

LECTURE 22: 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; in turn all of these young men would serve as pointers to the Messiah, the Son of God, who would embody wisdom.
- 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.
 - Rather than issuing 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.
 5. God is the source of wisdom (8:22–31; 30:1–6), yet in this book it is delivered through the royal son (1:1; 4:1–9), who himself serves as a pointer to the ultimate Son of God, who embodies wisdom (30:4).
- 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; to heighten hope for the messianic son, whose life would perfectly exemplify God’s character and by this enable him to serve as the agent of blessing to the world (Gen 12:2–3; 22:18).
- 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 Ancient Near Eastern Context of Proverbial Wisdom:

A. Comparative Examples:¹

1. Just weights honor God.
 - Prov 11:1. A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.

¹ Many of the comparisons that follow are drawn from the Egyptian document “The Instructions of Amen-hotep.” *ANET*, 424 n.46 offers the following comparison of Prov 22:17–24:22 with “The Instruction of Amen-hotep”:

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

- Prov 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 babbler.
 - Egyptian, ANET, 424. Empty not thy belly to everybody, nor damage (thus) the regard for thee. Spread not thy words to the common people, nor associate to thyself one (too) outgoing of heart. Better is a man whose talk (remains) in his belly than he who speaks it out injuriously [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xxii.10–16].
3. A little can be a blessing.
- Prov 15:16–17. Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.¹⁷ 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. . . .^{27:1} Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.
 - Egyptian, ANET, 424. Do not say: “I have found a strong superior, for a man in thy city has injured me.” Do not say: “I have found a *patron*, for one who hates me has injured me.” For surely thou knowest not the plans of god, lest thou *be ashamed* on the morrow. Sit thou down at the hands of the god, and they silence will cast them down [“The Instructions of Amen-hotep,” §xxii.1–8].
6. Heated people burn others.
- Prov 22:24–25. Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,²⁵ 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 their¹¹ 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,² and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.³ 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. ⁵ 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, ⁷ for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you. ⁸ 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 Characteristics of ANE Instruction Literature:

1. Examples of ANE instruction literature:
 - a. Egyptian:
 - i. The Instruction of Prince Hor-dedef
 - ii. The Instruction of the Vizier Ptahhotep
 - iii. The Instruction for King Merikare
 - iv. The Instruction of King Amenemhet
 - v. The Instruction of Ani
 - vi. The Instruction of Amenemopet
 - vii. The Instruction of Anksheshong
 - b. Aramaic: The Words of Ahiqar
 - c. Sumerian and Akkadian: The Instructions of Shuruppak
2. Common features (taken from Sam Bierig, 2020 directed study seminar paper titled “The Authorship and Audience of Proverbs in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” 41–42):
 - a. Almost all possess a direct address to a son.
 - b. Most are written with the royal and/or scribal court in view as the immediate audience.
 - c. They often contain elements or whole sections of proverbs lists and proverb-like instruction.
 - d. Toward the beginning, they regularly declare their genre to be instruction.
 - e. They typically utilize multiple elements of exhortation, signaled by terms like “hear,” “listen,” and “ears.”

- f. They regularly focus on the theme and controlling metaphor of life being a choice between two paths.
- g. A noble (or king or scribe) almost always is the author.

C. The Distinction of Biblical Proverbs and Biblical Wisdom

1. Ansberry notes three distinctions (*Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs*, BZAW 422 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011], 37):
 - a. Proverbs mentions the royal mother alongside the king (but see *The Instruction of Ani* and *The Words of Ahiqar*, both of which mention the mother).
 - b. Proverbs associates woman wisdom with Yahweh in contrast to the female goddess *Ma'at*.
 - c. The formal preamble in Proverbs does not identify specific addressees for the discourse (but note that the rest of the book highlights the king's "son[s]" as the primary audience).
2. Bierig distinguishes five features ("The Authorship and Audience of Proverbs," 42), which I have adapted as follows:
 - a. Unlike ANE instruction literature, Proverbs is part of a canon of Scripture and builds directly upon the covenantal foundation of Deuteronomy and other parts of the Pentateuch (cf. Gen 18:25; Deut 1:33; 5:33; 6:7, 24; 8:2; 9:16; 11:22; 12:4; 17:16; 30:14–16, 28; etc.).
 - b. In contrast to ANE instruction literature where the role of the deity is minimized to a subordinate or tertiary role and where things below (i.e., of earth) are more separated from things above (i.e., the heavenly realm), Proverbs elevates Yahweh as the proper benchmark for all wisdom in the universe (e.g., Prov 3:5–6). Yahweh alone orders the universe, defines value, and clarifies right and wrong.
 - c. Unlike ANE instruction literature, Proverbs emphasizes "the fear of Yahweh" as the basis for wisdom, because by it alone does one align with right order in the universe and because fearing Yahweh is the only proper disposition by which to live God's way. Such realities associate true wisdom with a covenantal relationship with Yahweh.
 - i. 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)
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. 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."
 - iv. 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. ⁴⁰ 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.
 - v. 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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
 - d. Proverbs is Scripture, the revealed word of the living God (Prov 30:5; 2 Tim 3:16), making biblical wisdom distinctive.
 - e. Proverbs is prophetic literature, both setting up Solomon as a typological embodiment and source of wisdom for the antitypical Christ and setting up the royal son, who stands as the audience of instruction, as the Christ himself.

III. Message

A. Literary Overview

1. Preamble (1:1–7)
2. Prologue: The need to “hear” and “keep” 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 source: The royal offspring of David, the king of Israel (v. 1)
2. The goal: Produce sound knowledge (v. 2), upright practice (v. 3), and discretion in when to apply both (v. 4).
3. Wisdom in Proverbs: The pursuit of understanding and preserving order in God’s world (vv. 5–6).
4. The fear of the Yahweh: The beginning of the quest, which is not engaged in by fools (v. 7).

