

## LECTURE 21: PROVERBS

### “The God who reveals wisdom”

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#### 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.
1. *Instructions*: directives, motive clauses, and predicted outcomes of wise behavior (primarily chs. 1–9)
  2. *Proverbial sayings*: mostly two-line parallelisms, where the second line complements (through restatement or development), compares (through similarity), or contrasts with the first (chs. 10–22, 25–29).
    - a. Complement (“and”), e.g., 11:16; 14:10, 17
    - b. Compare (“as/so, better/than, like”), e.g., 15:16–17; 25:25
    - c. Contrast (“but”), e.g., 10:3; 14:11, 18
  3. *Numerical sayings*: listing things or situations that have something in common (n, n+1) (30:15–31).
- 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>1</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.
  - 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 babblers.
  - 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

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

3:9–11; 3:16 (ch. 1)

22:25

13:8–9 (ch. 9)

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23:8

14:17–18 (ch. 11)

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 my introduction to Wisdom literature.
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”; *’ahābâ*, “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.
  - 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 3 (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 4 (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 5: 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 6 (4:10–19): Wisdom is taught through parents (v. 11).
    - ii. Plea 7 (4:20–27): No explicit mention

- iii. Plea 8 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 9 (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).
- Because the “highest places in the town” are associated with God and his temple, wisdom’s house is not trying to displace God but her messenger do call people to wisdom from there, suggesting that wisdom is associated with God himself (v. 3).
- 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 actually sits in “the highest places of the town,” perhaps suggesting that she is trying to dethrone God himself and calling for followers at the very place wisdom’s messengers call (v. 14).
- Dame folly makes big promises but her way leads to death (vv. 17–18).

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

1. 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. (This last statement should be qualified, for it seems likely that the sages already anticipated an eschatological reading of many proverbs, wherein while they may not appear always true in the present age, they will be shown true in the end; for more on this, see below.)
2. Proverbs defined:
  - a. The Proverb Test:
    - i. 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:
  - (1) 31–40 = Proverbial Genius
  - (2) 21–30 = Proverbially Bright
  - (3) 11–20 = Proverbially Dull
  - (4) 0–10 = Proverbially Challenged
- b. Proverbs as memorable bites.
  - i. Many proverbs package timeless generalizations in memorable ways.
  - ii. To remember well, people need:
    - (1) 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>2</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.

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.

<sup>2</sup> Both examples taken from Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 232–33.



- c. Many proverbs are brief, particular expressions of truth—generalizations that are *usually* true (or true in only certain situations).
  - i. Often proverbs present contradictory perspectives, and each proverb is correct *in given situations*.<sup>3</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 that foretell are *not* promises for the present age but are true observations that time will indeed bear out unless God intervenes for good or ill. 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>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is likely that the sages who penned proverbs were already thinking eschatologically, pointing to ultimate, consummate truths when considered from an eternal perspective.
    - (1) Example 1: Prov 14:26. *In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.*
      - (a) Unswerving confidence in God’s faithfulness does not mean that trouble will not harm those who fear the LORD.
      - (b) It does mean, however, that our eternal destiny is secure and that all children who live as true children, displaying the God-fearing character of their parents, will also enjoy such eternal refuge.
    - (2) 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.
    - (3) 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!

<sup>3</sup> Examples taken from Walton and Hill, *Old Testament Today*, 379.

<sup>4</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.
- (4) 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.
- (5) 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 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 something 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, which should, depending on the way they are shaped, even be considered real promises for this life and the next?
- 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). While divine justice and the realities of blessing and

curse may not be apparent from the short-view, in the long-view we can be absolutely confident that God will be faithful.

