

## LECTURE 20a: INTRODUCTION TO WISDOM LITERATURE

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### I. Wisdom Defined and Applied

#### A. Introduction:

1. Wisdom throughout the ages and in numerous cultures covers artisan skills, scientific knowledge, etiquette, philosophy, psychology, politics, sociology, jurisprudence, and the like. The common thread of all is that they address truth and order in God's world. John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill write: "Creation brought order to the cosmos; law brought order to society; etiquette brought order to human relationships; politics brought order to governance and authority. **Ancient wisdom can then be understood as the pursuit of understanding and preserving order in the world**" (*Old Testament Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 326).
2. Biblical wisdom states that the starting place for all true wisdom is "the fear of the LORD." This is because truth and order in God's world can only rightly be understood through acknowledgement of and submission to the one who brought order. True wisdom therefore transcends the basic knowledge or skill needed for a particular discipline by fixing that discipline within the grand purposes of God.

#### B. Definition:

1. **Wisdom** is about truth and order in God's world. On the one hand, it is intimately related to the way God builds his kingdom on a cosmic scale, and on the other hand it addresses how God's royal family should rule and live rightly in his world.
2. Specifically, **wisdom** is the exercised knowledge by which God oversees or governs his world and by which humans, through a fear-generating encounter with God (through his word and presence) are to do the same as his representatives (Gen. 1:27–28).

#### C. The Portrayal of Wisdom

1. Types and categories of wisdom:
  - a. Types:
    - i. Speculative wisdom: analyzing what is right and wrong
    - ii. Prudential wisdom: considering what can make life better
  - b. Categories:
    - i. Monological: Presentation only of what is right and wrong.
    - ii. Dialogical: Presentation and response of what is right and wrong.
    - iii. Epigrammatic/proverbial: Pithy statements that attempt to capture in general ways what is right and wrong.
2. Biblical wisdom books: All the "commentary" books in the Writings bear a stroke of wisdom, but Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are those that wrestle most intimately with these issues. Wisdom in Proverbs is approached from a somewhat different angle than it is in Job and Ecclesiastes.
3. In Proverbs:
  - a. In Proverbs, wisdom is portrayed as something humans are to pursue, as something God bestows, and as something that humans can gain and develop.
  - b. While affirming the cosmic-element of wisdom (Prov. 8:22–36), as a whole this book focuses on the human side, treating wisdom as a God-given and dependently exercised knowledge or understanding that enables a human to perform a task or skill rightly and to make God-honoring decisions, all grounded in the fear of the Lord. The wise are those who seek to know and live in accordance with God's ways.

- Prov. 1:7. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
  - Prov. 2:1–8. My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, <sup>2</sup>making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup>yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, <sup>4</sup>if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, <sup>5</sup>then you will understand the fear of Yahweh and find the knowledge of God. <sup>6</sup>For Yahweh gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; <sup>7</sup>he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, <sup>8</sup>guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.
  - Prov. 8:22–23, 30–36. Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. <sup>23</sup>Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.... <sup>30</sup>then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, <sup>31</sup>rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. <sup>32</sup>And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. <sup>33</sup>Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. <sup>34</sup>Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. <sup>35</sup>For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh, <sup>36</sup>but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.
  - Prov. 9:10. The fear of the Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
- c. Proverbs is mostly prudential, epigrammatic/proverbial wisdom.
4. In Job and Ecclesiastes:
- a. Job and Ecclesiastes affirm the call for humans to pursue wisdom and that through it alone is life, but they are also more explicit regarding the impact of the curse and the limitations of mankind.
  - b. In these books, emphasis is given to wisdom's relationship to God's vast, overseeing role as Creator in governing his world. Wisdom comes from God, is known by God, and is not fully disclosed to humans. The pursuit of wisdom, therefore, does not always arrive at clear answers, and much in this world does not make sense. The life of wisdom declared in Proverbs is not an easy path, and the truths of world order laid out in Proverbs do not always find immediate fulfillment. As such, Job and Ecclesiastes provide a balanced call to continue to fear and follow God and to turn from evil, even when life is filled with suffering and enigma. Wise living for humans always means *dependence* on a God who is not controlled but who is always in control.
- Job 28:20–28. For where, then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of the living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, "We have heard a rumor of it with our ears." God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, when he made a decree from the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."
  - Job 42:2–3. I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
  - Ecccl. 7:23–24. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?
  - Ecccl. 8:16–17. When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.
  - Ecccl. 12:11–14. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole

duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

- c. Job includes speculative wisdom in both monological and dialogical formats; Ecclesiastes provides both speculative and prudential wisdom in both monological and epigrammatic formats.

## II. Wisdom, Law, and Covenant

### A. Wisdom and Law

#### 1. Introduction:

- a. B. Wells and F. R. Magdalene propose that wisdom grew out of law “as an attempt to move from a strictly rules-based system that operated only within rigid boundaries to an advice-based way of living that had implications for areas of life outside the bounds of law” (*DOT:WPW*, 422). The implication that wisdom is a shift away from law seems unhelpful, for the law always provided the basis for a right worldview.
- b. Meredith G. Kline held that the law provides a bare minimum standard, a boundary line that cannot be crossed, whereas proverbial wisdom sets the goals that we should aspire to fulfill (*Structure of Biblical Authority*, 64–67). This should be tempered only by the fact that wisdom seeks to live out the life framed by the law. The law provided general guidelines and examples but still needed to be embodied in daily lives with specific applications for every circumstance.
- c. Sirach later held that a student of wisdom is nothing less than a student of *torah* (Sir 24:23; 38:34b; 39:8).

#### 2. *The Law in Psalms.* Deuteronomy appears to supply the backdrop to “law” in the Psalms, as is suggested by a number of features. (Much of this material is taken from Wells and Magdalene, “Law,” *DOT:WPW*, 420–27.)

- a. Deuteronomic language of law fills the so-called Torah psalms (Pss 1, 19, 119 = *tôrâ* “law, teaching,” *‘ēdūt* “decrees,” *piqqûdîm* “precepts,” *hōq* “statute, law,” *mišwâ* “commandment,” *mišpat* “judgment, ruling”), as well as other passages (e.g., 78:5).
- b. The phrase “meditate on the law day and night” in Ps 1:2 appears to be an parallel with the only other use of the phrase in Scripture—Josh 1:8, which bear explicit reference to Deuteronomy.
- c. Deuteronomic retribution theology fills the Psalter. In Deuteronomy, obedience will bring blessing of health, prosperity, and success (Deut 15:4–6; 28:1–14), whereas disobedience will result in curses of sickness, poverty, and defeat (28:15–68). Similarly, in the Psalms, Yahweh is judge over all the cosmos (e.g., Pss 7:8–11; 82:1), who makes covenants (e.g., 25:10; 89:3), investigates possible covenant breaches (e.g., 7:9; 17:3; 26:2; 44:21), and enforces the covenants with lawsuits (e.g., 82; 143:2). He evaluates the degree to which an individual or a society adheres to covenantal law (78:10; 103:18) and blesses or punishes accordingly (1:5–6; 5:12; 9:17; 33:12; 37:17). At times, when the psalmist felt God was not following his own rules of justice, they would petition Yahweh for assistance (e.g., 4:1; 5:2; 17:1; 55:1–2; 119:154; 130:2–3) or ask him to rehear a case (e.g., Ps 88), pleading for vindication for themselves (e.g., 26:1) and often ruin for their adversaries (143:11–12).

3. *The Law in Proverbs* (much of this material is taken from G. H. Wilson, “The Words of the Wise”: The Intent and Significance of Qoheleth 12:9–14,” *JBL* [1984]: 175–92; C. M. Carmichael, *The Origins of Biblical Law*, 73)
  - a. Life enjoyed through following God’s commands
    - Prov. 3:1–2. My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. (Cf. Deut. 4:40; 6:1–2)
    - Prov. 6:23. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life. (Cf. Deut. 4:1; 5:28–29; 8:1–2)
    - Deut. 4:40. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, that you may prolong your days in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you for all time. Cf. 4:1; 5:29; 6:1–2; 8:1–2.
  - b. “Bind” the commandments on the body
    - Prov. 6:20–23. My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.
    - Prov. 7:1–3. My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.
    - Deut. 6:6–9. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Cf. 11:18–19)
  - c. Two ways
    - Prov. 3:33–35. Yahweh’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Toward the scorner he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor. The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.
    - Prov. 4:10–19. Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.<sup>11</sup> I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.<sup>12</sup> When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.<sup>13</sup> Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.<sup>14</sup> Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.<sup>15</sup> Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.<sup>16</sup> For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.<sup>17</sup> For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.<sup>18</sup> But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.<sup>19</sup> The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.
    - Prov. 8:32–36. And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.
    - Deut. 11:26–28. See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.
    - Deut. 30:15–18. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you today, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

- d. God as “father” who disciplines the “son” he loves
  - Prov. 3:11–13. My son, do not despise Yahweh’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for Yahweh reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.
  - Deut. 8:5–6. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, Yahweh your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. Cf. Deut. 1:30–31.
- e. Possession of the land conditioned on adherence to the righteous path
  - Prov. 2:20–22. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.
  - Deut. 5:32–33. You shall be careful therefore to do as Yahweh your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way that Yahweh your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.
  - Deut. 30:15–18 (see above).
- f. Wisdom’s role at creation
  - Prov. 3:19–20. Yahweh by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; but his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.
  - Prov. 8:22–31. Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.
- g. The Ten Words Affirmed in Proverbs
  - i. Never take Yahweh’s Name in Vain
    - Prov. 30:8–9. Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is Yahweh?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.
  - ii. Honoring One’s Parents
    - Prov. 1:8. Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.
    - Prov. 15:5. A fool despises his father’s instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.
    - Prov. 19:26. He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach. (Cf. 17:21.)
    - Prov. 20:20. If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.
    - Prov. 23:22. Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.
    - Prov. 30:17. The eye that mocks the father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.
    - Cf. Sir. 3:1–16.
  - iii. Never commit adultery or lust
    - Prov. 6:25–26, 32. The adulterous... Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life.... He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.
  - iv. Never bear false witness against your neighbor
    - Prov. 6:19. Yahweh hates... A false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.
    - Prov. 14:25. A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.

- Prov. 19:5. A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.
  - Prov. 24:28. Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips.
  - Prov. 25:18. A man who bears a false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow.
4. *The Law in Job* (Most of this material is adapted from C. B. Ansberry, “‘The Revealed Things’: Deuteronomy and the Epistemology of Job,” in *For Our Good Always*.)
- a. The majority view in the ANE appears to have been that people do *not* know the will of the gods or their requirements. In contrast, Job and his friends have a defined standard for what is right.
    - i. **“Dialog between a man and his god”** (*COS* 1.151: 485): “My Lord, I have debated with myself, and in my feelings [...] of heart: the wrong I did I do not know! Have I [...] a vile forbidden act? Brother does not de[sp]ise his brother, Friend is not calumniator of his friend!”
    - ii. **“Prayer to Every God”** (*ANET* 391–92): “In ignorance I have eaten that forbidden of my god; In ignorance I have set foot on that prohibited by my goddess. O Lord, my transgressions are many; great are my sins.... The transgressions which I have committed, indeed I do not know; The sin which I have done, indeed I do not know. The forbidden thing which I have eaten, indeed I do not know; The prohibited (place) on which I have set foot, indeed I do not know. The lord in the anger of his heart looked at me; The god in the rage of his heart confronted me; When the goddess was angry with me, she made me become ill. The god whom I know or do not know has oppressed me; The goddess whom I know or do not know has placed suffering upon me.... How long, O my goddess, whom I know or do not know, ere thy hostile heart will be quieted? Man is dumb; he knows nothing; Mankind, everyone that exists,—what does he know? Whether he is committing sin or doing good, he does not even know.”
    - iii. **“The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer”** (*COS* 1.153: 487–88): “The lord divines the gods’ inmost thoughts, (But) no [god] understands his behavior. Marduk divines the gods’ inmost thoughts, Which god understands his mind? ... I wish I knew that these things [i.e., libations, good offerings, prostration, supplications and prayers, holy days, festivals] were pleasing to a god! What seems good to one’s self could be an offense to a god, What in one’s own heart seems abominable could be good to one’s god! Who could learn the reasoning of the gods in heaven? Who could grasp the intentions of the gods of the depths? Where might human beings have learned the way of a god?”
    - iv. **“The Babylonian Theodicy”** (*COS* 1.154: 493–94): “*Friend*: You are a mere child, the purpose of the gods is remote as the netherworld.... *Sufferer*: In my youth I tried to find out the will of (my) god, With prayer and supplication I besought my goddess. I bore a yoke of profitless servitude.... *Friend*: The strategy of a god is [as remote as] innermost heaven, The command of a goddess cannot be dr[awn out].... Divine purpose is as remote as innermost heaven, It is too difficult to understand, people cannot understand it.... Even if one (tries to) apprehend divine intention, people cannot understand it.”

- b. Experience and ancestral tradition, at least some of which may be Scripture (likely from the Pentateuch), appears to shape the presuppositions, rhetorical strategies, and distinctive moral vision of Job and his friends:<sup>1</sup>

i. The three friends:

(1) Assumptions concerning retribution

- Job 8:8–13 (Bildad). For inquire, please, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have searched out. <sup>9</sup>For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow. <sup>10</sup>Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding? <sup>11</sup>Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? <sup>12</sup>While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. <sup>13</sup>Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish.
- Job 15:17–21 (Eliphaz). I will show you; hear me, and what I have seen I will declare <sup>18</sup>(what wise men have told, without hiding it from their fathers, <sup>19</sup>to whom alone the land was given, and no stranger passed among them). <sup>20</sup>The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. <sup>21</sup>Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.
- Job 20:4–5, 27–29 (Zophar). Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, <sup>5</sup>that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment? ... <sup>27</sup>The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him. <sup>28</sup>The possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God's wrath. <sup>29</sup>This is the wicked man's portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God.