C. Prologue: A Wise Son “Hears” and “Keeps” Parental Instruction That Leads to Life (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 (3rd/1st person); 3:13–20 (3rd person); 4:5–9 (3rd person); 7:4–5 (3rd person); 8:1–31 (3rd/1st person); 9:1–12 (3rd person).
 - b. Why is it feminine?
 - i. Feminine because abstract nouns like “wisdom” (Hebrew = *hokmā*) are usually feminine (cf. *tôrâ*, “law/instruction”; *bînâ*, “understanding”; *’ahăbâ*, “love”).
 - ii. Feminine because it would be shown to be appealing to the youthful male audience.
3. Overview of the personification and portrayal of wisdom in 1:8–9:18.
 - a. Part 1, Pleas 1–5, “Hear, my son...” (1:8–3:35): *God will preserve and bless the wise but will disgrace and destroy the fool.*
 - i. Plea 1 (1:8–9). Following parental instruction results in blessing.
 - ii. Plea 2 (1:10–19): Do not follow sinners into their own snare.
 - iii. Interlude: Lady Wisdom’s cry (10:20–33): Failing to heed wisdom’s cry will result in destruction, but God will cause whoever listens to dwell secure.
 - (1) Wisdom is here portrayed as a female herald that should be heeded; her own words in 1st person are heard (1:20–33; cf. 8:1–31).
 - (2) Lady wisdom (3rd 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).
 - (3) Lady wisdom’s speech (1st 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).
- (4) 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).
- iv. Plea 3 (2:1–22): God supplies wisdom to all who diligently seek her, but he will cut off the wicked.
 - (1) Wisdom comes through agency of the teacher/parent (v. 1).
 - (2) Wisdom is a treasure to be sought (v. 2).
 - (3) Wisdom will result in fearing and knowing God (v. 5)
 - (4) 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.
 - (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).
- v. Plea 4 (3:1–20): Wisdom is an unmatched treasure, and blessed is the one who finds her by trusting the Lord and following his ways.
 - (1) Wisdom is again portrayed as a female, all in 3rd person.
 - (2) 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).
 - (3) Lady wisdom (3rd person) produces satisfaction and gain for all who find her (vv. 13–14).
 - (4) Lady wisdom (3rd 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).
 - (5) Yahweh shaped the entire cosmos by wisdom (vv. 19–20).
- vi. Plea 5 (3:21–35): The wise will enjoy security and inherit honor, but God will scorn and disgrace the fool.
 - (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, Plea 6, “Hear, O sons...” (4:1–9): *As Solomon learned from his father, heeding parental instruction will enable you to get wisdom, which will honor all who have her.* Lady wisdom (3rd person) is like a loving, protective wife, who exalts all who prize her and embrace her (vv. 5–9).
- c. Part 3, Pleas 7–10, “Hear, my son...” (4:10–6:19): *Walk in upright paths that lead to life by filling your heart with instruction, guarding yourself from evil, and not sowing discord in community.*
 - i. Plea 7 (4:10–19): The paths of the wise are light and life, whereas the ways of the wicked are darkness and stumbling. Wisdom is taught through parents (v. 11).
 - ii. Plea 8 (4:20–27): Filling your heart with instruction will help your speech, eyes, and feet stay fixed and right.

- iii. Plea 9 with Climax (5:1–6, 7–23): Wisdom’s path leads away from the forbidden woman and into the embrace of one’s wife.
 - (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 10 (6:1–19): Do not sow discord among brothers by failing to repay, by laziness, or by devising evil. Wise is one who considers the hardworking nature of the ant (v. 6)
- d. Part 4, Pleas 11–12, “Keep, my son...” + Concluding Reflections (6:20–9:18): *Flea sexual immorality and all other forms of foolishness by embracing lady wisdom.*
 - i. Plea 11 (6:20–35): Keep parental instruction for it will protect you from the adulterous whose embrace will certainly destroy you.
 - ii. Plea 12 with Climax (7:1–27): Do not become a victim of the adulteress, whose house is the way to death.
 - iii. –8:36; 9:1–18):
 - (1) 7:1–27. Plea. Using a term of endearment with delicate, romantic overtones, Lady wisdom (3rd 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:
 - iv. Concluding Reflections (8:1–9:18): The Cries of Lady Wisdom (8:1–9:12) vs. Dame Folly (9:13–18): The very wisdom that God appointed his representative before creation and by which he created the world urges the simple to pursue her and live, whereas folly seduces the simple to join her guests in the grave.
 - (1) Lady Wisdom (8:1–9:12). As in 1:20–33, Lady wisdom is again portrayed as a female herald that should be heeded.
 - (a) Lady wisdom (3rd 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 (1st 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 as a craftsman, 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. ² 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) Lady wisdom in 3rd person (9:1–12)

- (i) She has a feast of bounty and life ready for all who will turn to her (vv. 1–6).
- (ii) 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 messengers do call people to wisdom from there, suggesting that wisdom is associated with God himself (v. 3).
- (iii) Lady wisdom begins to be enjoyed only through the fear of Yahweh (v. 10).
- (iv) By Lady wisdom (properly 3rd person) the days of one’s life is multiplied (v. 11).

(2) Dame folly (9:13–18)

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

D. Proverbial Collections: Detailing the Way of Wisdom (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. 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.²
 - (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.
- b. Proverbs as Generalizations. 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*.³
 - (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.⁴ 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.

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

³ Examples taken from Walton and Hill, *Old Testament Today*, 379.

⁴ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 235–37.