3. Key themes in Proverbs with sample texts:
  - a. Main themes:
    - i. The Nature of Wisdom (esp. in chs 1-9)
    - ii. Wisdom vs. Folly (see Fig. 3 below)
    - iii. The Righteous vs. the Wicked (see Fig. 4 below)
    - iv. Speech (words, the tongue) (see Fig. 5 below)
    - v. Work (diligence vs. laziness) (see Fig. 6 below)
    - vi. The Family (parents and children, spouses) (see next section)
  - b. Secondary themes
    - i. Money (see Fig. 7 below)
    - ii. Humility vs. pride (see Fig. 8)
    - iii. Success and reputation (see Fig. 9 below)
    - iv. Leadership (see Fig. 10 below)
    - v. Learning and teaching (see Fig. 11 below)
    - vi. Industry and planning (business, decisions)
    - vii. Friends and neighbors
    - viii. Bosses and employees (masters and servants)
    - ix. Government and leadership (kings and rulers)
    - x. Attitudes (hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, contentment, anger)
    - xi. The fear of YHWH

**Fig. 1. The Portrait of God in Proverbs**

<b>God</b>	Is aware of all that happens	15:3
	Knows the heart of all people	15:11; 16:2; 21:2
	Controls all things	16:33; 21:30
	Is a place of safety	18:10
	Rescues good people from danger	11:8, 21
	Condemns the wicked	11:31
	Delights in our prayers	15:8, 29
	Loves those who obey him	15:9; 22:12
	Cares for the poor and needy	15:25; 22:22–23
	Purifies hearts	17:3
	Hates evil	17:5; 21:27; 28:9
<b>Our proper response</b>	To fear and revere God	10:27; 14:26–27; 15:16; 16:6; 19:23; 28:14
	To obey God's Word	13:13; 19:16
	To please God	21:3
	To trust in God	22:17–19; 29:25
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1001.		

**Fig. 2. Things God Hates in Proverbs**

Violent people	3:31
Haughtiness, lying, murdering, scheming, eagerness to do evil, a false witness, stirring up dissension	6:16–19
Those who are untruthful	12:22
The sacrifice of the wicked	15:8
The way of the wicked	15:9

The thoughts of the wicked	15:26
Those who are proud	16:5
Those who judge unjustly	17:15
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 991.	

**Fig. 3. Wisdom and Foolishness in Proverbs**

	<i>The Wise</i>	<i>The Foolish</i>	
<i>Characteristics</i>	Give good advice	Lack common sense	10:21
	Enjoy wisdom	Enjoy foolishness	10:23
	Consider their steps	Gullible	14:15
		Avoid the wise	15:12
	Hungry for truth	Feed on foolishness	15:14
	Value wisdom above riches		16:16
	Receive life	Receive punishment	16:22
	Respond positively to correction	Do not respond positively to correction	17:10
	Pursue wisdom	Pursue illusive dreams	17:24
		Blame failure on God	19:3
	Profit from correction	An example to others	19:25
		Are proud and arrogant	21:24
		Despise wise advice	23:9
		Make truth useless	26:7
		Repeat their folly	26:11
	Trust in wisdom	Trust in themselves	28:26
	Control their anger	Unleash their anger	29:11
<i>Reputation</i>	Admired as counselors	Punished as servants	10:13
	Crowned with knowledge	Inherit folly	14:18
		Cause strife and quarrels	22:10
		Receive no honor	26:1
	Keep peace	Stir up anger	29:8
<i>Results</i>	Stay on straight paths	Go the wrong way	15:21
		Lash out when discovered in folly	17:12
		Endangered by their words	18:6–7
	Their wisdom conquers others' strength		21:22
	Avoid wicked paths	Walk a troublesome path	22:5
	Have great advice		24:5
		Will never be chosen as counselors	24:7
		Must be guided by hardship	26:3
		Persist in foolishness	27:22
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 999.			

