 1 Chron. 15:29). Whereas this proverb uses a son and a wife as examples, the same could be said of a foolish daughter and a contentious husband.

"'Incessantly dripping eaves' invites the pun 'incessantly dripping Eves.'"²

19:14 "Fathers" can provide a physical inheritance of houses and riches for their children, but only "the LORD" can provide the greatest inheritance: a godly wife. Therefore it is wise to look to Him in prayer for this great gift. This proverb is not guaranteeing that every man who asks God to provide him with a godly wife will get one. But it credits the LORD, in contrast to the husband's human wisdom, for providing a godly wife when a man has one. "Praise God from who all blessings [including 'a prudent wife'] flow!" The story of how God provided prudent Rebekah for Isaac highlights

¹Ironside, pp. 245-46.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, pp. 107-8.

God's providential leading in their union (Gen. 24). The story of Ruth is another example (Ruth 2—4).

"Young men, this should tell you something. Do you want a good wife? The one who gives away good wives is not the father of the daughter. Many a father is glad to get rid of his daughter. But our Heavenly Father has a lot of good wives to give away. Keep in touch with Him, and He will lead you to the right one. He wants to give you the right kind of wife."¹

I can testify to that. When I was quite young I started asking God to give me a good wife—the best one for me. In time, He brought Mary and me together, even though she lived in New Jersey and I lived in Illinois. Since we have been married we have often marveled at how well suited we are to each other, and we thank God for bringing us together.

"An example of an associative sequence [of proverbs] is Prov 19:11-14. The importance of patience (v 11) calls to mind the king's wrath (v 12), which is the opposite of patience and a dangerous form of irritation. This leads into a proverb on an irritable wife (v 13), which in turn evokes a proverb on a virtuous one (v 14), which balances the negative picture."²

19:15 This proverb is one of many that warns against "laziness" (6:6, 9-11; 10:26; 13:4; 20:4; 24:33-34; 26:16; Cf. Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). Laziness is evil because it involves squandering a precious gift from God of which we are stewards, namely, time. Laziness is dangerous because it leads to worse things: idleness generally, and hunger potentially. In Jesus' parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-31), the son who told his father that he would go and work in his vineyard, but did not, was lazy.

"Once one chooses to be lazy, his lethargy is like a physical ailment that dulls him and throws him into a stupor."³

¹McGee, 3:66.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 480.

³*Ibid.*, p. 655.

19:16 "The commandment" in view is the commandment of God (cf. 6:23). The "soul" is the life. Normally people who live by God's instructions live longer than those who disregard them, though there are exceptions. Those who follow His instructions concerning salvation experience eternal life (keep their "soul"), but those who do not suffer eternal death ("will die"). Toward the end of his life Jacob said, "Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47:9). This was true because, for much of his life, Jacob had disregarded God's commandments. As the old saying goes: "God's Word will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from God's Word."

19:17 The widow of Zarephath was richly rewarded for ministering to Elijah in his distress, with an unfailing cruse of oil and an unending supply of meal (1 Kings 17:10-16). Those whom the LORD does not repay in this life will be compensated in the next (cf. Matt. 25:40). Peter did not have money to give the beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, but he gave him what he did have (Acts 3:6).

"Money and goods bestowed with loving pity on those in distress are not gone forever. He [the LORD] takes note of every mite, and makes Himself responsible to see that all shall be repaid; and we may be sure the interest will be greater far than could be realized in any other way."¹

19:18 If a parent does not discipline his child while there is hope of correcting him, he is really, though perhaps not consciously, expressing a willingness for him to die. A child's folly will lead to his death if his parents do not curb it with discipline.² Some parents allow their children to go astray out of neglect. This appears to have been the case with Eli and David, to some extent (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25; 2 Sam. 13—14). "Discipline" (Heb. *yasser*) includes chastisement (a severe rebuke or reprimand) as well as instruction.

"Better the child is corrected by a parent than by a law enforcement officer in a correctional institution."³

¹Ironside, p. 249.

²Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 110.

³Wiersbe, p. 105.

"The teacher should not seek correction as the object, but only as the means; he who has a desire after it, to put the child to death in the case of his guilt, changes correction into revenge, permits himself to be driven by passion from the proper end of correction, and to be pushed beyond its limits."¹

19:19 An uncontrolled temper will repeatedly send its owner into fresh trouble. The implication is that it is futile to bail such a person out of the trouble he gets himself into with his temper. King Saul is a classic example. He never learned to stop hating David, and his life went from bad to worse.

"Whereas the son is corrected by parental discipline, the hothead must be corrected by allowing the consequences of his own foibles to punish him. The wise father does not interfere in the operation of the cause-consequence of the divinely established penal and remedial moral order. Ironically, the person who 'rescues' the hothead becomes caught in the unhealthy dynamics of his way."²

"Repeated efforts of kindness are lost in ill-natured persons."³

This proverb is a strong argument for tough love. It is not loving to bail children out of the consequences of their actions, nor is it loving to control, or try to control, everything they do.

19:20 Not only do fathers need to discipline their sons (v. 18), but sons need to "listen" to the "advice" and "accept" the "discipline" of their fathers. A humble, teachable spirit, especially in one's youth, leads on to a life of wisdom. Moses gave Joshua good advice (Josh. 1:5-9), which Joshua heeded, and he acted wisely as a result.

19:21 People plan all kinds of things, but only what God approves comes to pass. He is sovereign and determines outcomes. Therefore we should be humble, but not fatalistic. Paul planned to go into Asia and Bithynia, but

¹Delitzsch, 2:30.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 113. Cf. Delitzsch, 2:31.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 468.

the Holy Spirit closed those doors and led him instead into Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

19:22 Character ("kindness" and truthfulness) is more valuable than riches in the long run. Unfortunately for him, Nabal thought the opposite (2 Sam. 25).

"A kindly, benevolent spirit appeals to all men, and charms by its unselfishness and thoughtfulness for others. But to promise large things while unable to perform them is reprehensible. It is far better to be poor and frankly admit one's inability to do what the heart might desire, than to promise largely and be at last proven untrustworthy."¹

19:23 This proverb highlights one of the psychological benefits of reverencing the LORD: sound sleep (cf. 14:27; Ps. 91:1). A bad conscience or unwarranted fears do not normally keep the God-fearer awake at night. And he or she knows that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). It seems that Peter was able to sleep in prison, with his trial before Herod on the calendar for the next day, because of his trust in the Lord (Acts 12:6).

"In Gen. 19 and in Judg. 19, we have stories of travelers who lodge for the evening in a strange town and face incredible evil, even though they have sought refuge in someone's home. These stories inform us that travel in the ancient world was not a secure matter, and the only sure recourse was Yahweh."²

19:24 This humorous and ironic proverb pictures a person so lazy that he cannot even lift his food from his plate to his mouth (cf. v. 15; 26:15). Perhaps his hands are cold and he prefers to keep them in his pockets rather than putting them to work feeding himself.³

"... most eating in the ancient Near East was done with the hand."⁴

¹Ironside, p. 253.

²Longman, p. 371.

³Henry, p. 768.

⁴Adams, p. 913. Bold font omitted.

The point is that a lazy person will bear the consequences of his own laziness. When Samson should have been fighting the LORD's enemies, he was lounging in the arms of a Philistine woman—and he died for it (Judg. 16). This warning is applicable to those who are too lazy to finish the projects they begin.¹

"The image in the first line is easily extended to negligence in all matters. Many opportunities for profit present themselves, but the sluggard refuses to make the slightest effort to take advantage of them."²

"The word of God is our food. I know Christians who will hold the Bible in their hands but are too lazy to read it."³

19:25 Punishing scoffers sends a helpful message to "the naive": Do not imitate this behavior. The fear of punishment does have a deterring effect on the naive. Rebuking a wise person also has a good result: It helps the wise to correct his behavior (to "gain knowledge"). The same advice also appears in 21:11.

"The sages never tire of affirming that it is part of wisdom to be open to correction."⁴

Paul instructed Timothy to correct the false teachers in Ephesus. Some of them were, hopefully, wise (1 Tim. 1:3-4), while others of them were evidently scoffers (1 Tim. 5:20).

19:26 Abuse of parents is in view in this proverb, not just disobedience to parents. It violates the fifth commandment: to honor one's parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1-3). Solomon promised shame and disgrace to the violator, which is the very opposite of honor (cf. Gal. 6:7).

In these "last days" (2 Tim. 3:1), it is increasingly common for sons and daughters to assault their parents, verbally and/or physically, and to drive them away rather than caring and providing for them in their later years (cf. Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for piously skirting their parental responsibilities (Matt. 15:4-7). Boaz provides a

¹Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 111.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 660.

³McGee, 3:67.

⁴Murphy, p. 146.

good example of one who cared for his mother-in-law Naomi, who may not have been the easiest person to live with, since she admitted to being bitter (Ruth 1:20-21).

Delitzsch believed that the recurrence of "father" and "son" in this verse signals the beginning of a new section of proverbs (cf. 10:1; 13:1; 15:20).¹

19:27 This proverb states negatively the idea expressed positively in verse 20 and elsewhere. Ceasing to persevere with good parental guidance will result in shame.

"It is not enough to heed wise advice one time: it is a continual process. The sage warns the son not to think that he will reach a point where no more instruction is necessary. Gathering wisdom is a lifelong process."²

"Without constant attention to wisdom depraved human beings unconsciously stray from it. Even Solomon, ancient Israel's paragon of wisdom, strayed when he ceased listening to his own proverbs ..."³

19:28 The first line of this proverb again warns against perjury, especially if it is motivated by contempt for the legal system. The perjurers in the lawsuit against Nabal were "worthless" (lit. "corrupt," Heb. *beliyya'al*) witnesses (1 Kings 21:13).

"... 28b means that wickedness, *i.e.* that which is morally perverse [perverted], is a delicious morsel for the mouth of the godless, which he eagerly devours; to practice evil is for him, as we say, '*ein wahrer Genuss*' [a true enjoyment]."⁴

19:29 God has ordained inevitable punishments ("beatings") for uncontrollable scoffers and fools. Sometimes His "judgments" come directly from Himself, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:32). Sometimes His "beatings" come indirectly through His human agents. Ezekiel explained that the sword, famine, wild beasts, and plagues were

¹Delitzsch, 2:35-36.

²Longman, p. 372.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 124.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:38.

Yahweh's tools in punishing the Judahites (Ezek. 14:21). In all cases, God is the ultimate source of the punishment.

- 20:1 The sage who wrote this proverb personified "wine" and "strong drink" (Heb., *shekar*: all alcoholic beverages besides wine, especially liquor made from dates, or beer; cf. 31:4, 6). He did so in order to teach that those who are controlled by alcohol often scoff at what is holy, and they frequently violate the limits of propriety and morality (cf. Eph. 5:18).

"These two aspects of wine, its use and its abuse, its benefits and its curse, its acceptance in God's sight and its abhorrence, are interwoven into the fabric of the OT so that it may gladden the heart of man (Ps. 104:15) or cause his mind to err (28:7), it can be associated with merriment (Ec. 10:19) or with anger (Is. 5:11), it can be used to uncover the shame of Noah (Gn. 9:21) [and Lot (Gen. 19:30-38)] or in the hands of Melchizedek to honor Abraham (Gn. 14:18)."¹

- 20:2 It is as dangerous to arouse the anger of a ruler as it is to disturb "a lion" (cf. 19:12). Both of them can do much damage to the one who "provokes" them. King Hanun aroused the anger of David and regretted it (2 Sam. 10). Those who provoke the anger of the Greatest King by rejecting His Son will taste His wrath (cf. Rev. 6—19).

"Henry VIII, fuming at the pope for blocking his plan to divorce and remarry, was neither the first nor last illustration of raging, royal anger."²

- 20:3 The prudent person who cares for his "honor" stops striving when the strife becomes passionate, and he removes himself from it (cf. Phil. 4:5). But the person who is quick to fight shows himself or herself to be a fool (cf. 17:14). By provoking a fight with Pharaoh Neco that was unnecessary, good King Josiah lost his honor and his life prematurely (2 Chron. 35:20-24).

"Persons who keep their tempers in check not only refuse to start quarrels no matter how badly they are baited, but

¹*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Wine and Strong Drink," by F. S. Fitzsimmonds, pp. 1331-32.

²Hubbard, p. 252.

they also are ready to intervene the instant someone else ventures to start one."¹

20:4 This is another proverb that warns of the law of retribution (Gal. 6:7). The Apostle Paul diligently and faithfully planted the seed of the gospel wherever he went, and when he died, multitudes had become Christians. He was no sluggard but labored "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2; cf. Gal. 6:9).

"Ready upon any pretext to abandon his labor, the sluggard neglects the cultivation of his fields when others are at work. Therefore when harvest-time arrives, his fields are bare, and he is found begging of (as he would put it) his more fortunate neighbors. The fact is, fortune has nothing to do with it. Their diligence has brought its own reward, and his slothfulness its natural consequence."²

"It [this proverb] reminds me of the man whose house had a leaky roof. The reason he didn't fix it was because he didn't want to work on it when it was raining, and when it wasn't raining it didn't need fixing."³

20:5 An "understanding" person will skillfully draw another person's "plan" from him, like a pearl diver extracts pearls from the bottom of "deep water" (cf. 18:4). Because the heart of man is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and because these plans are hidden deeply, the plans in view are probably plans to do evil.⁴ Sick David sensed that those who came to visit him were laying plans to use against him (Ps. 41:6; cf. Ps. 64:5-6). Jesus also "knew what was in mankind" (John 2:25), and He often skillfully drew it out.

"A discerning, competent man will draw on other's counsel and enjoy their wisdom."⁵

¹Ibid., p. 213.

²Ironside, p. 261.

³McGee, 3:68.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 131.

⁵Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 664.

- 20:6 Many people are quick to assert their own loyal kindness ("loyalty"), as Job did (Job 29—31). Many more affirm their own goodness. But the test comes when they confront someone in need. The Good Samaritan proved to be "trustworthy" by the way he responded to his injured neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). Therefore, the wise person will not judge a person's character by his professions but by his performance.
- 20:7 The person who is truly just ("righteous"), by God's grace, demonstrates it by the way he lives ("his integrity"), and his immediate lineal descendants benefit from his uprightness. Abraham is a brilliant example (Gen. 17:1-9).
- 20:8 The "eyes" of the king are, perhaps, the eyes of his mind. He understands or perceives what evil is afoot and so preserves justice (cf. v. 5). Not every king does this, but those whose thrones are characterized by justice do. Solomon perceived the evil that the prostitute who stood before him intended, analyzed it, and in justice dispensed a fair verdict (1 Kings 3:16-28).
- 20:9 Even though "a righteous person ... walks in his integrity" (v. 7), and a just king can ferret out iniquity (v. 8), there is no one who can claim 100 percent purity of heart (cf. Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 3:9, 23; 1 John 1:8). This proverb, set in the form of a rhetorical question, is designed to move the reader to seek cleansing outside himself or herself—cleansing that only God can provide. Most of the self-righteous Israelites of Jesus' day obstinately refused to acknowledge their need for His righteousness (cf. Matt. 23:36). And this continues to be the universal problem that keeps people from trusting in Christ. They prefer to trust their own goodness instead.
- 20:10 Deceitful ("differing") "weights" (on scales) and "measures" (in containers) are only two examples of fraud and deception in all of their various forms. God hates all such perversions of justice, because He is just, and because deceitful dealing is contrary to His nature and will (cf. 16:11; 20:23). Deception hurts the buyer, who is defrauded, and the seller, who falls under divine judgment for his deceptive dealings. Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables in the temple courtyard, not only because they were doing business in a place that was intended for prayer, but also because they were cheating the people (Matt. 21:13).

- 20:11 "Conduct" is such a reliable indicator of character that even a child is known as good ("pure and right") or bad by his or her behavior. Professions of goodness make little impression when practice contradicts it. Samuel's conduct as a child demonstrated his sensitivity to God (1 Sam. 3:18-21).
- 20:12 In Proverbs, the "hearing ear" usually refers to teachability, and here, as often in this book, the "seeing eye" connotes moral discernment. Together these organs imply application of the wisdom presented here. God has given to people the ability to receive instruction and to understand what is best, even though they are flawed by sin (v. 9). Noah proved teachable and discerning when he responded in obedience to "everything that the LORD had commanded him" (Gen. 7:5), as did Moses (Exod. 40:16).
- 20:13 This is another warning against laziness (cf. v. 4; 6:9-10; 19:15; 24:33-34; Eph. 5:15-16). Apparently David was lazy when he should have been active, which led to his falling into sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah (2 Sam. 11:1).
- 20:14 In negotiations it is customary for the prospective buyer of some merchandise to tell the seller that his product is inferior and not worth what he is asking for it. Yet after the haggling is all over, and the buyer goes away with his purchase, he brags to other people about what a cheap price he paid for it. Ephron appears to have bartered with Abraham, at first offering him a "steal of a deal" bargain—when they were negotiating the purchase of the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23). But Abraham was willing to pay the asking price.

"The unit [of proverbs] now moves from losing property through spiritual apathy (v. 13) to gaining property through active wickedness."¹

"That [i.e., negotiating] is an every-day experience; but the proverb indirectly warns against conventional lying, and shows that one should not be startled and deceived thereby."²

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 142.

²Delitzsch, 2:49.

20:15 From boastful speech in the marketplace (v. 14), the collector of these proverbs moved on to knowledgeable speech in general. That which is more valuable than gold and precious stones cannot be obtained by haggling. "Lips of knowledge" are lips that utter thought-through words that are consistent with God-ordained morality (cf. 3:13-15). Such careful, true words presuppose "the long, hard work of education."¹ Ahithophel had a reputation for giving such good advice to David and Absalom that his counsel "was taken as though one inquired of the word of God" (2 Sam. 16:23). This is another of the many "this is better than that" type of proverbs.

20:16 Solomon advised that a person who takes on the obligations of another person, who is a stranger or a foreigner to him, is not very wise (cf. 6:1-5; 11:15; 27:13). Such a stranger is a bad risk. If you lend to him, make sure you have some collateral, such as his garment or something else given as a pledge, so he will repay you. This proverb encourages us to hold people to their obligations. Much more than simply giving a pledge for a prostitute must be in view.² Tamar was wise in securing Judah's seal, cord, and staff as collateral, so that she could hold him responsible for what he had done to her later (Gen. 38).

"At stake in these warnings [20:16 and its twin: 27:13] was more than the protection of individual wealth or reputation. The stability of the society was a prime consideration. Promises lightly made or pledges rashly offered contribute to economic uncertainty and interpersonal ill will. They enable shysters and con men to flourish and jeopardize the credit of the reliable. The escalating incidence of personal bankruptcies should be warning enough that borrowing, pledging, and lending carry substantial risk of pain. Polonius was not far from the mark in his advice to his son and Hamlet's friend, Laertes: Neither a borrower nor a lender be, For loan oft loses both itself and friend, And borrowing dulleth [the] edge of husbandry [farm management].—*Hamlet, act I, scene iii.*"³

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 144.

²M. Dahood, "To Pawn One's Cloak," *Biblica* 42 (1961):359-66, argued for this limited meaning.

³Hubbard, p. 174.

20:17 Anything obtained deceptively ("by a lie") may at first satisfy and please the deceiver, like sweet "bread" tastes in the mouth. But eventually it will prove to be not only unsatisfying but destructive to him or her (cf. 9:17-18; 23:31-32). "Gravel" in the mouth not only lacks taste and nourishment, but it destroys the teeth, making any eating of it painful and difficult. Joseph's brothers thought that by selling Joseph they were buying a more care-free life, but what they obtained from his sale to the Midianites made their lives miserable from then on. Another example is Judas Iscariot's deal with Israel's chief priests (Matt. 26:14-16; 27:3-5).

20:18 If one has to engage in "war" he should do it only after obtaining "wise" advice, just as one normally prepares any plan after obtaining counsel (cf. 11:14; 15:22; Luke 14:31-32). Before using force one should make sure his goal and methods harmonize with the teachings of this book.

"This proverb is an excellent example of the sharpening effect of parallelism. The general principle is given first, but then it is applied to one particular area, warfare. The general principle, though, allows the reader to apply the idea to other aspects of life."¹

"The proverb can be broadened by the application to the struggle to survive in this life."²

King Rehoboam, without seeking divine counsel, foolishly decided to go to war with the northern tribes of Israel. But the LORD graciously told the king, through Shemaiah the prophet, to abandon his plan, and Rehoboam wisely obeyed (2 Chron. 11:1-4).

20:19 A "slanderer" who "reveals secrets" is not careful with his words. His lack of love, in damaging another person's reputation, reveals his lack of wisdom. Therefore one should not associate with a "gossip" (i.e., a person who likes talking about other people's private lives; cf. 11:13; 18:8; 25:23; 1 Tim. 5:13). The Apostle Paul had to deal with people who deliberately misrepresented what he taught for their personal advantage (Rom. 3:8).

"He who flatters to the face will as readily scandalize behind the back. By soft, sinuous [serpent-like] words and

¹Longman, p. 382.

²Murphy, p. 152.

ways he will gain the confidence of his victim, appealing to his pride and love of approbation [approval], and thus loosening his tongue, till he relates things far better left unsaid. When he has thus lured him on to unbarring his heart, he will go to others, and pour into their ears what he has just learned, flattering them in the same way, and giving them to suppose that they alone are the recipients of his favor. No character is more detestable."¹

20:20 Cursing one's "father" or "mother" is the opposite of honoring them. The person who curses his or her parents will experience an untimely death (cf. 19:26; Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), because God has commanded people to honor their parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1-3). "Curses" (Heb. *meqallel*, in the Piel form here) means to declare someone of no account in order to give him or her a bad name. "His lamp will go out" is a metaphor of death (cf. 13:9; 24:20; Job 18:5), and "in time of darkness" refers to an evil time. Ham disrespected his father Noah, and his descendants fell under God's curse as a result of Ham's sin (Gen. 9:22-25).

20:21 The "inheritance" in view in this proverb evidently comes prematurely, either by request or by dishonesty (cf. 19:26). In either case the consequence is often lack of divine blessing, because the motive is selfish (cf. 21:6; 28:20). The Prodigal Son is an obvious example of this proverb (Luke 15:11-24).

"Such wealth may be squandered and often squelches initiative and work."²

"The sages viewed hastiness with a certain suspicion. It seemed to suggest grasping at more than God allots—more than the natural fruits of one's labors [cf. 10:22]."³

20:22 Paul evidently had this proverb in mind when he wrote: "Never repay evil for evil to anyone. ... Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the LORD'" (Rom. 12:17, 19). It was the truth expressed in this

¹Ironside, p. 267.

²Buzzell, p. 949.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 672.

proverb that sustained David when Shimei cursed and threw stones at him (2 Sam. 16:5-12).

"No lesson is harder for some of us to learn than that of confiding all our affairs to the hands of the Lord, especially when we feel we have been wronged and ill-treated."¹

"Seeking revenge shows lack of confidence in God's justice."²

20:23 This proverb restates the advice already given (cf. 11:1a; 20:10), but it evidently appears here again because of the preceding verse. One form of taking inappropriate revenge is tilting the scales in one's favor. It would have been tempting for Israel's priests to tamper with the scales when the people came to present their annual "half shekel," since the shekel was not a coin but a weight of measure (Exod. 30:11-16). Cheating is in view, and Jacob "wrote the book" on cheating.

20:24 Since God ultimately controls all that happens, a person cannot be completely sure of the future ("understand his way"), no matter how wisely he may plan for it (cf. 16:1, 9; 27:1; Ps. 37:23; Jer. 10:23; Luke 12:19-20; James 4:14). It becomes imperative, therefore, that we commit our ways to God and trust in Him (3:5-6; cf. Jer. 10:24). Israel's officers did this as they prepared to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land (Josh. 3:2-5, 10). Moses asked the LORD to let him know His ways, so that he could lead the Israelites effectively (Exod. 33:12-13).

"This is one of the most profound insights in the Bible ..."³

20:25 The situation in view here is that of a person who impulsively pledges something to God and then, upon reconsidering, wishes that he had not done so (cf. Eccles. 5:5; Mark 7:11). It is better to wait to make the pledge—until one thinks through the implications of the decision carefully. In a larger application, we should realize that all unconsidered, spur-of-the-moment actions can be dangerous.⁴ We should think of the

¹Ironside, p. 269.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 673.