- (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 2: 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 3: Prov 22:26–27. *Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts. ²⁷ 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!
- (b) The principle: Debts should be taken on cautiously because foreclosure can be very painful.
- (4) Example 4: 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 5. 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) In its three other occurrences, the rare verb נָתַן that the NASB renders “give training” refers to “dedicating” houses, whether of a man (Deut 20:5) or of God (1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5). This suggests that the imperative is calling for parents to actively devote or commit their youth to a certain, perhaps even religious, course of action. As such, “give training to” may be too weak and miss the potential element of consecration to a religious and moral direction.
 - (iii) The ESV’s “in the way he should go” is a very idiomatic rendering of the Hebrew “according to the dictates of his way.” The 3ms pronominal suffix on “way” is left unexplained in most renderings.
- (c) Assessment:
- (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) Cultivating and Shaping Potential:
- (i) In light of the above, “Train the child according to *his way*” could seem more negative than positive; it is the way without wisdom. Read this way, the proverb would be an ironic command that warns parents of the result of not establishing the necessary standards and boundaries for their children: “Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge” (19:27). R. J. Clifford reads the proverb just this way: “Let a boy do what he wants and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change!” (R. J. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 197).
 - (ii) Three reasons, however, push me away from this more sarcastic rendering:
 - It requires a passive approach to parenting, whereas the verb “to dedicate” strongly suggests conscious intention. The sage is calling parents to intentionally commit or orient the moral and religious trajectories of their children.
 - While the youth’s way is naturally negative *when left to himself*, Prov 22:6 pictures not a self-willed individual but one who is benefiting from the *intentional discipline and instruction of his parents* (“Dedicate!”). Within this framework, the idiomatic “according to the dictates of his way” seems most naturally to express *the way that ought to be*. That is, every youth’s future is filled with possibility, and we as parents must recognize this and direct our child’s path toward God. This verse is about trajectories and potential, which suggests that the ESV’s “the way he should go,” while missing specificity, dynamically catches the point of the text.
 - The consequence of heeding the command is that “even when he grows old, he will not turn from it.” In Proverbs, “the wise, not fools, are crowned with the gray hair of age (20:29)” (Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, 205), so the proverb seems to anticipate a trajectory *toward wisdom*, not foolishness.
 - (iii) To say that parents’ intentional moral and religious shaping early on will have a permanent effect on their children is not a hard-and-fast promise to parents for this life, for the rest of the book makes clear that the power of the youth’s future

depends not only on the parents' guidance but also very much on the choices that the child himself makes. The immediately preceding verse implies that the youth must guard his soul from those who are crooked (22:5). He could choose to follow the wicked unto death (2:12–19), or he could heed the wisdom of his parents and choose the good paths of the righteous unto life (22:1–11, 20).

- (e) By God's grace, Prov 22:6 not only guides parents and gives hope, but it also reminds us of our faults and need for the gospel, wherein God makes those dead in sin alive (Eph 2:4–5), forgives all who confess (1 John 1:9), and overcomes the old creation with the new (2 Cor 5:17).
- 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.
- iv. 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*, 2nd ed., 381):
- (1) From the ANE (Benjamin Foster, *From Distant Days*, 371, 387):
 - (a) "Do the wish of the one present; slander the one not present."
 - (b) "The man who does not sacrifice to his god can make the god run after him like a dog."
 - (2) Contemporary:
 - (a) "A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple."
 - (b) "Don't offer me advice; give me money."
 - (c) "First secure an independent income; then practice virtue."
 - (d) "Whoever dies with the most toys wins."
- c. *Absolute Proverbs?* 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. . . .²⁷ 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. ⁵ 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.
- d. *Proverbs as Eschatological Truths*.
- i. 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. 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) Prov 10:25, 27. When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever. . . . ²⁷ The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
 - (2) Prov 13:21. Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.
 - (3) Prov. 22:8-9. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail. ⁹Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.
 - (4) Prov. 26:27. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.
 - (5) Prov. 28:10. Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.
 - (6) Prov. 28:18. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.
 - ii. While Proverbs and other books affirm the general truth of the act-consequence nexus for today, they also rightly note that the principle of "you reap what you sow" has many exceptions *in this life*.
 - (1) Prov. 11:16. A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches.
 - (2) Prov. 13:23. The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.
 - (3) Prov. 18:23. The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly.
 - iii. With respect to those expecting too much in the present (i.e., an over-realized eschatology), in this present cursed world, physical blessing seen in health and wealth is often delayed. Nevertheless, the call to walk in wisdom and promise of God's presence and help remains, and God, who is always just, will *ultimately* punish the wicked and uphold the righteous.

- (1) Prov. 1:18–19, 32–33. But these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. ¹⁹ Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.... ³² For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; ³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.
- (2) Prov. 11:21. Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.
- (3) Prov. 24:19–20. Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked, ²⁰for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