**Fig. 4. Righteousness and Wickedness in Proverbs**

	<i>Righteous</i>	<i>Wicked</i>	
<b>Outlook on life</b>	Hopeful	Fearful	10:24
	Concerned about the welfare of God's creation	Even their kindness is cruel	12:10
	Understand justice	Don't understand justice	28:5
<b>Response to life</b>	Showered with blessings	Covered with violence	10:6
		Plot evil	16:30
	Give thought to their ways	Put up a bold front	21:29
	Persevere against evil	Brought down by calamity	24:15–16
		Hate the honest	29:10
<b>How they are seen by others</b>	Are respected	Do not endure	13:15
		Lead others into sin	16:29
	Conduct is upright	Conduct is devious	21:8
	Are not to desire the company of godless people	Plot violence	24:1–2
	Others are glad when they succeed	Others hide when they rise to power	28:12
	Care for the poor	Unconcerned about the poor	29:7
	Despise the wicked	Despise the godly	29:27
<b>Quality of life</b>	Stand firm	Swept away	10:25
	Delivered by godliness	Trapped by evil desires	11:6
	No real harm befalls them	Constant trouble befalls them	12:21
	Income results in treasure	Income results in trouble	15:6
	Avoid evil		16:17
		Fall into constant trouble	17:20
	Are bold as lions	Are fearful constantly	28:1
	Will be safe	Will suddenly fall	28:18
<b>Short-term results</b>	Walk security	Will be found out	10:9
	Chased by blessings	Chased by trouble	13:21
<b>Long-term results</b>	God protects them	God destroys them	10:29
	Evil people will bow to them	Will bow to the righteous	14:19
		Will be punished for rebellion	17:11
<b>Eternal expectations</b>	Never uprooted	Will not remain	10:30
	Earn a sure reward	Earn deceptive wages	11:18
	Attain life	Go to death	11:19
	End only in good	End only in wrath	11:23
	Will stand firm	Will perish	12:7
	Have a refuge when they die	Crushed by their sins	14:32
<b>God's opinion of them</b>	Delights in the good	Detests the perverse	11:20

Adapted from the *Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1008–9.

**Fig. 5. Speech Patterns in Proverbs**

<i>Prov 10:20–21. From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.<sup>21</sup> Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.</i>		
<b>The Controlled Tongue</b>	Those who think before speaking, who know when silence is best, and who give wise advice.	10:19; 11:12–13; 12:16; 13:3; 15:1–2, 4, 7, 28; 16:23; 17:14, 27–28; 21:23; 24:26; 25:11
<b>The Caring Tongue</b>	Those who speak truthfully while seeking to encourage.	10:32; 12:18, 25; 15:23; 16:24; 25:15; 27:9
<b>The Conniving Tongue</b>	Those who are filled with wrong motives, gossip, slander, and desire to twist the truth.	6:12–14; 8:13; 16:28; 18:8; 25:18; 26:20–28
<b>The Careless Tongue</b>	Those who are filled with lies, curses, and quick-tempered words, which can lead to rebellion and destruction.	10:18, 32; 11:9; 12:16, 18; 15:4; 17:9, 14, 19; 20:19; 25:23
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1015.		

**Fig. 6. Diligence vs. Laziness in Proverbs**

<i>Prov 6:6–11. Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.<sup>7</sup> Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,<sup>8</sup> she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.<sup>9</sup> How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?<sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,<sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.</i>		
<b>The Diligent</b>	<b>The Lazy</b>	
Become rich	Are soon poor	10:4
Gather crops early	Sleep during harvest	10:5
	Are an annoyance	10:26
Are prosperous	Are idle	12:11
Hard work returns rewards		12:14
Will become leaders	Will become slaves	12:24
Make good use of resources	Waste good resources	12:27
Are fully satisfied	Want much but get little	13:4
Bring profit	Experience poverty	14:23
Have an easy path	Have trouble all through life	15:19
	Are like those who destroy	18:9
	Go hungry	19:15
	Won't feed themselves	19:24
	Won't plow in season	20:4
Stay awake and have food to spare	Love sleep and grow poor	20:13
Make careful plans	Make hasty shortcuts	21:5
	Love pleasure and become poor	21:5
Love to give	Desire things but refuse to work for them	21:25–26
	Are full of excuses for not working	22:13
Will serve before kings		22:29
	Sleep too much, which leads to poverty	24:30–34
Reap abundance through hard work	Experience poverty because of laziness	28:19
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1017.		