(2) Theological anthropology

- Job 15:7–8 (Eliphaz). Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? <sup>8</sup>Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself?
- Job 15:14–16 (Eliphaz). What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? <sup>15</sup>Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; <sup>16</sup>how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!
- Job 25:4–6 (Bildad). How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? <sup>5</sup>Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; <sup>6</sup>how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!

(3) Knowledge about God and his oversight of the world

- Job 5:8–16 (Eliphaz). As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, <sup>9</sup>who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: <sup>10</sup>he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; <sup>11</sup>he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. <sup>12</sup>He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. <sup>13</sup>He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. <sup>14</sup>They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night. <sup>15</sup>But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. <sup>16</sup>So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.
- Job 5:17–22 (Eliphaz). Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. <sup>18</sup>For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal. <sup>19</sup>He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you. <sup>20</sup>In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. <sup>21</sup>You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. <sup>22</sup>At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Along with ancestral tradition, Eliphaz argues that elderly status strengthens one's claims to knowledge and accentuates the superiority of one's wisdom (12:11–12; 15:9–10).

- Job 8:5–7 (Bildad). If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, <sup>6</sup>if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. <sup>7</sup>And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.
  - Job 11:13–20 (Zophar). If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. <sup>14</sup>If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. <sup>15</sup>Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. <sup>16</sup>You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. <sup>17</sup>And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. <sup>18</sup>And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security. <sup>19</sup>You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many will court your favor. <sup>20</sup>But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last.
  - 22:21–30 (Eliphaz). Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. <sup>22</sup>Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. <sup>23</sup>If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you remove injustice far from your tents, <sup>24</sup>if you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed, <sup>25</sup>then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver. <sup>26</sup>For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. <sup>27</sup>You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you, and you will pay your vows. <sup>28</sup>You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways. <sup>29</sup>For when they are humbled you say, “It is because of pride”; but he saves the lowly. <sup>30</sup>He delivers even the one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.
- ii. Job is aware of the ancestral tradition used by his friends:
- (1) Job appropriates various traditions to level the rhetorical field and to enhance the authority of his case:
    - (a) Traditional doxologies (9:2–12; 26:5–14)
    - (b) Parables from nature (12:7–10)
    - (c) Proverbs (6:5–6; 14:1–2)
    - (d) Wisdom sayings (7:1–2; 17:5)
  - (2) Job claims to know the traditions propagated by his friends:
    - Job 12:3. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these?
    - Job 13:2. What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you.
    - Job 16:2. I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all.
  - (3) Job draws on a common ethical code echoed by his friends:
    - Job 22:6–9 (Eliphaz). For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. <sup>7</sup>You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. <sup>8</sup>The man with power possessed the land, and the favored man lived in it. <sup>9</sup>You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.
    - Job 29:11–17 (Job). When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, <sup>12</sup>because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. <sup>13</sup>The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. <sup>14</sup>I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. <sup>15</sup>I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. <sup>16</sup>I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. <sup>17</sup>I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth. Cf. 24:2–25 (Job).
- c. There are a number of references to God’s words, ways, and commands, which suggests a general grounding in the biblical tradition.
- Job 6:10. This would be my comfort; I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.
  - Job 21:14. They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways.



- Job 22:22. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart.
- Job 23:11–12. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. <sup>12</sup>I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.
- d. There are a number of references that strongly suggest a link with the Psalms and Israel's wisdom tradition:
  - i. Job's declaration of innocence in ch. 31 resembles the entrance liturgies of the Psalter (Pss. 7:3–5[4–6]; 15; 24:3–6).
  - ii. The path metaphor (Job 31:4, 7), the image of divine surveillance (31:4; cf. Prov. 5:21), and the pervasive use of body parts are distinctive categories of the wisdom movement.
  - iii. Job's concern with sexual ethics (Job 31:1, 9–12; cf. Prov. 5:1–23, 6:20–35, 7:1–27), trust in wealth (Job 31:24–25; cf. Prov. 30:7–9), and social humaneness expressed through kindness toward an enemy (Job 31:29–30; cf. Prov. 25:21–22) all point to the books' grounding in wisdom.
- e. Job's stress on care for the disenfranchised, judicial impartiality, and kindness toward an enemy are all closely aligned with Israel's constitutional materials in the Pentateuch:
  - i. *Slave rights*, Job 31:13–15 (Exod. 21:18–21, 26–27; Lev 25:6–7; Deut. 5:12–15, 15:12–17, 16:9–15);
  - ii. *Sexual offenses*, Job 31:9–12 (Exod. 20:14, 22:16–17; Lev. 18:17, 20:10);
  - iii. *Enmity*, Job 31:29–30 (Lev. 19:17–18)
  - iv. *Idolatry*, Job 31:26–28 (Exod. 20:3–6, 23; Lev. 19:4; Deut. 4:15–19)
  - v. *Integrity in interpersonal relationships*, Job 31:16–23, 38–40 (Exod. 23:2–8; Lev. 19:11–18);
  - vi. *Covetousness*, Job 31:1 (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21)
- f. A number of other features appear to show close dependence on Deuteronomic thought if not Deuteronomy itself:
  - i. Uncleanness sticking to one's hand (Job 31:7c with Deut. 13:17a[18a])
    - Job 31:7c. and if any spot has stuck to my hands.
    - Deut. 13:17a[18a]. None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand.
  - ii. The heart being enticed (Job 31:9–12, 26–27 with Deut. 11:16)
    - Job 31:9–12. If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, <sup>10</sup> then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her. <sup>11</sup> For that would be a heinous crime; that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges; <sup>12</sup> for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.
    - Job 31:26–27. If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, <sup>27</sup> and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand....
    - Deut 11:16. Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.
  - iii. A devouring fire of judgment that burns to the netherworld (Job 31:12 with Deut. 32:22)
    - Job 31:12. For that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.
    - Deut. 32:22. For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

- iv. The celestial bodies as instruments of idolatrous seduction (Job 31:26–27 with Deut. 4:19)
  - Job 31:26–27. If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor,<sup>27</sup> and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand....
  - Deut. 4:19. And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that Yahweh your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. Cf. Deut. 17:3; 2 Kgs. 23:5; Jer. 8:1–2.
- v. Stress on the rights of slaves (Job 31:13–15 with Deuteronomy's version of the Sabbath command [Deut. 5:14–15], lavish economic provision for the indentured servant at the time of release [15:12–15], invitations for marginalized members of the community to participate in the cultic life of the nation [12:12, 18; 16:11, 14; 31:12], and asylum given to runaway slaves [23:15]).
  - Job 31:13–15. If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me,<sup>14</sup> what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?<sup>15</sup> Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?
- vi. Loving care for the destitute and day laborer (Job 31:16–23, 38–40 with Deut. 10:17–18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19–21; 26:12–13; 27:19).
  - Job 31:16–23. If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,<sup>17</sup> or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it<sup>18</sup> (for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow),<sup>19</sup> if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or the needy without covering,<sup>20</sup> if his body has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,<sup>21</sup> if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, because I saw my help in the gate,<sup>22</sup> then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket.<sup>23</sup> For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.
  - Job 31:38–40. If my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together,<sup>39</sup> if I have eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last,<sup>40</sup> let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley.
  - Deut. 10:17–18. For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.<sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.
- vii. Economic dealings with employees (Job 31:38–40 with Deut. 24:14–15)
  - Job 31:38–40. If my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together,<sup>39</sup> if I have eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last,<sup>40</sup> let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley.
  - Deut. 24:14–15. You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.<sup>15</sup> You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to Yahweh, and you be guilty of sin.
- g. Conclusion: The author of Job drew not only on broad wisdom traditions but also directly from the Pentateuchal materials, which suggests both an organic connection between wisdom and law but also the covenantal nature of Israel's wisdom writings.

**B. The Covenant as the Context for Wisdom** (Some of this material is adapted from J. A. Grant, "Wisdom and Covenant," in *DOTWPW*, 858–62.)

1. While the term "covenant" (*b<sup>e</sup>rît*) is rare in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes (see only Job 5:23; 31:1; 40:28; Prov. 2:17), the covenant relationship provides the context for understanding Israelite wisdom and for living life well.

2. Foundational to all wisdom is “the fear of Yahweh/God,” which shows that wisdom is linked to relationship with the covenant God. In the words of R. C. Van Leeuwen (“The Book of Proverbs,” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 5:33): “The great phrase ‘the fear of the LORD’ grounds human knowledge and wisdom (cf. [Prov] 9:10) in humble service of Yahweh..... Although this phrase has its origin in the experience of God’s numinous majesty (as at Sinai, Deut 4:9–10), it eventually has come to express the total claim of God upon humans and the total life-response of humans to God.”
  - a. According to the Pentateuch, the generator of all covenantal faithfulness is fear of Yahweh (Gen. 22:12; Exod. 20:20; Deut. 10:12–13).
    - Gen. 22:12. [The angel of Yahweh] said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”
    - Exod. 20:20. Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”
    - Deut. 10:12–13. And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of Yahweh, which I am commanding you today for your good?
  - b. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Eccl. 12:13).
    - Prov. 1:7. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
    - Eccl. 12:13. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
  - c. The structure of Proverbs is bracketed by statements addressing the centrality of fearing Yahweh, the main units of the book being Prov. 1–9, 10–31.
    - Prov. 1:7. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
    - Prov. 9:10. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
    - Prov. 31:30. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears Yahweh is to be praised.
  - d. The entire issue in Job addresses the basis for fearing God.
    - Job 1:1, 9–10. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil....<sup>9</sup> Then the Satan answered Yahweh and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup>Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.
    - Job 28:28. And [God] said to man, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”
  - e. The fear of Yahweh synthesizes the principal human response to life’s enigmas in Ecclesiastes.
    - Eccl. 3:14. I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.
    - Eccl. 5:8. If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.
    - Eccl. 8:12. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.
    - Eccl. 8:13. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.
    - Eccl. 12:13. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

3. Removing the covenant makes biblical wisdom nonsensical.
  - a. The main tension point in Job revolves around people's expectations of God that are not met, all grounded in an incomplete covenantal understanding of retribution (blessing and curse). The narrator, Job, and Yahweh all affirm that Job's suffering was not due to his own (covenantal) failures (Job 1:1, 8; ch. 31; 42:7–8), which leads Job to reflect on the days when he enjoyed God's close covenantal relationship—"the friendship of God was upon my tent, when the Almighty was yet with me" (29:4–5)—and to justify himself rather than to affirm God's right to act as he will (32:2; cf. 36:3–4, 22–23). As J. A. Grant has asserted, "The essence of [Job's] complaint is based in the understanding that God had not kept his side of the 'covenant deal'" (*DOTWPW*, 862).
  - b. In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher's crisis of faith was partially grounded in the fact that he expected justice and meaning in the ordering of life's patterns. Central to the covenant between God and his people was the structure of righteousness and justice, and it is the lack of the expected relationship between the Creator and his creation that leads the Preacher to view life as so enigmatic.
  - c. The sages in Proverbs identify that the normal pattern of life is that honoring God with one's life leads to positive real consequences. This is a covenantal pattern of retribution.

**C. Covenantal Retribution Theology and the Act-Consequence Nexus** (Some of this material is adapted from E. C. Lucas, "Wisdom Theology," *DOTWPW*, 907–909.)

1. In 1955, K. Koch ("Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw [London: SPCK, 1983]: 57–87; orig. German, 1955) described what he called "an act-consequence nexus" in Proverbs and other parts of the OT. The assumption is that wicked actions bring disastrous consequences, whereas good actions result in blessing. This act-consequence nexus is clearly *part* of Israel's wisdom tradition, for it is expressed in a number of proverbs, is assumed by Job's three friends as the only pattern for God's actions in the present, and stands behind the great frustrations of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes when he asserts that life makes little sense.
  - Job 4:8. As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.
  - Prov. 22:8. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail. <sup>9</sup>Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.
  - Prov. 26:27. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.
  - Prov. 28:10. Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.
  - Prov. 28:18. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.

Koch argued that the act-consequence nexus was grounded in natural inevitability and not the result of God's direct oversight. He held that while the Lord upholds the act-consequence nexus, ensuring that it is completed, it should not be viewed as God's administering (covenantal) punishments or rewards. Koch's comments address complex issues and deserve a thoughtful response.
2. In contrast to Koch, the Bible is clear that that the act-consequence nexus is *not* rooted in an impersonal order but is directly related to the character and will of God.
  - a. The "abomination sayings" show that wise living is directly related to what delights or abhors Yahweh.
    - Prov. 11:20. Those of crooked heart are an abomination to Yahweh, but those of blameless ways are his delight.