3. Proverbial Clusters?

- a. Scholars like Duane A. Garrett and Knut Heim have recently argued that many proverbs in Prov 10–31 are best read not independently but in clusters that are signaled through phonological, semantic, syntactic, and thematic repetitions. That is, according to these scholars, even proverbs have contexts that should inform our readings. The placement of a given proverb in relation to its surroundings should influence our reading of the details.
- b. Substantial challenges to the clustering of proverbs that identify scholars must do more work:
 - i. Scholars cannot agree on the criteria that identify clusters, so there is still a high-level of subjectivity to the science.
 - ii. Often scholars attempting to establish clusters do not employ consistency in their application.
 - iii. Clustering has a great impact on our understanding of individual proverbs, so improper clustering could result in reading specific proverbs improperly.
- c. *Examples of proverbial clusters*. You need not look at all of these, but pick at least three groupings to assess in detail with the biblical text open. I took all these notes with an eye toward Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, NAC.
 - i. **10:1–5 (The Diligent vs. Disgraceful Son)**
 - (1) The joy of the family is highly dependent on the state of the children (v. 1).
 - (2) A call to pursue the right kind of gain; “righteousness delivers from death” bears eschatological edge (v. 2). The family identity will continue only in the path of righteousness.
 - (3) **God** distinguishes the righteous and wicked, providing for one and curbing the designs of the other (v. 3); if he is against the child, then he is against the family.
 - (4) Balancing v. 2, the poverty vs. rich of v. 4 should probably be read eschatologically (v. 4).
 - (5) The mention of “son” and not just “man” suggests v. 5 is about the responsibility of the son within the home. The “shame” that can be brought, therefore, is probably shame against the household, when a son fails to perform rightly.
 - ii. **10:6–11 (The Mouth of the Wicked)**
 - (1) Structure:
 - (a) A - v. 6 - the mouth of the wicked conceals violence (the use of lips and immediate results)
 - (b) B - v. 7 - fate of the righteous vs. the fate of the wicked (the use of lips and lasting results)
 - (c) C - v. 8 - a chattering fool comes to ruin (the proper response to another’s instruction)

- (d) B' - v. 9 - fate of the righteous vs. the fate of the wicked (the use of lips and immediate results)
- (e) C' - v. 10 - a chattering fool comes to ruin (the use of speech)
- (f) A' - v. 11 - the mouth of the wicked conceals violence
- (2) V. 6 The wicked deceive ("conceal violence," resulting in implied curse), whereas blessings (of honor = "on the head") accompany the righteous (who tell the truth).
- (3) V. 7 The name (= "memory") of the righteous lasts but the name of the wicked does not and is even disgraced. (The future memory of one is dependent on how he uses his lips in the present [previous proverb].)
- (4) V. 8 Receiving instruction results in wisdom (and blessing), whereas (not receiving instruction and instead) babbling results in ruin
- (5) V. 9 Walking in integrity (= speaking honesty) brings security, whereas walking crookedly (in speech is false security and) will be discovered (and punished).
- (6) V. 10 Notes the need to weigh the source when hearing news.
- (7) V. 11 again speaks of the fruit of one's lips: life vs. violence
- iii. **10:12–18 (A Call to Love and not Hate)**
 - (1) V. 12 To love where one would be prone to hate is difficult; to "cover all offenses" (cited in 1 Pet 4:8) seems to mean "have the ability to look past" for the sake of love.
 - (2) Vv. 13–14 The lips of wisdom bring blessing, whereas the lips of a fool bring ruin.
 - (a) V. 13 The understanding man speaks wisely (and deserves praise), whereas the senseless man (speaks foolishly and) deserves punishment.
 - (b) V. 14 The wise man acquires knowledge (and therefore speaks wisely), whereas the fool speaks in a way that brings ruin near.
 - (3) Vv. 15–16 Righteousness, not earthly riches, should be our focus.
 - (a) V. 15 In this life money matters; its presence brings strength, whereas its absence results in ruin.
 - (b) V. 16 What matters for lasting life, however, is righteousness today, for wicked activity leads only to sin (and death).
 - (4) V. 17 A test to know whether you are on the right path: do you listen or reject instruction? Rejecting will lead to taking others with you, which suggests that onlookers should guard themselves from being near the rebellious.
 - (5) V. 18 Hatred is wrong, whether one conceals it or speaks it.
- iv. **10:19–32**
 - (1) Structure:
 - (a) A - vv. 19–21 On the tongue
 - (b) B - vv. 22–25 On personal security
 - (c) C - v. 26 On laziness
 - (d) B' - vv. 27–30 On personal security
 - (e) A' - vv. 31–32 On the tongue
 - (2) Vv. 19–21 On the tongue
 - (a) V. 19 Speaking too much is foolish
 - (b) Vv. 20–21 Parallel are tongue/lips and heart/lacking sense; contrasted are righteous with wicked/fool. Out of the heart the

mouth speaks; the righteous have valuable words that nurture others, whereas the wicked speak thoughtlessly to their own ruin and in ways that do not help others.

- (3) Vv. 22–25 On personal present security (may actually also be eschatological)
 - (a) V. 22 God’s blessing combats sorrow.
 - (b) V. 23 The understanding man will walk in wisdom; fools do wrong.
 - (c) V. 24 Wicked live in fear; the righteous in security
 - (d) V. 25 Life’s storms cannot hurt the righteous, whereas they blow away the wicked
 - (4) V. 26 On laziness: We should be cautious who we recommend
 - (5) Vv. 27–30 On personal eternal security
 - (a) A - V. 27 Fear of God results in long life (potentially eschatological dimension)
 - (b) B - V. 28 Hopes will be realized for the righteous but not the wicked
 - (c) A’ - V. 29 God’s purposes provide protection to the blameless but a problem to evildoers (way of the LORD // fear of the LORD, vv. 27, 29)
 - (d) B’ - V. 30 Long life and belonging are for the righteous
 - (6) Vv. 31–32 On the tongue: Righteous speech results in wisdom and acceptance, but perverse speech results in separation from the community
- v. **11:1–21 (What the LORD Abhors)**
- (1) Frame vv. 1, 20: “What the LORD abhors”; what is “his delight”
 - (2) Vv 1–8: Weighing the righteous against the wicked
 - (a) Vv 1–4: Moral integrity and good judgment
 - (i) Both light weights and arrogant people claim to be “heavier” than they really are.
 - (ii) Arrogance is linked to fraud and deceit, while humility is attached to moral integrity.
 - (iii) One who thinks of only himself and has no regard for others can easily resort to cheating in business affairs.
 - (b) Vv 5–6: Salvation for the righteous
 - (i) Punishment fits the crime, and God will just both righteous and wicked properly
 - (c) Vv 7–8: Death of a sinner, eternal life for the righteous
 - (3) Vv 9–17: The lasting benefits of neighbor-love
 - (a) Vv 9–13: Destructive lips: ABB’A’A’
 - (i) Vv 9, 12–13—slandering gossip of the wicked against the silence of the righteous
 - (ii) Vv 10–11—the joy of a city and righteous living
 - (b) Vv 14–15: National and personal prejudice: Imprudent action brings disaster, whereas prudent action gives security (both nationally and personally)
 - (c) Vv 16–17: Kindness and cruelty:
 - (i) Kind woman / cruel man // kind man / ruthless man