**Fig. 7. Advice about Money in Proverbs**

Be generous in giving	11:24–25; 22:9
Place people's needs ahead of profit	11:26
Be cautious of countersigning for another	17:18; 22:26–27; cf. 11:15; 20:16; 27:13
Don't accept bribes	17:23
Help the poor	19:17; 21:13
Store up for the future	21:20
Be careful about borrowing	22:7
Fulfill your pledges	25:14
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 993.	

**Fig. 8. Humility vs. Pride in Proverbs**

<i>Humility</i>	<i>Pride</i>	
	First thing God hates	6:16–17
Leads to wisdom	Leads to disgrace	11:2
Takes advice	Produces arguments	13:10
Leads to honor		15:33
	Leads to punishment	16:5
	Leads to destruction	16:18
Ends in honor	Ends in downfall	18:12
Brings one honor	Brings one humiliation	29:23
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1003.		

**Fig. 9. Success and Reputation in Proverbs**

<i>Qualities that Promote Success and a Good Reputation</i>	
Godliness (righteousness)	10:7; 12:3; 28:12
Hating what is false	13:5
Committing all work to the Lord	16:3
Using words with restraint; being even-tempered	17:27–28
Loving wisdom and understanding	19:8
Humility and fear of the Lord	22:4
Willingness to confess and forsake sin	28:13
<i>Qualities that Prevent Success and Cause a Bad Reputation</i>	
Wickedness	10:7; 12:3; 28:12
Seeking self-honor	25:27
Hatred	26:24–26
Praising oneself	27:2
Concealing sin	28:13
<b>Other Texts:</b> 11:10, 16; 14:3; 19:10; 22:1; 23:17–18; 24:13–14	
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1003.	

**Fig. 10. Leadership in Proverbs**

<b><i>Qualities of a Good Leader</i></b>	
Works hard	12:24
Doesn't penalize people for integrity	17:26
Listens before answering	18:13
Open to new ideas	18:15
Listens to both sides of a story	18:17
Stands up under pressure	24:10
Stands up under praise	27:21
<b><i>What Happens Without Good Leadership</i></b>	
Fools are honored	26:8
A wicked ruler is dangerous	28:15
People despair	29:2
A wicked ruler has wicked advisers	29:12
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 1019.	

**Fig. 11. Advice for Learners and Teachers in Proverbs**

<b><i>For Learners</i></b>		
<i>Wise Learners</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>	<i>Foolish Learners</i>
Quietly accept instruction and criticism	10:8; 23:12; 25:12	Ignore criticism
Love discipline	12:1	Hate correction
Listen to advice	12:15; 21:11; 24:6	Think they need no advice
Accept parents' discipline	13:1	Mock parents
Lead others to life	10:17	Lead others astray
Receive honor	13:18	End in poverty and shame
Profit from constructive rebuke	15:31–32; 29:1	Self-destruct by refusing rebuke
<b><i>For Teachers</i></b>		
Help people avoid traps (13:14), use pleasant words (16:21), and speak at the right time (15:23; 18:20).		
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), 995.		

#### 4. 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>5</sup> The most time should be spent in teaching, less in reiterating, and as little as possible in enforcing.

**Fig. 12. Child Discipline in Proverbs**

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/physical discipline		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 corporeal/physical discipline		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 >>>>>

<sup>5</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.

(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.

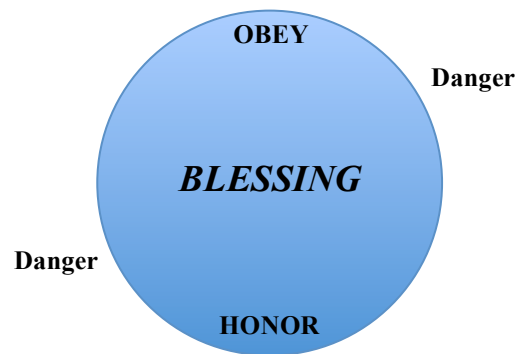
- Prov. 1:10–11, 15. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. <sup>11</sup> If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason . . .," <sup>15</sup> my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths.
- Prov 3:31–32. Do 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.