- b. The fear of the LORD is the very context for wise living, which highlights how the act-consequence nexus is directly related to relationship with God.
    - Prov. 15:33. The fear of Yahweh is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.
    - Job 28:28. Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.
  - c. Abraham linked the act-consequence nexus directly to God's character.
    - Gen. 18:24–25. Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?
3. The inter-relationship of God-ordained acts and consequences, however, is difficult to assess, for whereas the covenantal blessings and curses are initially portrayed as absolutes (obedience brings blessings and disobedience, curse; see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28), the act-consequence nexus is *not* absolute (at least in this life), for the wicked often enjoy plenty and ease and the righteous often suffer.
- a. Wisdom distinguishes two ways: the way of the wise and the way of the fool, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked (see Psalm 1). While recognizing that none are perfect, Israel's wisdom tradition also affirms that, in light of God's just ability to forgive sin, there were imperfect people in both the Old and New Testaments whom God considered righteous covenant keepers, all by grace through faith.
    - Gen. 6:8–9. But Noah found favor/grace in the eyes of Yahweh. <sup>9</sup>These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.
    - Ps. 25:8–15. Good and upright is Yahweh; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. <sup>9</sup>He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. <sup>10</sup>All the paths of Yahweh are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. <sup>11</sup>For your name's sake, O Yahweh, pardon my guilt, for it is great. <sup>12</sup>Who is the man who fears Yahweh? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. <sup>13</sup>His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. <sup>14</sup>The friendship of Yahweh is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. <sup>15</sup>My eyes are ever toward Yahweh, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
    - Rom. 2:13, 26–29. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.... <sup>26</sup>So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup>Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup>For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
    - 1 John 3:7. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.
  - b. What is striking, therefore, is that, while Proverbs and elsewhere affirm the general truth of the act-consequence nexus for today, they also rightly note that the principle of "you reap what you sow" has many exceptions *in this life*.
    - i. The "better than" proverbs clearly show that a simple act-consequence nexus does not always hold up in the present.
      - Prov. 16:8. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.
      - Prov. 16:16. How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.
      - Prov. 16:19. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.
    - ii. A number of other proverbs simply declare explicitly that, in this cursed age, the righteous do not always prosper and that the wicked sometimes do.
      - Prov. 11:16. A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches.

- Prov. 13:23. The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.
- Prov. 18:23. The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly.
- iii. The “less fitting” and “number” proverbs declare the same thing—this life does not always work out according to the harvester’s principle of “you reap what you sow.”
  - Prov. 17:7. Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince.
  - Prov. 19:10. It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to rule over princes.
  - Prov. 30:21–23. Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: <sup>22</sup>a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; <sup>23</sup>an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.
- iv. The fact that life is filled with apparent “contradictions” cautions all readers from mechanically treating all proverbs as absolute principles that work in every situation. Indeed, in alignment with the very nature of the proverb, most biblical proverbs are short, pithy statements that mark general truths in most settings rather than absolute truths for all settings. This fact is made clear in Prov. 26:4–5, which states apparent contradicting statements as equally valid, dependent on the circumstance:
  - Prov. 26:4–5. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.  
<sup>5</sup>Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.
- c. Similarly, part of the author’s intent in the book of Job appears to be to counter the false assumption that the act-consequence nexus explains all of God’s dealings with mankind in the present.
  - i. The core of Job’s argument against his three friends is that they misappropriated the act-consequence nexus, treating it as the only guide for this life and failing to account for God’s greater purposes.
    - Job 4:8. As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.
  - ii. Whereas most proverbs reason from cause to effect (a certain situation or action is likely to lead to a particular outcome), Job’s friends reason from effect to cause (Job must have sinned because he is experiencing great suffering), which is apparently not appropriate reasoning in a twisted world (cf. John 9:1–3).<sup>2</sup>
- d. Finally, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes is troubled over the fact that the act-consequence does not always work out in this age (Eccl. 8:14)—a sentiment echoed by the psalmist (Ps. 44:17–19).
  - Eccl. 8:14. There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

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<sup>2</sup> A SIDE QUESTION: Elihu as well appears to hold to the act-consequence nexus. His name means “my God is Yahweh,” and it is the only Hebrew name in the book. This along with his positive defense of Yahweh and the fact that his words are never critiqued by Yahweh (like the three friends’ words are) suggests that Elihu is a good guy, speaking truth about God (in contrast to Job’s friends—see Job 42:7). How then do we grasp the meaning of his words, for he appears to affirm the main voice of the three friends when he states, “For according to the work of a man [God] will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him” (Job 34:11). Similarly, in Job 36:6–14 we read: “He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their right. <sup>7</sup>He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous, but with kings on the throne he sets them forever, and they are exalted. <sup>8</sup>And if they are bound in chains and caught in the cords of affliction, <sup>9</sup>then he declares to them their work and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly. <sup>10</sup>He opens their ears to instruction and commands that they return from iniquity. <sup>11</sup>If they listen and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasantness. <sup>12</sup>But if they do not listen, they perish by the sword and die without knowledge. <sup>13</sup>The godless in heart cherish anger; they do not cry for help when he binds them. <sup>14</sup>They die in youth, and their life ends among the cult prostitutes.”

- Ps. 44:17–19. All this [turmoil] has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. <sup>18</sup>Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way; <sup>19</sup>yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.

#### 4. Conclusions:

- a. The presence of what can be called an act-consequence nexus in Israel's wisdom tradition seems best explained by wisdom's covenantal context, both the national covenant made to Moses (blessings and curses) and the global one made with all mankind in Adam (Isa. 24:4–6; cf. 43:27; Hos. 6:7).
- b. God is always just (Job 37:23), and his covenantal promises of blessing and curse must be seen as absolute truths, for redemptive history hinges on God's faithfulness to these promises in Christ (Deut. 4:25–31; 30:1–10; Gal. 3:13–14).
- c. Nevertheless, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes all stress that covenantal retribution theology is more complex than may first appear. This complexity is likely caused by theological realities associated with (1) the imperfections of all God's covenant partners before Christ, (2) the doctrine of imputation, and (3) the already but not yet aspect of a Christian's life with God.
  - i. First, while there appears to be both individual and communal aspects to the covenantal blessings and curses, humanity's imperfect obedience of faith and the typological, imperfect realities of OT sacrifices and temple worship made God's curse ever-justified and his blessing ever-gracious (i.e., unmerited), supplied only by his loving kindness in light of past promises to the fathers and future grace shown in Christ. Imputed righteousness alone is the basis (though not the sole condition) for all blessing in both the old and new covenants. The experience of this imputation, however, does impart fresh workings of grace that enable in the present age a real, though not perfect, obedience, which can meet necessary conditions for covenantal blessing.
  - ii. Second, while believers are redeemed from the curse as condemnation for sin, we have yet to be delivered from the cursed age with all its temptations, decay, and death. As saved sinners in need of sanctification, the Lord uses the cursed world as discipline to develop holiness: "He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity" (Job 36:15; cf. Heb. 12:10–11). The Job 36:15 reference, however, still assumes that the affliction itself was brought on due to sin (36:6–14).
  - iii. Third, while believers stand fully righteous in Christ and thus have secured every spiritual blessing now and the full inheritance (including physical blessing) later (Eph. 1:3, 13–14), we are still called to pursue gain through God-dependent obedience, allowing the promises of God to motivate us toward God-likeness and away from sin (2 Pet. 1:4; cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 3:3). The obedience itself is fruit, not root, and proves that we are indeed in Christ and living by future-oriented faith.
  - iv. The book of Psalms clearly asserts that the act-consequence nexus has an *eschatological nature*, finding its ultimate fulfillment only at the last judgment and beyond.
    - (1) For example, in Psalm 1 we read: "Blessed/satisfied is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked ... but his delight is in the law of Yahweh.... The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away. *Therefore* the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for Yahweh knows the way of the

righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The act-consequence nexus expressed in “the wicked . . . are like chaff that the wind drives away” provides the basis for the conviction that “the wicked will not stand in the judgment.” The act-consequence nexus therefore addresses *ultimate* realities, which are not always clearly perceived in the present.

- (2) This fact is stressed in Ps. 49:18–19, where we learn that though the wicked man in this age “counts himself blessed . . . his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never again see light.” The same context highlights that for the righteous there is hope “over dying/beyond death” (Ps. 48:14), for darkness will pass and “morning” will dawn as God receives his saint “from the power of Sheol” (49:14–15).
- (3) The entirety of Psalm 37 connects the eschatological nature of the act-consequence to blessings and curses, using language that echoes the covenant. It opens in vv. 1–2 by urging the reader: “Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! <sup>2</sup> For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.” We then read in vv. 21–22: “The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives; <sup>22</sup> for those blessed by Yahweh shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off.” The language of the wicked being “cut off” echoes the verb *krt* used for making a covenant and is repeated in vv. 9, 28, 34, 38.
- (4) References to God’s ultimate covenantal blessing for the righteous fill the Psalms, usually expressed in the context of hope out of struggle or tribulation, though some speak as if covenantal blessing will be enjoyed in the immediate present (e.g., Ps. 128:4).
  - (a) In Ps. 109:26–31, a text that clearly addresses the eschatological nature of retribution theology, we read in v. 28: “Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad!” David cries, “Salvation belongs to Yahweh; your blessing be on your people!” (Ps. 3:8[9]). Similarly, in the wake of external persecution, David declared in Ps. 5:11–12[12–13]: “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. <sup>12</sup> For you bless the righteous, O Yahweh; you cover him with favor as with a shield.” And again in 28:8–9: “Yahweh is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. <sup>9</sup> Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.” Comparable declarations of hope are found in Pss. 21:3, 6[4, 7]; 24:5; 29:11; 67:1, 6–7[2, 7–8]; 115:12–15; 129:8; 133:3; 134:3.
  - (b) Psalm 112 places the unshakable future for the righteous in the context of covenantal retribution theology. Echoing Psalm 1, it begins in 112:1–2: “Praise Yahweh! Blessed/satisfied is the man who fears Yahweh, who greatly delights in his commandments! <sup>2</sup> His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” Similarly, in Psalm 119 the act-consequence nexus is echoed in covenantal curse terms when the psalmist declares in vv. 20–21: “My soul is consumed with



- longing for your rules at all times. <sup>21</sup> You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments.”
- (c) Both Pss. 65:10 and 107:38 point to God’s causing rain to fall and crops to grow as (covenantal) blessing, and 67:6[7] sees the reality of such provision as a ground of hope that God will indeed uphold his people and bless them.
  - (d) Ps. 72:17 alludes to the Abrahamic promise of Gen. 12:3 by pointing to the Davidic Son as the one through whom the world will enjoy the blessing of covenantal reconciliation with God. Comparably, in Ps. 132:13–18, the Lord affirms that he will bless Jerusalem (v. 15) with provision, salvation, the Davidic king, and triumph (cf. 147:13).
- (5) For other examples of psalms that directly address retribution theology in eschatological terms, see Pss. 9:17–18; 10:17–18; 17:13–15; 30:5; 34:19–22; ch. 49; 68:2–3, 20; ch. 73; 92:6–11; ch. 94; 102:18–28.
- d. Job’s three friends forced the act-consequence/blessing-curse nexus to always hold true in this life. Those who follow this path may either have an over-realized eschatology or fail to see how God’s kindness shown in physical health and wealth may ultimately be a curse in disguise, operating as a means for God’s “giving one over into sin” (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) and serving as exhibit “A” against those who fail to honor God and give thanks to him (1:21). As Paul said in Rom 2:4–5: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”
- i. With respect to those expecting too much in the present (i.e., an over-realized eschatology), in this present cursed world, physical blessing seen in health and wealth is often delayed. Nevertheless, the call to walk in wisdom and promise of God’s presence and help remains, and God, who is always just, will *ultimately* punish the wicked and uphold the righteous.
    - Ps. 73. <sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. <sup>4</sup>For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. <sup>5</sup>They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.... <sup>16</sup>But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, <sup>17</sup>until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. <sup>18</sup>Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. <sup>19</sup>How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! <sup>20</sup>Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.... <sup>23</sup>Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. <sup>24</sup>You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. <sup>25</sup>Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. <sup>27</sup>For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. <sup>28</sup>But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord Yahweh my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.
    - Prov. 1:18–19, 32–33. But these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. <sup>19</sup> Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.... <sup>32</sup> For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; <sup>33</sup> but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.
    - Prov. 11:21. Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.

- Prov. 24:19–20. Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked,<sup>20</sup> for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out.
  - Eccl. 2:11–13. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.<sup>12</sup> So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.<sup>13</sup> Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.
  - Eccl. 8:12–13. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.<sup>13</sup> But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.
- ii. Furthermore, just as covenant “curses” can serve as blessings-in-disguise, that nurture holiness, for those who are able to learn from them (see Lev. 26:18, 21, 23, 27; Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; Heb. 12:10–11), so too “blessings” can operate as instruments of judgment for those who fail to recognize God’s kindness and praise him for it.
- Rom. 1:18, 21, 23, 26, 28. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him....<sup>23</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity....<sup>26</sup> ... God gave them up to dishonorable passions....<sup>28</sup> ... God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.
  - Rom. 2:4–5. Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.
  - Rom. 11:20–22. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.<sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.<sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

## LECTURE 20b: JOB

### “The God who is worth serving”

Jason S. DeRouchie, PhD

#### I. Orienting Data

- A.** *Focus:* How to retain fear of God amidst life’s challenges—the nature of true faith, calling the loyal follower of God to stand firm even in suffering.
- B.** *Content:* A brilliant wrestling with the questions:
  1. “Why do the righteous suffer?”
  2. “Why should we fear God?”
  3. “Where is wisdom found?”
- C.** *Emphases:*
  1. Wisdom is ultimately found in God alone.
  2. Human wisdom cannot on its own fathom all the ways of God.
  3. Undeserved suffering has no easy answer.
  4. God is not obligated to explain all things to fallen human beings.
  5. The fear of the Lord is the path to true wisdom.