³Murphy, p. 153.

⁴Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 116.

consequences of what we say before we speak. Jephthah made a vow rashly, because he acted impulsively (Judg. 11:30-40).

"Too many people will make promises under the inspiration of the hour only later to realize that they have strapped themselves; they then try to go back on their word."¹

20:26 Driving a "threshing wheel" over grain separated the nourishing food from its worthless hulls.

"Two or more heavy wheels were attached to a frame, which was drawn by animals over the grain to crack the husk."²

So this proverb advocates subjecting "the wicked" to processes that bring out the truth, so that the ruler can deal justly with the wicked. One application would be that leaders, including church leaders, should investigate prospective underlings thoroughly before hiring them. Solomon did this when he interviewed the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28). When Jesus, the Great King, comes again, He will separate the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, and determine who will enter His millennial kingdom—and who will not (Matt. 3:12; 25:32-33; Luke 3:17; Rev. 19:11-21).

20:27 God, even now, is "searching" out every person's "innermost" thoughts and feelings ("parts of his being"). Solomon compared our "spirit" (lit. "breath," Heb. *nishmat*, cf. Gen. 2:7) to a "lamp" that the LORD uses to investigate all the darkened crannies of our being, in this very graphic proverb (cf. Matt. 6:22; 1 Cor. 2:11). Here the "spirit" is almost equivalent to the conscience.

"Breath typically goes in and comes out of a person, giving life; but it also comes out as wisdom and words."³

"In sum, a person's speech associated with his breath serves as the LORD's flashlight to expose human thought,

¹Ross, p. 1047.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 676.

³R. C. Van Leeuwen, "The Book of Proverbs," in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, 5:188.

inclination, and will in the darkest recesses of a person's life."¹

Michal betrayed the pride in her heart when she rebuked David for the way he was worshipping God (2 Sam. 6:16). God's Word also searches our hearts (cf. Heb. 4:12.)

20:28 Not only accurate judgment (v. 26) but "loyalty" and "truth" sustain a king's rule. But ultimately it is the LORD who is responsible for the safety of both a ruler's person and his sphere of authority ("throne"; cf. 2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 18:35; 20:2; 41:3; 89:33; 119:117; Isa. 9:6). These are virtues that the reader, therefore, should value and apply to his or her own life. David was a king who was loyal to the LORD, for the most part. But Jesus will be the perfect King, who will combine loyalty to His Father and truth when He reigns on earth.

Waltke believed that verse 29 begins a new series of proverbs that deal with "doing righteousness and justice" (20:29—21:31).²

20:29 This proverb glorifies both the "strength" of the young—which is the "glory" of their youth and their physical strength—and the strength of the old: the "honor" acquired by a well-lived life of integrity and wisdom. Though the two groups are contrasted, the parallelism is synonymous, highlighting the strengths of each different set of people. Solomon did not prefer youth to old age, or old age to youth; each has its unique strength. The advantage of young people is their strength: strength of body, strength of vision, strength of energy, etc. The advantage of old people is their wisdom, gained over years of living, and symbolized by their typically "gray hair" (cf. 16:31).

"Here modern western society is out of odds with ancient Near Eastern and specifically biblical ideas. Today gray hair is almost something to be ashamed of. Youth now is venerated, but in antiquity gray hair, indicating advanced age, was a sign of distinction. The reason age was respected was that, all things being equal, it meant that a person had matured and was wiser than a youth. Experience would have led to advanced knowledge, and

¹Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 158.

²*Ibid.*, p. 159.

the very fact of surviving to old age meant that life strategies were successful."¹

David's life illustrates both lines of this proverb. In his youth David was strong in body and spirit, as is seen in his conflict with Goliath (1 Sam. 17). In his old age he demonstrated great wisdom, as seen in his dealings with Adonijah's threat to Solomon's throne (1 Kings 1). In both periods of his life David demonstrated the specified qualities because he trusted and obeyed the LORD—a condition assumed in this proverb.

20:30 Hurtful experiences ("bruising wounds") can have a positive effect: They can discourage one from pursuing "evil." Evil practices often result in hurtful experiences, either for the perpetrator, or for the person sinned against, or both. Whether the "blows" come from God, another person, or oneself, they can be a powerful teacher. Thus we should appreciate the value of pain. Toy interpreted this proverb's lesson as follows:

"... moral evil must be put away by severe chastisement."²

"... the obvious fact that evil flourishes among a generation raised on the advice not to inflict physical punishments like spanking calls into serious question whether modern child-rearing strategies are more beneficial than biblical wisdom. The proverb claims that physical punishment does more than produce outward conformity; it also helps transform the heart."³

God's severe judgments upon Nadab and Abihu; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; Achan; and Ananias and Sapphira have been strong lessons to God's people, throughout history, on the importance of avoiding evil.

21:1 This proverb is one of the great affirmations of the sovereignty of God in Scripture (cf. 16:14-15; 19:12; 20:2, 24). There are many proofs of the truth of this proverb elsewhere: in the cases of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5), Ahasuerus (Esth. 6:1-10), and Cyrus (Ezra 6:22; Isa. 45:1-7), to name only a few.

¹Longman, p. 386.

²Toy, p. 397.

³Longman, p. 386.

"... the proverb has specially in view evidences of kindness proceeding from the heart, as at xvi. 15 the favour of the king is compared to clouds of latter rain emptying themselves in beneficent showers, and at xix. 12 to the dew refreshing the plants. ... Rightly the Midrash: God gives to the world good or bad kings, according as He seeks to bless it or to visit it with punishment ..."¹

21:2 The implication of this proverb is that people should carefully examine their hearts (reasons, motives), because God does (cf. 16:2; 20:6; 24:12). Our natural tendency is simply to justify ourselves since "Every person's way is right in his own eyes." David's prayer, that God would search him and know his heart, sets a good example for us to follow, acknowledging that we may not see some of the sin in us that we should deal with (Ps. 139:23-24). Paul also recognized this need (1 Cor. 4:4).

"Self-righteousness is perhaps the most human of all sins. Men will excuse and explain away in themselves what in others would be censured with severity."²

21:3 Samuel said virtually the same thing that Solomon wrote here, when he rebuked King Saul for offering a sacrifice to the LORD rather than obeying His word (1 Sam. 15:22). Jesus also rebuked the Pharisees for their attention to ritualistic detail while at the same time neglecting "justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23; cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27).

There are several "better-than" proverbs. Here "rather than" indicates the comparison.

"... it must be borne in mind that the better-than form is used to present relative values, not absolute values."³

21:4 The "lamp of the wicked" seems to be their life (cf. 13:9b) or, more particularly, their conscience (cf. 20:27). Here, in the light of the first line, it seems to refer to the presumptuous pride of the wicked that is at the very root of their being. If this is so, the verse is saying that arrogance and pride are the sum and substance of the life of the wicked, and that these

¹Delitzsch, 2:62.

²Ironside, p. 281.

³Longman, p. 566.

are sin. This hubris (excessive pride or self-confidence) is evident in their "haughty eyes" and their "proud heart," which the LORD detests (6:16-17; 8:13). The Pharaoh of the Exodus personified hubris (Exod. 7—10).

"The wicked employ haughty arrogance as their lamp, to illumine their way and guide them."¹

"Not only is the high look and a proud heart sinful, but what otherwise would be meritorious is *sin* in a man who is in rebellion against God."²

- 21:5 The contrast here is between careful, "diligent" planning and hasty, ill-considered action. The former normally results in advantage for the person or persons involved, whereas the latter typically leads ultimately "to poverty." "Haste makes waste" is a common equivalent of this saying. Nehemiah modeled the former approach to his work, and Judas Iscariot the latter.
- 21:6 This proverb also addresses the "acquisition of treasures." Ironically, people who think that they can get rich by deceiving others deceive themselves. Their plans will not normally work out in the long run, and rather than obtaining a better life, they will find themselves on the road leading to death. The Prodigal Son is a good example (Luke 15:11-24).
- 21:7 Another irony is that people who resort to "violence," to do away with others, often get caught up in the violence themselves and perish. This fate befalls them because they have no respect for "justice." Vigilantes, for example, often become targets themselves because they take justice into their own hands. A biblical example is Joab, who violently took the lives of Abner and Amasa, rather than allowing justice to run its course (2 Sam. 3:27; 20:10). Solomon eventually had Joab executed for his unwarranted murders (1 Kings 2:34).
- 21:8 A person who continually has to explain and excuse his actions tips his hand: He is probably trying to cover up something bad that he has done. But a person who habitually tells the truth, and does right, proceeds straight on through life. King Ahab's complicated history illustrates the

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 680.

²McGee, 3:72.

first line (1 Kings 16—22), and Daniel's upright integrity exemplifies the second (Dan. 6:4). Another interpretation follows:

"Strange and even circuitous behavior is not always immoral."¹

21:9 This proverb makes sense if we keep in mind that roofs in the ancient Near East were flat, and people used them as patios. The "corner of the housetop" probably refers to the uncovered portion of the flat roof.² It is better to live alone outside, exposed to the elements, than in the sheltered, comfortable interior of one's house if one has to share the inside with a scolding woman (cf. v. 19; 19:13; 27:15). In other words, spartan conditions with peace are better than physical comforts with strife. Both Job and David had to deal with contentious wives (Job 2:9-10; 2 Sam. 6:20-23). And Jacob found his wives difficult to live with.

"One wonders why the sexual roles are never reversed; such sayings are just as applicable to an autocratic and 'quarrelsome' male."³

21:10 Wicked Sanballat desired "evil" for the returned Israelites, and Nehemiah found no favor in his eyes (Neh. 6:5-9).

"We generally find in others what we look for. The man who seeks in his neighbor goodness and virtue is almost certain to find something worthy of praise; but he who goes about looking for evil can readily find that in most people which he can gloat over. None find favor in his eyes, even though he have [*sic* has] to admit their superiority to himself."⁴

21:11 When Paul rebuked Elymas, Sergius Paulus learned that Paul's and Barnabas's message was to be believed (Acts 13:8-12). And when Paul rebuked Peter and Barnabas, the latter two learned to take a different view of Christian liberty (Gal. 2:11-16). Paul gave Timothy advice that is very similar to this proverb when he wrote, "Those who continue in sin,

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1469.

²Adams, p. 915.

³Murphy, p. 159.

⁴Ironside, p. 285.

rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning" (1 Tim. 5:20).

"The mocker at religion and virtue is incorrigible, punishment avails him nothing, but yet it is not lost; for as a warning example it teaches the simple, who might otherwise be easily drawn into the same frivolity."¹

- 21:12 Solomon was probably referring to God here as "the righteous one" who evaluates "the house[hold]" of every wicked person, and he observed that God in righteousness brings all the wicked "to ruin" eventually. This should encourage the godly when they observe the wicked flourishing (temporarily). Sometimes God judges the wicked directly, but often He uses the just to do so. He even used Jehu, who got carried away with punishing the wicked and went too far, to do so (2 Kings 9—10).
- 21:13 The person who turns a deaf ear to the appeals of the genuinely needy ("the poor") will probably find himself without a helper one day (cf. James 2:13). This is because the LORD is the Defender of the poor, and He takes notice of what is done to, done for, and not done for them (cf. 19:17). God typically pays back what is given in kind: exercising talionic judgment. Jezebel, who turned a deaf ear to Naboth's assumed cry for help, found that her own servants would not help her when Jehu called for her death (2 Kings 9:30-33). The slave who owed his king 10,000 talents, but refused to show his fellow slave who owed him only 100 denarii any mercy, received no mercy from his king (Matt. 18:23-35).
- 21:14 While not advocating bribery, this proverb teaches that kindness toward others defuses hostility, especially kindness shown "in secret" or privately (cf. 18:16; 19:6). Jacob sought to appease the indignation—that he mistakenly assumed that Joseph felt toward his family—with a generous gift (Gen. 43:11-14). It was totally unnecessary, but Jacob was relying on the principle that later found expression in this proverb. Earlier, Jacob had sought to pacify his brother Esau with a large gift (Gen. 32:1-8). Another interpretation:

¹Delitzsch, 2:70.

"Gifts or bribes were acceptable, even recommended, if the intention was good [cf. 18:16]."¹

- 21:15 The righteous rejoice at the "exercise [execution] of justice," because the wicked have been defeated. In contrast, the wicked are terrified when justice is done, because it bodes ill for them. They do not want what they rightfully deserve: punishment. The Jews of Esther's day rejoiced when King Ahasuerus allowed them to defend themselves (Esth. 9:20-24). Haman, on the other hand, had previously been terrified because his plan to annihilate all the Jews had run amuck (Esth. 7:6-8).
- 21:16 This proverb warns against departing from "the way of understanding." It is not enough to pursue wisdom for a while. One must continue to do so (cf. Heb. 2:1). Death awaits those who cease doing good and pursue the way of folly (cf. 1 Tim. 5:6). "Rest" is the poetic equivalent of "dwell."² All the time that he had spent with Jesus did not save Judas Iscariot, because he chose to leave the wise way of discipleship and to pursue folly (Acts 1:18).
- 21:17 It was customary at feasts for the participants to drink "wine" and to pour "oil" and other fragrances on people's heads and clothes (cf. 27:9; Amos 6:6). The proverb's point is: Be moderate in your celebrations, because excess will drain away your money. The Prodigal Son lost his inheritance because he celebrated immoderately (Luke 15:11-30).
- 21:18 A "ransom" is a payment given to free a person from some penalty that he has incurred, similar to posting bail to get out of jail. In this proverb it appears that God punishes the wicked and sets the righteous free. Such would be the case if the wicked were oppressing the righteous (cf. 11:8). God delivers the righteous by punishing the wicked who oppress them. For example, when God sends judgment on a group, the wicked who die serve as "a ransom for the righteous" who are spared.³ Daniel's accusers died in his place (Dan. 6). Rebellious Sheba died in place of the innocent people of Abel Beth-maacah, due to the intervention of a wise woman (2 Sam. 20:14-22).

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1469.

²Toy, p. 404.

³Murphy, p. 160.

21:19 Solomon used yet another metaphor to describe the misery that comes with living with a "contentious" and "irritating" woman (cf. v. 9; 27:15-16). Living in the heat of a "desert" without water is better.

"Athaliah was evidently of this unhappy class [of women], who, violent and treacherous, would stop at nothing to accomplish her unholy ends (2 Kings 11)."¹

21:20 This proverb advocates anticipating a time of future material need and making advance preparation to get through it. The wise person does not live only for the present. Whereas the Bible condemns hoarding money, and relying on it instead of God for one's ultimate security, it does not condemn saving for the future. In fact, this proverb advocates it. The person who spends all that he has, or gives it all away, is not wise. Though David was extremely wealthy, he saved a large portion of his wealth to pay for the construction of the temple, which took place after his death (1 Chron. 22:14-16). Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Cor. 12:14).

"Whatever the 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous' may look like in our day, the teachers' emphasis on diligence and stewardship rather than idle consumption is a lesson worth noting."²

Insurance policies, wills, trusts, savings accounts, investments, and estate planning find support in this proverb.

21:21 The person who diligently pursues right conduct before God and kindness toward other people typically finds, along the way, the treasures of "life," "righteousness," and "honor." King Asa did (2 Chron. 14—16).

21:22 Wisdom is better than physical strength. A "wise person" can defeat a stronger enemy by using his or her wisdom. By wisely choosing the right weapon, David was able to kill Goliath (1 Sam. 17). Jerusalem and Babylon were supposedly impregnable, but both of them fell to men of wisdom and sagacity (1 Chron. 11:4-6; Jer. 51:27-33).

¹Ironside, p. 290.

²Hubbard, p. 207.

- 21:23 By saying no more than he should (guarding "his mouth"), a person can also guard himself from unnecessary trouble (cf. 11:13; 13:3; 15:1; 17:20; 18:6-8; James 3:2-12). Ahimaaz carried the news of Absalom's defeat to David, but he told him only enough to encourage the king, and spared him the bad news of his son's death (2 Sam. 18:19-30).
- 21:24 The person who acts with "insolent pride" disregards God. Things that characterize him are his pride (he is overly impressed with himself), his haughtiness toward others, and his scoffing at or mocking what is true and good. Simeon and Levi proved to be such people in their dealings with the Shechemites (Gen. 34:25-30; 49:5-7).
- "The proverb does not aim as much to define the mocker as to explain that his fury against God and humanity stems from his exaggerated opinion of his self-importance."¹
- 21:25-26 The "desire" of the "lazy one" is unsatisfied hunger, and refusing to work will lead him to ruin. Even though he has strong desires for things, he refuses to exert himself to obtain them. The "righteous" person (one who does right), on the other hand, not only works but gives to others part of what he earns. He is a productive and benevolent individual (cf. 12:27; 13:4; 19:24; 20:4). Achan preferred stealing to working (Josh. 7:21), but the Philippian Christians gained a reputation for their sacrificial generosity (2 Cor. 8:2).
- "Verse 25 points out that longings are necessary for survival; v. 26 warns that uncontrolled longings are harmful."²
- "Laziness, with its consequent deprivation, further constrains moral behavior, whereas ethical virtue, with its consequent prosperity, facilitates it."³
- 21:27 God abhorred King Saul's "sacrifice," which he offered "with evil intent" and in place of obedience (1 Sam. 15:17-29; cf. Prov. 15:8, 9, 26; 21:4).
- "... frequently would it occur [in Israel] that rich sensualists brought trespass-offerings, and other offerings, in order

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 187.

²Longman, p. 398.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 691.

thereby to recompense for their transgressions, and to purchase for themselves the connivance [assistance] of God for their dissolute life. Such offerings of the godless, the proverb means, are to God a twofold and a threefold abomination; for in this case not only does the godless fail in respect of repentance and a desire after salvation, which are the conditions of all sacrifices acceptable to God, but he makes God directly a minister of sin."¹

21:28 The first person ("a false witness") has little concern for listening carefully. He has his mind made up and does not want to be bothered with the facts. But the second person ("a person who listens") really listens, learns, and so speaks the truth. He or she will have the last word, all other things being equal. The "false witness" is therefore not a reliable listener, but a witness who tells the truth typically listens attentively and critically.²

"The key phrase is *a man who hears*: his first aim is to know and understand, not to grind some axe. ... the man who listens (Is. 50:4) is the man worth listening to."³

"Prerequisite to the truthful lip is the open ear ..."⁴

"False witnesses will be discredited and destroyed."⁵

Paul's Jewish accusers did not listen carefully (objectively) to the apostle's defense and so pursued their case against him, even though it was unsound. Paul, by contrast, carefully listened to his accusers and refuted them on every point (Acts 23—24).

21:29 A wicked man puts up a show of confidence, but it is a bluff. His "bold face" reflects a hard heart that holds the opinions and views of others in contempt.⁶ The "upright," on the other hand, does not need to pretend to be something he is not, because he is walking on the right path ("he makes his way sure"). Contrast the testimony of the false witnesses

¹Delitzsch, 2:80.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 189.

³Kidner, p. 146.

⁴Hubbard, p. 185.

⁵Ross, p. 1058. Cf. McKane, p. 556.

⁶Plaut, p. 224.

against Jesus with the testimony of the Lord Himself (Matt. 26:59-64; 27:11-14).

21:30 "No wisdom," "no understanding," or "no plan" will prevail "against the LORD." His Word is truth (John 17:17). For example, no theory of how the universe came into being, and no explanation of how it operates—that contradicts biblical revelation—will stand. Such ideas will prove false eventually. No counsel that seeks to subvert God's will can succeed, for He is sovereign. Human wisdom that opposes His truth counts for nothing in God's sight.¹

"... God is able to defend Himself, and He is able to defend His Word."²

King Asa expressed his confidence in the truth expressed here in his prayer (2 Chron. 14:11).

21:31 Even though man makes his plans and prepares for what he anticipates the best he can ("the horse is prepared for the day of battle"), God determines the final outcome. This is not to discourage thorough preparation, which other proverbs advocate. It is a reminder of the sovereignty of God. He is the One who is due the credit ("victory belongs to the LORD") when our plan turns out well. King Hezekiah experienced God's deliverance when the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem, and he undoubtedly gave God the credit for the victory (2 Kings 18—19; Isa. 36—37).

22:1 "Favor" in the eyes of others is probably the meaning of the second line of this proverb. Moses' name and influence have lived on through the centuries, whereas scholars still debate the mere name of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, who was probably the richest and most powerful man of his day. The names of David's "mighty men" remain forever enshrined on the pages of Scripture (2 Sam. 23:8-39). Jesus had no earthly riches, but His "good name" and "favor" exceed all others.

"In our modern, hedonistic, pleasure-seeking culture, character and reputation have a way of being ignored if not actually denigrated [spoken ill of]. True value must be

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 692.

²McGee, 3:75.

seen, however, not in what one has but in what he or she truly is. A good name is an asset whose currency is unaffected by the boom or bust of the material world."¹

22:2 Since "the rich" and "the poor" have a common "Maker," they have a "common" value and humanity. In God's sight all people have equal value and dignity, so we should respect them as fellow human beings (cf. 3:31-33; 14:31; 17:5, 15; 29:13; Job 34:19). Before God everyone is on the same plane in this sense. This is important revelation, because the rich tend to oppress the poor, and the poor tend to despise the rich. Usually oppression comes from the top down: from the person in power.

Biblical examples include David's abuse of Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 11), Jezebel's murder of Naboth (1 Kings 21), and the treatment that the creditor slave gave the debtor slave in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:21-35).

22:3 One application of this clear proverb is: Evacuate in the path of an oncoming tornado or hurricane, rather than staying put and trying to ride it out (cf. Exod. 9:20-21). Another is: Believe the gospel message, in view of future judgment. The proverb undoubtedly applies to hiding oneself from moral evil as well as from physical danger (cf. 14:15, 18; 27:12). The Philippian jailer foresaw his danger and sought salvation (Acts 16:25-34). Unfortunately Uriah did not foresee the danger that David had planned for him, and he died (2 Sam. 11:6-17).

22:4 "Humility" and "the fear of the LORD" are two sides of the same coin, one side looking at self and the other side at God. The rewards, "riches, honor, and life" normally follow these attitudes (cf. 21:21; 1 Pet. 5:5-6). Abraham experienced all of these rewards abundantly during his lifetime and afterward because he manifested these attitudes.

"The positive value of biblical obedience is summed up simply in these synthetic lines:"²

22:5 "Thorns" are painful, and "snares" entrap. The "perverse" person is one who is crooked, who does not take a straight course, following God's will through life. Such a person can expect many painful entrapments, in

¹Merrill, p. 495.

²Hubbard, p. 204.

contrast to the godly who walk carefully in God's path. During the earlier part of his life Jacob seems to have gone from one patch of thorns to another, largely due to his double-minded perversity.

22:6 "Train" (Heb. *hanak*) means to dedicate (cf. Deut. 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5; Dan. 3:2). It has the idea of narrowing and, in this verse, implies channeling the child's conduct into the way of wisdom. That guidance might include dedicating him or her to God and preparing the child for future responsibilities and adulthood.¹

"... when one stands back to assess the book of Proverbs, there is no other office ascribed to parents than that of education of children."²

The Hebrew word translated "child" is *na'ar*, which normally refers to a "marriageable male while still single."³ So the "child" in view is not a very young child, but an adolescent of marriageable age.

"According to the Talmud a young man was cursed if he was not married by the age of twenty (cf. Isa. 54:6; Prov. 2:17; 5:18; Joel 1:8)."⁴

"In the way he should go" is literally "according to his way." This may mean according to his personality, temperament, responses, or stage in life.⁵ On the other hand, it could mean the way in which he ought to go.⁶ The Hebrew grammar permits either interpretation. However the context favors the latter view. The "way" in Proverbs usually means the path that a person takes through life, not one's personality, disposition, or stage in life. Consequently, the verse is probably saying that the parent should train up a child in the way of wisdom, namely, to live in the fear of God.⁷

¹Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 252.

²Murphy, p. 224.

³William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 241.

⁴Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, p. 274.

⁵Delitzsch, 2:86-87.

⁶Jamieson, et al., p. 470.

⁷Ross, pp. 1061-62; Toy, p. 415; McKane, p. 564; Kidner, p. 147; Greenstone, p. 234; Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 698.