## (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.

**Fig. 13. The Circle of Blessing**

Eph 6:1–3. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.<sup>2</sup> “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),<sup>3</sup> that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

(3) *Parental Enforcing:*

(a) Parents gently rebuke and reprove (without corporeal/physical discipline).

- 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 corporeal/physical discipline (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.

	<i>Spanking</i>	<i>Beating, Hitting</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<b>Context of the act</b>	Responding	Reacting	
<b>Heart of the parent</b>	Love	Hate, rage	Prov 13:24
<b>Motivation of the parent</b>	Curb danger, hope of blessing	Inflict pain	Prov 19:18
<b>Nature of the act</b>	Temporary physical pain	Potential lasting pain	Prov 23:13
<b>Goal of the act</b>	Restore, shape, dislodge folly	Distance, break	Prov 22:15; 23:14
<b>Result of the act</b>	Heals, saves, instructs	Hurts, wounds	Prov 19:18; 23:14; 29:15
<b>God’s view of the act</b>	Parental obedience	Parental disobedience	

(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>6</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?

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<sup>6</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.

- (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.
- (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>7</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?

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<sup>7</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.



- (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.

### 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, <b>and works</b> 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 <b>and provides</b> food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She <b>considers</b> a field <b>and buys</b> it; with the fruit of her hands she <b>plants</b> a vineyard. 17 She <b>dresses</b> herself with strength <b>and makes</b> her arms <b>strong</b> . 18 She <b>perceives</b> that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp <b>does not go</b> out 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 are clothed in scarlet. 22 She <b>makes</b> bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.	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, <b>and 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 <b>And</b> she <b>rose</b> while it was yet night <b>and provided</b> food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She <b>considered</b> a field <b>and bought</b> it; with the fruit of her hands she <b>planted</b> a vineyard. 17 She <b>dressed</b> herself with strength <b>and made</b> her arms <b>strong</b> . 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 were clothed in scarlet. 22 She <b>made</b> bed coverings for herself; her clothing was fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.	23 Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.
24 She <b>makes</b> linen garments <b>and sells</b> them; she <b>delivers</b> sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, <b>and she laughs</b> at the time to come. 26 She <b>opens</b> her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household and <b>does not eat</b> the bread of idleness. 28 Her children <b>rise up and call</b> her blessed; her husband also, <b>and he praises</b> her: 29 “Many women <b>have done</b> excellently, but you <b>surpass</b> them all.”	24 She <b>made</b> linen garments <b>and sold</b> them; she <b>delivered</b> sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity were her clothing, <b>and she laughed</b> at the time to come. 26 She <b>opened</b> her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness was on her tongue. 27 She looked well to the ways of her household and <b>did not eat</b> the bread of idleness. 28 Her children <b>have arisen and called</b> her blessed; her husband also, <b>and he has praised</b> her: 29 “Many women <b>have done</b> 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 let her works praise her in the gates.	30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD—she is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, so that her works may praise her in the gates.
NOTE: The 19 qatal/perfect verbs are <b>bold</b> ; the nine wayyiqtol/waw-consecutive verbs are <b>bold italics</b> ; the five yiqtol/imperfect verbs are <b>bold underline</b> .	

b. Brian L. Webster summarizes the significance of this shift as follows:<sup>8</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

<sup>8</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.

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.