#### II. Structure and Overview

##### A. The Structure: A Five Act Drama

1. Act 1: Prologue (chs. 1–2)
2. Act 2: Dialogue with Three Friends (chs. 3–31)
  - a. Interchange with Three Friends (chs. 3–26)
  - b. Job’s extended response (chs. 27–28), including a meditation on the nature & source of wisdom (ch. 28: the question, vv. 12–22; the answer, vv. 23–24)
  - c. Job’s final defense (chs. 29–31)
3. Act 3: Elihu’s Speeches (chs. 32–37)
4. Act 4: Yahweh’s Speeches (38:1–42:6)
5. Act 5: Epilogue (42:7–17)

##### B. Overview of the Drama:

1. *Act 1: Prologue* (chs. 1–2)
  - a. Setting (1:1–5)
    - i. Job’s piety (v. 1)
    - ii. Job’s progeny (v. 2)
    - iii. Job’s possessions (v. 3)
    - iv. Job’s pattern: a patriarchal-priestly role (vv. 4–5)
  - b. Scene 1 (1:6–22):
    - i. Heavenly confrontation (1:6–13):
      - (1) Setting: The Satan (“adversary/accuser”) before Sovereign Yahweh (v. 6)
      - (2) Q&A 1: The sphere of Satan’s accusatory power (v. 7):
        - (a) Yahweh’s query (v. 7a)
        - (b) The Satan’s answer (v. 7b)
      - (3) Q&A 2: The object of the Satan’s attack (vv. 8–12)
        - (a) Yahweh’s query (v. 8)
        - (b) The Satan’s response (vv. 9–11): “Does Job fear God for no reason?” (v. 9).
        - (c) Yahweh’s guidelines (v. 12)
    - ii. Test 1: Job’s earthly suffering—deep loss (1:14–22):

- (1) The nature of Job's loss described (1:14–19)
    - (a) The setting (v. 13)
    - (b) The announcement (vv. 14–19)
      - (i) *Messenger 1*: Foreigners from the south steal oxen and donkeys and slay servants (vv. 14–15).
      - (ii) *Messenger 2*: Fire from heaven consumes sheep and servants (v. 16).
      - (iii) *Messenger 3*: Foreigners from the north steal camels and slay servants (v. 17).
      - (iv) *Messenger 4*: Wind destroys house, killing all his sons and daughters (vv. 18–19).
    - (c) The significance: Job 9:13, 17–18. God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. . . . <sup>17</sup> He crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; <sup>18</sup> he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness.
  - (2) Job's response detailed (1:20–22)
    - (a) *Job's posture*: grief and trust (v. 20)
    - (b) *Job's pronouncement*: Job 1:21. Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.
    - (c) *Job's purity*: Job 1:22. In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.
  - (3) Significance:
    - (a) While Satan is a secondary cause unknown to Job, Job himself asserts that Yahweh is the ultimate causer of his pain (1:21) and yet is fully worthy of his trust and praise (1:20–21).
    - (b) The inspired narrator affirms that Job's massive view of God's sovereignty was correct (1:22).
- iii. Lesson:
- (1) *Satan's query*: “Does Job fear God for no reason? . . . Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (Job 1:9, 11).
  - (2) *The truth*: Yahweh's worth is greater than all possessions or family.
- c. Scene 2 (2:1–13)
- i. Heavenly confrontation (2:1–6)
    - (1) Setting: The Satan (“adversary/accuser”) before Sovereign Yahweh (v. 1)
    - (2) Q&A 1: Restating the sphere of the Satan's accusatory power (v. 2)
    - (3) Q&A 2: The object of the Satan's renewed attack (vv. 3–6)
      - (a) Yahweh's query and reassertion of Job's integrity and, ultimately, his own worth (v. 3)
      - (b) The Satan's response (vv. 4–5)
      - (c) Yahweh's guidelines (v. 6)
  - ii. Test 2 Introduced: Job's earthly suffering—deep physical, emotional, and theological pain (2:7–10):
    - (1) The source and nature of Job's physical pain described (v. 7)
      - (a) Satan is here explicitly marked as the secondary cause of Job's pain (2:7).
      - (b) Comparable texts relating ultimate and secondary cause:

- (i) Example 1:
  - 2 Sam 24:1. Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”
  - 1 Chr 21:1. Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.
- (ii) Example 2:
  - 2 Cor 12:7–9. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- (2) The response detailed (vv. 8–10)
  - (a) Job’s *posture*: mourning and attempt to ease the physical pain (v. 8)
  - (b) Job’s wife’s *plea*: Curse God and die! (thus failing the test) (v. 9)
  - (c) Job’s *pronouncement* (v. 10): Job 2:10. You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall be not receive evil?
  - (d) Job’s *purity* (v. 10): Job 1:10. In all this Job did not sin with his lips.
- (3) Significance:
  - (a) Job’s wife succumbs to the very sin Satan anticipated in Job (2:9; cf. 1:11; 2:5).
  - (b) Job and the narrator again affirm Yahweh as the ultimate causer of all things—both good and evil (2:10).
- iii. Transition: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar mourn with Job (2:11–13)
- iv. Lessons:
  - (1) Yahweh’s worth is greater than life itself.
  - (2) God’s purposes in our suffering are far greater than we can grasp. His wisdom is beyond us:
    - Job 28:20–28. From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? <sup>21</sup> It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. <sup>22</sup> Abaddon and Death say, “We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.” <sup>23</sup> God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. <sup>24</sup> For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. <sup>25</sup> When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, <sup>26</sup> when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, <sup>27</sup> then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. <sup>28</sup> And he said to man, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”
    - Rom 11:33–36. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup> For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? <sup>35</sup> Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
  - (3) Why would God grant that suffering would his children?
    - (a) It must be for his own glory and for our good.
    - (b) We know “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

(c) When believers cry for help, God is magnified and we are satisfied.

2. *Act 2: Dialogue with Three Friends* (chs. 3–31)

a. Overview:

- Opening (ch. 3) J >
- Round 1 (chs. 4–14, long) E > J > B > J > Z > J >
- Round 2 (chs. 15–21, medium) E > J > B > J > Z > J >
- Round 3 (chs. 22–26, short) E > J > B > J > ?
- Initial climax (chs. 27–28) J >
- Final defense (chs. 29–31) J

b. Job: “With the depth of my pain, death would be better than life to me!” (3:16–26)

c. Dialogue between Job and his friends:

- i. Overview: E (4:2, 7–9) > J (6:1–4, 24–27; 7:20–21) > B (8:1–7) > J (9:1–4, 14–20; 10:2–7) > Z (11:1–6, 13–15)
- ii. Job’s friends: Cold, simplistic theology that does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how God works in his world—“God is good and therefore surely has made a good world; God causes bad things to happen to bad people and rewards good people; one can infer from the events whether God is punishing you or not.” Eliphaz: “As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (4:8).

d. Job:

- i. Overview: J (27:1–6; 28:12–28) > J (ch. 31)
- ii. Job: “I didn’t do anything wrong to deserve this suffering, but who am I to talk back to God? Wisdom is found in God alone!” (28:21, 23, 28): “[Wisdom] is hidden from the eyes of all living.... God understands the way to it.... Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”

e. Job justifies himself by asserting his integrity (ch. 31)

- i. 31:5 – He has not been a liar or deceiver.
- ii. 31:7 – He has not traveled off the right path, or allowed his heart to be lured in by what he sees, or acquired any blemish by what he has touched.
- iii. 31:9 – He has not lusted after a woman or played around with his neighbor’s wife.
- iv. 31:13 – He has not failed to heed the formal complaints of his own servants against him.
- v. 31:16–21 – He has not failed to care for the less fortunate.
- vi. 31:29–33 – He has not rejoiced at the enemy’s destruction, failed to provide for his own, or acted as a hypocrite, concealing his iniquity in the eyes of all others.
- vii. 31:38–39 – He has not profaned his land by failing to pay his workers/land-managers.

3. *Act 3: Elihu's Speeches* (chs. 32–37): Elihu responds in ch. 33 to Job's charge of God's remoteness:
  - a. Setting:
    - 32:2–3. [Elihu] burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer.
  - b. Response: "In the midst of pain, the proper response is not self-justification but God-dependence, resting in the awesome Creator and Sustainer of all, who has bestowed on man amazing blessing and purpose and yet whose ways are always higher than man's ways."
    - 36:3. I will ... ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
    - 36:22–23. Behold, God is exalted in power; who is a teacher like him? <sup>23</sup>Who has prescribed for him his way, or who can say, "You have done wrong?"
    - 37:23–24. The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. <sup>24</sup>Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.
4. *Act 4: Yahweh's Speeches with Brief Response* (38:1–42:6)
  - a. Overview: Y > Y > J > Y > J
  - b. Setting: Judging by the final position, exalted nature, and unparalleled magnificence in poetic style, God's speeches are the climax of the book.
  - c. Yahweh: "Can you do all the things I have done? Do you think I know how to handle your case?"
    - 38:4–5. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ... Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
    - 38:8–11. Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I ... prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?"
    - 38:12. Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?
    - 38:16–18. Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.
    - 38:22. Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail?
    - 38:24. What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?
    - 38:25–27. Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt to bring rain on a land where no man is ... to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass?
    - 38:28–29. Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?
    - 38:33. Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?
    - 38:34–35. Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings?
    - 38:36. Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?
    - 38:41. Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?
    - 39:1. Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
    - 39:5. Who has let the wild donkey go free?
    - 39:19–20. Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust?
    - 39:26–27. Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high?

- d. An added question and response:
  - 40:1–2. Yahweh: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”
  - 40:3–5. Job: “Behold, I am of small count; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”
- e. The final questioning and response:
  - 40:8–9. Yahweh: “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?”
  - 42:2–6. Job: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.... I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

NOTE: The speeches are completely silent on Job’s suffering and alleged sin; they make no allusions to Job’s friends. Job’s reply: “Silence! God knows what he is doing.”

5. *Act 5: Epilogue (42:7–17):*
  - a. Job never finds out why he suffered; the reader learns that Job was not reason but that God was the reason—not simply as the source but as the goal.
  - b. No word is given regarding Elihu.
  - c. Job’s three friends get scolded, whereas Job is affirmed and blessed.

### III. The Message

#### A. Overview:

1. Job is a book wrestling with *why* the righteous suffer, but it does so in an unexpected way. It does not attempt to answer questions like, “Why me and not him? *or* Why this hard or this long?” Instead, rather than focusing on the human, it focuses on the worth and wisdom of God. The context of human pain is first and foremost designed to exalt Yahweh’s infinite value as one who is to be praised and feared at all times and in all circumstances. We suffer to display the surpassing worth of God, who holds our trust and remains our treasure even amidst the greatest trials.
2. The Foundational Issue:
  - a. Question (1:9): “Does Job fear God for nothing?”
  - b. Answer: We fear God because of who he is not because of what he gives (or takes away)! The only kind of faith that will stand up under the problems of life is one that is based on the person of God, not just on his actions as we understand them.
3. The Secondary but Related Issue:
  - a. Question: Where is true wisdom found?
  - b. Answer: True wisdom is found in God alone and is gained by humans only through fearing God and running from evil (28:28).
4. Why does the book end the way it does, showing Job restored?
  - a. While it may seem more like a fairy-tale ending that is not true to life, the ending seems to play a vital role in the whole book.
  - b. As in the story of Lazarus, where Jesus’ raising him from the dead gave visible proof that he held the power to provide future resurrection, the ending of Job gives tangible evidence that God *will* make good for his righteous. Whereas the glories of the future are at times portrayed in new creational images of the “out there,” Job ends in a way that gives visual evidence in the “right here” that God is both able and willing to overcome all evil for his beloved. Job’s life gives all believers hope..



**B. Theological Synthesis:**

1. Within the covenant structure, faith in and faithfulness to God results in blessing, whereas lack of surrender and loyalty results in curses.
2. Job experiences what appears to be “curses” (so say his friends), though he is “blameless and upright,” a man of integrity in the eyes of the narrator (1:1) and God (1:8; 2:3). Indeed, God declares that his inflicting Job was “without reason” (2:3), and after Job argues his innocence, God’s fault with him is not in his understanding of God’s ways (42:7) but in his attempt to craft a defense to God for why he should receive good from God and not evil (40:2; cf. 32:2; 36:3, 22–23).
3. Job was indeed blameless and upright. Though aware of his past sins, he was confident in God’s forgiveness, and he was also confident in his present integrity (9:20; 10:7; 27:5–6; ch. 31). God never questions this, saying, for example, “No one is righteous, Job.” Job’s friends declare this, but Job is compelled to maintain his conviction in his integrity, and in the end he appears vindicated, at least at some levels. In God’s words at the end of the book against the three friends, “You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7).
4. On what basis do the righteous suffer? Job suggests that not all suffering is a consequence of human failure—a sentiment that Jesus affirmed (John 9:2–3), though he also asserted that all will receive God’s just wrath unless they repent (Luke 13:1–4). Pain is part of the curse-filled frustration brought by God on the world due to the sin of Adam (Rom. 8:20). Nevertheless, not all pain is “deserved,” though God is always just in his dealings (Deut. 32:4). At times, suffering is the disciplinary means of God to bring people back (see Lev. 26:18, 21, 23, 27) or to develop holiness (Heb. 12:7–10). Other times it is indeed the just punishment for human failures (e.g., Num. 12:10–11; Acts 5:1–11; 12:23; 1 Cor. 11:29–30).

However, within Job, the reality of universal curse does not appear as part of the picture. Rather, the focus is on the reality of a truly righteous person suffering without just human cause and God having a right, simply because he is God, to allow such suffering to occur. To what end? The initial scene of the book opens with Satan asking God (1:9–11): “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” In this light, the point of Job’s suffering appears to be to justify God as one who is worth fearing or serving, not because of what he gives but because of who he is, regardless of how bad life gets. We serve God not for the blessings—though they will ultimately come; we serve him because he is God over all.

5. If we end our probing with the question, “Why am *I* suffering or being cursed?”, we fail to exalt the justness of God in all things and fall into the same debacle of which Elihu (Job 32:2; 36:3, 22–23) and Yahweh himself (40:2, 8–9; 41:10–11) corrected Job. Our goal instead must be to recognize—even through the pain—that God is worth serving, regardless of how difficult life gets. The answer, therefore, to the question “Why do the righteous suffer?” has more to do with God than with us; it has to do with declaring his inexhaustible worthiness to be feared in all circumstances and all times—not because of what he gives but because of who he is. A key reason trials come to the righteous is to strengthen our conviction and witness even to the invisible, spiritual realm that God is forever worth serving!