"They are not to bring up a child in the way *they* think he should go, but in the way *God* wants him to go."¹

If one takes the other meaning ("according to *his* way"), the proverb appears to warn parents that if they train up their adolescent and allow him to go his own way, they can expect that the child will continue along this bad path into later life.²

The second part of this verse has challenged the faith of many a godly parent. Obviously many children who have received good training have abandoned the way of wisdom later in life. The explanation for this seemingly broken promise lies in a correct understanding of what a proverb is.

"A proverb is a literary device whereby a general truth is brought to bear on a specific situation. Many of the proverbs are not absolute guarantees for they express truths that are necessarily conditioned by prevailing circumstances. For example, verses 3-4, 9, 11, 16, 29 [of this chapter] do not express promises that are *always* binding. Though the proverbs are generally and usually true, occasional exceptions may be noted. This may be because of the self-will or deliberate disobedience of an individual who chooses to go his own way—the way of folly instead of the way of wisdom ... It *is* generally true, however, that most children who are brought up in Christian homes, under the influence of godly parents who teach and live God's standards (cf. Eph. 6:4), follow that training."³

This proverb clearly does not state a Scriptural promise.⁴ Rather, the revelation of Scripture elsewhere is that God allows people to make their own decisions. He does not force them to do what is right (cf. 2:11-15; 5:11-14; Ezek. 18:20). This includes children as they grow up.

¹McGee, 3:76.

²See Douglas K. Stuart, "'The Cool of the Day' (Gen. 3:8) and 'the Way He Should Go' (Prov. 22:6)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:683 (July-September 2014):266-73.

³Buzzell, p. 953. See also Archer, pp. 252-53.

⁴See Hubbard, p. 310; *The Nelson ...*, p. 1064; Longman, p. 405.

"In sum, the proverb promises the educator that his original, and early, moral initiative has a permanent effect on a person for good. But that is not the whole truth about religious education."¹

The influences of Timothy's mother and grandmother played a significant role in determining the course of his life for good (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15), even though his father was evidently an unbeliever (Acts 16:1).

22:7 This verse does not forbid borrowing. In Israel the Jews borrowed from one another. The Mosaic Law permitted this, but it condemned charging other Jews interest (Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19; 28:12, 44), though the Israelites could charge foreigners interest (Deut. 23:20).

"In antiquity, money was typically lent for short periods at very high interest rates."²

The New Testament does not forbid borrowing either, though it condemns not paying debts (Rom. 13:6-8). It may be unwise to go into debt in some—or even most—situations, but it is going too far to say that the Bible condemns going into debt.

"While a certain amount of honest debt is expected in today's world, and everybody wants to achieve a good credit rating, we must be careful not to mistake presumption for faith. As the familiar adage puts it, 'When your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep is your downfall.'"³

This verse warns the borrower that he puts himself in a vulnerable position by borrowing. He becomes dependent on another or others by borrowing. An unscrupulous lender might take advantage of him. Most lenders will not take unfair advantage of someone who borrows from them, but the borrower should be aware of this possibility.

"The verse may be referring to the apparently common practice of Israelites selling themselves into slavery to pay off debts (see Exod 21:2-7). It is not appreciably

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 206.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1470.

³Wiersbe, p. 93.

[significantly] different from the modern debtor who is working to pay off bills."¹

One of the God-fearing "sons of the prophets" in Elisha's day died and left his wife with debts. She appealed to Elisha for help because the creditors wanted to take her two sons into slavery as payment (2 Kings 4:1).

22:8 This verse provides encouragement for the oppressed. The last line assures the sufferer that God will eventually break the oppressing rod of the person (the "rod of his fury") who sows iniquity (cf. 24:16; Gal. 6:7). The Pharaoh of the Exodus is a case in point.

22:9 This proverb sets forth both the consequence and the cause of generosity. The consequence of being "generous" is divine blessing (cf. 19:17; 2 Cor. 9:6). The cause is giving some of what one has to those in need (cf. Luke 14:13). The Ethiopian, Ebed-melech, fed Jeremiah in a dungeon, and God blessed him by sparing his life during the Babylonian siege (Jer. 38:6-13; 39:15-18).

22:10 A "scoffer" is one who ridicules and opposes what is right and good (cf. 18:6). Hagar proved to be a source of irritation to Sarah, so Abraham drove her out of his compound—with God's approval (Gen. 21:9-14).

"The scorner of this book is practically the same as the railer [i.e., the immoral person] of 1 Cor. 5. Such a man can work untold mischief among a company of the Lord's people. His wretched evil-speaking, coupled with his contempt for all godly restraint, like the leaven placed in the meal, will, if unchecked, go on working till the whole is leavened. Therefore the necessity of obeying the word of God, 'Put away from among yourselves that wicked person' (1 Cor. 5:11-13)."²

"Scoffers or scorners (see Ps. 1:1) are persons so entrenched in foolish and spiteful behavior that they make sport of those who try to do right (see 1:22; 3:34; 9:7-8)."³

¹Ross, p. 1062. See also *Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "Debt," by Stephen Adei, p. 805.

²Ironside, p. 306. See also Longman, p. 407.

³Hubbard, p. 273.

- 22:11 There is a connection between "purity of heart" and "gracious" "speech" (cf. Matt. 12:34). Both qualities endear people to those in positions of power. Consider godly Mordecai's final outcome (Esth. 10:2-3).
- 22:12 "The eyes of the LORD" represent His moral awareness. Evidently the meaning of the first line is that the LORD, being aware of moral issues, protects the words of His faithful mouthpieces (teachers of "knowledge"). The antithetical second line gives the other side of this coin: He will overthrow, or subvert, the words of those who treacherously deny His words of truth.¹ God fulfilled and preserved Jeremiah's prophecies regarding Jerusalem's destruction, but He frustrated the prophecies of the false prophet Hananiah that the city would not fall, and He put him to death (Jer. 28).
- 22:13 Sluggards rationalize their laziness by appealing to unlikely possibilities (cf. 12:27; 15:19; 19:24; 21:25; 26:13).
- "The lazy man comes up with the silliest excuses to beg off work."²
- "He talks of *a lion without*, but considers not his real danger from the devil, that *roaring lion*, which is in bed with him, and from his own slothfulness, which kills him."³
- What a different kind of person was Benaiah, one of David's mighty men, who "went down and killed a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day" (2 Sam. 23:20).
- 22:14 Solomon compared the "mouth" of an adulteress to a "deep pit." She lures the naive into a dangerous place from which they cannot escape unscathed, by her flattering and fateful words (cf. 2:16-19; 6:23-35; 7:4-27). Those who succumb to her temptation do so because they yield to her beguiling influence. Thus they experience the LORD's curse. Judah found himself trapped after he had an illicit affair with his daughter-in-law Tamar, and the consequences for him were not the LORD's blessing (Gen. 38).

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 213.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 701.

³Henry, p. 773.

- 22:15 Children demonstrate "foolishness" by wasting time, doing dangerous things, and misusing their abilities and talents. But "discipline" can correct these natural tendencies and make them more mature and wise (cf. 13:24; 19:18). Reference to the "rod" of discipline does not mean that all or even most discipline must be carried out with a physical rod. The rod here is a symbol of the instrument used in discipline, which might include any number of methods of punishment. Unfortunately Eli's sons grew up without adequate parental discipline, and they retained their foolish ways (1 Sam. 2:22-36).
- 22:16 This verse warns against two appealing ways to make more money, neither of which pays in the long run. The first is to squeeze as much out of the poor as possible. Slumlords are notorious for doing this. The second is to bribe the rich. Giving them preferential treatment, with a view to their "returning the favor," is an example. The gifts given to the rich are to secure their favor in this case, not out of love for them (cf. 14:31; 19:17; 28:3). Jezebel oppressed poor Naboth to obtain a field for her husband, which Ahab did not need (1 Kings 21). And Governor Felix tried to get Paul to bribe him, which Paul did not do (Acts 24:26). Jesus taught us to invite the poor to dinner, which is the opposite of oppressing them (Luke 14:12-14).

III. COLLECTION 3: THIRTY SAYINGS OF THE WISE 22:17—24:22

A third major section of the Book of Proverbs begins with 22:17. This is clear from several indicators: The proverbs lengthen out again from the typical one-verse couplet (distich) that characterizes 10:1 through 22:16 (cf. chs. 1—9). Also, the phrase "my son" appears again, as in chapters 1 through 9. Third, we read in 22:20 (in the Hebrew text) that a group of 30 sayings will follow. 22:17 through 19 introduce these 30 sayings.

The emphasis in 22:17 through 24:34, which includes the fourth collection of proverbs (six more sayings of the wise, 24:23-34), is on the importance of applying the instruction previously given. Delitzsch considered 22:17 through 24:22 and 24:23 and 34 to be two appendices or supplements to "the older Book of Proverbs" (i.e., 10:1—22:16).¹ In

¹Delitzsch, 2:95, 140.

several respects these sayings resemble 1:1 through 9:18 more than the proverbs in 10:1 through 22:16.¹

Emphasis	Section
The value of wisdom	1:1—9:18
The examples of wisdom	10:1—22:16
The application of wisdom	22:17—24:34

The reason that many scholars believe that Solomon did not write the 36 sayings of the wise (22:17—24:34) is that the title "These also are sayings of the wise [or sages, plural]," in 24:23a, suggests several writers rather than one.

"The plur. *sages* points to the existence of a special class of wise men, who were oral teachers or writers. The utterances of these men formed a distinct body of thought, part of which is preserved in the Book of Proverbs ..."²

The word "also" in 24:23a apparently refers to the similar title in 22:17, suggesting that these sages, not Solomon, wrote the proverbs in 22:17 through 24:22.

The 36 sayings divide into two groups: "the [30] words of the wise" (22:17), and six more "sayings of the wise" (24:23).

Many scholars have called attention to the similarities between Proverbs 22:17 through 24:22, the 30 sayings of the wise, and *The Instruction of Amen-em-Ope*.³ *The Instruction of Amen-em-Ope* is a piece of Egyptian wisdom literature that scholars have dated in the New Kingdom period (ca. 1558-1085 B.C.). Both sets of proverbs, the following one in the Book of Proverbs and the one in *The Instruction of Amen-em-Ope*, contain 30 sayings each, both use the "my son" terminology, and both follow the same structural design. This design includes an introduction that explains why the writer gave the instruction followed by 30 independent sections of sayings on diverse subjects.

¹Hubbard, p. 361.

²Toy, p. 451.

³E.g., McKane, pp. 369-74; Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, pp. 707-33, 753-67. For an introduction to other similar ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, see Harris, pp. 555-57; or Waltke, *The Book ...*, pp. 28-31, who cited eight other similar pre-Solomonic Egyptian texts. *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible* also has brief discussions of them.

However, a difference between these two collections is significant. The writer or writers of the biblical proverbs, evidently not Solomon, said that their purpose was that the readers' "trust may be in the LORD" (22:19). But Amen-em-Ope expressed no such hope or any belief in a personal God. As mentioned previously, the biblical writers' purpose and faith distinguish the Book of Proverbs from all other ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.¹ I think it is probable that Solomon and/or other wise Israelite men repeated and recast some of these Egyptian sayings, and that is what we have in this part of the Book of Proverbs.²

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE 30 SAYINGS 22:17-21

As in chapters 1 through 9, the writer began this section of the book with an exhortation to hear and pay attention to the words of wisdom that follow. The reason that the writer gave the following proverbs introduces the 30 sayings.

"This extended introduction reminds us that the wise sayings were not curiosity pieces; they were revelation, and revelation demands a response."³

First, there is a call to hear (v. 17) followed by three motivations: a pleasant condition (v. 18), a deeper trust in the LORD (v. 19), and greater effectiveness (vv. 20-21).⁴ The call is similar to "He who has an ear, let him hear ..." (Rev. 2:7; et al.).

The Hebrew word translated "excellent things" (NASB, AV, NKJV, v. 20; *s/swm*) has also been rendered "triplly" (Septuagint, Vulgate), and "30 sayings" (ESV, CEV, RSV, NRSV, NET2, NEB, HCSB, NIV, TNIV). Since 30 sayings follow, that seems to be the best option for translation. "Him who sent you" (v. 21) is probably the original reader's teacher, who may have been his father.

"Notwithstanding the difficulties of the text, the general thought of the paragraph is plain: the pupil is to devote himself to study, in order that his religious life may be firmly established, and that he may be able to give wise counsel to those who seek advice."⁵

¹For an introduction to the study of comparative ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, see Waltke, *The Book ...*, pp. 221-38.

²See also Schultz, pp. 468-69.

³Ross, p. 1065.

⁴Kidner, p. 149.

⁵Toy, pp. 424-25.

"Knowledge is given us to do good with, that others may light their candle at our lamp, and that we may in our place serve our generation according to the will of God."¹

"Even the most brilliant moral sayings are powerless without personal application."²

B. THE 30 SAYINGS 22:22—24:22

Waltke titled the first 10 sayings (22:22—23:11) "a Decalogue of sayings about wealth."³

22:22-23 Note the chiasmic structure in these four lines (tetrastich) that unifies the thought of the passage: violence, litigation (legal proceedings), litigation, violence. "The gate" of a town was the place where judgments were dispensed. The point of this first saying is that God will avenge the poor and punish those who oppress them (cf. Exod. 23:6). The LORD presents Himself as the defense attorney of "the poor," who have not received justice on earth. Jesus' parable of the persistent widow taught that God will grant justice fairly (Luke 18:1-8). All Pilates and Herods, who take advantage of the poor who come before them, should beware.

22:24-25 The influence of a hothead can cause harm (cf. 1:10-19; 14:17, 29; 15:1). Those around him tend to behave like him. His type of behavior displeases God and leads to ruinous complications. David was wise to put distance between himself and hot-tempered King Saul (1 Sam. 20).

22:26-27 Solomon previously warned of the folly of making promises to cover the debts of others (6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16), and this is another similar warning. Taking responsibility for someone else's debt may result in losing what one has. "Shake hands" pictures sealing a deal in this proverb, not giving a warm greeting. The unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable consigned his fellow servant to prison until he could repay his whole debt (Matt. 18:30).

"It would not be difficult to find numerous examples of persons who have read Proverbs all their lives, but who, despite its many warnings as to suretyship [taking

¹Henry, p. 773.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 223.

³*Ibid.*, p. 225.

responsibility for the actions of another], have lost nearly all they had through endorsing notes or going on the bond of men who turned out unworthy of their confidence. How much that is painful, and shameful too, might have been avoided had such a passage as this been heeded!"¹

22:28 Joshua distributed Canaan among the various tribes of Israel (Josh. 14—19), and some borders were undoubtedly marked by special stones. Farmers also sometimes marked the boundaries of their property with such stones. Moving boundaries in fields, usually marked by stone pillars or piles of stones (cairns), resulted in individuals losing and gaining property and wealth in Israel. This was also a sin against God, since God owned and apportioned all the land (cf. Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2a). The warning is against illegally appropriating someone else's property; it is not a warning against disrespecting historical markers (cf. 23:10-11). Some of the pre-exilic prophets referred to the practice of moving markers in order to gain more land (Hos. 5:10; cf. Isa. 5:8). The Israelites during Jephthah's judgeship had a boundary dispute that led to war (Judg. 11).

"Probably the boundary stone was moved annually only about an inconspicuous half-inch, which in time could add up to a sizeable land grab."²

22:29 The quality of a person's work, not his bribes or flattery, will ultimately determine how his career progresses, under normal circumstances. Therefore a person should seek to improve his or her skills and not rely on deception in order to advance. Joseph and Daniel advanced because of their ability, not because of their politicking.

"Anyone who puts his workmanship before his prospects towers above the thrusters [those who push themselves forward] and climbers of the adjacent paragraphs."³

"'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord,' is the canon for the ordering of the believer's daily service (Rom. 12:11). Often, one fears, we act as though it

¹Ironside, p. 314.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 235.

³Kidner, p. 150.

read, 'Fervent in business; slothful in spirit; serving yourselves.'"¹

23:1-3 The point of this advice is to be humble and restrained in the presence of a prestigious host. The guest should "put a knife to [his own] throat" rather than to his food (i.e., curb his appetite, control himself).²

"Threaten your appetite with death."³

"I can state this in very commonplace language: Don't make a pig of yourself when you are invited out to eat—especially if you are invited to a place that serves you gourmet food, the type of food that you are not accustomed to eating."⁴

The fact that the host serves "delicacies" may not indicate that he esteems the guest highly. The host may simply be getting him in a good mood for his own selfish reasons. He may want something from him or he may be evaluating him. "What is before you" (v. 1) is better than "who is before you."⁵ Daniel, faced with the temptation to indulge his desires away from home, disciplined himself in his eating habits (Dan. 1).

My father was once invited to dine with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, then head of the Nationalist government in China, and his wife Madame Chiang, in Taiwan. At dinner, the Generalissimo noticed that my father was not eating much and asked if he did not like the food. My father explained that he was trying to apply a biblical proverb and quoted this one. This amused the Generalissimo greatly.

23:4-5 Wealth is just as fleeting as social prestige; it lasts for only a short time. Therefore people should not wear themselves out trying to get rich.

"... what has been gained by many years of labour and search, often passes away suddenly, is lost in a moment."⁶

¹Ironside, p. 316.

²Delitzsch, 2:104.

³Harris, p. 575.

⁴McGee, 3:78.

⁵Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, pp. 237-38.

⁶Delitzsch, 2:106.

God struck King Nebuchadnezzar with temporary insanity, and immediately—overnight—he lost all of his power, including the use of his vast wealth (Dan. 4). Jesus and Paul also warned of the danger of trusting in riches (cf. Luke 12:20; 1 Tim. 6:7-10).

23:6-8 It is better to decline a dinner invitation from a miser, because, if you accept it, you will only have a miserable experience. He will feel bitter about what he gives you and will probably express his bitterness. Kidner paraphrased verse 8 as follows: "It takes away the relish ... to have one's grudging host ... doing mental arithmetic (7a) with each dish."¹ The old prophet of Bethel insincerely hosted his young visitor and actually set a trap for his death out of jealousy (1 Kings 13:11-32).

"The seventh saying [23:1-3] warns about the greed of the gluttonous guest and the ninth saying [23:6-8] about the greed of the stingy host. At their center stands the eighth saying [23:4-5], prohibiting the quest for riches, for they are a false security. All three sayings warn that things are not as they appear."²

"The evil eye mentioned in verse 6 [the AV has translated the Hebrew literally as "an evil eye," whereas the NASB has "a selfish person"] has nothing to do with the superstitious belief that some person with an evil eye can cast a spell to harm others. It means a dishonest, insincere person, one who is pharisaical. While he urges to eat and drink, puts on a friendly front, in his heart he entertains other thoughts."³

23:9 One should not try to speak words of wisdom to a fool (cf. 26:4). As always in Proverbs, the fool is one who rejects God's words. The words spoken on this occasion are in harmony with God's, since they are words containing wisdom. Trying to teach someone divine wisdom when he or she rejects divine wisdom is a waste of time. Jotham's warning to Abimelech's followers is one example of this (Judg. 9:7-21). Jesus taught His disciples to depart from any town that did not receive their teaching (Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:11; cf. Acts 13:51). God can change

¹Kidner, p. 151.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 237.

³Gaebelein, 2:2:37.

people's minds about divine wisdom, but this proverb deals with how to respond to foolish rejection.

23:10-11 Here the writer added a reason to the warning in the fourth saying (22:28; cf. 22:22-23). God is the rescuing avenger ("their Redeemer is strong") of the defenseless (e.g., in Genesis 28:16; Exodus 6:6; Job 19:25; and many times in Isaiah 41—63). Here it is evidently God who is in view rather than a human kinsman-redeemer (Heb. *goel*, cf. Gen. 48:16; Exod. 6:6; Job 19:25; Isa. 41—63). This is another warning against taking unfair advantage of a defenseless person. David typically trusted the LORD to plead his case with his adversaries when they misjudged and oppressed him (Ps. 35).

23:12 We should probably take this verse as an exhortation added to the tenth saying (vv. 10-11). Some scholars have viewed it as an introduction to the remaining 20 sayings in view of its similarity to 22:17; 23:15, 16, 19, and 26.¹ In either case it is a general admonition to apply these wise declarations to life.

"An aged Christian was said to have '*meditated* the Bible through three times' in his life. This is very different from merely *reading* the Scriptures. It implies patient, careful study of each portion perused. Only by some such means will there be true spiritual growth. Listen to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16)."²

23:13-14 The sage again advocated the discipline of children (cf. 19:18; 22:15). Beating with "the rod" is not the only form of discipline advocated in Proverbs. It is simply one form used here as a poetic parallel to "discipline" (Heb. *musar*, moral correction). Other forms of discipline (reproof, time out, temporary isolation, "grounding," etc.) may be more appropriate in some situations with children of differing ages and temperaments. These verses assure the parent that the child will not only survive the discipline, but he or she will survive because of it.

"Its [this saying's] point seems to be, 'Don't let the young one bluff you to "*withhold correction*" by shouts, protests, or accusations. "I hate you," "I'll never speak to you again,"

¹Toy, pp. 432-33.

²Ironside, p. 321.

"I'm going to run away," "You're a bad daddy," "You're killing me"—none of these outbursts is accurate under normal circumstances; they should not deter us from our parental duties to correct our children when they violate the rules of the household. ...

"Uncorrected waywardness leads to rasher acts of disobedience, which, if left unchecked, can be literally life-threatening. Parents who carelessly or fearfully turned their backs on substance abuse, on petty thievery, on modest acts of cruelty or violence, on companionship with unruly gang members have learned this lesson from a sheriff's phone call, a judge's verdict, or a coroner's report. Love may have to inflict moderate pain to '*deliver*' a child from ultimate pain."¹

Manoah, Samson's father, recognized his need for the LORD's help in rearing his son. He asked the LORD to help him, and God gave him guidance (Judg. 13:8-12). Samson's failures were the result of his own rebelliousness, not because his parents failed to discipline him. Hophni and Phinehas' failures, on the other hand, were due at least in part to Eli's failure to discipline them (1 Sam. 3:13).

"The idea is that discipline helps the child to live a full life; if he dies (prematurely), it would be a consequence of not being trained. In Proverbs such a death might be moral and social as well as physical."²

"Severe discipline is not cruel, but to withhold it from callous youth is. ... However, the cleansing rod must be applied with warmth, affection, and respect for the youth. Warmth and affection, not steely discipline, characterize the father's lectures (cf. 4:1-9). Parents who brutalize their children cannot hide behind the rod doctrine of Proverbs."³

¹Hubbard, p. 370.

²Ross, p. 1070.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 252.

My parents spanked me when I misbehaved. But before the spanking, which my father administered, he would say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." I did not understand or believe him at the time, but I did understand that he did not enjoy what he was doing. Having grown up I now understand and appreciate the fact that he was willing to discipline me even though it hurt him to do so.

23:15-16 This saying balances the previous one. The child's choice is as vital as the parent's discipline. The affectionate "My son" address adds a warm touch and removes any possibility that the writer enjoyed whipping his child. This father's greatest concern was that his son should learn wisdom.

"Wisdom is inborn in no one."¹

Parents "rejoice" when they observe their children making wise choices. The Apostle John rejoiced that Gaius, whom he described as one of "my children," was walking in the truth (3 John 3-4).

23:17-18 The long view, even beyond death, is essential in order to avoid envying the wicked, who frequently prosper in this life. However "future" does not necessarily imply life after death. It can simply mean life farther down the road of life, when one's mistakes will catch up with him.² We should always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. We should envy it instead of the lifestyle of sinners. Looking up (v. 17) and looking ahead (v. 18) can help us avoid envying sinners in the present.³

"Good counsel is all of this for a generation conditioned by the cheap, tricky, and instant solutions of television comedy (thirty minutes) or drama (sixty minutes)."⁴

Job did not "envy" sinners but looked forward to a time in the future when his trials would be over and God would reward him (Job 19:25-26).

23:19-21 Overindulgence in food and drink can lead to drowsiness, then laziness, then poverty (cf. vv. 29-35; 20:1). We should avoid the constant companionship of people who are "heavy drinkers" and "gluttonous."

¹Delitzsch, 2:112.