## F. The Messianic Hope of Proverbs

### 1. Introductory comments:

- a. Israel was God's "firstborn son" (Exod 4:22–23), who was called to hear God's voice, keep his covenant, and be his treasured possession amidst all the world and thereby serve as mediators of God's glory (kingdom of priests) and displayers of God's character (holy nation) (19:5–6). As keepers of God's law, living out the fear of Yahweh (10:12–13) and choosing blessing, life, and good over curse, death, and evil (Deut 11:26; 30:15), they would show themselves both "*wise and understanding*" (4:6). As a sinful, devastated nation, their redemptive-historical hope was that God would raise up a representative a royal "son" of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7) who would be a man of the law, his life emulating fear of God and obedience to his Word (Deut. 17:18–20) and thus embodying in himself both "wisdom and understanding" (4:6).<sup>9</sup> The age of his reign would be characterized by radical God-wrought fear of the Lord (Jer. 32:39–40), hunger for his law (Isa 42:4), and a walking in his ways (2:3). The hoped-for king is the embodiment of wisdom—Isa 11:1–2 "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 the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." In his day, Yahweh "will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure" (33:5–6).
- b. This portrait of nobility and the model Israelite is what Proverbs describes, and as such the book is a depiction of the Messiah. In training folks to live wisely, it trains people to follow the ways of the Messiah and in turn to kindle kingdom hope for the day when total peace will be enjoyed on earth. Those who walk in wisdom fulfill the call to "kiss the Son," and they in turn will find eternal "refuge in him" (Ps 2:12). Proverbs is a book of kingdom hope.

### 2. The Messiah in Proverbs

- a. Proverbs opens by highlighting Solomon as "the son of David, king of Israel" (Prov 1:1). This additional description sets forth a number of key points:
  - i. Proverbs is laid out as royal wisdom, and the "son" or "sons" called to listen in the book are in the royal line of messianic hope. The book is designed to train nobility who are hoping in the Messiah.

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<sup>9</sup> Sirach equates the law of Moses with wisdom (Sir 24:1–2, 23): "Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people."<sup>2</sup> In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory. . . .<sup>23</sup> All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob."

- ii. The language of “the son of David, kingdom of Israel” explicitly recalls the Davidic kingdom promises that he would have son who would be called the “son” of God and whose house, kingdom, and throne would last forever (2 Sam 7:14, 16).
- iii. Solomon’s own life of waywardness reminds the reader that he himself is not the ultimate, hope-for royal son, but the wisdom he shares highlights the hope for the one who would be. It also details the right path to finding him and identifies those who oppose him.
- iv. The identification of Solomon as David’s son suggests automatically some connection between his royal wisdom and that of his father. Solomon’s sonship reminds the reader of David’s own shortcomings, for Solomon was the son of Bathsheba, whom David claimed unjustly. The wisdom in this book, therefore, grows out of the seeds of repentance—a repentance that God accepts justly only in light of the sacrifice that the future David would make on behalf of his great royal ancestor and all who follow in the path of repentance. Indeed, in the wake of his sin with Bathsheba, David would declare, “Behold, you [O God] delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart” (Ps 51:6). David promised to “teach transgressors your ways,” if he could but be restored to God (51:13). We read in 1 Kgs 2:2–4 that he charged Solomon to rule in accordance with the wisdom of what is written in the “law of Moses,” and in Prov 4:3–9 we hear Solomon’s own reflections on his father’s instruction. The mention of David in Prov 1:1 is, therefore, probably designed to highlight that Solomon is himself a mouthpiece of the wisdom he received first from his redeemed father in the hope of the greater Son of David, who would be the embodiment of all wisdom.
  - 1 Kgs 2:1–4. When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying,<sup>2</sup> “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man,<sup>3</sup> and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn,<sup>4</sup> that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”
  - Ps 51:1, 6, 12–13, 15. To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgression. . . .<sup>6</sup> Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. . . .<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. . . .<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
  - Prov 4:3–9. When I [Solomon] was a son with my father [David], tender, the only one in the sight of my mother [Bathsheba],<sup>4</sup> he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.<sup>5</sup> Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.<sup>6</sup> Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”
- b. Along with the wisdom of Proverbs coming from the royal son who himself served as a prophetic pointer to the messianic royal Son who would embody all wisdom, Proverbs likely identifies the eternal Son of God as wisdom itself that

would in turn be embodied in the hoped-for king (Prov 30:1–6). (Some of what follows is adapted from Brian Verrett, “Proverbs 30:1–6 and Its Use in the New Testament.”)