6. The New Testament captures the teaching in this way.
  - a. God is absolutely sovereign over all things, including the evil one.
    - Col 1:16. For by [God's Son Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and *invisible*, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and *for him*.
  - b. The very evil powers that we fight against were created by Jesus.
    - Eph 6:12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
  - c. The very evil powers that we fight against were created *for* Jesus.
    - Col 6:12. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them.
    - Eph 1:16–23. I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
  - d. Our perseverance in hope displays God's wisdom and worth to the very rulers and authorities Christ triumphed over at the cross.
    - Eph 3:8, 10. To me . . . this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

#### IV. Concluding Reflections

##### A. The Redeemer in Job

1. Job 19:25 declares, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." When read canonically, this reference must be seen in light of the previous uses of Redeemer that ready the reader for this book.
2. From the exodus forward, Yahweh declares himself to be Israel's redeemer.
  - Exod. 6:6. Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment."
  - Exod. 15:13. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have *redeemed*; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
3. Throughout Isaiah (no less than 23x), Yahweh was exalted as Israel's Redeemer, even with direct echo of the exodus (51:10).
  - Isa. 41:14. Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares Yahweh; your *Redeemer* is the Holy One of Israel.
  - Isa. 43:14. Thus says Yahweh, your *Redeemer*, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice."
  - Isa. 44:6. Thus says Yahweh, the King of Israel and his *Redeemer*, Yahweh of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."
  - Isa. 44:24. Thus says Yahweh, your *Redeemer*, who formed you from the womb: "I am Yahweh, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself."
  - Isa. 49:7. Thus says Yahweh, the *Redeemer* of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of Yahweh, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

- Isa. 51:10. Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the *redeemed* to pass over?
- Isa. 54:5. For your Maker is your husband, Yahweh of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your *Redeemer*, the God of the whole earth he is called.

Isaiah, however, highlights that this redemption would come through Yahweh's servant-king—a fact that suggests that Job's ultimate deliverance through suffering is intended to heighten hope for all sufferers in God's coming kingdom.

- Isa. 9:2–7. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. <sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. <sup>4</sup> For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will do this.
  - Isa. 11:1–5. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. <sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of Yahweh. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
4. Similarly, in the Psalter we read of God as redeemer ten times, as in Ps. 19:14:
- Ps. 19:14. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Yahweh, my rock and my *redeemer*.

And again it is royal Son of God by whom God redeems.

- Ps. 2:7–9. I will tell of the decree: Yahweh said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”
5. For the reader, the hope of redemption from suffering and bondage would be found in God alone, ultimately through faith in Christ Jesus.
- Luke 1:68–71. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
  - 1 Thess. 1:10. . . . and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who *delivers* us from the wrath to come.
  - Titus 2:13–14. . . . waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to *redeem* us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

## **B. A relevant biblical parallel with Job: Hebrews 11:29–40**

1. Living by faith will often be accompanied by great miracles, success, and joy (11:29–35a).
2. This is not always the case, for living by faith will also be accompanied by great suffering (11:35b–38).
3. Our faith is not the determining factor in whether we experience miracles or suffering; God is the determining factor as he works for his good purposes, which are often not disclosed to us. We often do not learn, “Why me and not him?” or “Why so hard or so long?” But we push ahead with the conviction that God is worth living for, trusting in, persevering with; that he has called us to a life of faith; that God in Christ is for us and

not against us; and that in him we hope for joy beyond this cursed world, for joy in a “better life” (11:35b).

4. The common feature of the faith that enjoys miracles and the faith the sustains through suffering is that God is better than this life and that he is always worthy of persevering faith (11:35b).
5. Those who suffer by faith are a gift to the world as reflectors of the great worth of God (11:37b–38a).

## **V. Guided Reading of Job**

### **A. Focus Points:**

1. Key chapters: 1–2, 19, 28, 31, 38–42
2. Key characters: Bildad, Elihu, Eliphaz, Job, the Satan, Yahweh, Zophar

### **B. Questions:**

1. Define “theodicy” and clarify how it relates to the issues raised in Job. What evidence in the book is given that Yahweh is indeed both good and sovereign over evil?
2. What overwhelming enigma does Job have, and what key question is left a mystery at the end of the book?
3. Taking your clue from the introduction in Job 1–2, what is the main question being addressed in the book? (Hint: What does the Satan ask God regarding Job that begs a response?)
4. Summarize in three sentences or less the main message of Job’s “three friends” and Job’s response in chs. 3–27.
5. What is Elihu’s main problem with Job?
6. Summarize Yahweh’s comments to Job?

## PROVERBS

### “The God who reveals wisdom”

Jason S. DeRouchie, PhD

#### I. Orienting Data

- A. Focus:** How to develop wisdom—a practical guide for training youth (specifically, young noblemen) in how to live as God-fearing adults in a wayward world.
1. In Proverbs, the dominant thrust of *wisdom* is as a God-given and dependently exercised knowledge or understanding that enables a human to perform a task or skill rightly and to make God-honoring decisions, all grounded in the fear of the Lord. The wise are those who seek to know and live in accordance with God’s ways.
  2. Rather than issue dictates about what is right and wrong (as law would do), the wisdom of proverbs elaborates on the consequences of actions, portraying the reality of how things work in real-life experiences.
  3. We could also say that *wisdom in Proverbs is the making of right choices under the fear of God*. Reminders help people live rightly, and proverbs package the reminders in memorable ways.
  4. Proverbs addresses most directly the training of *males* in their late teens (college age) to master sin and to live in God-honoring ways in his world. Note “my son” (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2) and the personification of “wisdom” (1:20–21; 3:13–18; 8:1–11; 9:1–6; 31:10–31) and “folly” (9:13–18; cf. 5:1–6; 6:23–26; 7:4–27) as women in order to highlight their attraction.
- B. Content:** A series of opening poems praising wisdom and warning against folly, followed by several collections of proverbs from sages who taught wisdom to Israel, starting with Solomon.
- C. Purpose:** To shape character and to promote virtue, all for the glory of God.
- D. Emphases:** Wisdom begins with the fear of and trust in Yahweh; wisdom is expressed in making wise choices between good and evil behavior—choices that are measured by the Law; such wisdom is to be desired above all else in order to live a full and godly life.

#### II. The ANE Context of Proverbial Wisdom:

##### A. Comparative examples:<sup>3</sup>

1. Just weights honor God:
  - Prov 11:1. A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.
  - Prov 16:11. A just balance and scales are the LORD’s; all the weights in the bag are his work.

<sup>3</sup> Many of the comparisons that follow are drawn from the Egyptian document “The Instructions of Amen-hotep.” *ANET*, 424 n.46 offers the following comparison of Prov 22:17–24:22 with “The Instruction of Amen-hotep”:

| Prov 22:17–24 | Instructions of Amen-hotep | Prov 22:25–23:7 | Instructions of Amen-hotep | Prov 23:8–24:22 | Instructions of Amen-hotep |
|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 22:17–18      | 3:9–11; 3:16 (ch. 1)       | 22:25           | 13:8–9 (ch. 9)             | 23:8            | 14:17–18 (ch. 11)          |
| 22:19         | 1:7 (Intro)                | 22:26–27        | —                          | 23:9            | 22:11–12 (ch. 21)          |
| 22:20         | 27:7–8 (ch. 30)            | 22:28           | 7:12–13 (ch. 6)            | 23:10–11        | 7:12–15; 8:9–10 (ch. 6)    |
| 22:21         | 1:5–6 (Intro)              | 22:29           | 27:16–17 (ch. 30)          | 23:12–24:10     | —                          |
| 22:22         | 4:4–5 (ch. 2)              | 23:1–3          | 23:13–18 (ch. 23)          | 24:11           | 11:6–7 (ch. 8)             |
| 22:23         | —                          | 23:4–5          | 9:14–10:5 (ch. 7)          | 24:12–22        | —                          |
| 22:24         | 11:13–14 (ch. 9)           | 23:6–7          | 14:5–10 (ch. 11)           |                 |                            |

- Prov 20:23. Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. Do not *lean on* the scales nor falsify the weights, nor damage the fractions of the measure [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xvii.18–19].
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. Make not for thyself weights which are deficient; they *abound in grief* through the will of god [from Egypt, “The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xviii.4–5].
2. One should guard his words.
- Prov 12:23. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.
  - Prov 23:9. Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.
  - Prov 20:19. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 424. Empty not thy belly to everybody, nor damage (thus) the regard for thee. Spread not thy words to the common people, nor associate to thyself one (too) outgoing of heart. Better is a man whose talk (remains) in his belly than he who speaks it out injuriously [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xxii.10–16].
3. A little can be a blessing:
- Prov 15:16–17. Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.<sup>17</sup> Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.
  - Prov 16:8. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 417. More acceptable is the character of one upright of heart than the ox of the evildoer [“The Instructions for King Meri-ka-re,” §128–29].
  - Egyptian, ANET, 422. Better is poverty in the hand of the god than riches in a storehouse; better is bread, when the heart is happy, than riches with sorrow [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §ix.5–8].
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. Better is bread, when the heart is happy, than riches with sorrow [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xvi.13–14].
4. God’s way prevails over man’s.
- Prov 16:9. The heart of man plans his ways, but the LORD establishes his steps.
  - Prov 19:21. Many are the plans in the mind of man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. One thing are the words which men say, another is that which the god does [from Egypt, “The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xix.16–17].
5. Trust the God who holds tomorrow to bring justice.
- Prov 20:22; 27:1. Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you. . . .<sup>27:1</sup> Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 424. Do not say: “I have found a strong superior, for a man in thy city has injured me.” Do not say: “I have found a *patron*, for one who hates me has injured me.” For surely thou knowest not the plans of god, lest thou *be ashamed* on the morrow. Sit thou down at the hands of the god, and they silence will cast them down [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xxii.1–8].
6. Heated people burn others:
- Prov 22:24–25. Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,<sup>25</sup> lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. “Do not associate to thyself the heated man, nor visit him for conversation. . . . Swifter is speech when the heart is hurt than wind *of the head-waters*. . . . Do not leap to hold to such a one, lest a terror carry thee off [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xi.13–14, xii.1–2, xiii.8–9].
7. Love your neighbor not stealing his land:
- Prov 22:28. Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set.
  - Prov 23:10–11. Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, for their<sup>11</sup> Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 422. Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of the arable land, . . . nor encroach upon the boundaries of a widow. . . . Guard against encroaching upon the boundaries of the fields, lest a terror carry thee off. One satisfies god with the will of the Lord, who determines the boundaries of the arable land [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §vii.12–15, viii.9–12].
8. Overindulging could cost you.
- Prov 23:1–3. When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,<sup>2</sup> and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.<sup>3</sup> Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

- Egyptian, ANET, 424. Do not eat bread before a noble, nor lay on thy mouth at first. If thou art satisfied with false chewings, they are a pastime for thy spittle. Look at the cup which is before thee, and let it serve thy needs. As a noble is great in his office, he is as well abounds (in) the drawing (of water) [“The Instruction of Amen-hotep,” §xxiii.13–20].
9. Riches are fleeting:
- Prov 23:4–5. Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. <sup>5</sup> When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 422. Cast not thy heart in pursuit of riches, (for) there is no ignoring Fate and Fortune. Place not thy heart upon externals, (for) every man belongs to his (appointed) hour. Do not strain to seek an excess, when thy needs are safe for thee. If riches are brought to thee by robbery, they will not spend the night with thee; at daybreak they are not in thy house: their places may be seen, but they are not. The ground has opened its mouth . . . that it might swallow them up, and might sing them into the underworld. (Or) they have made themselves a great breach of their (own) size and are sunken down into the underworld. (Or) they have made themselves wings like geese and are flown away to the heavens [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” ix.10–x.5].
10. The food of the rich and poor can cause disgust:
- Prov 23:6–8. Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, <sup>7</sup> for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you. <sup>8</sup> You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423. Be not greedy for the property of a poor man, nor hunger for his bread. As for the property of a poor man, it (is) a blocking to the throat, it makes a *vomiting* to the gullet. If he has *obtained* it by false oaths, his heart is perverted by his belly. . . . The mouthful of bread (too) great thou swallowest and vomitest up, and art emptied of thy good [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xiv.5–10, 17–18].
11. Untimely greetings can be a curse:
- Prov 27:14. Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.
  - Egyptian, ANET, 423 n.21. You will suffer if you treat an excited opponent with arbitrary abruptness [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xiii.11].
12. See also *ANET*, 425–30 for Akkadian and Aramaic proverbs.

## B. The Distinction of Biblical Wisdom

1. Biblical wisdom is distinct in its affirmation that Yahweh alone orders the universe, defines value, and clarifies right and wrong.
2. Fear of Yahweh provides the basis for wisdom because it aligns one with right order and provides the only proper disposition by which to live God’s way.
  - Prov 1:7. The **fear of Yahweh** is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (cf. 2:1–8; 3:5–7; 9:10)
  - Exod 20:20. Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the **fear of [God]** may be before you, that you may not sin.
  - Deut 4:5–6. See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be **your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples**, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”
  - Jer 32:39–40. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may **fear me** forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the **fear of me** in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.
  - Phil 2:12–13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with **fear** and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

### III. Message

#### A. Literary Overview

1. Preamble (1:1–7)
2. Prologue: the importance of wisdom (1:8–9:18)
3. Proverbial Collections (10:1–31:9)
  - a. Proverbs of Solomon I (10:1–22:16)
  - b. Sayings of the Wise I (22:17–24:22)
  - c. Sayings of the Wise II (24:23–34)
  - d. Proverbs of Solomon II (25:1–29:27)
  - e. Sayings of Agur (30:1–33)
  - f. Sayings of Lemuel (31:1–9)
4. Epilogue: the ideal wife—a woman of wisdom (31:10–31)

#### B. Preamble (1:1–7):

1. The goal: Produce sound knowledge (v. 2), upright practice (v. 3), and discretion in when to apply both (v. 4).
2. Wisdom in Proverbs: The pursuit of understanding and preserving order in God's world (vv. 5–6).
3. The fear of the Yahweh: The beginning of the quest, which is not engaged in by fools (v. 7).