²Hubbard, p. 371.

³Kidner, p. 152.

⁴Hubbard, p. 372.

Excessive eating and drinking are often symptoms of deeper problems.¹ Moderation is wiser and preferable. This saying also implies that the influence of bad companions is strong. King Belshazzar feasted and drank to excess and was unprepared for his enemy's attack (Dan. 5).

23:22-23 Heeding wise parental instruction is hard for some children, but it is necessary for them to become wise (cf. 4:7-9). By listening to and obeying his or her parents, the child learns to listen to and obey God. Submission to parental authority makes submission to divine authority easier (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-4). Honoring parents here means listening (paying attention) to their instructions.² It does not necessarily mean obeying their instructions—if their instructions are to do evil, for example. Esther heeded the advice of her guardian cousin Mordecai and, as a result, delivered her people (Esth. 2:20). Ruth likewise prospered because she followed the advice of her mother-in-law Naomi (Ruth 2:22—3:5).

23:24-25 Note again that righteousness (right conduct) and wisdom were synonymous in the mind of the writer (v. 24). Children who follow God's way of wisdom not only bring joy to themselves but also to their parents (cf. 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 29:3, 15). Wise Joseph proved to be the source of great delight to his father Jacob later in life.

23:26-28 Another exhortation to apply what follows prefaces this saying (cf. v. 12). This one is especially important. Our culture glamorizes sexual promiscuity, but these verses reveal its true consequences: entrapment, constraint, painful loss, and treachery (cf. ch. 7). Two types of harlots are in view: the unmarried (Heb. *zonah*, "harlot" or "prostitute") and the married (*nokriyah*, "adulterous woman," "strange woman," or "wayward wife," v. 27).

Samson lost his life by playing with the type of woman that the sage warned about here: Delilah (Judg. 16), but Joseph avoided the seduction of Potiphar's wife and went on to much greater things (Gen. 39). Judah also found himself trapped, as in "a deep pit" or "a narrow well," by Tamar (Gen. 38).

"The figure [of a deep pit] has, after xxii. 14, the mouth of the harlot in view. Whoever is enticed by her siren voice

¹Plaut, pp. 241-42.

²Toy, p. 436.

falls into a deep ditch, into a pit with a narrow mouth, into which one can more easily enter than escape from."¹

23:29-35 This classic description of drunkenness, in the form of an ode, ironically illustrates the folly of that vice. The father urges his son to remember how too much drinking will end so its present enjoyment will not enslave him.

"Bleak humor this is, calculated in its pathetic ridiculousness to warn the student of the immense dangers of letting alcohol seize the upper hand."²

One of the marks of an incorrigible son in Israel, that justified his execution, was drunkenness (Deut. 21:20). Zimri assassinated King Elah while Elah was drunk (1 Kings 16:8-10). Paul wrote to the Corinthians not to keep company with a professing Christian who was a drunkard (1 Cor. 5:11; cf. Eph. 5:18).

"While alcoholism is a medical problem, it is also a moral problem because it involves choices and brings danger to other people."³

24:1-2 Previously the writer cited the ruinous end of evil companions as motivation to avoid their company (23:20-21). Here it is their essential character ("their minds plot violence") that is the basis for the same advice (cf. 3:31; 23:17; 24:19).

"A great deal of modern entertainment—whether short story, novel, film, or ballad—is based on the celebration of the wickedly unconventional. It banks on the fact that we as audience members have a perverse attraction, even affection, for those who act out the mischief that we only dream of."⁴

¹Delitzsch, 2:119.

²Hubbard, p. 378.

³Ross, p. 1072.

⁴Hubbard, p. 378.

When the psalmist Asaph remembered the end of the wicked, his envy of their prosperity evaporated (Ps. 73). King Jehoram of Judah is one example of many in the Bible who illustrate verse 2 (2 Chron. 21).

24:3-4 The "house" in view is probably a figure for one's life experience, including literal houses, one's household, his business, etc. (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). If it takes "wisdom" to build a house, it takes even more wisdom to build a household. Wisdom is essential for all domestic enterprises. "The wise man built his house upon a rock," as the song goes, and that Rock is Christ Jesus (cf. Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 10:4). Abraham built his household and his dynasty with wisdom, by habitually trusting and obeying the LORD.

"It is wisdom, viz. that which originates from God, which is rooted in fellowship with Him, by which every household, be it great or small, prospers and attains to a successful and flourishing state ..."¹

"The replacement of book shelves by television sets and of the study by the 'den' [or man-cave] in modern homes (regressing from human to bestial habitats!) is a sad commentary on our times."²

24:5-6 Again we see that the wise person is not completely self-reliant. He recognizes his own imperfection and looks to others to supplement his personal deficiencies. "Wage war" means to seek to overcome any obstacle one may face in life. Wise strategy is always more important than mere strength ("in an abundance of counselors there is victory"). David not only sought the LORD for direction as he waged war against Israel's enemies, but he also surrounded himself with wise men who advised him, such as Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Sam. 17).

"I don't believe in this method of opening the Bible to look at some verse at the time of making a decision. That is not good. The Word of God is not a roulette wheel for us to turn and hope it stops at the right place. We need to know what the whole Bible says. We need to read Moses and Joshua and Samuel and David and Micah and Zechariah and Matthew and Paul and John. They are all our

¹Delitzsch, 2:126.

²Plaut, p. 247.

counselors. We can appeal to all of them at any time of decision."¹

As Christians, we need to understand the meaning of Scripture before we can apply it to our own lives and explain it to others. For this God has given us a multitude of counselors in the writers of commentaries and other Bible study aids. The Christian is a fool who does not listen to these counselors by reading what they have written to supplement and challenge his or her own study and understanding of the Scriptures. But books, tapes, videos, podcasts, etc., including these notes, are no substitute for Scripture itself.

24:7 Wisdom is beyond the fool's reach. Therefore "a fool" does not, if he has any wisdom at all, seek to give advice in the decision-making places of his world ("in the gate").² Fortunately Nabal's folly seems to have been limited to his own household. Even so, by opening his mouth against David, he sealed his own fate (1 Sam. 25).

"This saying inferentially commends becoming competently wise by warning against being an incompetent fool."³

24:8-9 Other people will despise the person who dreams up plans designed to do evil. Such planning is sin and the work of a fool. Fools are not necessarily unintelligent, but their plans often result in sin.⁴

Amnon's friend Jonadab suggested a course of action that eventually resulted in the deaths of Tamar and Amnon, though whether that outcome was what he hoped for when he advised Amnon remains a mystery (2 Sam. 13). He became "an abomination" to Amnon for advising the foolish deception that he did. The Pharaoh of the Exodus is an example of a scoffer who became an abomination to Israel and to humanity.

24:10 The "day of distress" is any day or period of time when trouble comes. If a person does not persevere (is "lacking courage"), but quits under the

¹McGee, 3:82.

²See Kidner's subject study on the fool, pp. 39-42.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 273.

⁴McKane, p. 399.

pressure of trouble, he shows that he does not have "strength" of character, which is a fruit of possessing wisdom (cf. 24:5a). Furthermore, he will be weakened thereby.¹ We never know our true strength until we find ourselves in situations that demand much from us. Weak people plead unfavorable conditions so they can justify quitting.²

Whereas this proverb appears on the surface to be a simple statement, it is really an earnest admonition to persevere. Elijah fled when Jezebel threatened him (1 Kings 19:2-4), but David strengthened himself in the LORD, and pressed on, when the people spoke of stoning him (1 Sam. 30:6).

24:11-12 The people carried away in verse 11 are evidently innocent captives or oppressed individuals. We have a responsibility to help such people. If we claim ignorance of their condition as a reason for not helping them, we need to remember that God knows the true condition of our heart and will repay us accordingly. We are responsible to rescue those who are in mortal danger. This includes warning and teaching those who are hastening to eternal destruction.³

"The notion that one is duty-bound to intervene to prevent capital punishment is grossly anachronistic [inappropriate]."⁴

God told Ezekiel that He had made him a "watchman" over the house of Israel in order to warn the people of impending judgment. God charged him to be faithful to his calling (see Ezek. 33:1-12).

"In Proverbs 24:12 Yahweh is represented as one 'who weighs the heart.' This figure goes back to the Egyptian god Thoth, who is often represented as standing at the judgment of the dead beside the scales with the human heart."⁵

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 745.

²Kidner, p. 154.

³Toy, p. 445.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 747.

⁵Waltke, "The Book ...," p. 237.

The concept of God weighing (judging the thoughts and intents of) the heart was also very old in Israelite theology, going back as far as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:17-19).

24:13-14 The writer pictured the pleasantness and desirability of wisdom in this saying. Wisdom prepares for the future, but folly does not. Cornelius sent for Peter because he had a desire to taste of the wisdom that he knew Peter could impart (Acts 10). Through Peter's preaching he found "a future" and "a hope."

"Wisdom has all the immediate sweetness of honey, but also the additional characteristic of a pleasure that lasts for eternity."¹

24:15-16 To make a point, the speaker spoke to his son as though he were addressing a "wicked person" in this saying. This device gives the warning more force, since the wicked man's main concern is his own self-interest. The point is that the "righteous man" is resilient ("falls seven times" [i.e. many times] but "rises again"), because he repents and trusts in God. Furthermore, God defends the righteous. Virtue triumphs in the end.² Peter fell many times, but he got up to try again. Judas Iscariot stumbled, never repented, and suffered calamity (Matt. 26:75; 27:3-5).

"This is a warning against encroaching on the property or goods of the righteous [cf. Ps. 34:20]."³

24:17-18 To complete the thought we might add at the end of this saying: "and turn it (His anger) on you." This assumes that the last word, "him," refers to "your enemy." However "Him" could refer to the LORD. In either case the meaning is the same. Gloating over someone else's misfortune is a practice that God disapproves of, even if the other person is the adversary of the righteous and his suffering is deserved (cf. Matt. 5:44). Fear of God's displeasure should warn the wise away from this attitude and activity. McGee understood Solomon to be saying:

¹M. L. Malbim, *The Book of Proverbs*, p. 248.

²Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 140.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 749.

"If you rejoice when your enemy falls, the Lord may turn around and start prospering that man. Then you really will be miserable."¹

God announced judgment on the Edomites because they rejoiced when the Israelites suffered (Obad. 12-16). David truly grieved over the death of King Saul, though he could have rejoiced (2 Sam. 1).

"In truth the proverb teaches that the LORD will not promote further moral ugliness by maintaining the situation that exacerbates [worsens] it."²

24:19-20 "Get upset" (Heb. *tithar*) means to burn up emotionally. The sage again addressed the problem of envying wicked people who enjoy temporary prosperity (cf. 23:17; 24:1; Ps. 37:1). The "lamp" is the life of the wicked. The wicked are doomed; they will have no good outcome for their lives.³ Though Herod Agrippa I enjoyed prosperity for some time, God eventually judged him for his sins (Acts 12:20-23).

24:21-22 The change in view in this proverb is deviation from the will of God or the laws of the king. "Both of them" (v. 22) refers to God and the king. The structure is again chiasmic in order to emphasize the central thought of the proverb. People should fear God and the government because they both punish rebels (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17). They should not entertain rebellious thoughts against God and the king.⁴ The rebels Theudas and Judas of Galilee tried to overthrow their government, but they died, and their revolutions soon petered out (Acts 5:36-37).

This concludes the so-called 30 sayings of the wise, as is clear from 24:23a.

IV. COLLECTION 4: SIX MORE SAYINGS OF THE WISE 24:23-34

The first sentence in 24:23 indicates that what follows was not part of the collection of 30 sayings that preceded. Other wise men (lit. "sages") evidently provided these proverbs. Schultz believed that "This superscription supports the claim that there was a

¹McGee, 3:83.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. p. 285.

³Toy, p. 449.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:137.

distinct professional group of sages in ancient Israel, perhaps serving primarily as court officials and advisors in Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 18:18).¹ Hubbard divided this section into four sayings rather than six. He suggested that they may have been added to the previous 30 because they deal with areas of justice and wisdom that are not specifically dealt with in the preceding 30 sayings: partiality in law (vv. 23-26), sound priorities (v. 27), honesty in court (vv. 28-29), and industry in work (vv. 30-34).² Most interpreters have identified six separate sayings.

24:23-25 This saying advocates justice and straight talk. It is particularly relevant for judges of all kinds. Pilate, Felix, and Festus were all judges who perverted justice to please their Jewish subjects (Matt. 27; Acts 24; 25). Ironically, the Jews hated them all.

24:26 One paraphrase of this verse is as follows: "The right word spoken seals all, like a kiss on the lips."³ Truthful speech is a mark of friendship. Abigail's humble, wise words to David were as pleasing to him as a kiss, and they won his love (1 Sam. 25).

"As a sincere kiss shows affection and is desirable, so an honest (and perhaps straightforward) answer shows a person's concern and therefore is welcomed."⁴

"Such words are like as if the lips of the inquirer received a kiss from the lips of the answerer."⁵

24:27 The farmer must pay more attention to the cultivation of his fields (i.e., the source of his livelihood) than to his personal comfort. One application might be: Everyone should put a well-ordered life, including a measure of financial security, ahead of getting married and starting a family. In a broader application, we should keep first things first (cf. Luke 14:28-32).⁶ Solomon first built the Lord's house, to honor Him, and then, when that was finished, he built his own house, to honor himself (1 Kings 6:38—7:1).

¹Schultz, p. 470.

²Hubbard, p. 389.

³Knox cited by Kidner, p. 156. See Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 293, for information about kissing customs in the ancient Near East.

⁴Buzzell, p. 959.

⁵Delitzsch, 2:143.

⁶Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 153.

24:28 Being a witness against a neighbor means testifying against him. This proverb advises us to keep quiet unless our testimony is necessary, and to keep truthful when we do speak. Naboth's neighbors testified against him falsely, and their perjury resulted in his execution (1 Kings 21:13).

"Do not speak even truth needlessly against any, and never falsehood."¹

24:29 This verse expresses, in a negative way, the same truth as the golden rule (cf. 20:22; Matt. 5:43-45; Rom. 12:19). David refused to take revenge on King Saul for Saul's evil treatment of him.

24:30-34 This lengthy proverb is another ode (cf. 23:29-35). "Poverty will come like a drifter" (v. 34) in that it will overtake the sluggard surprisingly and/or suddenly. Continued laziness typically leads to poverty (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10).

"The parallel between 'lazy man' and 'devoid of understanding' ["lacking sense"] make clear that the laziness in view was not the result of a weak back but a hollow brain. Not strength but will was the lack."²

It was while he slept that the enemy of the farmer, in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, did his damage (Matt. 13:24-25; cf. Isa. 5:1-6).

These sections of 36 wise sayings begin and end with a reference to the poor (cf. 22:22-23; 24:30-34). Poverty has some obvious connections with folly, though not every poor person is a fool. Foolishness often results in poverty.

V. COLLECTION 5: SOLOMON'S MAXIMS EXPRESSING WISDOM CHS. 25—29

We return now to consider more proverbs of Solomon (cf. 1:1—22:16). Chapters 25 and 26 contain proverbs that are mainly comparisons. The key words in these chapters are "like ... so." Chapter 27 is a mixture of comparative and antithetical proverbs. Chapters 28 and 29 contain maxims that are mainly contrasts marked by the word "but." In all these chapters there are mostly couplets (distichs) but also some longer proverbs. Also, there are several clusters of proverbs and "a low frequency of sayings mentioning

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 471.

²Hubbard, p. 393.

Yahweh."¹ I counted 66 proverbs in the group of analogies (25:1—27:22) and 54 in the group of contrasts (chs. 28—29). So there are 120 proverbs in this major section of the book, if we exclude the discourse on prudence in 27:23 through 27.

"The proverbs in these chapters differ in that there are more multiple line sayings and more similes; chapters 28—29 are similar to chapters 10—16, but chapters 25—27 differ in having few references to God."²

A. INTRODUCTION OF THE LATER SOLOMONIC COLLECTION 25:1

A group of scholars who served during King Hezekiah's reign (715-686 B.C.) added more of Solomon's 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32) to the former collection (1:1—22:16). These men lived about 250 years after Solomon, who ruled from 971-931 B.C. This verse introduces chapters 25 through 29.

"It may be a piece of very good service to the church to publish other men's works that have lain hidden in obscurity."³

B. INSTRUCTIVE ANALOGIES 25:2—27:22

The emphasis in this section of Proverbs continues to be on wisdom and folly and their accompanying virtues and vices.

1. Wise and foolish conduct 25:2-28

Verses 2 through 7 all deal with how to deal with kings (rulers).

25:2 The fact that God has chosen not to reveal everything that human beings want to know has resulted in our holding Him in awe and glorifying Him (cf. Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33-34). However, a king's subjects hold him in awe and glorify him when he diligently investigates a matter and does not make his decisions on the basis of superficial understanding (cf. John 5:39; 2 Tim. 2:15).

The angel of the LORD chose not to reveal everything about Himself to Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:17-18). King Solomon's dealings with the

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 775.

²Ross, p. 1078.

³Henry, p. 776.

two prostitutes who appealed to him for justice proved that God had indeed blessed him with great wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28).

25:3 The wise woman from Tekoa, whom Joab hoped would persuade David to welcome Absalom back home, testified to King David's unusual insight. David saw that Joab was behind her words (2 Sam. 14:18-20). How much more is the heart of the King of Kings past understanding completely ("unsearchable").

"The proverb is a warning against the delusion of being flattered by the favour of the king, which may, before one thinks of it, be withdrawn or changed even into the contrary; and a counsel to one to take heed to his words and acts, and to see to it that he is influenced by higher motives than by the fallacious calculation of the impression on the view and disposition of the king."¹

25:4-5 Like dross separated from silver, evil people must be removed if a king's rule is to be righteous (cf. 17:3; 20:8). It is not enough for a ruler to be just. His associates must also be people of integrity for his administration to do right ("be established in righteousness"). King Solomon had to judge many evil-doers before he could occupy his throne safely and quietly (1 Kings 2).

"The same principle abides in regard to the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wicked shall be destroyed and all the transgressors rooted out of the land when He returns in triumph to usher in the great day of the Lord (2 Thess. 1 and 2; Rev. 19)."²

25:6-7 This proverb advocates humility in the presence of rulers and others in authority (cf. 23:1-2). The person who thinks highly of himself or herself may not be so regarded by others, either legitimately or illegitimately.

"It is better that superiors elevate him because his aptitude warrants it than that he outreach his limits and risk a

¹Delitzsch, 2:151.

²Ironside, p. 346.

reprimand and loss of face that will damage his career prospects (cf. Luke 14:8-11)."¹

"There is a decent middle way between being a braggart and 'pushy,' and simply groveling; one has to have the prudence to know one's ability, one's place. Such prudence, it is implied, will be observed and rewarded accordingly."²

It is to his credit that young Saul, who was humble in his early years, did not seek Israel's kingship (1 Sam. 10:22). David, after God removed King Saul, wisely sought the LORD about how he should proceed, rather than rushing ahead to assume leadership of his nation (2 Sam. 2:1).

25:8-10 This proverb advises us to settle disputes privately whenever possible (cf. Luke 12:57-59; 14:31-33). It is not wise to drag someone hastily into court to argue. We should be cautious about publicly sharing information that may lead to embarrassment (v. 8). We should not divulge secrets, including secrets about our opponent, in order to clear ourselves in arguments, or we may ruin a friendship. The plaintiff should debate his case with his neighbor out of court. Then the point of disagreement will not become public knowledge (v. 9) and give the plaintiff a bad reputation (v. 10; cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-8). King Josiah meddled unnecessarily in the affairs of his neighbor, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, and lost his life as a result (2 Chron. 35:20-24).

"To run to the law or to the neighbors is usually to run away from the duty of personal relationship—see Christ's clinching comment in Matthew 18:15b."³

"There is no success which is achieved at the price of your own integrity or someone else's hurt."⁴

The following four proverbs (vv. 11-14) all use emblems (symbols) to illustrate their points.

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 315.

²Murphy, p. 191.

³Kidner, p. 157.

⁴Plaut, p. 258.

25:11 "Gold" may refer to the color of the apples or, probably, to the precious metal. Delitzsch took "apples of gold" as a poetic name for oranges.¹ "Settings" suggests an appropriate background, such as an attractive basket or frame, if a picture of an apple (or orange) is in view. Fox believed that the description is of jewelry.² The point is that just the right words spoken at the right time in the right way can be as pleasing as a beautiful piece of fruit in a suitable container.³

Queen Esther's surprise revelation of the enemy of her people was effective because she carefully prepared the setting in which she planned to expose Haman to King Ahasuerus (Esth. 4:16—7:6).

"... the writer witnessed one day a most unusual occurrence in the chief orange-growing district of southern California; something, in deed, that none remembered as having taken place previously. A fairly heavy fall of snow occurred during the height of the orange harvest. The trees everywhere were covered with the silvery down, and as the lovely view spread out before me, and I noticed the great yellow globes hanging among the whitened boughs and leaves, I exclaimed involuntarily, 'Apples of gold in pictures of silver!'"⁴

25:12 This is another emblematic proverb, the emblems and objects of comparison in this case being a golden earring and a golden pendant. The point here is that appropriate words are as attractive to the ear as beautiful jewelry is to the eye. The remarks of Job's friends were not attractive to him because they did not apply to his situation; they were out of place. Likewise, untrue words are unattractive if they are known to be untrue. In one of the rare instances in which a prophet of the LORD actually convinced the Israelites to change their ways, Samuel eloquently appealed to them to return to the LORD, and they did (1 Sam. 12; cf. 2 Chron. 28:9-15). His words were, on that occasion, as valuable as gold jewelry.

¹Delitzsch, 2:158.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 782.

³Cf. Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 148.

⁴Ironside, pp. 349-50.

"... as the former two ornaments [in 12a] form a beautiful *ensemble*, so the latter two [in 12b], the wise preacher of morality and an attentive ear, form a harmonious whole ..."¹

25:13 "The cold of snow" here probably does not refer to a snowfall at harvest time, since this would be a calamity. It probably refers to a drink cooled with snow, like with ice cubes, which would be welcome and refreshing.

"Do you suppose that's how God feels when we messengers deliver His Word with reasonable accuracy?"²

"... the peasants of Damascus store up the winter's snow in a cleft of the mountains, and convey it in the warm months to Damascus and the coast towns."³

Another interpretive option is that "snow" may be a deliberate exaggeration.⁴ In this case the point is that a faithful messenger is as welcome and refreshing as cool weather at harvest-time.

When the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites attacked King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, the message promising victory, which God sent through Jahaziel the Levite, proved as refreshing and invigorating as a drink of cold water on a hot day (2 Chron. 20:14-17).

25:14 This proverb contrasts with the one in the previous verse, and with the one in 18:16. As a cold drink on a hot day refreshes, so a windy, cloudy sky that promises rain, but does not deliver it, disappoints. Such is the person who proudly claims to have certain abilities ("gifts") but fails to show them when called upon to do so. Jude used this figure, of "clouds without water," to describe false teachers who deliver a lot of wind but no refreshing revelation (Jude 12; cf. 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1). Many of the Old Testament false prophets did the same thing. Remember also Pharaoh's magicians who failed to be able to do the later miracles that Moses did (Exod. 9:11).

¹Delitzsch, 2:159.

²Hubbard, p. 408.

³Delitzsch, 2:160.

⁴Murphy, p. 192.

25:15 This and the following two proverbs advocate moderation, this one in regard to speech. The point is: Do not speak too long or too forcefully. A gentle tongue can be very powerful.

"Calm and patient speech can break down insurmountable opposition."¹

"The bones are the most rigid body parts inside of a person, and fracturing the bones here refers to breaking down the deepest, most hardened resistance to an idea a person may possess."²

David convicted King Saul of his unwarranted harsh treatment of him with simple words (1 Sam. 24:8-15; 26:17-25). Abigail changed David's attitude completely by appealing to him humbly and reasonably. She tried to force nothing with her words (1 Sam. 25:23-35). Nathan later won David's confession with a simple story, not with threats or accusations (2 Sam. 12).