- (ii) Women often place relationships above career, in contrast to men
- (4) Vv 18–21: Harvesting tomorrow what we sow today
 - (a) Vv 18–19 The wages of sin
 - (i) Wicked vs. sowing righteousness // righteous vs. sowing wickedness
 - (ii) Wages of sin are fleeting; the wages of righteousness eternal
 - (iii) Cf. vv. 16–17
 - (b) Vv 20–21: Divine judgment: God’s judgment follows his evaluation of people; action impacts later generations
- vi. **11:22:**
 - (1) Gold ring is here compared to a beautiful woman; just as the ring is where it shouldn’t be, so the woman has departed from discretion and is where she should not be.
 - (2) Written to men, the caution is to not become a pig’s snout.
 - (3) Stand alone proverb.
- vii. **11:23–27 – Generosity and Selfishness**
 - (1) In God’s economy, the greedy lose and the givers gain.
 - (2) Structure:
 - (a) V. 23 Sowing good desire reaps good; sowing wickedness reaps destruction.
 - (b) V. 24 Giving/Hoarding: Givers get; hoarders suffer want—always longing for more.
 - (c) V. 25 Giving: Only positive 2x
 - (d) V. 26 Hoarding/Selling: Hoarding are cursed; those who sell excess are blessed.
 - (e) V. 27 Sowing good reaps favor; sowing evil reaps evil.
- viii. **11:28–12:4 – The Source of Life—Enjoying the Favor of God**
 - (1) Structure (Garrett):
 - (a) Aa The true source of life (11:28) – still connected to previous
 - (b) Ab Family life (11:29)
 - (c) Ba Behavior of righteous and wicked (11:30)
 - (d) Bb Divine judgment (11:31)
 - (e) Ba’ Behavior of righteous and wicked (12:1)
 - (f) Bb’ Divine judgment (12:2)
 - (g) Aa’ The true source of life (12:3)
 - (h) Ab’ Family life (12:4)
 - (2) Life and health for both individual and family is obtained by virtue and submission to God; violence and selfishness bring judgment, and wealth affords no security.
- ix. **12:5–7 (Plans and Schemes)**
 - (1) All three lines are parallel structurally, though the ordering is changes: (v. 5) righteous–wicked; (v. 6) wicked–righteous; (v. 7) wicked–righteous.
 - (2) V. 5 addresses plans ahead, v. 6 focuses on deliverance from bad situations, and v. 7 on lasting security.
- x. **12:8 (Earned Respect)**
- xi. **12:9–11 (On Providing for One’s Needs)**
 - (1) V. 9 – Modest prosperity is more important than status.

- (2) V. 10 – Right order in God’s world demands care for the beast, for they enable sustenance.
- (3) V. 11 – Hard work pays, whereas distraction hurts.
- xii. **12:12–14 (On Fruit and Snares)**
 - (1) All use images of food gathering—hunting with snares and laboring to raise crops.
 - (2) V. 12 – Deep righteous roots bear fruit
 - (3) V. 13 – Bad words ensnare
 - (4) V. 14 – Good speech and work produce good
- xiii. **12:15 (Taking Advice):** The fool does not seek help or others’ insight; the wise do.
- xiv. **12:16–22 (Use and Abuse of Words)**
 - (1) Structure:
 - (a) A: Thoughtless reactions (v. 16)
 - (b) B: Honesty and lying: Nature (v. 17)
 - (c) A’: Reckless words (v. 18)
 - (d) B’: Honesty and lying: Lasting benefit (v. 19)
 - (e) C: Plotting evil and promoting peace (v. 20)
 - (f) C’: Trouble to the wicked, not the righteous (v. 21)
 - (g) B’’: Honesty and lying: God’s perspective (v. 22)
 - (2) Wicked: react negatively (v. 16a) and speak rash words (v. 18a), deceive and lie (v. 17b, v. 22) from a heart of deceit (v. 20a) and in a way that is an abomination to God (v. 22a), are fleeting (v. 19b), falling into trouble (v. 21b).
 - (3) Righteous: don’t react negatively (v. 16b) but speak the truth (v. 17a), bearing words that last (v. 19a), bringing healing (v. 18b), and having joy for they plan peace (v. 20b) and receive God’s favor and delight (vv. 21, 22b)
- xv. **12:23–28 (A Wholesome Life)**
 - (1) Structure:
 - (a) A: Caution and No Caution (v. 23)
 - (b) B: Diligence and Laziness (v. 24)
 - (c) C: Anxiety and joy (v. 25)
 - (d) A’: Caution and No Caution (v. 26)
 - (e) B’: Laziness and Diligence (v. 27)
 - (f) C’: Life and Immortality (v. 28)
 - (2) V. 23 – speaking about everything is not wise
 - (3) V. 24 – hard work matters
 - (4) V. 25 – be mindful of how to encourage others with words
 - (5) V. 26 – choose friends wisely
 - (6) V. 27 – diligence benefits
 - (7) V. 28 – Life is the only result of the righteous life
- xvi. **13:1–4 (Filling and Being Full)**
 - (1) V. 1 – Wisdom entails listening and responding well to instruction/rebuke; scoffer’s are fools.
 - (2) V. 2 – Those who speak rightly receive reward and fullness; there is nothing left after the fool works.
 - (3) V. 3 – Being careful in speech benefits; a quick tongue destroys.