#### C. Prologue: the importance of wisdom (1:8–9:18)

1. For the Deuteronomic background to the wisdom teaching in Proverbs 1–9, see the introduction to Wisdom literature in these notes.
2. Proverbs 1–9 personifies wisdom and folly as women, seeking our attention.
  - a. Key texts wherein wisdom is personified: **1:20–33** (3<sup>rd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> person); 3:13–20 (3<sup>rd</sup> person); 4:5–9 (3<sup>rd</sup> person); 7:4–5 (3<sup>rd</sup> person); **8:1–31** (3<sup>rd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> person); 9:1–12 (3<sup>rd</sup> person).
  - b. Why is it feminine?
    - i. Feminine because abstract nouns like “wisdom” (Hebrew = *hokmā*) are usually feminine (cf. *tôrâ*, “law/instruction”; *bînâ*, “understanding”; *’ahăbâ*, “love”).
    - ii. Feminine because it would be shown to be appealing to the youthful male audience.
3. Overview of the personification and portrayal of wisdom in 1:8–9:18 (note especially the pointed highlighted in bold).
  - a. Part 1 (1:8–3:35): Pleas for a son or sons to pursue wisdom, including descriptions of wisdom as a woman.
    - i. Introduction (1:8–9)
    - ii. Plea 1 (1:10–33): Wisdom is here portrayed as a female herald that should be heeded; her own words in 1<sup>st</sup> person are heard (1:20–33; cf. 8:1–31).
      - (1) **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) cries out in the heart of the city in both the market place and political sphere. Her audience is the “simple ones” (i.e., the men), and it is clear she wants to be known (vv. 20–22).
      - (2) **Lady wisdom’s speech** (1<sup>st</sup> person):
        - (a) She has a deep desire to teach humans to learn, pleading with them (vv. 22–23).
        - (b) She warns that the resistant and deaf will be killed (vv. 24–32), but she promises that those who heed will be rewarded and find refuge (v. 33).



- (3) Wisdom is not explicitly equated with God, though she is associated with Yahweh through the phrase “the fear of Yahweh” (v. 29). She also has a “spirit” that can be poured out, enabling knowledge for all who repent from their waywardness (v. 23).
- iii. Plea 2 (2:1–22): Wisdom is characterized in generic terms.
  - (1) Wisdom comes through agency of the teacher/parent (v. 1).
  - (2) Wisdom is a treasure to be sought (v. 2).
  - (3) Wisdom finds its source in Yahweh (v. 6), and he bestows it only on the upright (v. 7), who are equated with seekers of wisdom.
  - (4) Wisdom will result in fearing and knowing God (v. 5)
  - (5) When wisdom lodges in the heart (v. 10), the upright are guarded from evil ways and men who work in darkness (vv. 12–15) and from the forbidden woman who leads to death (vv. 16–19; cf. 5:3–8; 6:23–24; 7:5).
- iv. Plea 2 (3:1–20): Wisdom is again portrayed as a female, all in 3<sup>rd</sup> person.
  - (1) Wisdom is associated with trust in Yahweh and fear of Yahweh and is in no way linked with self-sufficiency or human boasting (vv. 5, 7).
  - (2) **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) produces satisfaction and gain for all who find her (vv. 13–14).
  - (3) **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) is of highest value in the world (v. 15), who produces pleasantness, peace, life, and satisfaction for all who embrace her (vv. 16–18).
  - (4) Yahweh shaped the entire cosmos by wisdom (vv. 19–20).
- v. Plea 3 (3:21–35):
  - (1) Wisdom must be kept (v. 21).
  - (2) Wisdom will produce security and fearlessness, for those with wisdom have Yahweh as their protector (vv. 23–26).
  - (3) The wise are associated with the humble who receive favor and will inherit honor from God (vv. 34–35).
- b. Part 2 (4:1–9): Plea 4: **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) is like a loving, protective wife, who exalts all who prize her and embrace her (vv. 5–9).
- c. Part 3 (4:10–6:19):
  - i. Plea 5 (4:10–19): Wisdom is taught through parents (v. 11).
  - ii. Plea 6 (4:20–27): No explicit mention
  - iii. Plea 7 with Climax (5:1–6, 7–23):
    - (1) 5:1–6. Wisdom is enjoyed by the parent (v. 1) and heeding it will keep one from the forbidden woman, dame folly (vv. 3–6; cf. 2:16–19).
    - (2) 5:7–23. Climax: A man is to crave his wife, not Dame folly; here is the first hint that wisdom is bound up in a real woman (vv. 18–19).
  - iv. Plea 8 (6:1–19): Wise is one who considers the hardworking nature of the ant (v. 6)
- d. Part 4 (6:20–9:18)
  - i. Plea 10 (6:20–35): No explicit mention
  - ii. Plea 11 with Climax and Concluding Commentary (7:1–23; 7:24–8:36; 9:1–18):
    - (1) 7:1–23. Plea. Using a term of endearment with delicate, romantic overtones, **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) is called a “sister” and “intimate friend,” whose joys will protect one from the forbidden woman and adulterous (v. 4–5; cf. Song 4:9–10, 12; 5:1–2).

- (2) 7:24–8:36. Climax: As in 1:20–33, Lady wisdom is again portrayed as a female herald that should be heeded; she speaks in 1<sup>st</sup> person (8:1–
- (a) **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) calls to men at the very crossroads and besides the gates, where everyone must pass (vv. 1–3). She clearly wants to be known.
  - (b) **Lady wisdom's speech** (1<sup>st</sup> person):
    - (i) She pleads for simple and foolish men to gain prudence and learn sense (vv. 4–5).
    - (ii) She declares what is right, truths that are the opposite of wickedness (vv. 6–9).
    - (iii) She asserts that her worth is greater than anything else one could desire (vv. 10–11).
    - (iv) She is associated with prudence, knowledge, discretion, fear of Yahweh, humility, and truthful speech (vv. 12–13).
    - (v) She is partner with counsel, success, insight, and strength, and she is the means by which leaders reign and govern justly (vv. 14–16).
    - (vi) She loves those who love her and makes their lives fruitful (vv. 17–21); wisdom is a life-long relationship.
    - (vii) She was at the beginning with Yahweh, like a master workman guiding the creation and delighting in his inhabited world (vv. 22–31).
    - (viii) Climax—Wisdom's plea (vv. 32–36):
      - Wisdom is gained by hearing instruction (v. 33).
      - Wisdom results in blessing, life, and favor from Yahweh, but death comes to all without wisdom (vv. 34–36).
      - You either love wisdom and hate death or you hate wisdom and love death (v. 36).
      - Cf. *Isa 55:1–2*. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
  - (c) 9:1–18. Concluding Commentary: Final contrast between Lady wisdom and Dame folly.
    - (i) Lady wisdom (9:1–12)
      - **Lady wisdom** (3<sup>rd</sup> person) has a feast of bounty and life ready for all who will turn to her (vv. 1–6).
      - **Lady wisdom** begins to be enjoyed only through the fear of Yahweh (v. 10).
      - By **Lady wisdom** (properly 3<sup>rd</sup> person) the days of one's life is multiplied (v. 11).
    - (ii) Dame folly (9:13–18)

- Dame folly is found in the same place lady wisdom calls, and she makes a comparable same plea (vv. 13–16; cf. v. 4).
- Dame folly makes big promises but her way leads to death (vv. 17–18).

### D. Proverbial Collections (10:1–31:9)

#### 1. Proverbs defined:

##### a. The Proverb Test:

- Directions: Below are two sets of columns with proverbs split in half. Cover the second half of the proverb, state the first half, and attempt to complete it. Pull down your paper to confirm you got it correct. Grade yourself based on the number of total proverbs you got correct.

##### ii. Grade:

- 31–40 = Proverbial Genius
- 21–30 = Proverbially Bright
- 11–20 = Proverbially Dull
- 0–10 = Proverbially Challenged

Fig. 17.1. Sample Modern Proverbs

|   |                           |  |                               |
|---|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. A bird in the hand ...               |                           | 21. If you can't stand the heat ...          |                               |
| 2. A chain is no stronger ...           | is worth two in the bush. | 22. If you play with fire ...                | get out of the kitchen.       |
| 3. A leopard cannot ...                 | than its weakest link.    | 23. Lightning never strikes ...              | you're going to get burned.   |
| 4. A penny saved ...                    | change its spots.         | 24. Nice guys ...                            | the same place twice.         |
| 5. A stitch in time ...                 | is a penny earned.        | 25. No news is ...                           | finish last.                  |
| 6. Actions speak ...                    | saves nine.               | 26. If you can't beat 'em ...                | good news.                    |
| 7. Birds of a feather ...               | louder than words.        | 27. Rome was not built ...                   | join 'em.                     |
| 8. Don't bite off more ...              | flock together.           | 28. When the going gets tough ...            | in a day.                     |
| 9. Don't change horses ...              | than you can chew.        | 29. Strike while ...                         | the tough get going.          |
| 10. Don't count your chickens ...       | midstream.                | 30. The bigger they are ...                  | the iron is hot.              |
| 11. Don't cry over ...                  | before their hatched.     | 31. The early bird ...                       | the harder they fall.         |
| 12. Don't judge a book ...              | spilled milk.             | 32. The grass is always ...                  | catches the worm.             |
| 13. Don't put all your eggs ...         | by its cover.             | 33. The pen is ...                           | greener on the other side.    |
| 14. Don't put the cart ...              | in one basket.            | 34. The road to hell is ...                  | mightier than the sword.      |
| 15. Don't throw the baby out ...        | before the horse.         | 35. The rotten apple ...                     | paved with good intentions.   |
| 16. Every cloud has ...                 | with the bath water.      | 36. The squeaking wheel ...                  | spoils the whole barrel.      |
| 17. Give someone an inch ...            | a silver lining.          | 37. There's more than one way ...            | gets the oil.                 |
| 18. If a thing is worth doing ...       | and they'll take a mile.  | 38. Two wrongs ...                           | to skin a cat.                |
| 19. If at first you don't succeed ...   | it's worth doing well.    | 39. Waste not ...                            | don't make a right.           |
| 20. People who live in glass houses ... | try, try again.           | 40. Sticks and stones may break my bones ... | want not.                     |
|   | shouldn't throw stones.   |  | but words will never hurt me. |

##### b. Proverbs as memorable bites.

- Proverbs package timeless generalizations in memorable ways.
- To remember well, people need:
  - Small bits, capable of being chewed;

- (2) Rehearseable bits, worded in a way easily restated;
    - (3) Understandable bits in a fluent language.
  - iii. Most proverbs are pithy, memorable, and poetic.<sup>4</sup>
    - (1) “Look before you leap” vs. “In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances.”
    - (2) “A stitch in time saves nine” vs. “There are certain corrective measures for minor problems that, when taken early on in a course of action, forestall major problems from arising.”
  - iv. The briefer a statement is, the less likely it is to be totally precise and universally applicable.
- c. Proverbs as brief, particular expressions of truth—generalizations that are *usually* true.
  - i. Often proverbs present contradictory perspectives, and each proverb is correct *in given situations*.<sup>5</sup>
    - (1) Examples from English proverbs:
      - (a) “Birds of a feather flock together” vs. “Opposites attract.”
      - (b) “Too many cooks spoil the broth” vs. “Two heads are better than one.”
      - (c) “He who hesitates is lost” vs. “Look before you leap.”
      - (d) “A Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” vs. “A man’s reach should exceed his grasp.”
    - (2) A biblical example of this tension is found in Prov 26:4–5: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” The wise person knows which advise is best to follow in any given situation.
  - ii. Proverbs are not promises, at least for the present age. The particular blessing, rewards, and opportunities mentioned in proverbs are *likely* to follow in this life, but they are not legal guarantees from God.<sup>6</sup>
    - (1) Example 1: *Prov 15:25. The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow’s boundaries.*
      - (a) Life and Scripture testify that there are arrogant people whose houses still stand and widows who have been abused by greedy creditors or fraud (cf. Mark 12:40; Job 24:2–3).
      - (b) The principle: God opposes the proud and cares for the needy, and he will eventually make all things right.
    - (2) Example 2: *Prov 22:26–27. Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts.<sup>27</sup> If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you.*
      - (a) A strict reading of this proverb may lead one never to buy a house with a mortgage (a secured debt). Or, one may think that credit card debt will *automatically* result in God’s taking away all your possessions—including your bed!

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<sup>4</sup> Both examples taken from Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 232–33.

<sup>5</sup> Examples taken from Walton and Hill, *Old Testament Today*, 379.

<sup>6</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 235–37.

- (b) The principle: Debts should be taken on cautiously because foreclosure can be very painful.
- (3) Example 3: Prov 29:12. *If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.*
- (a) This proverb does not guarantee that a government official has no choice but to become corrupt if his boss (i.e., the governor, president, etc.) listens to some people who do not tell him the truth.
- (b) The principle: The ruler who insists on hearing truth will help keep the government honest.
- (4) Example 4. Prov 22:6.
- (a) Traditional Handling:
- (i) Renderings:
- ESV: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Cf. 23:13–14.)
  - NIV: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”
  - HCSB: “Teach a youth about the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
  - NRSV: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”
  - BBE: “If a child is trained up in the right way, even when he is old he will not be turned away from it.”
- (ii) Meaning?
- Raise a child in the right way, and he will stay on that path forever.
  - Consider the bent of your child, and move him in that direction.
- (b) The problem:
- (i) Word-for-word: “Give training to the child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it” (cf. NASB margin).
- (ii) No Hebrew equivalent for “should.”
- (iii) The 3ms pronominal suffix on “way” is left unexplained.
- (c) The solution:
- (i) What does “his way” mean?
- “His way” in Proverbs (see 11:5; 14:2; 16:17; 19:3, 16; 21:29) is always a way actually taken rather than a way that should be taken.
    - Prov. 11:5. The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness.
    - Prov. 14:2. Whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.
    - Prov. 16:17. The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life.
    - Prov. 19:3. When a man’s folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD.
    - Prov. 19:16. Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die.