25:16 Anything overindulged, even the most desirable of things, can become distasteful and repulsive. This applies to overloading the mind as well as the stomach. Paul warned Timothy: "Bodily training is just slightly beneficial, but godliness is beneficial for all things" (1 Tim. 4:8). Some people spend too much time on physical exercise and not enough on spiritual exercise. Samson loved games (riddles) and women too much, and they eventually brought him to ruin.

"Since Eden, man has wanted the last ounce out of life, as though beyond God's 'enough' lay ecstasy, not nausea."³

"Wives and husbands need to watch lest their affection for each other, sweet and lovely as it is, crowds out the things of God. So with the various joys and pleasures of life. What is legitimate and wholly proper in its place, may prove very detrimental to all spiritual growth if it be permitted to become the supreme controlling power of life."⁴

¹Ross, p. 1082.

²D. A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, p. 207.

³Kidner, p. 159.

⁴Ironside, p. 353.

25:17 As we say today: "Don't wear out your welcome." And: "Familiarity breeds contempt." Or, as another sage put it: "Visitors and fish stink after three days." Staying too long, even in the presence of friends, is another example of overindulgence (v. 16; cf. 1 Tim. 5:13). Job's friends overstayed their visit.

"Friendship ripens through discreet sensitivity not to intrude on privacy and to allow space for the other person to be a person in his own right, not through self-enjoyment, impetuosity, or imposition. Without that discretion, instead of enriching life, friendship takes away from it."¹

Proverbs 25:16 and 17 are a good example of a "proverbial pair," as Fox called them:

"Each couplet makes sense separately. The first warns against excess in any pleasure. When the two verses are juxtaposed, they interact. The second narrows the focus of the first to a particular excess, and the first provides the second with a vivid and memorable image."²

More emblematic proverbs follow through 26:3.

25:18 A lying witness is a destructive weapon that can severely injure another person, so we should avoid speaking lies (cf. 6:19; 14:5; 19:5, 9, 28; Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:17). A "club," a "sword," and an "arrow" all did their deadly work in various ways. Similarly, lying and perjury can injure a "neighbor" in a variety of ways. Cain's lie led to God cursing him (Gen. 4:9-11). Joseph's brothers' lie broke the heart of their father (Gen. 37:31-35). The testimony of false witnesses at Naboth's trial resulted in his execution (1 Kings 21:13).

25:19 Relying on an untrustworthy ("treacherous") person in a time of danger can result in as much pain as a "bad tooth" or an "unsteady foot" for those who place "confidence" in him (cf. 14:22; 17:17; 19:22; 20:6). The false witness (v. 18) actively causes pain, but the untrustworthy person does so passively: He fails to deliver when needed. Judas proved to be an

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 327.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 478.

unreliable person. John Mark also proved untrustworthy during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:13; 15:37-38). Jesus, in contrast, never fails those who trust in Him (Matt. 20:30-34; Heb. 13:5).

25:20 Taking away someone's garment in cold weather would add to his or her discomfort. Similarly, pouring acidic vinegar on alkali bicarbonate of soda (or a wound [Septuagint], Heb. *nater*) disturbs the natural state of things (or the healing process). It is as wrong to disturb "a troubled heart" in need of quiet and comfort—by trying to cheer it up with intrusive, unwanted songs—as it is to disturb a body by depriving it of warmth or healing. Songs can be therapeutic, but when they are insensitively sung, they can cause pain and can damage the spirit (cf. Eccles. 3:4). David's soothing music only aggravated King Saul's already sick spirit (1 Sam. 19:9-10).

25:21-22 Clearly the point of this proverb is to return good for evil (cf. Matt. 5:40-46; Rom. 12:20-21). Such conduct will bring blessing from God and remorse to the evildoer. Still, what does "heap burning coals on his head" mean? Presumably this clause alludes to an ancient custom, though I have not been able to verify the custom. It is possible that when a person's fire went out at home, he or she would go to a neighbor and get some live coals to rekindle the fire. Carrying those burning coals in a pan on the head would have involved some danger and discomfort for the person carrying them, but they would have been an evidence of the neighbor's love. Likewise, the person who receives good in return for evil feels somewhat uncomfortable, even though he receives a good gift. His discomfort arises over his guilt for having wronged his neighbor in the first place. So returning good for evil not only secures the blessing of God (v. 22b), but it also convicts the wrongdoer of his ways (v. 22a) in a gentle way. It causes him some humiliation (cf. 6:27-28).

"There have been many explanations of the difficult phrase about heaping burning coals on the head. Some see a connection with an Egyptian ritual of penitence, where a person bears a pan of coals on the head, while others see it as referring to the red face of shame. Still others translate in a way that reverses the meaning and suggests that burning coals are removed from the enemy. None of these are completely convincing, but I include myself in

the vast majority who have no doubt that it refers to some kind of punishment or pain inflicted on the enemy."¹

"The way to turn an enemy into a friend is to act towards him in a friendly manner."²

By praying for their executioners, Jesus and Stephen overcame the evil being done to them with good (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).

25:23 The "angry face" in this proverb belongs to the person who is the target of a "gossiping" tongue. Sly words can infuriate people just as a northerly wind brings rain. These are inevitable results.

"An untimely, icy blast of rain from the north takes the farmer aback and ruins his crop (cf. 26:1; 28:3). So also the unaware victim, when he hears the slander, realizes that the benefits he was about to reap from his work are suddenly ruined."³

"When people come with unsavory tales about absent persons it would be well to meet them in the spirit that David manifested towards Rechab and Baanah, for such people are character-assassins (2 Sam. 4:5-12)."⁴

25:24 This proverb's identical twin is in 21:9, and its fraternal twin is in 21:19, which see.

"'Contentious' in each of these proverbs is a word that suggests constant quarreling about decisions—who, how, what, and why. ... The contentious woman is one who never backs away from her nagging commitment to quarrelsomeness."⁵

Jezebel must have made life miserable for King Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 18; 19; 21; 2 Kings 9). Paul urged wives to be submissive to their husbands rather than contentious (Eph. 5:22-24).

¹Longman, p. 458.

²Henry, p. 778.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 333.

⁴Ironside, p. 358.

⁵Hubbard, p. 439.

- 25:25 While this proverb is true of any "good news," it is even more true when we think of the gospel message as good news. The Samaritan woman found the good news that Jesus brought to her revitalizing and worth sharing with her needy neighbors (John 4:6-29). The intent of the proverb seems to be to encourage people to share good news, rather than bad news, since it is invigorating.
- 25:26 If people or animals walk into clear, clean water, they pollute it by stirring up mud and sediment. Likewise, a good person ("righteous person") can pollute a good situation by allowing evil people to disturb it. Therefore wise people should oppose evil people when they try to disturb the peace. Ishmael disturbed the peace that had come to Judah, after the destruction of Jerusalem, by assassinating good Gedaliah, the governor whom the Babylonians had put over the people. Gedaliah could have prevented his own assassination, but he "gave way before the wicked" (Jer. 41:1-3).
- 25:27 Both practices in this verse are pleasant for the person who engages in them, but they can affect him adversely if he pursues them to excess (cf. v. 16). "One's own glory" should probably read "weighty matters" (Heb. *kebedim*), such as the hidden things of God and the king (cf. v. 3).¹ Thus this proverb warns against trying to find the answers to questions that are unanswerable, probably with inordinate ambition.
- The Book of Ecclesiastes is the record of Solomon's attempts to discover the answers to many such mysteries, and his frustration at being unable to do so. David wrote that his heart was not proud, nor his eyes haughty, nor had he involved himself in great matters that were too difficult for him (Ps. 131:1). He recommended simply hoping in the LORD (Ps. 131:2-3).
- 25:28 Both "a city ... with without walls" and "a person who has no self-control over his spirit" are vulnerable to attack and defeat by an enemy (contrast 16:32). Noah laid himself open to shame by his lack of self-control (Gen. 9:20-21). Moses could not enter the Promised Land because he lost control of himself at Meribah (Num. 20). Given the right pressure, anyone can lose control of himself or herself. For this reason we need to submit

¹Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 336.

control of ourselves to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), who will produce the fruit of self-control within us (Gal. 5:23).

2. Fools and folly ch. 26

The analogies in chapter 25 dealt with both wise and foolish conduct, but those in chapter 26 deal mainly with fools and folly. The first three proverbs also employ emblems for comparison.

- 26:1 Honoring a fool is as out of place as "snow in summer" or "rain in harvest" time. All three may also cause serious inconvenience. God removed the honor and judged the folly of King Nebuchadnezzar by removing his sanity temporarily (Dan. 4).
- 26:2 If someone curses another person who does not deserve it, the "curse" will not be effective (cf. Num. 23:8). It will not "come to rest," namely, attach itself to the person cursed. Of course, the LORD controls curses, just as He controls the lot cast into the lap (16:33).

"It was commonly believed that blessings and curses had objective existence—that once uttered, the word was effectual. Scriptures make it clear that the power of a blessing or a curse depends on the power of the one behind it (e.g., Balaam could not curse what God had blessed; cf. Num 22:38; 23:8). This proverb underscores the correction of superstition. The Word of the Lord is powerful because it is the word of the Lord—he will fulfill it."¹

Goliath's curse did not stick to David because it was without cause. David had done nothing to deserve it (1 Sam. 17:43).

- 26:3 This proverb illustrates what is fitting (suitable, appropriate) for a fool, in contrast to what is not fitting (cf. v. 1). Whips and bridles keep horses and donkeys under control, whips by spurring them to action and bridles by restraining them. Likewise "a rod" of discipline applied to "the back of fools" keeps them under control (cf. 10:13; 19:29). The fool may need strong stimulation because he or she is obstinate or lazy, or he or she may

¹Ross, p. 1087.

need restraint for being too wild. A particular kind of fool is in view in verses 3 through 12.

"The *dullard* (Heb 'kesil') is not merely a man of low intelligence. He is the kind of fool who is obtuse because of smug overconfidence. See, e.g., 1.32b."¹

David needed prodding to do his duty as king when he stayed behind in Jerusalem and saw Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1). And he needed restraining when he lost patience with Nabal (1 Sam. 25:13). God, in His love, applies discipline for these purposes (cf. Heb. 12:4-13).

26:4-5 The pieces of advice in these two verses do not contradict each other, because each is wise in its own way. Verse 4 means that in replying to a fool one should not descend to his level by giving him a foolish response. King Hezekiah's men, for example, did not reply to the blasphemous threats of Rabshakeh (e.g., 2 Kings 18:36). Verse 5 means that one should correct a fool so he will not conclude that he is right. Nehemiah needed to reply to the wretched pretensions of Sanballat (Neh. 6:8; cf. Job 2:9-10).

Some of a fool's comments do not deserve a reply (v. 4), but others require one (v. 5). In unimportant matters one should ignore the foolish comment, but in important matters one needs to respond so that others will not conclude that the fool is correct.²

"In other words, it depends on the fool, and the truly wise person will be so sensitive to human nature that he will know when to apply the one and not the other."³

"I suggest that while it is true that both proverbs could be used effectively in different situations, when the proverbs are conjoined, the second proverb becomes a cautionary limitation to the first. Yes, it is dangerous to respond to a fool (v 4), but the wise have a duty to speak up (v 5)."⁴

¹Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1477.

²Plaut, p. 266. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:16-17; 12:11.

³Longman and Dillard, p. 276.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 794.

"This proverb pair is prime evidence leading toward the proper understanding of the proverb genre. Proverbs are not universally true laws but circumstantially relevant principles ..."¹

More emblematic proverbs follow through verse 11, often marked by the comparative "like ... so" (cf. vv. 14, 17, 18-19, 21, 23).

26:6 Cutting off a messenger's "feet" makes it impossible for him to deliver a message, and so does sending a fool with a message make the delivery of it impossible. The "fool" will lose heart, get distracted, or for some other reason prove unfaithful to his duty. Drinking "violence" refers to drinking something that does violence to one's system, such as poison.

"Instead of bringing healing (see 13:17) and finding refreshment through the communication (25:13; cf. 10:26), one inflicts on himself high-handed injustice and cold-blooded, physical brutality (see 4:17; cf. Num. 13:32; 14:1-4; 1 K. 11:26-40; 2 K. 8:15)."²

The ten spies who brought back the discouraging report had this effect on the Israelites in the wilderness (Num. 13:32; 14:1-4).

26:7 It is unwise to arm a fool with wise sayings, to ask him to deliver them, and to expect others to profit from them. Jonah was such a fool, until the LORD brought him to repentance (Jon. 1).

"The fool can as little make use of an intelligent proverb, or moral maxim ... as a lame man can of his feet ..."³

"... a noble proverb in the mouth of a fool carries no weight (i.e., authority) and gets him nowhere. ... The proverb's good message in the flawed messenger falls flat on its face and makes not the slightest impact."⁴

26:8 By giving honor to a fool one arms him to do damage; it gives him ammunition. This can happen, for example, by promoting him to a

¹Longman, p. 464.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 351.

³Delitzsch, 2:179-80.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, pp. 351, 352.

position of great responsibility. The figure of binding a stone in a sling seems to suggest that the person doing the binding did not know how to operate a sling. People did not "bind" stones in slings but simply laid them in the sling so that, when the sling was slung, the stone would fly out. Similarly, one who expects a fool to accomplish something honorable does not know how things normally work.¹

"A stone, bound in a sling, is useless; so honor, conferred on a fool, is thrown away."²

When Caesar appointed Pontius Pilate to his governorship, he did not realize what a fool Pilate would prove to be in dealing with his Jewish subjects. King Ahasuerus also found that his trusted friend Haman was "a fool."

- 26:9 A proverb in the mouth of a fool is as painful and dangerous as "a thorn that sticks in the hand of a heavy drinker." Both the teaching and the thorn turn out to be instruments of pain and danger for drunks and fools who hear them or have them. The implication is that the fool, by using a proverb, is as disgusting and out of control as a drunkard. God announced through Jeremiah that He would punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite for misleading the people of Judah (Jer. 29:30-32).
- 26:10 Not only is a fool unfit to teach with proverbs (v. 9), but he is unfit for any work. He inflicts damage with both his words and his deeds. Solomon compared fools and those who "pass by" (i.e., are unknown and untested) to what we call "loose cannons." Their actions are unpredictable and dangerous. Jesus discouraged a would-be disciple who said that he would follow Jesus wherever He went, by reminding him that: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58).
- 26:11 A wise man does not repeat his folly, but a fool does. Similarly, a dog returns to eat its vomit, but a man does not. A fool behaves like a dog, instead of a man, when he "repeats" his folly. Even wise people sometimes repeat their folly, but by doing so they act foolishly.

¹Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 152.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 471.

"The presumption is that the dog throws up because the food does not agree with it. In spite of that, it eats it again!"¹

Peter alluded to this proverb when he described the habit of false teachers in becoming entangled again in the defilements of the world (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

26:12 Nabal was the type of fool described in this proverb. No one could reason with him (1 Sam. 25:17). Paul counseled: "Do not be wise in your own estimation" (Rom. 12:16). According to this proverb, an egomaniac is worse than a fool.

"Arrogant self-assumption and fancied superiority to all instruction place a man hopelessly beyond the reach of help [cf. vv. 3, 11]."²

"Worse than a fool is a deluded fool."³

Verses 13 through 16 deal with a particular kind of fool: the sluggard.

"Proverbs parodies laziness more than any other form of foolishness ..."⁴

26:13 "The lazy one" is a procrastinator (cf. 13:4; 15:19; 19:15; 20:4; 21:25-26; 22:13; 24:30-34). Even if there are no real difficulties or reasons to delay, he will imagine them so that he can avoid going to work or taking action. When irrational fears disable a person, he or she may be a sluggard who is trying to justify his or her inaction. King David at one time had a military commander named Amasa who acted sluggishly, and David had to replace him (2 Sam. 20:4-7).

26:14 Rather than getting out of bed and going to work, the sluggard uses his energy uselessly: turning from side to side on his bed or couch. Doors in Solomon's time rotated on pivots that rested in sockets rather than on hinges. A door at least fulfills its function by opening and closing, but the sluggard does not, because he or she stays in bed, tossing from side to side, going nowhere. Perhaps he turns so much because he does not

¹Longman, p. 467.

²Ironside, p. 369.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 355.

⁴Longman, p. 468.

need as much rest as he is taking. The ten foolish virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching and waiting for the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13).

26:15 This hyperbolic description of the sluggard repeats almost verbatim 19:24. The sluggard is so lazy that he will not even do the work necessary to move his food from his dinner plate to his mouth. Paul taught that if any Christian refused to work, he should not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Perhaps there is a connection between at first being unwilling to feed oneself, and later being unable to feed oneself. The sluggard is not one who cannot work, but one who will not work.

26:16 Ironically, the sluggard eventually convinces himself that his laziness is justified. He becomes so sure of this that even "seven people who can give a discreet answer" (i.e., a full complement of wise counselors) will have no success in changing his mind. His laziness has led to irrationality.

"He can invent excuses and plausible arguments in unlimited quantities to justify his disgraceful behavior; and neither the disgust nor the anger of better men than himself will affect him."¹

"... the sage is at his most sarcastically comedic when it comes to the lazy person ..."²

King Saul, who should have been leading his army against the Philistines, lay resting under a pomegranate tree, whereas Jonathan was out fighting Israel's enemies. When God gave Jonathan success, Saul took offense and wanted to execute Jonathan. Only the people of Israel were able to deliver Jonathan from Saul's folly, which seems to be traceable to his slothfulness in engaging the enemy (1 Sam. 14:1-46).

The strong emphasis on the folly of sluggishness in the Book of Proverbs is part of the foundation of the so-called "Protestant work ethic."

Verses 17 through 19 deal with the love of peace, verses 20 and 21 deal with slanderers, and verses 22 through 28 deal with hypocrisy.

¹Ironside, p. 371.

²Longman, p. 561.

26:17 The busybody who unnecessarily gets involved in conflicts that do not concern him or her can be sure that he or she will get hurt.

"*Passes by*" probably modifies the '*dog*' not the outsider. The illustration thus is strengthened: Clutching a passing, therefore, strange dog '*by the ears*' is both disturbing because of the yapping and dangerous because of the nipping. No good can come from either."¹

Moses had to flee from Egypt because he got involved in a fight between two Israelites (Exod. 2:13-14). And King Josiah died unnecessarily because he tried to stop Pharaoh Neco from engaging the Babylonians in battle (2 Kings 23:29).

26:18-19 The "maniac" (v. 18) is a berserk warrior who is armed and dangerous. Because he is a madman, out of his mind, he is doubly dangerous: he is armed and he is crazy. The "person who deceives his neighbor" (v. 19) is a troublemaker who needlessly does damage to this neighbor with malicious intent (cf. 10:23). He justifies his behavior to escape punishment, when he is suspected or caught, by claiming: "It was only a joke!"

The maniac and the deceiver are alike in that they both do damage wherever they go. They are unlike each other, in that the first one does his damage without malice aforethought, but the second one does so deliberately. The point of the comparison is that the mischief-maker is worse than the crazed warrior, because he hypocritically disguises his motives. Peter warned his readers that false teachers would try to exploit them with false words (2 Pet. 2:13).

26:20 If gossips would stop gossiping, interpersonal conflicts would die out—just like when someone stops adding fuel to a fire, it goes out (cf. 10:18; 11:13, 27; 16:27-28; 18:8; 20:19). The "gossiper" typically uses insinuations and half-truths, and he or she distorts and exaggerates facts. The serpent bent the truth in this way in order to seduce Eve to sin (Gen. 3:1-5). Nehemiah refused to listen to the gossip that Sanballat was circulating about him, and consequently opposition declined (Neh. 6:5-9).

¹Hubbard, p. 418.

- 26:21 This proverb states the other side of the previous one. "Contentious" people stir up strife, just like adding fuel to a fire causes it to keep burning. The hostile unbelieving Jews, who stirred up people against the early Christian missionaries, forced Paul out of many a town, and their contentiousness led to his arrest in the temple (Acts 21:27-30).
- 26:22 This proverb repeats 18:8 verbatim. Gossiped untruths enter the ears and lodge in the memories of those who welcome them, like candy ("dainty morsels") pleases the lips and soothes the stomach. Solomon warned us to avoid these tempting sweets, which can have a lasting effect on us, and on those who distribute them. Undoubtedly much gossip preceded the eventual charge, by 250 Israelite leaders, that Moses had exalted himself over the people (Num. 16:1-3).
- Fox saw "the phony friend" as the subject of the cluster of proverbs in verses 23 through 28.¹
- 26:23 Flattery is as cheap or worthless as things that appear to be expensive but is really of little value. Hypocritical flattery cloaks a wicked heart. "Burning lips" pictures the flatterer speaking his lies with great fervor, while implying their absolute truth. King Saul, on more than one occasion, flattered David, but David was wise enough to see beyond Saul's tearful, apologetic words to his unrepentant heart (1 Sam. 24:16-22; 26:17-25).
- 26:24-26 Often people who are hateful and wicked speak to those they hate with gracious words. Such was the case with the enemies of the Jews who returned to the Promised Land from the Babylonian Captivity. Their enemies, with "deceit" (v. 24), offered to help them rebuild the temple, but they secretly planned to frustrate the builders. Their motives eventually became clear (Ezra 4:1-3). "Seven abominations in his heart" (v. 25) means that the hypocrite is thoroughly evil, "seven" being regarded as a number representing completeness.
- 26:27 The person who tries to trap his neighbor ("One who digs a pit"), as people sometimes dug pits to capture wild animals, will often find that he himself becomes tangled up in the trouble that he planned. Positioning a large stone to fall on an animal or enemy ("one who rolls a stone") was

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 800.

another way of doing damage. But sometimes the stone fell back and hurt the one who was setting the trap.

"Of themselves, these actions merely point out possibilities: one *can* fall into the pit, and one *can* be struck by a stone that rolls back."¹

Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai, but he ended up hanging from it himself (Esth. 7). Daniel's enemies had him thrown into the lions' den, but they ended up there themselves (Dan. 6).

26:28 The "lying tongue" and the "flattering mouth" are metonyms (words used as a substitute for something else closely associated with them) for deceptive speech. Deceptive speech has two effects: First, it does great damage to the person spoken to, who hears the lies and gossip, and it also hurts the person spoken about. Second, it eventually ruins the speaker.²

"The lying mouth is a gun that shoots its owner in the foot."³

Interestingly, Judas Iscariot's tongue ("Greetings, Rabbi!" Matt. 26:49) and his mouth ("kissed Him," Matt. 26:49) led to the arrest of Jesus and the suicide of Judas.

3. Virtues and vices 27:1-22

Many of the analogies in this group of verses deal with virtues and vices that are characteristic of both the wise and the foolish.

27:1 Boasting "about tomorrow" involves relying confidently on what one will do and experience in the future, even the near future (cf. Luke 12:20; James 4:13).

"If anything is certain, it is human ignorance of what will happen—this is a sphere that belongs to God."⁴

¹Murphy, p. 202.

²Waltke, *The Book ...31*, p. 366.

³Hubbard, p. 421.

⁴Murphy, p. 206.

Jesus' parable of the rich fool, who planned to live many more years but died the next night, should be a warning to all self-confident people (Luke 12:16-21). Felix procrastinated, and, as far as we know, never trusted in Christ (Acts 24:25). The implication of this proverb is that we should use each day profitably rather than procrastinating (cf. Exod. 8:10; Acts 24:25).

- 27:2 Goliath boasted of his own power, which proved to be an empty boast (1 Sam. 17:43-44). The people of the tribe of Ephraim seem to have had an unwarranted high opinion of themselves that eventually led to their defeat in battle (Josh. 17:14-15; Judg. 8:1-3; 12:1-6). James and John felt that they deserved places in Christ's kingdom superior to the other disciples, and the Lord had to humble them (Mark 10:35-41; cf. Matt. 18:1-6; 20:20-28; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-30).

"There is certainly in rare cases a praising of oneself, which is authorized because it is demanded (2 Cor. xi. 18), which, because it is offered strongly against one's will, will be measured by truth ([2 Cor.] x. 13); but in general it is improper to applaud oneself ..." ¹

- 27:3 People who have to bear the angry wrath ("provocation") of a fool will find it harder to endure than carrying a heavy stone or a load of sand. So we should avoid it.