- (4) V. 4 – Diligence is here paralleled with speaking rightly (v. 2), both of which make one full; there is nothing available for the sluggard, for he produces no fruit.
- xvii. **13:5–6 (Action and Reaction)**
- (1) V. 5 – The disposition of the righteous is against falsehood; the wicked receives shame.
 - (2) V. 6 – Righteousness protects one from danger; sin opens the door wide for danger.
 - (3) The righteous are concerned for truth, whereas the wicked delight in scandal.
- xviii. **13:7–11 (The Ambiguity of Riches)**
- (1) Vv. 7–8, 11
 - (a) V. 7 – Riches are actually deceptive. Why?
 - (b) V. 8 – Because wealth is actually a prison, whereas in poverty one is free.
 - (c) V. 11 – Prudence with wealth makes gain
 - (2) Vv. 9–10 – Pure life comes from a pure life and patient spirit, not wealth. Arrogance (due to wealth) quickly fades.
- xix. **13:12–19 (Desire Fulfilled, Word Heeded)**
- (1) Inclusio in vv. 12, 19 all addressing “hope fulfilled,” whereas the body focuses on heeding godly instruction; this suggests that one’s desires will be fulfilled when one pursue the right things in the right way, turning from all treachery. V. 19b says that fools will not turn from evil, suggesting that fools will not see desires fulfilled.
 - (2) Possible chiasmic structure (DeRouchie):
 - (a) A, v. 12: Desire fulfilled is tree of life
 - (b) B, v. 13: Heeding instruction brings reward
 - (c) C, v. 14: Faithful guides keep one alive
 - (d) D, v. 15: Good sense wins favor
 - (e) D’, v. 16: Prudence should pervade all of life
 - (f) C’, v. 17: Faithful envoy brings healing
 - (g) B’, v. 18: Heeding reproof bring honor
 - (h) A’, v. 19: Desire fulfilled sweet to the soul
 - (3) V. 13: The “word/commandment” are either God’s or, more likely (in view of v. 14) a parent’s; heeding leads to reward, whereas failure to heed leads to destruction.
 - (4) V. 14: Similarly, having wise guide keeps one alive.
 - (5) V. 15: Part of blessing is gaining the favor of others, which is enjoyed only by good sense.
 - (6) V. 16: One’s makeup pervades every thought and deed, whether prudence or foolishness.
 - (7) V. 17: Be a faithful messenger!
 - (8) V. 18: Heeding instruction brings gain.
- xx. **13:20–21 (Choice Companions)**
- (1) V. 20: You become like those you hang around. Character is contagious.
 - (2) V. 21: You will reap the fruits of those you hang around. Character reaps a harvest.
- xxi. **13:22–25 (Provision for the Family)**

- (1) A, v. 22: Material inheritance is important
 - (2) B, v. 23: Hunger because of injustice, due to no internal fault
 - (3) A', v. 24: Moral heritage is important
 - (4) B', v. 25: Hunger because of divine displeasure, due to internal fault
4. 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

God	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
Our proper response	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 *Life Application Study Bible* (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>	
Characteristics	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
Reputation	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
Results	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>	
Outlook on life	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
Response to life	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
How they are seen by others	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
Quality of life	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
Short-term results	Walk security	Will be found out	10:9
	Chased by blessings	Chased by trouble	13:21
Long-term results	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
Eternal expectations	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
God's opinion of them	Delights in the good	Detests the perverse	11:20
Adapted from the <i>Life Application Study Bible</i> (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.²¹ Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.</i>		
<i>The Controlled Tongue</i>	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
<i>The Caring Tongue</i>	Those who speak truthfully while seeking to encourage.	10:32; 12:18, 25; 15:23; 16:24; 25:15; 27:9
<i>The Conniving Tongue</i>	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

<i>The Careless Tongue</i>	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

Prov 6:6–11. Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. ⁷ Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, ⁸ she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ¹¹ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

<i>The Diligent</i>	<i>The Lazy</i>	
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
Other Texts: 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

<i>Qualities of a Good Leader</i>	
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
<i>What Happens Without Good Leadership</i>	
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

For Learners		
<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
For Teachers		
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.		

5. 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, ¹⁹ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ²⁴ 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; ¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; ¹⁸ for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; ¹⁹ 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, ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; ⁶ she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it. ⁷ And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. ⁸ 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. ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ 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, ²⁴ to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. ²⁵ Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; ²⁶ for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life. ²⁷ Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? ²⁸ Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? ²⁹ So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished. . . . ³² 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. ⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. ⁹ Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. ¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life. ¹² 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!" ¹⁴ As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. ¹⁵ The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. ¹⁶ 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.⁵ 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	>>>>> Increasing Severity >>>>>
<i>Level 1: Parent(s) Teach the Guidelines</i>		
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	
<i>Level 2: Parent(s) Reiterate the Guidelines</i>		
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	
<i>Level 3: Parent(s) Enforce the Guidelines</i>		
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*		
<i>Level 4: Government’s Role in Discipline</i>		
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).		

(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,⁹ 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 . . . ,² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,⁵ 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,¹⁴ for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.¹⁵ 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.⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

⁵ 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.

(b) Parents inform of improper behavior.