Prov. 30:1–6. The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The oracle. The man declares, I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out. <sup>2</sup> Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. <sup>3</sup> I have not learned wisdom, nor [lit., but] have I knowledge of the Holy One. <sup>4</sup> Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son’s name? Surely you know! <sup>5</sup> Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. <sup>6</sup> Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

- i. A prophetic oracle (v. 1)
  - (1) The language of “oracle” suggests that we are here reading a prophecy.
  - (2) Of the 372 times the term “utterance” occurs in the OT, a man speaks an “utterance” only here, Num 24:3–4, 15–16 (Balaam’s utterance), and 2 Sam 23:1 (David’s utterance). Both earlier texts are messianic oracles, which supports the idea that what follows is indeed designed to heighten messianic kingdom hope—a hope that builds off the two earlier texts.
- ii. A stupid man who does know God (vv. 2–3).
  - (1) While the ESV read the second line of v. 3 negatively, such seems forced and unnecessary.
  - (2) Instead, while Agur affirms his ignorance (vv. 2–3a), he also stresses that he *does* know the Holy One (v. 3b; cf. 9:10—“The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”; see also Num 24:16).
  - (3) The implication: His “oracle” rightly expresses the word of God.
- iii. Wisdom’s source and identity (v. 4).
  - (1) “Who has ascended into heaven and come down [with wisdom]?”
    - (a) This question is difficult to answer. It appears he is asking from whence wisdom comes. Wisdom finds its source with God in heaven (Prov 8:22–31; Job 28:12–28). Baruch 3:28–31a says: “They perished because they had no wisdom.... Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure-gold? No one knows the way to her.”
    - (b) Agur may be alluding to Deut 30:12. Of the law, which is wisdom (Deut 4:6), Moses declares in Deut 30:11–14: “For this commandment that I command you today will not be too hard for you, neither will it be far off. <sup>12</sup> **It will not be in heaven, that you will say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’** <sup>13</sup> Neither will it be beyond the sea, that you will say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>14</sup> But the word will be very near you. It will be in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (DeRouchie’s translation). Moses had to cross the [Red] Sea and ascend [Mount Sinai] to heaven to get God’s law. In contrast, the new covenant will not require such feats, for “the word will be very near you,” meaning that God will have brought wisdom close. Paul sees the fulfillment of both Deut 30:12 and Prov 30:4 in Rom 10:6–8.

- (2) “Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth?” All elements were created by God in wisdom (Job 28:23–27; Prov 3:19; 8:27–30).
- (3) “What is his name, and what is his son’s name? Surely you know!”
  - (a) The answer to the first is clearly God! The answer to the second question points in two ways: the king as son of God and wisdom, which was with God in the beginning. In this book, the king serves as the agent of God’s wisdom, which was with God in the beginning. The king, therefore, becomes wisdom embodied and points to the hope of the Messiah, who, as a man of God’s Word, would embody wisdom.
  - (b) An intriguing parallel exists between “wisdom,” which was “set up” in Prov 8:23, and God’s royal Son, who was “set up” in Ps 2:6 (the only two texts in all of Scripture that use the verb).
  - (c) If God is the source of wisdom, and his Son is wisdom, and the king embodies wisdom, we are in a place to see Jesus as the very image of God, the royal Son who stands as the embodiment of wisdom.
- iv. The set nature of these words (vv. 5–6).
  - (1) “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” This verse appears to echo 2 Sam 22:31—“[God] is a shield for all who take refuge in him.” It also parallels Ps 2:12—“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”
  - (2) “Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.” Perhaps echoing Deut 4:2, Agur asserts again that his words are from God and therefore fixed. The Son of God of which he speaks is the new wisdom of God, who will ultimately fulfill Moses’ new covenant predictions.
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 stands against the folly of human speculations that stand against him (Col. 2:1–8) and who through his cross-victory becomes our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).
- Col. 2:1–4, 8. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,<sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. . . .<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.
  - 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 preeminent.<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?