"Treat him as Hezekiah commanded his nobles to act towards Rabshakeh (Isa. 36:21)." ²

- 27:4 Sudden rage ("wrath") is hard to endure, and boiling "anger" can overwhelm someone who is its target. But "jealousy" (envy) is even harder to endure. Therefore we should avoid making others jealous and learn to manage jealousy effectively ourselves. These emotions can destroy both the giver and the receiver. Joseph's brothers needed a lesson in jealousy management (Gen. 37), and they got it. King Saul did as well.

"... jealousy is a passion that not only rages, but reckons calmly; it incessantly ferments through the mind, and

¹Delitzsch, 2:199.

²Ironside, p. 381.

when it breaks forth, he perishes irretrievably who is its object."¹

27:5 It is better to be corrected—by anyone—than to be loved by someone who does not demonstrate that "love" overtly. A person may profess love yet do nothing to show it. Conversely, a person may be critical of us and let us know it by rebuking us ("open rebuke"). The latter person is more helpful than the former. Paul rebuked Peter and Barnabas, and the Galatian Christians, rather than allowing his affection for them to override their need for correction (Gal. 1—2). True love for another person should result in confrontation and correction, if needed. False love simply lets things go—things that need correcting—in order to selfishly avoid conflict (cf. Lev. 19:17-18).

27:6 This proverb is similar to the preceding one. Criticism by one who truly loves us is beneficial, and thus "faithful," even though it may hurt. Therefore we should not despise the "wounds" that a true friend causes in us. On the other hand, someone who professes to love us (with "kisses," either literal or figurative) may gloss over our faults and mistakes, but by doing so reveals that he is really our "enemy": He cares nothing for our welfare, but only wants affection for himself.

Moses verbally wounded his brother Aaron for building the golden calf (Exod. 32:21), but for Aaron's own good. Judas Iscariot kissed Jesus, not as an act of love, which he professed, but to betray Him (Matt. 26:47-49).

27:7 The point of this proverb seems to be that the quantity of a person's material possessions affects his attitude toward them. Those who have much do not appreciate some things, even some things that are valuable. On the other hand, a person with little tends to appreciate even the comparatively insignificant items that he receives or owns. For example, a person who receives much praise may find it nauseating, but someone who gets very little praise may savor what little he gets.²

This applies to money and power as well to praise. Solomon had great wealth, but he found it unsatisfying (Eccles. 2:4-11). The rich man in

¹Delitzsch, 2:200.

²Whybray, *The Book ...*, p. 152.

Hades had nothing and longed for even a drop of cool water (Luke 16:19-24).

"Hunger is the best sauce."¹

27:8 This bit of wisdom does not fault a person for leaving "his home." There are many good reasons that he may need to do so. "Wanders" (Heb. *noded*) can mean "flees." Perhaps Solomon had in mind someone who had to leave his home because of some crisis.² The intent of the proverb seems to be to encourage people to protect and be grateful for their homes.

"It is as undesirable and unnatural for a man to wander from home as it is for a bird to wander from his nest (Ralbag), for they are both lonely and vulnerable."³

The Prodigal Son had not learned to value his home when he left it, but later he came to appreciate his father's house (Luke 15:11-24).

27:9 David found Jonathan's friendship and selfless counsel to him to be both refreshing and stimulating (1 Sam. 20).

"Loving, solicitous counsel on the part of a true friend is as refreshing and stimulating to the soul as oil and perfume are to the body."⁴

"It is more satisfying to discuss something with another person than to deliberate on it alone."⁵

27:10 The first statement in this saying makes the point of the proverb: friends are important allies that we should retain if possible (v. 10a). The second statement is not as clear. The thought seems to be: Do not go all the way to your blood brother's house in a crisis if he lives far from you. The third statement gives the reason for the second. A friend nearby, who is not a blood relative, can be of more help than a close relation who lives farther

¹Toy, p. 483; Henry, p. 780.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 378.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 806. "Ralbag" was a medieval Jewish writer.

⁴Ironside, p. 384.

⁵Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1479.

away. A friend nearby can be more advantageous than a brother who lives miles away.

"We all need friends, and it is better to make friends among our neighbors than depend on family and old friends who are great distances from us."¹

Jesus' disciples were of more help to Him than His physical half-brothers, because they traveled with Him and supported Him (cf. Matt. 12:46-50).

27:11 A wise son brings great pleasure to his father, and he also equips his father to defend himself against the attacks of critics. The criticism may concern the son's behavior or the father's. In either case the behavior of a wise son can defuse such criticism and bring honor rather than shame on the parent. This proverb encourages the cultivation of wisdom in the son and diligence in the parent. Solomon, for example, brought great joy to aged David, and doubtless reduced the criticism that David received for raising Absalom as he had (cf. 1 Kings 2; cf. Eli and his sons, 1 Sam. 2:22-36).

"The teacher is held responsible for the faults of the pupil."²

27:12 This proverb restates 22:3. The shrewd ("prudent," Heb. *'arum*) person can anticipate trouble and protects himself, like David did repeatedly when Saul was pursuing him. The gullible ("naive," Heb. *peti*) person, in contrast, fails to do so and gets into trouble, like Nabal did when David approached his home with his army (1 Sam. 25).

"Buy insurance."³

27:13 The point of this parable and the one in 20:16 are the same.

"The unchaste wife, who is mostly encountered in the book's prologue (see 2:16; 5:10, 20; 6:24), functions as the countervoice to the father's. His voice and teaching aim to overcome her voice and seduction. In that light 27:13 probably functions in this series of educational proverbs as

¹McGee, 3:92.

²Toy, p. 487.

³McGee, 3:92.

an implicit warning to the son to stay far away from her and the fools that have indebted themselves to her. ... According to this proverb, a foolish guarantor has pledged himself to pay the debt of a foolish stranger, who has indebted himself to the unchaste wife. Both the guarantor and the debtor are in her hands. Probably by her enticements and flatteries, she seduced some male to become indebted to her (see Proverbs 5 and 7). The proverb instructs the disciple to have nothing to do with these fools, neither the guarantor, nor the debtor, nor the creditor (the unchaste wife). His allegiance belongs to his wise father."¹

After Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife's seduction, he experienced punishment (Gen. 39). But if he had not fled, he would have experienced worse consequences. Parental training seems to have been responsible for his strength of character, at least in part, though the text does not say so explicitly (cf. Gen. 37:3).

27:14 The person who hypocritically "blesses" his neighbor—for example, by praising him unusually loudly at an inappropriately "early" hour—will receive a curse from other people. One's manner of blessing others will be thought to be hypocritical if he does it inappropriately. Therefore one needs to be careful to do good things in the right way and at the right time—sincerely rather than hypocritically.

"Excessive cheeriness early in the morning can be grating."²

The way that Absalom won the hearts of the men of Israel illustrates this proverb (2 Sam. 15:1-6). After the second "beast" of Revelation 13 (i.e., "the false prophet") causes the earth's inhabitants to worship the "first beast" (i.e., Antichrist) through deceit, it will become clear to everyone that he has grossly exaggerated the power and virtue of this "first beast" (Rev. 13:11-18; 19:20).

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, pp. 381-82.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 809.

"The Italians say, 'He who praises you more than he is wont to do, either has deceived you, or is about to do it.'"¹

"Flattery is like perfume. The idea is to smell it, not swallow it."²

27:15-16 A man goes into his house during a rainstorm expecting to find protection. But he may find that his leaky roof affords him no relief from the downpour. Similarly, a man gets married hoping to find that his wife will protect him from many of the discomforts of the world. But if he marries unwisely, he may find that his wife is more of an irritant than she is a comfort (cf. 21:9, 19). Both the leaky roof and the "contentious woman" make staying in the house intolerable. One wonders if Rachel's contentious spirit sometimes drove Jacob from their tent (cf. Gen. 30:1).

Perhaps Solomon had the shrew's words in mind when he compared restraining her to restraining "the wind" (v. 16). As it is impossible to control the wind, so it is sometimes impossible to stop the torrent of words that come from such a woman's mouth. Getting control of her, and restraining her, are similar to grasping "oil." She is impossible to control. Often it is her arguments that prove slippery and elusive, and sometimes it is her movements. King Ahasuerus found Vashti impossible to control (Esth. 1:10-20).

27:17 As one "iron" implement interfacing and interacting with another "sharpens" them both, so the interaction of two people improves them both.³ People who live alone, or avoid the company of others, fail to benefit from this helpful give and take. Sometimes it can be abrasive and unpleasant, but it usually yields better people. This is one of the advantages of Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:25). David and Jonathan's interactions benefited both of them. So did Paul's contacts with Peter, Priscilla and Aquila, and his other fellow missionaries.

"This proverb is one of the best-known and often-quoted verses in the book. It is often exclusively cited in

¹Ironside, pp. 386-87.

²McGee, 3:92.

³See Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron*.

connection with male friendship, but there is really no reason to think it does not apply to women."¹

27:18 The faithful servant who tends to his responsibility ("cares for his master") will one day benefit from his labor. The LORD reminded Eli: "Those who honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30; cf. Matt. 25:21, 23; John 12:26; Rev. 22:3-4). Paul was confident that the Lord would honor him one day for his faithful labor (2 Tim. 4:8).

"Tending the sycamore fig requires notching every fig to enable it to ripen and is thus the epitome of painstaking labor. Just as one profits from tending to his own possessions, so does he benefit from taking care of his superiors."²

Obviously an overly zealous employee could get into trouble with his or her boss by being too solicitous of the boss's welfare. What is in view in this proverb is showing sensitivity and being willing to do more than is required in order to assist one's boss.

27:19 If you want to see what your "face" looks like, look in a placid pool of water. If you want to see what a man is really like, look in his "heart." That is, find out what he loves and values, and you will know what kind of person he is. One's thoughts reflect his or her true character. The best mirror to use is God's Word (James 1:23). This proverb is not advocating judging other people but looking beyond a person's professions into the things that "make him tick" in order to understand him.

Fox understood this proverb a bit differently:

"As when one looks into water and sees a reflection of his own face, so when one looks at another man's heart—attempting to ascertain how he feels—he sees a reflection of his own heart. He sees love if he feels love, hate if he feels hate. In other words, we project our own feelings onto others."³

¹Longman, p. 480.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 812.

³*Ibid.*

Jesus taught that what a person says reveals what is in his or her heart (Matt. 12:34). Judas Iscariot's actions and words eventually revealed his true character, which totally surprised his fellow disciples.

I have noticed that when a person retires from working full-time, and now has more time on his hands, his choices of how he uses his time often indicate what he really values. Does he spend his newfound time almost totally on family, or on fishing, or on golf? Or does he see retirement primarily as an opportunity to serve the Lord in new and even more productive ways? Does he become more active, serving in his church or in some mission work, than he was before? The use of one's disposable time often reveals whether his or her life is self-centered or Christ-centered.

27:20 The grave and the place of destruction are insatiable; they never have enough. "Sheol" is a poetic word for the grave. "Abaddon" rhetorically intensifies the grave as the place of destruction. The Hebrew root *'bd*, from which "Abaddon" comes, means "to perish."¹ The "eyes" here evidently represent human covetousness, since they look out farther and farther.² The sinful heart will not enable the eyes to be "satisfied"; both heart and eyes ceaselessly want more. Some people feel that "The world is not enough." This is the message of Ecclesiastes.

"This proverb is about the impossibility of fulfilling desires."³

Covetousness led the rich fool in Jesus' parable to fail to prepare for the possibility of catastrophe (Luke 12:16-21). We must learn to be content (1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5; cf. Phil. 4:11). "For not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). It consists of his relationships, especially his relationship with God.

27:21 Public opinion is for a person what a "crucible is for silver" and a "furnace for gold." A person's reputation indicates what that person is like, as does how he responds to praise. Likewise, in order to understand what a person is like, it is often helpful to consider what sort of person holds him or her in esteem.⁴ Gideon seems to have fallen victim to the praise that

¹See Waltke, *The Book ...*, pp. 622-23.

²Delitzsch, 2:216.

³Longman, p. 481.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 813.

came to him following his amazing military success (Judg. 8:22-27). Prosperity has ruined more Christians' spiritual lives than adversity.

"If a man be made, by the applause that is given him, proud and scornful,—if he take the glory to himself which he should transmit to God, thereby it will appear that he is a vain foolish man, and had nothing in him truly praiseworthy. If, on the contrary, a man is made by his praise more thankful to God, more respectful to his friends, more diligent to do good to others, by this it will appear that he is a wise and good man, 2 Cor. vi. 8."¹

"This [proverb] is a profound psychological observation."²

27:22 Even severe punishment ("pound ... in a mortar with a pestle") will not drive a hardened fool's folly ("foolishness") out of him. Many long-time fools, having previously avoided instructions that were designed to help them, become incorrigible. King Saul went from bad to worse. He even refused to pay attention to a warning that he would die the next day (1 Sam. 28:19; 31:1).

"Prisons were made into penitentiaries through the mistaken notion that confinement would bring repentance and effect a cure. Instead, many prisoners become hardened criminals. Divine grace that regenerates the fool is his only hope of being converted into a useful person (cf. 26:11)."³

C. A DISCOURSE ON PRUDENCE 27:23-27

This poem recalls the earlier discourses in chapters 1 through 9. In this one Solomon gave some basic and practical advice designed to assure success in the context of one of the Israelites' most common occupations: animal husbandry. The essentials stressed here are the care of one's resources, hard work, and a recognition and appreciation of God's provisions. The reader should apply these essentials to whatever occupation he or she may pursue. These are the basics for wise living in practical daily work.

¹Henry, p. 781.

²Murphy, p. 209.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 388.

- 27:23 A manager needs to know what he is responsible for, and what condition the things that have been entrusted to his care are in, in order to work wisely. Moreover, he needs to care for what he manages in order to preserve his livelihood. Verses 24 through 27 go on, poetically, to advocate preserving one's income. David learned to shepherd the Israelites by being an effective shepherd of his father's sheep.
- 27:24 "Riches" and a "crown," the symbols of prosperity, are transitory, perishable, and they depreciate, rather than maintaining themselves (cf. 23:4-5). With wisdom they can be preserved and increased, but by themselves they tend to diminish. The history of nations shows that crowns do not last forever. They always leave the head of the reigning monarch, only to find a home on the brow of a successor, or a usurper. The history of Judah is an exception, but only because of God's promise to perpetuate David's dynasty (2 Sam. 7).
- 27:25 Therefore one should take good care of one's sources of income, in this case "herbs." He must harvest and store the good grass and other crops at the proper time. In other words, he must work hard to ensure his future. Of course, the LORD is responsible for providing these resources, but human responsibility plays an important part in preserving them. Boaz seems to have been a diligent farmer who trusted God but also worked hard (Ruth 2—4).
- 27:26 When the farmer is faithful, there will be sufficient lambs so that clothes for the family can be made from their wool. And there will be enough goats so that they can be sold for income enough to pay the landlord, or even buy more land. Jacob grew rich because God blessed him, but also because he worked hard for Laban (Gen. 31; 41).
- 27:27 There will also be an abundance of "goats' milk" to drink and animals to slaughter for meat. The farmer's "household" will not go hungry.

"Meat was rarely eaten; the staples of food were bread, honey, fruits, and the products of the dairy."¹

Jesus commissioned Peter to "Tend My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Tend My sheep" (John 21:15-17). And Peter urged his fellow elders to "Shepherd the flock of God

¹Toy, p. 494.

among you" (1 Pet. 5:1-4). This requires diligent effort, but the reward will be ample provision, with God's blessing. This is the point of this brief poem (vv. 23-27).

D. INSTRUCTIVE CONTRASTS CHS. 28—29

Most of the proverbs in this section are couplets, and most of them set forth a truth by means of a contrast. Many of them deal with the correct exercise, or abuse, of power.

28:1 Wicked behavior tends to produce paranoia, but righteous behavior tends to produce courage.

"I was speaking to a group of young people about sin, just sin in general. A young fellow and girl in the group were living together. I had never even mentioned that as a sin, but it was interesting to hear how that young man began to defend himself—it would have been amusing if it had not been so serious. When sin was being discussed, his conscience began to prick him, and then he began defending himself. 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth.' No one had pointed a finger at him. I would not have known of his sin if he had kept quiet. The discussion was about sin, not his particular sin."¹

Jacob dreaded his meeting with Esau because, when they had last been together, Jacob had cheated Esau out of his birthright (Gen. 32:6—33:17).

"Sin makes men cowards."²

28:2 When wickedness abounds in a land there is usually a high rate of turnover in the leadership (v. 2a). The Northern Kingdom of Israel is a prime example. Nevertheless, a single wise ruler can bring stability to a land (v. 2b). God blessed the Southern Kingdom of Judah with relative stability because of David's godly leadership.

"Somalia, which has had no central government for the last thirteen years due to the selfishness of competing

¹McGee, 3:93.

²Henry, p. 782.

warlords, is a good illustration of the disastrous effects of having numerous rulers."¹

"To continue in office the son must uphold what is known to be right and not tolerate legal offenses either in himself or in his subjects."²

28:3 Jephthah, who was of lowly birth, was very hard on the Israelite leaders in his region (Judg. 11:1—12:7). The Jewish tax collectors of Jesus' day, who purchased their jobs from the occupying Romans, were also very hard on their fellow Jews. Zaccheus was an exception (Luke 19:8).

"Obscure men, when suddenly elevated to positions of trust and confidence, are likely to be far harder on those of their own former class than one born in a different station of life."³

28:4 It is natural that people who do not take "the Law" seriously applaud others who do "wicked" things. But people who respect the law oppose ("strive against") the wicked. When a person tries to justify the behavior of wicked people, others reasonably suspect his own uprightness. King Saul sought out the witch of Endor, to whom he gave his official protection, even though he had previously outlawed mediums and spiritists in Israel (1 Sam. 28:8-10).

28:5 The iniquity of "evil people" blinds them to true "justice." For them, wrong is often right. Having hardened their hearts to God's will, they become incapable—but for the grace of God—of recognizing some forms of sinful behavior as sinful. Ironically, such people sometimes become quite judgmental of others. Pontius Pilate did not, for all practical purposes, understand justice, because he was evil.

In contrast, those who seek the LORD and follow His will see things more realistically. The Apostle John wrote that the Holy Spirit enables Christians who walk with the Lord to perceive what is right and what is wrong (1 John 2:20, 27).

¹Habtu, p. 808. This statement was published in 2006.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 408.

³Ironside, p. 395.

- 28:6 The world's "wisdom" would reverse this proverb: It is better to be rich and crooked, than poor and upright. But Solomon was speaking from God's viewpoint, from which the opposite is true. Also, many people would rank "integrity" of greater value than riches, because integrity has proven to be worth more in the long run than material wealth. Other people tend to trust men and women of integrity, and trust creates many opportunities, whereas they tend to distrust the rich. The rich man and Lazarus are examples of the two types of people that this proverb contrasts (Luke 16:19-31).
- 28:7 The "son" who keeps God's commandments ("the Law") demonstrates true intelligence and so gives his father great joy. But the son who demonstrates his disregard for God's law—by joining other wild, dissolute, and unrestrained people—brings him shame. Eli's carnal sons brought him much shame (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-36).
- 28:8 When authorities discover a person who gets rich by charging the needy exorbitant "interest," and they bring him to justice, they usually turn his money over to others who are trustworthy and "gracious," rather than greedy, in dealing with the poor. This illustrates the fact that a person who amasses a fortune dishonestly often loses it eventually (cf. Jer. 17:11; James 5:1-6).
- Nehemiah discovered that the returned Israelites were charging their brethren unreasonably high rates of interest on loans, so he stopped them (Neh. 5:1-13). The moneychangers in the temple, whom Jesus opposed, were taking advantage of the poor, as well as providing a service for temple worshippers (John 2:13-22; cf. Matt. 21:12-13).
- 28:9 When people refuse to listen to (pay attention to, obey) what God has said in His Word, He might not listen to what they say to Him in prayer. God stopped giving King Saul guidance because he had disregarded it so often before (1 Sam. 28:6). The LORD told Ezekiel to tell the elders of Israel, who came to inquire about God's will for them, that He would not respond to them, because they had not obeyed what He had previously told them to do (Ezek. 20:1-8).
- "If you want God to hear you, you must hear Him first. He has made it very clear that He does not listen to the prayer of the godless man. It is just sentimental twaddle to talk

about the prayers of the godless man being answered in time of trouble. Tear-jerking stories tell of a sick little daughter whose father in a very sentimental way calls upon God to raise her up. I would suggest that he call a godly friend to pray to the Lord for his little girl, because God will not hear the prayer of the ungodly man. He says he won't [cf. 1 Pet. 3:12]. ... Here in Proverbs it says that his prayer is actually an abomination to God."¹

28:10 The person who deliberately "leads" someone who is "upright astray," namely, into trouble, error, or danger, will himself experience those things (cf. 26:27). God will avenge the innocent. Jesus applied this truth to causing one of the "little ones" who believed in Him to stumble (Matt. 18:6). False teachers, who mislead others doctrinally, need to beware! Balaam led the Israelites into sin, and he died as a result (Num. 31:16; cf. Rev. 2:14).

The opposite condition (line 3) is leading others in the true, safe way. Such a person ("the blameless") "will inherit good" things from the LORD, and often the praise of other people. The Apostle Paul's epistles provide such guidance, for example, and his reward is great in heaven.

28:11 Sometimes "rich" people think that they are "wise" because they have accumulated much money (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17). Pride and conceit frequently accompany great wealth. Riches give a false sense of security, as well as a feeling of independence from God (cf. 10:15a; 11:28a). However, a "rich" wise person, or even a "poor" wise man, can see that his wisdom is not the ultimate reason for whatever amount of wealth he has accumulated. "Riches" are a blessing from the Lord. The rich man in Jesus' parable disdained poor Lazarus, until he saw things from the other side of the grave (Luke 16:19-31). Another example is rich Nabal, who lived up to his name: Fool (1 Sam. 25).

28:12 People's conditions depend on who rules over them: the righteous or the wicked. The Jews rejoiced when "righteous" Mordecai was exalted to rule over them (Esth. 8:17), but they hid in the mountains and caves when the "wicked" Midianites dominated them (Judg. 6:2). Therefore, if people

¹McGee, 3:94.

have any say in appointing their leaders, they should realize that the character of their leaders will determine the conditions in their land.

"Righteousness is the ethical side of wisdom, and wickedness the ethical side of folly."¹

28:13 Trying to cover up one's sins, rather than confessing and forsaking them, will not work. Sins destroy the sinner like a cancer, and they incur the judgment of God. "Confesses" and "abandons" summarize what the Bible means by repentance. Adam and Eve tried to hide from God (Gen. 3:7-10). Genuine repentance, however, draws out God's favor, and often the respect of others. David's life illustrates both lines a and b (cf. 2 Sam. 12; Ps. 32; 51).

"This unique proverb speaks of God's mercy and defines true repentance."²

28:14 Fearing sin is in view here, not having a timid disposition or fearing God.³ The contrast of hardening the heart supports this interpretation (cf. 23:17). Joseph feared the consequences of committing adultery with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:8-9). The Pharaoh of the Exodus, on the other hand, hardened his heart, continued in sin, and perished (Exod. 7—10).

"This is an interesting proverb in the light of present-day desires to rid life of all stress."⁴

28:15 A "wicked ruler" is as dangerous to his destitute people as a strong, fierce, wild animal let loose. The "lion" and the "bear" were the two most savage animals that roamed Canaan (cf. 1 Sam. 17:34). Often their attacks were unexpected and unprovoked. These two animals were also symbols that rulers in biblical times likened to themselves. But instead of defending and protecting those under their authority, the wicked among them turned on their own people and attacked them. King Ahab did this to poor Naboth (1 Kings 21).

28:16 The point of this proverb is very similar to that of the preceding one. Leaders who oppress their people, rather than supporting them, lack

¹Longman, p. 491.

²Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 417.

³Ross, p. 1106; Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1481.

⁴Longman, p. 492.

"understanding." They do not realize that God upholds the moral order and will punish them. The motive of personal "gain," in the second line, gives the reason for the unjust oppression in the first line. Lengthened life for right behavior was a promised blessing under the Old Covenant, but it still holds true that people who live by God's rules usually live longer than those who do not. An illustration of the "great oppressor" in Israel's history is King Jehoiakim (cf. Jer. 22:13-19).