- Prov. 1:10–11, 15. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. ¹¹ If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason . . .,” ¹⁵ 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, ³² 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. ¹⁹ 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, ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; ⁶ 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, ² 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. ¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. ¹⁶ 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. ²² The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. ²³ 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. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ 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, ²⁵ 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. ¹⁴ 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>
Context of the act	Responding	Reacting	
Heart of the parent	Love	Hate, rage	Prov 13:24
Motivation of the parent	Curb danger, hope of blessing	Inflict pain	Prov 19:18
Nature of the act	Temporary physical pain	Potential lasting pain	Prov 23:13
Goal of the act	Restore, shape, dislodge folly	Distance, break	Prov 22:15; 23:14
Result of the act	Heals, saves, instructs	Hurts, wounds	Prov 19:18; 23:14; 29:15
God's view of the act	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, ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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.” ²¹ 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, ⁴ 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:⁶
- (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. ¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.
 - (b) While the term may be able to refer to multiple levels of discipline, it certainly includes physical discipline, the kind that Heb 12:11 says “seems painful rather than pleasant.”
 - (c) Proverbs that speak of spanking assume that “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” and that it will take more than words to dislodge it.
 - Prov. 22:15. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
 - (d) Spanking rightly administered is not cruel; withholding it is, for without it the child may follow a trajectory climaxing in eternal punishment (Prov 23:13–14; cf. 19:18). *Not* spanking can be a form of *spiritual child abuse*.
 - (e) Spanking is a means of imparting wisdom (Prov 29:15).
 - Prov. 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
 - (2) Is spanking a form of physical and psychological abuse?
 - (a) Spanking is *not* “beating, hitting, or hurting” a child; rather it is “physical discipline that is temporarily painful.” Spanking is not punching, back-handing, striking on the face, kicking, pushing, or public shaming a child—these actions are abuse and always sin.
 - (b) Simply because an action could be abusive, does not mean that it always is. The goal in spanking is not to revenge, abuse, or hurt but to love (13:24), instruct (22:15; 29:15), instill hope (19:18), and save from divine wrath (23:14).
 - (c) Spanking is only used after the child has refused lower levels of discipline.
 - (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?

⁶ 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.

- (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.⁷
 - (b) The use of Prov 3:12 in Heb 12:5–11 and the stress on the role of the father in discipline in Eph 6:4 suggests a continuity between the OT and NT concepts of discipline.
- (5) Is spanking antithetical to the gospel, requiring children to “atone” for sins that Christ already atoned?
 - (a) Spanking is not atoning for sins. Christ was punished; we are disciplined so that we don’t have to be punished. Punishment satisfies justice, whereas discipline trains. Because God disciplines his children, discipline is not antithetical to the gospel.
 - (b) Discipline actually reinforces the gospel, for it stresses that sin is serious and must be curbed. The grace of the cross secures not only justification but also sanctification, and discipline through spanking is a means of grace for nurturing sanctification.

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.

⁷ 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.

<p>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)</p>
<p>Adapted from Duane A. Garrett, <i>Proverbs–Ecclesiastes</i>, 248.</p>

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 trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. 14 She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. 15 She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. 17 She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong . 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. 19 She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. 20 She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. 22 She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.	11 The heart of her husband trusted in her, and he had no lack of gain. 12 She did him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She sought wool and flax, and worked with willing hands. 14 She was like the ships of the merchant; she would bring her food from afar. 15 And she rose while it was yet night and provided food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16 She considered a field and bought it; with the fruit of her hands she planted a vineyard. 17 She dressed herself with strength and made her arms strong . 18 She perceived that her merchandise was profitable. Her lamp did not go out at night. 19 She put her hands to the distaff, and her hands held the spindle. 20 She opened her hand to the poor and reached out her hands to the needy. 21 She was not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household were clothed in scarlet. 22 She made 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 makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on	24 She made linen garments and sold them; she delivered sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity were her clothing, and she laughed at the time to come. 26 She opened her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of

her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 29 “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”	kindness was on her tongue. 27 She looked well to the ways of her household and did not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children have arisen and called her blessed; her husband also, and he has praised her: 29 “Many women have done excellently, but you have surpassed 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 bold ; the nine wayyiqtol/waw-consecutive verbs are bold italics ; the five yiqtol/imperfect verbs are bold underline .	

- b. Brian L. Webster summarizes the significance of this shift as follows:⁸

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

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

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

⁸ 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.

“wisdom and understanding” (4:6).⁹ 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. ² 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.
 - ii. The language of “the son of David, king of Israel” explicitly recalls the Davidic kingdom promises that one of his heirs would be called the “son” of God and bear a house, kingdom, and throne that would last forever (2 Sam 7:14, 16; cf. Ps 2).
 - 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. Capturing this great exchange are the words of the psalmist, “Behold, you [O God] delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart” (Ps 51:6). He promised to “teach transgressors your ways,” if he could but be restored to God (51:13), and we get this king’s wisdom in the book of Proverbs. We read in 1 Kgs 2:2–4 that David 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

⁹ 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. ² In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory. . . . ²³ 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.”

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, ² "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgression. . . . ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me **wisdom** in the secret heart.... ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.... ¹⁵ 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], ⁴ he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. ⁵ Get **wisdom**; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. ⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. ⁷ The beginning of **wisdom** is this: Get **wisdom**, and whatever you get, get insight. ⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹ 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 8:22–31; 30:1–6).
- i. Prov 8:22–31. The LORD possessed me, the beginning of his way, earlier than his acts of old. ²³ From eternity I was appointed representative, from the beginning, from times before earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was strengthened [*or* brought forth], when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before hills, I was strengthened [*or* brought forth], ²⁶ before he had made earth and its fields, or a start of clods of soil. ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ then I was beside him, a faithful one, and I was daily delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world, and my delight was with the children of man.
- (DeRouchie's adapted ESV)
- (1) Wisdom was the beginning of God's way (8:22), such that before creation, Yahweh appointed wisdom as his representative (8:23–26), and at creation, wisdom worked as a joyful and faithful partner beside Yahweh (8:27–31).
 - (2) A number of features suggest that Solomon portrays wisdom as Yahweh's eternally begotten Son.