- Prov. 21:29. A wicked man puts on a bold face, but the upright gives thought to his ways.
- Two ways in Proverbs: The way of wisdom and life and the way of folly and death
- (ii) Is the “youth’s way” more the way of wisdom or folly?
  - When left to themselves, the “young” lack judgment (7:7) and have hearts filled with foolishness (22:15).
    - Prov. 7:7. And I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense.
    - Prov. 22:15. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
  - Without discipline the young bring disgrace on their mothers (29:15).
    - Prov 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
  - Parents are thus exhorted, “Discipline your son, for there is hope” (19:18; cf. 23:14), and they are challenged to instruct their children in wisdom (1:4; cf. 29:15).
    - Prov. 19:18. Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.
    - Prov. 23:14. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.
    - Prov. 1:1, 4. The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: . . . to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.
    - Prov. 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
- (d) Conclusion:
  - (i) “Train the child according to *his way*” seems more negative than positive; it is the way without wisdom.
  - (ii) We are *always* training, and the proverb appears to be an ironic command (cf. 19:27) that warns parents of the result of not establishing the necessary standards and boundaries for their children.
    - Prov. 19:27. Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.
  - (e) The principle: “Let a boy do what he wants and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change!” (R. J. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 197).
  - (f) But proverbs are not promises! And the power of the gospel can transform any child who was not raised well!
    - 2 Cor 5:17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
- iii. Solomon captured the purpose of a proverb when he wrote, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov 25:11). In contrast, when proverbs are applied in the wrong context, we get something far less beautiful:
  - Prov 26:7. Like a lame man’s legs, which hang useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
  - Prov 26:9. Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

- d. The fact that proverbs are not true in every context, does not make them false. False proverbs would only be those that are based on a misguided values that are worldly and flawed. True proverbs are not those that describe something that is true in every context but those that declare some that is true in some contexts and that always moves the student toward the development of godly values. Walton and Hill offer the following examples of *false* proverbs, false because they don't promote godly values (*Old Testament Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 381):
  - i. From the ANE (Benjamin Foster, *From Distant Days*, 371, 387):
    - (1) "Do the wish of the one present; slander the one not present."
    - (2) "The man who does not sacrifice to his god can make the god run after him like a dog."
  - ii. Contemporary:
    - (1) "A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple."
    - (2) "Don't offer me advice; give me money."
    - (3) "First secure an independent income; then practice virtue."
    - (4) "Whoever dies with the most toys wins."
- e. The question does arise: Are there are any *absolute* (always true) proverbs?
  - i. Consider the following examples and distinguish which proverbs mark absolute truths *in all contexts*.
    - (1) Prov 10:25, 27. When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever. . . .<sup>27</sup> The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
    - (2) Prov 11:20. Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD; but those of blameless ways are his delight.
    - (3) Prov 13:21. Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.
    - (4) Prov 16:1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
    - (5) Prov 16:4–5. The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.<sup>5</sup> Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.
    - (6) Prov 16:31. Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
    - (7) Prov 19:21. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.
    - (8) Prov 21:30. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD.
    - (9) Prov 22:8. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.
    - (10) Prov 28:14. Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.
  - ii. THE RULE: Absolute proverbs relate to God's unchanging character and sovereign action (16:1, 4; 19:21; 21:30) or his unswerving disposition or response toward human will or action (10:25, 27; 11:20; 13:21; 16:5; 28:14); what is not absolute is the cause-effect of humanity's circumstantial existence (16:31; 22:8).
2. Guidelines for interpreting proverbs (D. Stuart in *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, 240):
  - a. Proverbs are often parabolic (i.e., figurative, pointing beyond themselves).

- b. Proverbs are intensely practical, not theoretically theological.
  - c. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.
  - d. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior—just the opposite!
  - e. Proverbs strongly reflecting ancient culture may need sensible “translation” so as not to lose their meaning.
  - f. Proverbs are not guarantees from God but poetic guidelines for good behavior.
3. Proverbs and the family.
- a. *Order in relationships.* Proverbs are designed to nurture right order in God’s world, at the center of which is the human family.
    - Prov. 5:18–19. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, <sup>19</sup> a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.
    - Prov. 12:4. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.
    - Prov 14:17. A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.
    - Prov 15:18. A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.
    - Prov. 17:1. Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting and strife.
    - Prov. 18:22. He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.
    - Prov. 19:13–14. A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife’s quarreling is a continual dripping of rain. <sup>14</sup> House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.
    - Prov 20:6. Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?
    - Prov. 21:9. It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.
    - Prov. 25:23–24. The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, angry looks. <sup>24</sup> It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.
    - Prov. 27:15–16. A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; <sup>16</sup> to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one’s right hand.
  - b. *Order in sexuality.* Chapter 1–9 contain the bulk of the book’s teaching on this subject. Rather than offering dictates, Proverbs motivates sexual purity by highlighting its benefits and stressing sin’s consequences.
    - Prov. 2:16–19. So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, <sup>17</sup> who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; <sup>18</sup> for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; <sup>19</sup> none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.
    - Prov. 5:3–8. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, <sup>4</sup> but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. <sup>5</sup> Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; <sup>6</sup> she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it. <sup>7</sup> And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. <sup>8</sup> Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.
    - Prov. 5:15–18. Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. <sup>16</sup> Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? <sup>17</sup> Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. <sup>18</sup> Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
    - Prov. 6:23–29, 32. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, <sup>24</sup> to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. <sup>25</sup> Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; <sup>26</sup> for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life. <sup>27</sup> Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? <sup>28</sup> Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? <sup>29</sup> So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished. . . . <sup>32</sup> He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.
    - See also 7:6–27.



- c. *Order in communication.* Words can destroy families and, with that, communities. Siblings mocking one another, children talking back to parents, men lashing out at their wives in anger, women gossiping or nagging—Proverbs has much to say about speech, calling regularly for wise (use of) words.
- i. Words should not be crooked (4:24), rash (13:3), contentious (15:1; 21:19), disrespectful (13:1; 20:20), or abusive (9:7–12).
- Prov 4:24. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.
  - Prov. 13:3. Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
  - Prov. 15:1. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
  - Prov. 15:4. A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
  - Prov. 21:19. It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.
  - Prov. 13:1. A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
  - Prov. 20:20. If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.
  - Prov. 9:7–12. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. <sup>8</sup> Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. <sup>9</sup> Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. <sup>11</sup> For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life. <sup>12</sup> If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.
- ii. Words should be set for the occasion and well-timed (15:23; 25:11).
- Prov 15:23. To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!
  - Prov 25:11. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
- d. *Order in one's daily life.* Hard, God-dependent work is a character quality associated with wisdom and life.
- Prov. 6:6. Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.
  - Prov. 12:14. From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him.
  - Prov. 16:3. Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.
  - Prov. 16:11. A just balance and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his work.
  - Prov. 18:9. Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.
  - Prov. 22:29. Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.
  - Prov. 24:12. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?
  - Prov. 26:13–16. The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" <sup>14</sup> As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. <sup>15</sup> The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. <sup>16</sup> The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.
- e. *Order in disciplining children.* Central to the vision of right order in Proverbs is the need for parents to discipline their children.
- i. Paul Wegner has identified four levels of child discipline in the book of Proverbs, three related to parents (teaching > reiterating > enforcing) and one

for the government.<sup>7</sup> The most time should be spent in teaching, less in reiterating, and as little as possible in enforcing.

| PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE  |  | BIBLICAL REFERENCES  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Level 1: Parent(s) Teach the Guidelines   |  |  |  |
| Principle 1: Teach appropriate behavior   |  | Prov 1:8–9; 2:1–22; 3:1–35; 4:1–13; 6:20–26; 7:1–5; 8:1–36; 23:24–25   |  |
| Principle 2: Inform of improper behavior  |  | Prov 1:10–19; 4:14–27; 6:1–19; 7:6–21; 9:13–18; 22:24–25; 23:26–28   |  |
| Principle 3: Explain the negative consequences of disobedience  |  | Prov 1:10–33; 5:1–23; 6:26–35; 7:22–27; 9:17–18; 10:1; 13:18; 14:14; 16:18, 26; 17:20; 18:13; 23:10–12   |  |
| Level 2: Parent(s) Reiterate the Guidelines   |  |  |  |
| Principle: Give appropriate warnings  |  | Prov 1:7, 15, 19, 22, 28, 31–33; 2:11–19, 22; 3:7, 11; 4:2, 5–6, 14–19, 23–27; 5:3–16, 21–23; 6:1–5, 9–15, 25–35; 7:24–27; 8:33–36; 9:13–18; 10:1–24; 34; 26:17–29; 27; 31:2–9 |  |
| Level 3: Parent(s) Enforce the Guidelines   |  |  |  |
| Principle 1: A Reprimand with non-corporal punishment   |  | Prov 1:8; 3:12; 4:1–2, 10–27; 5:1–2; 6:1–5, 20–35; 7:1–5, 24–27; 23:22–23; 24:24–25; 25:12; 27:5–6; 28:23  |  |
| Principle 2: A reprimand with non-abusive corporal punishment   |  | Prov 13:24; 19:18; 23:13–14; 29:15   |  |
| BEYOND A PARENT’S RESPONSIBILITY*   |  |  |  |
| Level 4: Government’s Role in Discipline  |  |  |  |
| Principle: Continued disobedience may bring severe punishment   |  | Prov 10:31; 20:30  |  |
| *You will notice that Level 4 discipline falls outside the parent’s responsibility. Such is in accordance with Israel’s covenant law (Deut 21:18–21). |  |  |  |

Increasing Severity

(1) *Parental Teaching:*

(a) Parents are to encourage proper behavior.

- Prov 1:8–9. Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,<sup>9</sup> for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.
- Prov 2:1–5. My son, if you receive my words . . . ,<sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;<sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,<sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,<sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
- Prov 3:13–15. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,<sup>14</sup> for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.<sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
- Prov 4:7–8. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.<sup>8</sup> Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

(b) Parents inform of improper behavior.

- Prov. 1:10–11, 15. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.<sup>11</sup> If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason . . .,"<sup>15</sup> my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths.
- Prov 3:31–32. Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways,<sup>32</sup> for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence.

<sup>7</sup> Paul D. Wegner, "Discipline in the Book of Proverbs: 'To Spank or Not to Spank,'" *JETS* 48 (2005): 715–32; Paul D. Wegner, Catherine Wegner, and Kimberlee Hermann, *Wise Parenting: Guidelines from the Book of Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2009); the table is from p. 32 in the book.

- (c) Parents explain the negative consequences of sin.
  - Prov. 1:18–19. But these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. <sup>19</sup> Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.
  - Prov. 5:3–6. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, <sup>4</sup> but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. <sup>5</sup> Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; <sup>6</sup> she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.
- (2) *Parental Warning*: Parents gently exhort in light of dangers.
  - Prov. 4:1–2. Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, <sup>2</sup> for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.
  - Prov. 4:14–16. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. <sup>15</sup> Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. <sup>16</sup> For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
  - Prov. 5:21–23. A man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. <sup>22</sup> The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. <sup>23</sup> He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.
- (3) *Parental Enforcing*:
  - (a) Parents gently rebuke and reprove (without corporal punishment).
    - Prov. 3:12. The LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.
    - Prov. 24:24–25. Whoever says to the wicked, "You are right," will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations, <sup>25</sup> but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.
  - (b) Parents perform corporal punishment (i.e., spank) in a way that does not cause physical harm.
    - Prov 19:18. Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.
    - Prov. 13:24. Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
    - Prov. 22:15. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
    - Prov. 23:13–14. Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. <sup>14</sup> If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.
    - Prov. 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
- (4) *Governmental Enforcing*. Serious sin can lead to serious punishment, when the sin of the youth begins to influence the welfare of the community and not just the family.
  - (a) Governments deliver extreme blows to punish and curb evil.
    - Prov. 20:30. Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts.
    - Prov. 10:31. The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off.
  - (b) Governments can bring the death penalty in extreme cases.
    - Prov 19:18. Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.
    - Gen 9:6. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.
    - Deut. 21:18–21. If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they

discipline him, will not listen to them,<sup>19</sup> then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives,<sup>20</sup> and they shall say to the elders of his city, “This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.”<sup>21</sup> Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

- Rom 13:3–4. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,<sup>4</sup> for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.

ii. Questions on spanking:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) Does “the rod” represent discipline but exclude *physical* discipline (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15)? Prov 13:24. *Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*
  - (a) “The rod” can accompany the verb “to strike” (Prov 23:13–14), identifying that the rod is an instrument of *physical* corporal punishment (i.e., spanking).
    - Prov 23:13–14. Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.<sup>14</sup> If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.
  - (b) While the term may be able to refer to multiple levels of discipline, it certainly includes physical discipline, the kind that Heb 12:11 says “seems painful rather than pleasant.”
  - (c) Proverbs that speak of spanking assume that “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” and that it will take more than words to dislodge it.
    - Prov. 22:15. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
  - (d) Spanking rightly administered is not cruel; withholding it is, for without it the child may follow a trajectory climaxing in eternal punishment (Prov 23:13–14; cf. 19:18). *Not* spanking can be a form of *spiritual child abuse*.
  - (e) Spanking is a means of imparting wisdom (Prov 29:15).
    - Prov. 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
- (2) Is spanking a form of physical and psychological abuse?
  - (a) Spanking is *not* “beating, hitting, or hurting” a child; rather it is “physical discipline that is temporarily painful.” Spanking is not punching, back-handing, striking on the face, kicking, pushing, or public shaming a child—these actions are abuse and always sin.
  - (b) Simply because an action could be abusive, does not mean that it always is. The goal in spanking is not to revenge, abuse, or hurt but to love (13:24), instruct (22:15; 29:15), instill hope (19:18), and save from divine wrath (23:14).
  - (c) Spanking is only used after the child has refused lower levels of discipline.