28:17 God's sentence on Cain was that he would be "a wanderer and a drifter on the earth" for murdering his brother (Gen. 4:12). Cain feared that whoever found him would kill him (Gen. 4:14). Perhaps Judas is the prime example of the truth of this proverb. Examples from modern times could include Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.

This proverb "posits the case of a murderer who is in flight until the end of his life, whether pursued by an avenger or driven by a bad conscience. The advice that is given in this situation is: Do not interfere; let justice be done."¹

"... no one should give to the murderer, as such, any assistance; ... no one should save him clandestinely, and thereby make himself a partaker of his sin. Grace cannot come into the place of justice till justice has been fully recognised [*sic*]. Human sympathy, human forbearance, under the false title of grace, do not stand in contrast to this justice."²

28:18 God delivers those who deal with their sinful humanity as He has ordained. But the perverse, double-dealing crook "will fall" to his final ruin "all at once." David was not sinless, but he was blameless, and God delivered him many times. Saul was twisted in his dealings, and God's judgment of him was quick and final (1 Sam. 31).

28:19 Plodding (plowing) yields "plenty," but piddling ("empty pursuits") produces "poverty." The contrast in this proverb is between the person who concentrates on his work and the one who allows himself to become distracted—and spends his time and energy on non-productive activities. Recreation and diversion are necessary, but too much of them can lead to

¹Murphy, p. 216.

²Delitzsch, 2:234.

ruin. David was evidently piddling around Jerusalem when he observed Bathsheba bathing (2 Sam. 11:1). The follower of Christ must not look back "after putting his hand to the plow," but give himself to the task that God has set before him to do (Luke 9:62).

28:20 The "faithful" person in view is one who conducts his affairs in harmony with God's will. But "one who hurries to be rich" is one who cuts ethical corners in order to gain wealth (cf. 22:1, 16; 23:4; 27:24).

"Any one who gets rich quick is suspect."¹

"See Isaiah's message to the conscienceless capitalists of his day, who seemed to know as much as money-lovers in our times, concerning the advantages to themselves, of the trust system (Isa. 5:8-10)."²

28:21 One reason that showing "partiality" to some people at the expense of others is not good is: it is very easy to pervert justice with a bribe. Even "for a piece of bread" some people will show favoritism. Once a person takes money in return for a favor, it becomes more tempting to repeat the act. Money gained so easily becomes addictive, and eventually the person taking the bribe will do so for very little. This proverb counsels us not to start down that road (cf. 18:5; 24:23). The false prophetesses of Ezekiel's day were showing favoritism to people, and the LORD commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against them (Ezek. 13:17-19).

28:22 The "evil eye" represents the wicked purposes or intent of a wicked person. In this case that intent is a selfish desire to get rich. The person with the "evil eye" is miserly and demonstrates a dislike of people (is misanthropic), whereas the person with the "good eye" (22:9) is generous and promotes the welfare of others (is philanthropic).³ The wicked person in view here fails to look far into the future when he will be in need before God, if not before men (cf. v. 20). Greed leads to poverty eventually (cf. 20:21). The first servant in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant wanted to wring every last cent out of his fellow servant, but his lord ended up condemning him for his grasping greed (Matt. 18:21-35).

¹Murphy, p. 217.

²Ironside, pp. 408-9.

³McKane, p. 627.

- 28:23 This is another of several proverbs that recommends honest confrontation over hypocritical flattery (cf. 19:25; 20:30; 26:28; 27:6). The emphasis here is on the consequences of these actions. The former (rebuke) will gain "more favor" with a wise man, eventually, than the latter (flattery). Nathan's confrontation of David required courage, but Nathan continued to serve the king thereafter (2 Sam. 12). Peter likewise received Paul's rebuke well and continued in good favor with his Christian brethren (Gal. 2:14; 2 Pet. 3:15).
- 28:24 One way of robbing one's parents would be to take what is theirs and justify the taking on the grounds that one would eventually inherit it anyway. Anyone who takes what rightfully belongs to his or her parents is no better than a common thief. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for failing to discharge their duty to their parents, because they claimed that what they owed their parents had been dedicated to God (Mark 7:6-13; cf. Prov. 19:13, 26).
- 28:25 Arrogance betrays excessive self-assurance and pride, which most people react against—often with "strife" resulting. Such a person will not prosper as much as the individual who commits his cause to ("trusts in") the LORD. The LORD will take up the cause of those who trust in Him. Queen Esther assumed the role of a humble servant when she appealed to King Ahasuerus for her people, trusting in the LORD (Esth. 4:16; 5—6).
- 28:26 This proverb is very similar to the preceding one. In both first lines, excessive self-confidence is in view. In the second line of this verse, walking "wisely" corresponds to trusting in the LORD in verse 25b. Two objects of trust are contrasted: "the LORD" (25b), and one's "own heart" (i.e., oneself, 26a). When Paul laid his plans he submitted them to the sovereign will of God (Acts 21:14; et al.). Jesus also did this, in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).
- 28:27 The person who "gives to the poor" will not lack what he or she needs ("never lack anything"), which is God's blessing. They may also receive the blessing of other people and material benefits that God promised generous people. We may supply the idea of blessing to the first statement legitimately, since the contrast is with curses in the second statement (cf. v. 8; 11:25; 14:21; 21:13). The rich young ruler, who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, was unwilling to part with

his riches, and consequently he lost the benefits of becoming one of Jesus' disciples (Luke 18:18-27).

"To hide the eyes means to refuse to see poverty. It is the sin of those who say they are too sensitive to visit the slums."¹

28:28 When "the wicked" rise to power, many people "hide themselves," because they know that corruption and evil will follow. But when wicked people disappear ("perish"), good people know that it is safe to show themselves once more, and they become active in public life again (cf. v. 12). This proverb has far-reaching application to all aspects of life: religious, social, economic, political, etc. During King Saul's reign, the Philistines dominated the Israelites and drove them into hiding. But when Jonathan attacked them, the people gained courage and strength (1 Sam. 13:6; 14:22).

29:1 "Becomes obstinate" is a figure taken from animal farming. It describes a bull that stubbornly and persistently turns away and avoids a yoke.² Applied to a man, it pictures someone who inflexibly resists doing what is in his own best interest to do. This type of person will normally experience quick destruction rather than a gradual decline. The wise person listens to, and acts upon, the reproofs of family and friends, magistrates, and ministers. The Pharaoh of the Exodus; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; King Saul; Queen Jezebel; and King Belshazzar are all examples of this type of fool.

"The door to penitence, to which earnest, well-meant admonition calls a man, does not always remain open."³

29:2 Rulers who operate on the basis of just principles delight their subjects, but corrupt leaders cause them to "groan" in grief (cf. 28:12, 28). Contrast the reigns of godly Hezekiah and Josiah with the wicked reigns of Ahab and Manasseh.

"In democracies one contrasts statesmen, who use their offices to serve the people, with politicians, who see their

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 288.

²Ironside, p. 414.

³Delitzsch, 2:241.

offices as prizes they won, often by taking bribe-money from lobby groups."¹

29:3 The first line of this proverb expresses its point about wisdom positively and generally. The second line gives the negative contrast with a specific example of folly (cf. 28:7). Samson not only wasted his wealth by keeping company with harlots, but he lost his life as well (Judg. 16).

"Loose living is a snare to which young men are peculiarly exposed. He who is wise will shun it as he would a viper about to strike. Immorality is ruinous alike to body and soul."²

29:4 Rulers can destroy a nation through corruption (cf. v. 2). A just king, through his fair dealings, stabilizes his kingdom, but an unjust ruler can bring about its demise—by taking "bribes," for example. Samuel's sons were unfit to rule because they took bribes (1 Sam. 8:1-3).

29:5 Flattering words are like a "net" laid out to trap an animal. They can captivate (charm, seduce) the person flattered, and bring him or her under the control of the flatterer. For example, if someone flatters another person because of his or her physical appearance, the person flattered will be tempted to spend more time with and be more favorably inclined to the flatterer, even though that person's character may be corrupt. Therefore the wise person will beware of flatterers and will not use this tactic himself in order to win friends and influence people (cf. 28:23). The Israelites "flattered Him [the LORD] with their mouth and lied to Him with their tongue" in the wilderness (Ps. 78:36), but this did not avert His righteous judgment of them.

29:6 Overstepping designated bounds can also snare a person. A righteous person avoids becoming entangled for this reason, and so is able to rejoice rather than bemoaning his fate for transgressing.

"To set foot on a sinful act is to trigger your own captivity."³

¹Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 431.

²Ironside, p. 416.

³Hubbard, p. 455.

King Uzziah intruded into the priests' area of responsibility by offering incense, and he became a leper as a result (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Moses, on the other hand, was careful to do just as the LORD commanded him, and he ended his life rejoicing with a song (Deut. 32).

29:7 One of the marks of a "righteous" person is that he cares about "the rights" of those who tend to be abused by others: "the poor," the powerless, and the disenfranchised. In this he shares God's heart (cf. 14:21; 24:12; 30:8). "The wicked does not understand" such concern, because his interest is his own welfare and prosperity. He has little time for those who need help. Peter and John helped a beggar (Acts 3:1-8), but the Pharisees, generally speaking, devoured widows' houses (Matt. 23:14).

29:8 "Arrogant people" are at the bottom of the sages' list of scoundrels (cf. 1:22; Isa. 28:14). They inflame their communities by ridiculing what is moral and ethical, misrepresenting the truth, and fanning unworthy passions with angry words. In contrast, "wise people" create peace in their communities by advocating good things in right ways. Arrogant Sheba inflamed the town of Abel Beth-maacah (set it in an uproar), but a wise woman turned away Joab's anger and saved the city from destruction (2 Sam. 20:14-22). Rehoboam's reply to the men of Israel so inflamed them that they revolted from Judah (1 Kings 12:13-16). David's wise reply to his soldiers, earlier, prevented a major division within his army (1 Sam. 30:22-24).

29:9 A typical "foolish" response to some disagreement ("controversy") that arises between two people, is that the fool loses his temper ("rages") or tries to laugh off the disagreement, rather than dealing with the matter seriously, calmly, and with consideration for the other person. The foolish response does not solve the problem. The Pharaoh of the Exodus did not take Moses and Aaron seriously at first, so their controversy escalated (Exod. 7).

"Continuing the theme of public disputes, this verse warns that if a wise man gets into an argument with a fool (*'ewil*), presumably to chastise him, the results will be

disappointing. The fool will be truculent [defiant] and derisive, and peace will not ensue."¹

- 29:10 This proverb contrasts the attitudes of two very different types of people toward those who live blameless lives. Some people "hate" them. Sometimes they hate them so much that they kill them, thus gaining a reputation as bloodthirsty people ("people of bloodshed"; i.e., people who commit unwarranted violence, murderers). This Cain did to his brother Abel (1 John 3:12). The "upright," on the other hand, do not hate the blameless but hope and work for their continued preservation and well-being. Such was Boaz's attitude toward Ruth (Ruth 4).
- 29:11 The idea in this proverb is that fools customarily vent their feelings ("let it all hang out"), whereas wise individuals control themselves. "Always" is hyperbole. Simeon and Levi lashed out against the men of Shechem, bringing shame on themselves and their family (Gen. 34). Joseph wisely controlled himself and did not reveal his identity to his brothers until he had determined that they had changed (Gen. 42—45).
- 29:12 If "a ruler pays attention to" and believes lies, he will encourage his underlings to lie to him. If, on the other hand, he accepts only true words, "his ministers" (those who serve him) will be encouraged to speak only the truth to him. Leaders become role models for their followers, whether they intend to or not.
- "Corruption quickly seeps down and permeates the power hierarchy. If a ruler's minions learn that falsehood is what gets the boss's ear, that's what they will give him. It is the ruler's duty to rid his staff of crooks."²
- King Ahab's court was so full of wicked people that Elijah, at one time, believed that he was the only righteous person left in Israel (1 Kings 19:10).
- 29:13 "The poor person" represents the oppressed, and "the oppressor" represents the rich. They are opposites in this regard. But both owe God their physical eyesight, and really all the common blessings that He bestows on everyone (cf. 22:2). Giving "light to the eyes" probably means

¹Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 837.

²*Ibid.*, p. 838.

giving them life (cf. Job 33:30; Ps. 13:3).¹ Similarly, the LORD "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45).

"... all intelligence is a divine gift, whether it be used in righteousness or in wickedness. Sin is always the prostitution of a God-given power to base purposes."²

The grace of God is the great leveler of humanity. Therefore one should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). The Pharisee who prayed "to himself" thought more highly of himself than did the publican who humbly prayed: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18:13).

29:14 One of the primary responsibilities of leaders is to distribute justice evenhandedly ("with truth"). The ruler who treats the defenseless poor person fairly, rather than abusing him for personal gain, will enjoy God's blessing on his reign. His people will also support him, because they can count on him to do what is right. Solomon cultivated a reputation for being fair from the beginning of his reign (cf. 1 Kings 3:16-28), and this earned him both divine and human favor (cf. Ps. 89:19-29).

29:15 Both physical ("rod") and verbal ("rebuke") discipline can instill "wisdom" in a child (cf. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14). But a child who is allowed to go his or her own way, without guidance and correction, will "shame" his or her "mother."

"Parents are motivated to do the hard work of correction in order to avoid the shame that a wayward child brings on a family."³

"Let the over-indulgent parent be warned by the fate of Adonijah. It is not for nothing that God has caused the unhappy fact to be left on record that 'his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?' No wonder he became a rebel! (1 Kings 1; 2:13-25)."⁴

¹Ross, p. 1114.

²Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 288.

³Longman, p. 506. See also his summary discussion of physical discipline as taught in the proverbs, pp. 564-65.

⁴Ironside, p. 422.

- 29:16 We must take the divine perspective here, as in all the proverbs. Some individual cases may not fit the principle, but generally the principle holds true. "When ... wicked" people gain power and authority ("increase"), the crime rate goes up. Nevertheless, the righteous will prevail, and the wicked will fail, eventually. Paul wrote that in the last days wickedness would increase (2 Tim. 3:1-8). But he also wrote that when Jesus Christ returns, He will punish the wicked and establish a righteous reign (2 Thess. 2:1-12).
- 29:17 This is yet another encouragement to parents to discipline their children (cf. v. 15; et al.). Some parents fail to discipline their children because it hurts them to do so. But this proverb reminds them that "comfort" and "delight" for them (and their children) will be the eventual outcome of exercising discipline. Think how Abraham must have felt when God told him to kill Isaac, and how he must have felt after that trial of his faith was over (Gen. 22:1-19)!
- 29:18 The "vision" (Heb. *hazon*) in this proverb does not refer to some dream of success that a person may have but to a prophetic vision that was a revelation from God (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1). The Hebrew verb translated "perish" (AV; *para*) does not mean "die in their sins" (e.g., because someone did not see the "vision" of the importance of some evangelistic effort). It means "cast off restraint" ("unrestrained"). This proverb means that without the guidance of divine revelation, people abandon themselves to their own sinful ways (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1; Amos 8:11-12). God's Word restrains human wickedness, and those who keep it are "happy." Thus "a nation's well-being depends on obedience to divine revelation."¹ There must be knowledge of divine revelation, through preaching and teaching, for there to be obedience to it.²
- The "valley of vision" (Isa. 22:1, 5) was evidently the Kidron Valley, just east of the temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah probably called it this because God gave His people so much revelation in and around that place. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would truly comprehend the revelation that God had given—that they would not cast it off, but submit to it and apply it (Eph. 1:15-23).

¹Ross, p. 1116.

²Cf. Alden, p. 202.

"... [People] are only truly happy when they earnestly and willingly subordinate themselves to the word of God which they possess and have the opportunity of hearing."¹

Another interpretation takes "vision" in the more ordinary sense of seeing something:

"The meaning of the colon seems to warn that those who don't have a goal and/or a plan for the future have nothing to guide them onward, so they go every which way. The 'vision' restrains them because it suggests a strategy to achieve that goal."²

29:19 A foolish "slave" needs discipline as much as a foolish son (cf. v. 17).

"By responding to proper discipline a slave can become wise and displace a disgraceful son (17:2). A slave who flouts the moral order will not be conformed to it by mere words."³

Jonah had to learn to serve the LORD through serious grief and trouble. Verbal instruction was not enough.

29:20 Words spoken in haste often disappoint, if not worse (cf. 26:12). Saul almost lost his son Jonathan because he was "hasty with his words" (1 Sam. 14), and Jephthah did lose his daughter because of his hasty words (Judg. 11).

"... the self-confident man is continually uttering words which he has to recall, because of his reckless impatience and his ready exaggeration. There is little hope of checking such a man, unless there be true self-judgment and repentance for what is a grave sin, though often treated as a mere infirmity for which he is to be pitied rather than blamed. Hasty speech betokens an unbroken spirit."⁴

¹Delitzsch, 2:252.

²Longman, p. 507.

³Waltke, *The Book ...* 31, p. 447.

⁴Ironside, p. 427.

"'Look before you leap' can be interpreted as 'think before you speak.'"¹

- 29:21 Pampering, as opposed to disciplining, makes slaves disrespectful. A slave is not a son. Pampering will make the slave expect to receive all the rights and privileges of a son. To bring this parable over into modern life, an employee should not normally receive the same privileges as a son. If he does, the relationship essential to the effective operation of the business will suffer. Paul asked Philemon to receive Onesimus back as "a beloved brother," equal with himself in Christ, but he still had servant responsibilities socially (Phile. 16).
- 29:22 Where there is anger, conflict ("strife") is sure to follow; and a "hot-tempered" person will violate many boundaries ("abounds in wrongdoing"; cf. v. 20; 28:25). The elder brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son created conflict with his father, and he transgressed the bounds of brotherly love when he heatedly objected to his father's grace and forgiveness (Luke 15:28).
- 29:23 The proud person is headed for a fall, because his attitude toward himself is unrealistic and inappropriate, and others will make him aware of it sooner or later. In contrast, a "humble" person will normally "obtain honor," because his humility makes him worth it, and because others will confer it upon him, since he refuses to confer it on himself (cf. 11:2; 16:18). Contrast Haman the proud and Mordecai the humble in the Book of Esther.
- 29:24 The bad thing about being a thief's "partner" is that when the thief gets caught, and the authorities haul his partner into court, the accomplice finds himself in a "no win" situation: If he defends his partner, he shares his guilt, but if he says nothing (or pleads the fifth amendment)—which the partner in this proverb does—his accusers assume that he shares his guilt. Many a businessman has discovered the truth of this proverb to his sorrow. Micah did the correct thing when he returned the silver that he had stolen from his mother. He admitted his sin, she forgave him, and she even blessed him in the LORD's name (Judg. 17:1-3).

¹Hubbard, p. 411.

29:25 The contrast in this proverb is between fearing "man" and fearing "the LORD." If we trust in man, we will be disappointed and, Solomon said, caught in a snare. But if we trust in the LORD, He will exalt us. The Apostle Paul illustrates proper fear (Gal. 1:10; cf. Ps. 56:11; Luke 12:4-5; John 12:43; 1 John 4:18).

"He who fears God will not fear man. He who fears man does not fear God as he should."¹

29:26 The LORD gave Elijah "justice" when he did not seek it from wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 18).

"... it is not the ruler who finally decides the fate and determines the worth of a man, as they appear to think who with eye-service court his favour and fawn upon him."²

29:27 The "unjust" person and the "upright" person typically dislike one another intensely. The reason is that they disrespect the basic convictions and conduct of each other. We can see this quite clearly in Jesus' dealings with the unbelieving religious leaders of His day.

This is a fitting proverb with which to close this section of the book. The conflict between right and wrong, good and evil, with which this proverb and so many of the proverbs deal, will continue until Jesus Christ returns to the earth to establish his kingdom of righteousness.

VI. COLLECTION 6: THE WISDOM OF AGUR CH. 30

Chapters 30 and 31 form a distinct section in Proverbs because neither Solomon (1:1—22:16; chs. 25—29) nor the unnamed sages (22:17—24:34) wrote them. Two other wise men, whose names the text records, did. Some expositors speculate that because these men's discourses occur at the end of the book, the writers probably lived later than the men of Hezekiah.³ Nevertheless who Agur and Lemuel were, as well as when and where they lived, remain mysteries. In a sense, these two chapters constitute two appendices to the second collection of Solomon's proverbs (chs. 25—29), like 22:17 through 24:22

¹Ironside, p. 430.

²Delitzsch, 2:239.

³E.g., Toy, p. 517.

and 24:23 through 34 constitute two appendices to the first collection of Solomon's proverbs (10:1—22:16).¹

The most distinctive features of Agur's proverbs are his numerical style of grouping similar items, his picturesque speech, and a unique phrase that he used. This phrase, "There are three things ... four," occurs with minor changes five times in this chapter (vv. 15, 18, 21, 24, 29; cf. vv. 11-14).

"The purpose of such a device may be simply to indicate that the list is not exhaustive, though specific (see Amos 1:3, 6). Or the purpose may be to emphasize the fourth item on the list."²

A. THE INTRODUCTION OF AGUR 30:1

Scripture does not refer elsewhere to either "Agur" (whose name means "the Gatherer," "Collector," or "Industrious in Collecting") or his father (or ancestor) "Jahel" ("the Obedient" or "Pious").³ At least one writer believed that he may have been a contemporary of Solomon.⁴ Delitzsch believed that both Agur and Lemuel were Ishmaelites.⁵ A "pronouncement" (Heb. *massa*, "prophecy" AV, "oracle" NIV, HCSB, NET2, NRSV, ESV, or "inspired utterance" TNIV, cf. HCSB) is an important "message" (CEV) from God (cf. Num. 24:15; 2 Sam. 23:1; Zech. 9:1), though elsewhere the Hebrew word *massa* may refer to a place or a tribe (cf. Gen. 25:14; 1 Chron. 1:30).⁶ "Ithiel" ("God is With Me") and "Ucal" ("Able") may have been Agur's sons, disciples, or contemporaries.⁷

"However, these Hebrew words are better translated not as names but as verbs: 'I am weary, God, but I can prevail' (NIV)."⁸

The actual NIV footnote reads: "I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and faint." The ESV has "worn out" instead of "faint."

¹Delitzsch, 2:95, 140, 260, 314.

²Jensen, p. 105. See also Delitzsch, 2:281.

³Ibid., 2:260-61, for discussion of the meaning of these names.

⁴Kidner, p. 178.

⁵Delitzsch, 2:266.

⁶See Ross, p. 1119; Delitzsch, 2:267.

⁷Ibid., 2:268.

⁸Schultz, p. 471.

B. WISDOM ABOUT GOD 30:2-9

Agur began with three declarations. The subject of each one is God.

30:2-4 Behind this ironical section one can perhaps imagine Agur's sons claiming to be wiser than their father. Agur confessed his own limited understanding while at the same time making it clear that those he addressed knew no more than he did.

If wisdom is essentially a proper orientation to God, and it is, how could Agur say that he had not learned wisdom but he knew God (v. 3; cf. Eccles. 7:23-24)? In view of the context (vv. 2, 4), he probably meant that he had not reached a high level of wisdom. "Wisdom" in Proverbs includes understanding as well as godliness (e.g., 1:1b; 2:2; et al.). Agur humbly regarded his own discernment as limited, but he did not admit to being a fool (cf. Job 38—39).

The only Person who meets Agur's qualifications in verse 5 is God (cf. Job 38—41; Prov. 8:24-29). He is the only One with perfect understanding. "What is His name?" (v. 4) implies: Do you fully understand Him? In the ancient world knowledge of a deity's name implied understanding his characteristics, having power over him, and being close to him.

The question about "His Son's name" (v. 4) evidently means: Has He [God] imparted His nature or attributes to any other person who may in any sense be called His Son?¹ In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to reveal His character and nature more completely than anyone had known them previously (John 3:13; Eph. 4:9-10; Heb. 1:1-2). "Wrapped the waters in His garment" (v. 4) probably means "infusing the clouds with water."²

30:5-6 Agur treasured the revelation that God had given. It had been tested, as in a furnace, and had proven "pure" (cf. Ps. 12:6). He also trusted in God, who defends those who go to Him in times of trouble. Agur warned against adding to God's revelation, because that is a serious offense (v. 6; cf. Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18). Adding to God's words distorts their meaning, so anyone who does this becomes guilty of perverting the truth: being a "liar."

¹Perowne, p. 180.

²Longman, p. 523.

"There are two great facts enunciated in these verses. The first is the perfection, and the second, the all-sufficiency of the words, or sayings of God."¹

30:7-9 Agur asked God not to lead him into temptation (Matt. 6:13; cf. 1 Chron. 4:10). He had more concern for his purity before God than about his place among people (cf. Phil. 4:11-12). Poverty and wealth both bring with them certain temptations that the middle-class citizen does not face, at least as strongly (cf. 1 Tim. 6:8). Abundance tempts us to feel unrealistically self-sufficient (cf. Deut. 8:11-14; John 15:5), and need tempts us to stop trusting God and to resort to acts that harm others.

"Agur's exemplary prayer in vv. 7-9, the only prayer in Proverbs, continues his autobiography and functions as a janus [transition] to his numerical sayings."²

C. WISDOM ABOUT LIFE 30:10-33

Though his view of and awareness of God lie very much behind what Agur said in the rest of this chapter, his counsel deals primarily with practical prudence from this point on. Fox believed that Agur's appendix to the Book of Proverbs ends with verse 9 and that the rest of this chapter is a miscellaneous collection of epigrams.³ He did this because of the difference in the proverbs in these two sections (vv. 1-9 and 10-33). This is a minority opinion.

30:10 It is unwise to meddle in the domestic (and other) affairs of other people. The case in point in this couplet is falsely accusing a slave to his master. "He" (v. 10b) could refer to the master. The slave might never discover that someone had slandered him, but it is more likely that the master would investigate the charge and discover it false. Of course, if the slave discovered that he had been slandered, he might curse the one who slandered him. The false witnesses at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin slandered Him, but He did not curse them. However, Jesus' master, His Father, found them guilty.

¹Ironside, p. 439.

²Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 478. R. W. Byargeon, "Echoes of Wisdom in the Lord's Prayer," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):353-65, noted similar structure and theology in the Lord's Prayer.

³Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 862.

"To slander people is to speak negatively about them in a way that besmirches their reputation."¹

30:11-14 Agur sketched four verbal pictures and simply placed them side by side in these verses, in order to illustrate the folly of arrogance. He had demonstrated humility himself previously (vv. 2-4, 7-9; cf. 20:6). Each thing listed begins with the Hebrew word *dor* ("generation") meaning a class or group of people (cf. Matt. 11:16).² The numerical sequence creates a cumulative effect, namely, a feeling of growing intensity.³

Absalom is an example of someone who virtually cursed his father (2 Sam. 15). Haman was pure in his own eyes, but was guilty of premeditated murder (Esth. 7). He is also an example of an arrogant person, and of one who sought to "devour the poor from the earth" (v. 14).

A series of five "numerical proverbs" follows (vv. 15-31):

30:15-16 Here the warning is against greediness.

"The leech has two suckers at each end of its body with which it draws blood until bloated. These are the 'daughters,' ..."⁴

"Why daughters? Perhaps daughters, even more than sons, were known to be consumers, so the daughter of a leech would be particularly demanding."⁵

"'Give! Give!' [v. 15] can be taken as the names—with more pointed wit than as the cries—of these identical twins, who are made of the same stuff as their mother—other people's blood."⁶

Another view of the "leech" is that it refers to a horse-leech:

¹Longman, p. 526.

²Ross, p. 1121.

³J. J. Glück, "Proverbs xxx 15a," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964):368.

⁴Murphy, p. 234. Cf. F. S. North, "The Four Insatiabiles," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965):281-82.

⁵Longman, p. 528.

⁶Kidner, p. 180. Cf. Ironside, p. 447.

"... supposed by some to be the vampire (a fabulous creature), as being literally insatiable; but the other subjects mentioned must be taken as this, comparatively insatiable."¹

Greediness is not just silly (v. 15), it is dangerous ("Sheol" and "fire," v. 16) and pathetic (being childless or sexually insatiable,² and parched, v. 16). Sheol ("the grave, with overtones of the underworld generally"³) ever yearns to end life, and the barren womb ever yearns to produce it.⁴ Agur personified "fire" as a terrible monster "crying out" for more and never saying: That is "enough."

- 30:17 Disrespect for one's parents is as bad as arrogance and greed (cf. v. 11). Agur's graphic descriptions visualize the terrible consequences of this folly. Whereas we should obey our parents as long as we live under their authority, we should honor them all our lives. We should do so simply because they have given us physical life, if for no other reason. This proverb warns that severe punishment awaits those who disrespect their parents, such as a violent death and/or a lack of burial. Adonijah mocked his father and scorned his mother when he sought to assume the throne contrary to their wishes, and he died prematurely (1 Kings 1—2).
- 30:18-19 These four "ways" (Heb. *derek*) have several things in common that make each of them remarkable. All are mysterious (inexplicable), non-traceable, effective in their element, and aggressive. "The way of a man with a virgin" (v. 19) refers to the process by which a man wins the love of a woman. The point of these four snapshots seems to be that, in view of remarkable phenomena such as these, arrogance is absurd and humility is only reasonable (cf. Job 38—41; 42:3; Ps. 139:6). Solomon's courting of the Shulamite illustrates the way of a man with a virgin (Song of Sol.).
- 30:20 The mention of the woman in verse 19 seems to have triggered this pigtail comment about another unexplainable phenomenon. That is, how some women can commit adultery as easily as, and without any more remorse than, they can wipe a fragment of food away from their mouths.

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 473.

²Delitzsch, 2:293.

³Longman, p. 529.

⁴Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 487.

The sage could have said the same of some men, of course. The prophets often compared Israel to an insatiable harlot, because the people constantly pursued idols.

30:21-23 These are four more pictures of arrogant folly. They picture upside-down social situations. One writer saw Adolph Hitler as an example of the kind of servant who became a king that the writer envisioned (v. 22a).¹ King Jeroboam I is another.

"It was not an unfrequent occurrence in the East for a slave or a servant to be, through some remarkable turn of events, suddenly elevated to great power; sometimes through treachery, as in the case of Zimri (1 Kings 16:1-20), or through favoritism as in that of [Joseph and] the undeserving Haman."²

An example of a fool "satisfied with food" (v. 22) is Nabal (1 Sam. 25). Leah was a woman "unloved" by her husband (Gen. 29:31). And Hagar dispossessed her mistress Sarah (Gen. 16:4).

30:24-28 In contrast to the arrogant, here are four examples of humble creatures functioning as God created them to, each being remarkably effective and successful. Animals (vv. 24-28) are sometimes wiser than humans (vv. 21-23). The small are often more effective than the large (cf. 6:6-8). The basic contrast, however, is between humility and arrogance.

30:29-31 To keep us from concluding that little is always better than big (in view of vv. 24-28), Agur produced four more illustrations of "stately" or noble behavior. He had shown the balance between groundless pride (cf. vv. 21-23) and false humility (cf. vv. 24-28). Now these stately things demonstrate that a proper bearing in life comes neither from exalting nor from depreciating oneself. It comes from functioning as God created one to function (i.e., to be oneself, sincere). David, as warrior-king of Israel, marching into battle against Israel's enemies, gives us a picture of a stately king. When Messiah returns to the earth to establish His righteous rule, every knee will bow before this stately King (Rev. 19:11-16).

¹Greenstone, p. 324.

²Ironside, p. 450.

30:32-33 These verses call for personal application of this counsel as necessary. Peaceable behavior manifests humility, the key virtue in this chapter (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24).

"The warning is against taking any action that would only lead to further embroilment."¹

"Just as squeezing (or 'churning') *milk* or a *nose* produces *butter* or *blood*, so does squeezing someone's *patience* produce conflict."²

"... the intent of this concluding advice is to strive for peace and harmony through humility and righteousness."³

"The idea is if you are in the middle of making trouble and suddenly realize your foolishness, stop right then before things get worse."⁴

VII. COLLECTION 7: THE WISDOM OF LEMUEL CH. 31

Some commentators have regarded only the first nine verses of this chapter as Lemuel's writing.⁵ One reason for this is that the Septuagint translators separated verses 1 through 9 from verse 10 through 31 by five chapters (chs. 25—29). But the Hebrew text implies that Lemuel wrote the whole chapter, since it connects these two sections.

A. THE INTRODUCTION OF LEMUEL 31:1

"King Lemuel" was evidently not a king of Israel or Judah. No king by this name appears in Kings or Chronicles. Some scholars have suggested that "Lemuel" (lit. "Devoted to God") may have been a pen name for Solomon.⁶ But there is no evidence for this. Yet this is the only reference to a king by name in Proverbs, which is an unusual feature in

¹Murphy, p. 237.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1485.

³Ross, p. 1126.

⁴*The Nelson ...*, p. 1076.

⁵E.g., Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 849.

⁶E.g., McGee, 3:102.

wisdom literature from the ancient Near East.¹ This is also the only ancient Near Eastern wisdom teaching attributed to a woman.²

"Since such a king is unattested in Israel's history, he is probably a proselyte to Israel's faith."³

The use of foreign loanwords in this poem supports the view that Lemuel was not an Israelite.

"We assume that 'Lemuel' is a symbolical name, like 'Jareb' in 'King Jareb,' Hos. V. 13, x. 6 ..."⁴

Proverbs generally contains the counsel of aged courtiers to the sons who were in line to succeed them as government officials, as previously mentioned. We have also noted that both parents normally shared the training of these young men.⁵ In chapter 31 we have King Lemuel's recollections of the instruction that he had received from his mother earlier in life. Perhaps his father had died, or was unable to instruct him, or gave him other teaching not recorded here. According to Jewish legend, Lemuel was Solomon and his mother was Bathsheba.⁶ There is no factual basis for this tradition, however.

The bottom line is that who Lemuel was remains a mystery.

B. THE WISE KING 31:2-9

31:2 The unusual address, "What, my son?" is "affectionately reproachful."⁷ Lemuel's mother (v. 1) was getting his attention and strongly appealed to him to pay attention to her words for two reasons: First, she had borne him in her "womb," and secondly, Lemuel had some connection to certain "vows" that she had made to God. Perhaps she had dedicated him to the LORD (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11, 28).

"The question [What, my son?], which is at the same time a call, is like a deep sigh from the heart of the mother

¹Leah L. Brunner, "King and Commoner in Proverbs and Near Eastern Sources," *Dor le Dor* 10 (1982):210-19.

²Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 883.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 503.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:315.

⁵See my comments on 1:8-19.

⁶Greenstone, p. 329.

⁷Kidner, p. 182.

concerned for the welfare of her son, who would say to him what is beneficial, and say it in words which strike and remain fixed."¹

"Like Hannah, she had doubtless been much in prayer for her child both before and after his birth."²

31:3-9 The queen-mother's counsel was that it is not wise for a king to make himself dependent on "women" (v. 3) or "wine" (vv. 4-7).

"David's lust for Bathsheba made him callous toward justice and cost Uriah his life, and Solomon's many sexual partners made him callous toward pure and undefiled religion and incapable of real love. In other words, obsession with women has the same effect as obsession with liquor (v. 5)."³

We can see the folly of a king drinking too much in the account of Belshazzar's feast (Dan. 6).

"Prov 31:4 is formulated as an absolute prohibition, though absolute abstinence is probably not intended. Though drunkenness is condemned in Proverbs and elsewhere ..., drinking wine and beer is not. They were a staple of diet and were used at festive meals ..."⁴

"He who would rule well over a nation, must first be master of himself. It was here that Noah failed when set over the renewed earth [Gen. 9]."⁵

The advice in verses 6 and 7 may be sarcastic—in order to point out the uselessness of intoxicants.⁶

"I think verses 6-7 are spoken in irony and not as a commandment, because nobody's problems are solved by

¹Delitzsch, 2:317.

²Ironside, pp. 467-68.

³Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, p. 507.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 886.

⁵Ironside, p. 471.

⁶Waltke, *The Book ... 31*, pp. 508-9.

forgetting them, and who wants to spend his or her last minutes of life on earth drunk? [cf. Matt. 27:33-34]."¹

Positively, a king should uphold justice, especially for the afflicted (the poor, the weak, the sick and disabled), those whom other people might take advantage of (vv. 8-9).

"It is the responsibility of the king to champion the rights of the poor and the needy, those who are left desolate by the cruelties of life (see 2 Sam 14:4-11; 1 Kings 3:16-28; Pss 45:3-5; 72:4; Isa 9:6-7)."²

Matthew Henry interpreted these verses positively. He paraphrased the king's mother's advice and added his own comments:

"Thou hast wine or strong drink at [your] command; instead of doing thyself hurt with it, do others good with it; let those have it that need it, through sickness or pain. We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others. Wine is a cordial, and therefore to be used for want and not for wantonness, by those only that need cordials, as Timothy, who is advised to *drink a little wine, only for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities*, 1 Tim. v.23. He [Lemuel] must do good with his power, his knowledge, and must administer justice with care, courage, and compassion, v. 8, 9."³

"Whereas a ruler should avoid alcohol so that he *not* forget the law, the poor should be given wine *so that* they forget their misery. Alcohol is here commended as an anodyne to dull the pain of him who is embittered and declining to death. Such a one does not have royal responsibilities that require alertness."⁴

¹Wiersbe, p. 149.

²Ross, p. 1128.

³Henry, p. 788.

⁴Fox, *Proverbs 10—31*, p. 887.

C. THE WISE WOMAN 31:10-31

There is much in Proverbs about unwise women, as we have seen. Solomon personified both wisdom and folly as women earlier (chs. 8–9). Perhaps God wanted us to finish reading this book—assured that women are not essentially evil or foolish—but that they can be very good, wise, and admirable. Jewish husbands and children traditionally recited this section of Proverbs at the Sabbath table on Friday evenings.¹

The form of this discourse is an acrostic poem. Each of the 22 verses in the Hebrew Bible begins with the succeeding consonant of the Hebrew alphabet (cf. Ps. 34; Lam. 2; 3; 4). Such a device not only made for more interesting and beautiful reading, but it also aided the Hebrew reader in memorizing this passage. The genre of this section is perhaps a heroic poem.²

The woman in view in this passage is probably no single historic individual. This seems clear from the fact that the writer described her impersonally in verse 10 as "an excellent wife," rather than as Lemuel's mother or some other specific woman. Furthermore, throughout Proverbs the writers described people generally. They did not use particular individuals as examples, positively or negatively. However, there are many biblical women who modeled the various descriptions set forth here.

Some scholars believe that this chapter does not describe women at all but deals with wisdom personified as a woman.³ It is interesting, however, that even those who hold this symbolic view occasionally speak of the woman in this poem as a real woman. I believe this view is too extreme. Wherever a writer personified wisdom elsewhere in the book it is always clear to the reader that he was using personification as a literary device (cf. 8:1; 9:1, 13). That is not the case here. Lemuel's mother seems to have been describing the eminently wise woman, not just Wisdom as a woman. The woman in view seems to be a role model who epitomizes wisdom.⁴

In this chapter the wife in view does the things that the wife of a prince or courtier in the ancient Near East would do.

"The woman here presented is a wealthy aristocrat who runs a household estate with servants and conducts business affairs—real estate, vineyards,

¹Y. Levin, "'The Woman of Valor' in Jewish Ritual [Prov. 31:10-31]," *Beth Mikra* 31 (1985-86):339-47.

²A. Wolters, "Proverbs XXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis," *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988):446-57.

³E.g., Ross, pp. 1128-30; Aitken, p. 158.

⁴Tom R. Hawkins, "The Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10-31," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):12-23.

and merchandise—domestic affairs, and charity. It would be quite a task for any woman to emulate this pattern."¹

Lemuel said nothing of this woman's intellectual interests or pursuits, because those things were not significant for his purpose, which was to stress her practical wisdom. He did not mention her relationship to God or to her husband. The absence of her husband's involvement in domestic matters fits her station in life as an aristocrat. He would have been busy with public affairs in the ancient Near East.

Probably Lemuel's mother intended the qualities and characteristics that follow to be a guide to her son as he considered marrying. They provide a standard of godly wisdom for women. However, this standard is not within every woman's reach, since it assumes certain personal abilities and resources that are not available to all. It is idealistic.²

The poem presents the height of female effectiveness. Within the sphere of the household we see that the wife has opportunity for great influence and achievement, not only succeeding herself but enabling her husband to succeed as well.

I do not believe we should interpret this poem as denigrating a woman's work outside the home. It simply addresses a certain kind of woman in a particular social and historical context whose arena of activity was domestic, in the largest sense, almost exclusively. It also advocates characteristics that women can demonstrate in many different contexts in life. Women can manifest them in any period of history and in any culture.

31:10 The Hebrew word translated "excellent" (v. 10, *hayil*) means noble, virtuous, and fine. It denotes strength, wealth, ability, valor, and dependability. The sense of verse 10 is: "a good wife is not easy to find, but, when found, she is of inestimable value."³

"A virtuous woman ... is not found by every one [*sic*], she is found by comparatively few. ... The poet thereby means to say that such a wife is a more precious possession than all earthly things which are precious, and that he who finds such an one has to speak of his rare fortune."⁴

¹Ross, p. 1128.

²Fox, "Proverbs," p. 1486. See Dorothy R. Pape, *In Search of God's Ideal Woman*, for a study of New Testament passages dealing with women.

³Toy, p. 543.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:327.

- 31:11 She will not bring her husband to ruin by overspending. Abram trusted in Sarai because she was loyal to him (Gen. 16).
- "... the [excellent] wife keeps the family possessions scrupulously together, and increases them by her laborious and prudent management, so that there is not wanting to him [her husband] gain ..." ¹
- 31:12 Since "she does him good" and "not evil all the days of her life," she must not be contentious (cf. 27:15). Such a jewel was Hannah (1 Sam. 2).
- 31:13 "Wool and linen" were quality fabrics in the eastern economy. "In delight" (v. 13) reveals her positive motivation toward her tasks. She is industrious.
- 31:14 Rather than using whatever is handy, she wisely shops for what is the best that she can afford (v. 14). She is thrifty. She puts the needs of others in her household ahead of her own comfort and convenience. She is self-sacrificing (v. 15). Ruth is a good example of these qualities (Ruth 2—3).
- 31:15 Note that she has "attendants" (v. 15), which indicates that she has some wealth. This fits the picture of the household of a ruler, which has been assumed throughout the Book of Proverbs.
- 31:16 Eastern culture is again obvious in verses 16 through 18. She supplements her husband's income. Today, supplementing her family's income may be a possibility for her (cf. v. 34). However, husband and wife should agree that this is best for the family. She should make sure her motives and priorities are in order before committing herself to such a job. Is the income essential to meet needs or wants? Is she doing the work to avoid her other higher priority responsibilities? Is she hoping that her job or career, rather than her relationships with God and her family members, will satisfy her needs?
- 31:17 She increases her own effectiveness. Strong arms, in this context, are probably a figure for adequate ability.
- "... she approaches her work with determination, with readiness, and with strength." ²

¹Ibid., 2:327-28.

²Murphy, p. 247.

- 31:18 She has a legitimate sense of self-respect, and she works hard, with the result that she is prosperous (cf. 13:9; 20:20; 24:20). Esther worked hard, in her own creative way, to provide for the needs of her people.
- 31:19 The "distaff" was the rod that held the raw wool while spinning. The "spindle" was the stick the spinner twirled between her fingers that took up the spun wool.
- "These instruments were used in hand spinning of cloth fibers."¹
- 31:20 She is compassionate and generous rather than selfish.
- "The hands that grasp to produce open wide to provide."²
- 31:21 She provides security for her family by providing them with clothing that is both warm and attractive. Scarlet dye was expensive.³
- 31:22 She also tends to her own appearance. She dresses in quality garments. Dorcas comes to mind, who made coats and other garments for those in need (Acts 9:36-39).
- "Beds were most commonly a simple cloth sack stuffed with straw or fiber and used as a mattress. ... The fact that these beds have coverings (additional layers of cloth used for comfort and decoration) is a further indicator of wealth."⁴
- 31:23 The implication of this verse is that she helps her husband advance. She is a credit and an ornament to him (cf. 12:4).
- 31:24 She is both creative and hard-working.
- "The merchants are literally 'Canaanites,' a term that came to be understood of commercial traders."⁵
- Remember Lydia, the seller of purple (Acts 16:14).

¹Adams, p. 927.

²Van Leeuwen, p. 262. Cf. Eph. 4:28.

³Adams, p. 928.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Murphy, p. 247.

- 31:25 "Strength and dignity" are the outstanding qualities that people see when they observe her—dressed in the high-quality clothes she fashioned with her own skillful hands (v. 25a). She is also optimistic about the future because she has prepared for it (v. 25b).
- 31:26 She "opens her mouth in wisdom" (speaks wisely) because she has learned wisdom (v. 26a). Priscilla did so with Aquila when they helped Apollos (Acts 18:26). The "excellent wife" (v. 10) is a kind person, because she wisely realizes the importance of that virtue (v. 26b).
- 31:27 Moreover, she manages her home well and stays busy. She gives her household high priority. Abigail certainly did this (1 Sam. 25).
- 31:28-29 "Her husband" and "children," those who know her best, appreciate and praise her for her many excellent qualities. This poem pictures her caring for others, but verse 28 shows that, as a result, others care for her. Boaz paid Ruth a similar compliment (Ruth 2:11).
- 31:30 Here is the key to her greatness: Charm can be misleading, because it promises a lifetime of happiness but cannot always deliver, and physical beauty is only temporary. But the fear of the LORD is the indispensable core of a woman like this. Though she does not fear the natural elements (v. 21), she does fear the LORD. The reference to "the fear of the LORD" in this verse recalls 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." Thus these two references frame the entire book.
- 31:31 Such a woman deserves to share in the fruits of her labors and to receive public recognition for her greatness.

"Her best praise is her works themselves."¹

A wise woman will enjoy many benefits. Her husband, assuming he is of normal intelligence, will value, bless, and praise her (vv. 10, 28b, 31). She will be secure (v. 25). Moreover, her husband will also cherish and honor her (Eph. 5:28-29; 1 Pet. 3:7b), unless he is a fool.

¹Delitzsch, 2:342.

Conclusion

The quality of wisdom that Proverbs presents is much more than the ability to apply knowledge to various situations in life effectively. It also involves submission to the way of God that is the order of life that God has revealed as best for men and women. It is possible for people to think correctly and to speak and act wisely with no direct knowledge of divine revelation. However, people of this type possess only limited wisdom.

The wise person is one who takes God into account. He realizes his own limitations and his need for divine guidance. He listens to and applies what God has revealed to his own life. The foolish person believes that he does not need God's help. He closes his ears and his mind to God's revelation. He goes his own way. The wise person becomes a success eventually, while the fool suffers destruction—if not in this life, in the next.

Proverbs begins with appeals to listen and submit to God's revealed wisdom (chs. 1—9). Then the writers cite particular cases of wise and foolish behavior to help us readers live wisely (chs. 10—31).

The Book of Proverbs deserves more exposition by preachers and Bible teachers than it gets.

"With the exception of Leviticus, it is doubtful that any biblical book is viewed with less enthusiasm by the preacher."¹

One writer suggested these hermeneutical and homiletical guidelines for interpreting (hermeneutical) and proclaiming (homiletical) Proverbs:²

Hermeneutical guidelines

1. Interpret individual passages in light of the overall structure, purpose, and "motto" of the Book of Proverbs.
2. Recognize the various literary forms and devices (the "building blocks" of the individual passages or proverbs) as clues to the context.
3. Beware of the erroneous assumption that proverbs are unconditional promises.

¹Collins, p. 1. Cf. Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, p. 53.

²Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines of Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Proverbs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):151-70. See also Bruce K. Waltke, "Fundamentals for Preaching the Book of Proverbs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:657 (January-March 2008):3-12; 165:658 (April-June 2008):131-44; 165:659 (July-September 2008):259-67; 165:660 (October-December 2008):387-96.

4. Realize that some proverbs are unconditionally true.
5. Interpret the Book of Proverbs in light of the historical-cultural context of extrabiblical wisdom literature.

Homiletical Guidelines

1. In seeking to apply a proverb, be sure to validate the application through the context of the Bible.
2. Utilize the characteristics and nature of proverbial wisdom as a foundation for graphic communication of timeless principles.
3. Explore the creative use of proverbial characters.

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