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<sup>8</sup> What follows is an adaptation of a portion of Andy Naselli, “Training Children for Their Good,” *The Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3.2 (2013): 48–64, spec. pp. 54–58.

- (d) Spanking clarifies that a boundary-line has been crossed. When children “obey” and “honor” parents (Eph 6:1–3), life flourishes, but outside this “circle of blessing” is danger that will culminate in the wrath of God. Spanking calls a child back away from danger.
- (e) The Bible in general and Proverbs in particular does not answer many question in relation to spanking:
  - (i) How old should the child be?
  - (ii) Can we use our hand as “the rod,” or should it be an object like a wooden spoon?
  - (iii) How many “swats” should we administer to the bottom or for what offenses?
  - (iv) How frequently should this occur?
- (f) The reality of questions keeps us dependent, but it does not diminish the fact that spanking rightly administered is a necessary, loving means of discipline, when all else has been rejected.
- (3) Do the proverbs about using the rod refer to young men rather than children?
  - (a) Common terms for the audience includes Hebrew *na’ar* “boy, youth” (Prov 1:4; 7:7; 20:11; 22:6, 15; 23:13; 29:15) and *bēn* “son” (e.g., 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11–12, 21; 4:1, 3, 10, 20; etc.) and some contexts clearly point to the very young (4:1–9) while others likely include the young.
  - (b) Proverbs touches on people in a whole range of ages and life situations.
- (4) Is spanking an obsolete part of the Mosaic law-covenant that no longer applies to Christians?
  - (a) While biblical proverbs in the book of Proverbs are built into the covenant relationship, they express timeless truths for all peoples in every culture who seek a relationship with Yahweh.<sup>9</sup>
  - (b) The use of Prov 3:12 in Heb 12:5–11 and the stress on the role of the father in discipline in Eph 6:4 suggests a continuity between the OT and NT concepts of discipline.
- (5) Is spanking antithetical to the gospel, requiring children to “atone” for sins that Christ already atoned?
  - (a) Spanking is not atoning for sins. Christ was punished; we are disciplined so that we don’t have to be punished. Punishment satisfies justice, whereas discipline trains. Because God disciplines his children, discipline is not antithetical to the gospel.
  - (b) Discipline actually reinforces the gospel, for it stresses that sin is serious and must be curbed. The grace of the cross secures not only justification but also sanctification, and discipline through spanking is a means of grace for nurturing sanctification.

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<sup>9</sup> Naselli states that “the proverbs are not part of the Mosaic law-covenant. They are general, timeless truths” (ibid., 57). However, I have argued in part 1 of this lecture that OT wisdom is indeed covenantal wisdom, guiding proper living for all who seek relationship with Yahweh.

**E. Epilogue (31:10–31)**

1. Just as wisdom is personified as a woman in prologue (chs. 1–9), wisdom is embodied in a woman in the epilogue (31:10–31).
2. The poem is an alphabetic acrostic, structured with 22 lines, each beginning with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The image is, therefore, of complete wisdom embodied in the life of the excellent wife.
3. The poem content can be seen as chiasmic in the pattern of a stepped pyramid, where each step has a corresponding step on the other side (see figure below).
  - a. The focus in such structures is either the outer rim or center.
  - b. Strikingly, the audience (made up of young men/prospective husbands) finds itself the focus of v. 23, the only statement in the entire poem that does not focus on the woman. The point seems to be that the wise man is made so by surrounding himself by a wise woman—i.e., one who aspires to this type of greatness.

**A: High value of a good wife (v. 10)**

B: Husband benefited from the wife (vv. 11–12)

C: Wife worked hard (vv. 13–19)

D: Wife gave to the poor (v. 20)

E: Wife had no fear of snow (v. 21a)

F: Children were clothed in scarlet (v. 21b)

G: Coverings for bed, wife wore linen (v. 22)

**H: Public respect for husband (v. 23)**

G': Sold garments and sashes (v. 24)

F': Wife was clothed in dignity (v. 25a)

E': Wife had no fear of future (v. 25b)

D': Wife spoke wisdom (v. 26)

C': Wife worked hard (v. 27)

B': Husband and children praised wife (vv. 28–29)

**A': High value of a good wife (vv. 30–31)**Adapted from Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs–Ecclesiastes*, 248.

4. A key interpretive challenge:
  - a. Prov 31:10–31 is dominated by *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* forms, which elsewhere would normally be translated as past but which English translations have tended to render in present. When one removes the introductory comment (v. 10) and concluding statement (vv. 30–31), there are 19 *qatal* and 9 *wayyiqtol* forms. In contrast, excluding the frame, there are 5 *yiqtol* forms, all of which can legitimately be rendered as habitual past actions in past time contexts. Rather than overthrow the normal past-time reference of 28 *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* verbs on the basis of 5 *yiqtol* forms, it is better to understand the *yiqtol* verbs in light of the *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* verbs and to render all the verbs in the body in past tense.

| ESV  | DeRouchie (Modified ESV)   |
|--|--|
| 10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.   | 10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.   |
| 11 The heart of her husband <b>trusts</b> in her, and he <b>will have no lack of</b> gain. 12 She <b>does</b> him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She <b>seeks</b> wool and flax, and works with willing hands. 14 She <b>is</b> like the ships of the merchant; she <b>brings</b> her food from afar. 15 She <b>ris</b> es while it is yet night and <b>provides</b> food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She <b>considers</b> a field and <b>buys</b> it; with the fruit | 11 The heart of her husband <b>trusted</b> in her, and he <b>had no lack of</b> gain. 12 She <b>did</b> him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She <b>sought</b> wool and flax, and <b>worked</b> with willing hands. 14 She <b>was</b> like the ships of the merchant; she <b>would bring</b> her food from afar. 15 She <b>rose</b> while it was yet night and <b>provided</b> food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She <b>considered</b> a field and |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| of her hands she <b>plants</b> a vineyard. 17 She <b>dresses</b> herself with strength and <b>makes</b> her arms strong. 18 She <b>perceives</b> that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp <b>does not go out</b> at night. 19 She <b>puts</b> her hands to the distaff, and her hands <b>hold</b> the spindle. 20 She <b>opens</b> her hand to the poor and <b>reaches</b> out her hands to the needy. 21 She <b>is not afraid</b> of snow for her household, for all her household <b>are</b> clothed in scarlet. 22 She <b>makes</b> bed coverings for herself; her clothing <b>is</b> fine linen and purple. | <b>bought</b> it; with the fruit of her hands she <b>planted</b> a vineyard. 17 She <b>dressed</b> herself with strength and <b>made</b> her arms strong. 18 She <b>perceived</b> that her merchandise was profitable. Her lamp <b>did not go out</b> at night. 19 She <b>put</b> her hands to the distaff, and her hands <b>held</b> the spindle. 20 She <b>opened</b> her hand to the poor and <b>reached</b> out her hands to the needy. 21 She <b>was not afraid</b> of snow for her household, for all her household <b>were</b> clothed in scarlet. 22 She <b>made</b> bed coverings for herself; her clothing <b>was</b> fine linen and purple. |
| 23 Her husband <b>is</b> known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.  | 23 Her husband <b>was/is</b> known in the gates <b>in his sitting</b> among the elders of the land.  |
| 24 She <b>makes</b> linen garments and <b>sells</b> them; she <b>delivers</b> sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity <b>are</b> her clothing, and she <b>laughs</b> at the time to come. 26 She <b>opens</b> her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness <b>is</b> on her tongue. 27 She <b>looks</b> well to the ways of her household and <b>does not eat</b> the bread of idleness. 28 Her children <b>rise</b> up and <b>call</b> her blessed; her husband also, and he <b>praises</b> her: 29 “Many women have done excellently, but you <b>surpass</b> them all.”                            | 24 She <b>made</b> linen garments and <b>sold</b> them; she <b>delivered</b> sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity <b>were</b> her clothing, and she <b>laughed</b> at the time to come. 26 She <b>opened</b> her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness <b>was</b> on her tongue. 27 She <b>looked</b> well to the ways of her household and <b>did not eat</b> the bread of idleness. 28 Her children <b>rose</b> up and <b>called</b> her blessed; her husband also, and he <b>praised</b> her: 29 “Many women have done excellently, but you <b>have surpassed</b> them all.”   |
| 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and <b>let her works praise</b> her in the gates.  | 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD— <b>she</b> is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, <b>so that her works may praise</b> her in the gates.   |

- b. Brian L. Webster summarizes the significance of this shift as follows:<sup>10</sup>

But what does this mean for our understanding of the woman? Instead of what she does, the description says what she did and what she used to do. Likewise, her children have risen and blessed her. If her grown children have risen and blessed her, then we have not been talking about a prospective spouse that a young bachelor is trying to find and marry. She is not even a young wife, who would still be in the process of becoming such a woman. The passage describes the mature woman who has done it. It describes a woman whose husband and household have benefited from her character and labor. She did not necessarily stay up late every night and get up early every morning. But she did whichever may have been needed when it was necessary. She did not necessarily have ongoing concurrent businesses in real estate, farming, tanning, and textiles. But over the years she has done such things. The behaviors are typical, not constant and simultaneous. We are reading about a lifetime achievement recognition, not her daily planner.

The shift away from present-tense translation removes possible overtones of workaholicism and adds the quality of persevering faithfulness. She is still an ideal. She has demonstrated that beauty is vain by having lived out what is important. She fears God, speaks with wisdom, is industrious, valuable, valiant. But she is perhaps a bit more human, a bit more possible to imitate. If the perfect verbs are translated as past and perfective, then the perfect woman is more possible to find in the present.

<sup>10</sup> Brian L. Webster, “The Perfect Verb and the Perfect Woman in Proverbs,” in *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus* (ed. Bill T. Arnold, Nancy L. Erickson, and John H. Walton; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 261–71, quote from 271.

## F. The Messianic Hope of Proverbs

1. Israel's redemptive-historical hope established thus far in the canon is for a royal son of God who would be a man of the torah, whose life emulated fear of God and obedience to his Word (Deut. 17:18–20). Indeed the age of his reign would be characterized by radical God-wrought fear of the Lord (Jer. 32:39–40), hunger for his torah, and a walking in his ways (Isa. 2:3).
2. This is model Israelite called for in Proverbs, and thus as all engaged in the pursuit of the life of wisdom did so in the hope of the ultimate wise king one who would come and established total peace on earth. Proverbs is, therefore, a book of kingdom hope.
3. The NT portrays Christ as the ultimate wise man—indeed the embodiment of all God's wisdom present before the world began.
  - a. Christ's wisdom was shown in his teaching and proven by his deeds of power (Matt. 11:2, 19; 13:54).
    - Matt. 11:2, 19. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples. . . .<sup>19</sup> [Jesus said,] "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."
    - Matt. 13:54. And coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"
  - b. Christ's wisdom is greater than Solomon's (Matt. 12:42).
    - Matt. 12:42. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.
  - c. The gospel message is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2:7)—a divine wisdom derived from the Creator whose previously hidden plan of salvation has become a reality through the crucifixion of Christ (2:8).
    - 1 Cor. 2:7–8. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.<sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
  - d. Christ is the wisdom of God who through his cross-victory becomes our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).
    - 1 Cor. 1:22–24, 30. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . .<sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.
  - e. OT wisdom imagery (Prov. 8:22–31; cf. Sir. 1:4; 24:9; Wis. 7:26; 9:4, 9–10) is embodied in Paul's description to the Colossians of Christ's being "the image of the invisible God," "the firstborn of all creation," "the beginning," the dwelling place of "all the fullness of God," and the mediator of and master workman over creation (Col. 1:15–19). Similarly, Paul's designation of Christ as being "in the form of God" and "being equal to God" (Phil. 2:6) also echoes how wisdom shares in God's nature and existed before creation (see citations above), and Christ's exaltation over all things in Phil. 2:9–11 demands the same homage that wisdom itself commands (Prov. 8:32–36).
    - Col. 1:15–19. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.<sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preminent.<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.



- Phil. 2:5–11. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- Prov. 8:22–31. Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. <sup>23</sup> Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. <sup>24</sup> When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. <sup>25</sup> Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, <sup>26</sup> before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. <sup>27</sup> When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, <sup>28</sup> when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, <sup>29</sup> when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, <sup>30</sup> then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, <sup>31</sup> rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.
- Prov. 8:32–36. And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. <sup>33</sup> Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. <sup>34</sup> Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. <sup>35</sup> For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh, <sup>36</sup> but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.

#### IV. Guided Reading of Proverbs

##### A. Focus Points:

1. Key chapters: 1; 8–9; 31:10–31
2. Key characters: Lady Wisdom, Lady Folly, Solomon, wise son, foolish son, excellent wife

##### B. Questions:

1. According to Proverbs 1:1–7, what is the primary reason why the Book of Proverbs was written?
2. On what is all wisdom in the Book of Proverbs solidly based?
3. Define the nature and/or makeup of most proverbs.
4. How do proverbs seem to be related to law and promise?
5. What is literarily intriguing about the way the Book of Proverbs begins (ch. 1–9) and ends (31:10–31) in relation to its treatment of wisdom?