- (a) The Qal of the verb **קנה** in Prov 8:22 means “to possess,” whether by *acquisition* (e.g., people in Exod 15:16; Isa 11:11; Ps 74:2; places in 78:54; abstract realities in Prov 1:5; 4:5, 7; 15:32; 16:16; 17:16; 18:15; 19:18; 23:23), *purchase* (e.g., ground in Gen 47:22; a field in Gen 49:30; Ruth 4:5; Neh 5:16; Jer 32:9; a house in Lev 25:30), or *generation* (Gen 4:1; Deut 32:6). The latter contexts identify how the semantic range includes parental spheres.
- (b) Prov 8:23 includes an intransitive use of the verb **נָסַף** in the Niphal. The root is a homonym having two unrelated meanings: (1) “to pour out” (**נָסַף**), which relates directly to the nouns **נְסֻף** (Deut 32:38) and **נְסֻף** (e.g., Gen 35:14; Exod 29:40; Ps 16:4; Isa 57:6), two words for “drink offering, libation”; and (2) “to be appointed as representative” (Ps 2:6; Prov 8:23), manifest both as a “cast image” (**נְסֻף**, Dan 11:8; **נְסֻף**, Isa 41:29; 48:5; Jer 10:14; 51:17) or a leader (**נְסֻף**, Josh 13:21; Ps 83:11[12]; Ezek 32:30; Mic 5:4). Significantly, the LXX of Ps 2:6 read a Niphal of **נָסַף** instead of the Qal of **נָסַף** present in the MT; this would make it the only other instance of the Niphal form in Scripture—occurring in passage charged with messianic hope. Regardless, though, it is the only other occurrence of the verb **נָסַף** related to the meaning “to appoint as representative,” and this ties Prov 8:23 to the messianic context of Ps 2. The MT has Yahweh speaking, “As for me, *I have appointed as representative my king* [נְסַפְתִּי מִלְּבִי] in Zion, my holy hill,” whereas the LXX reads, “*But I was appointed king* [Ἐγὼ δὲ κατεστάθην βασιλεὺς; **נְסַפְתִּי מִלְּבו**] by him over Zion, his holy mountain.” The following verse notes that the royal Anointed One’s appointed representative status is nothing less than his identification as the Son of God: “I will tell of the decree: Yahweh said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you [נָלַדְתִּיךָ]’” (Ps 2:7).
- (c) The verb **חיל** 2x in 8:24–25 is associated with a base meaning of “to tighten or to pressure,” which results in two different spheres of use, the first related to trembling or labor and the second associated with strength. The Polal, therefore, means either to be “to be brought forth” (as if through labor pains) (e.g., Ps 51:7; Job 15:7) or, potentially, “to be strengthened” (cf. Job 20:21; Ps 10:5). Intriguingly, the denominative **חֵל** “strength” is used in Ps 110:3 with respect to the present administration of the messianic king, and some propose that **חֵילִיךָ** “your strength” there should actually be pointed **חֹלְלִיךָ** “your strengthening” or “your being brought forth,” polal inf of **חיל** (*HALOT*). Significantly, at the end of the verse, the LXX bears a reading that links back to Ps 2:7. Where the MT reads “to you is the dew of your youth” (**טל לְךָ יְלֻדְתֵיךָ**), the LXX read **נָלַדְתִּיךָ**, rendering the whole *πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγγένυσά σε* “before morning star, I brought you forth.”

- (3) A number of parallels with Gen 1:1–2:3 are clear:
- (a) *rē'šît*: “The *beginning* of his way” (Prov 8:22); “from the *beginning*, from times before earth” (8:23); “before ... a *beginning* of clods of soil” (8:26); “in the *beginning*, God created ... the earth” (Gen 1:1)
 - (b) *l'ehôm*: “When there were no *depths*” (Prov 8:24); “when he drew a circle on a face of *deep*” (8:27b); “and darkness was over the surface of the *deep*” (Gen 1:2)
 - (c) *'ereš*: “Before he made *earth*” (Prov 8:26); “In the beginning God created ... the *earth*” (Gen 1:1); “And God called the dry land *earth*” (1:10)
 - (d) *šamayim*: “When he established the *heavens*, I was there” (Prov 8:27a); “in the beginning, God created the *heavens*” (Gen 1:1); “and God called the expanse *heavens*” (1:8; cf. 1:9, 14, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1)
 - (e) *yām* and *mayim*: “When he assigned to the *sea* its limit, so that the *waters* might not transgress his command” (Prov 8:29); “and the *waters* that were gathered together he called *Seas*” (Gen 1:10)
 - (f) “Rejoicing in the soil of his earth” (Prov 8:31a); “and God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10; cf. 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)
 - (g) *'ādām*: “And my delight was with the children of mankind” (Prov 8:31b); “Let us make mankind” (Gen 1:26); “and behold it was very good” (1:31)
- (4) The Christ-hymn in Col 1:15–20 appears to identify Christ with the wisdom-Son in Prov 8:22–31. Christ is “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15), the agent of creation (1:16), and “the beginning” (1:18).
- ii. 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. ² Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. ³ I have not learned wisdom, nor [lit., but] have I knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴ 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! ⁵ Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. ⁶ Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar. (Some of what follows is adapted from Brian Verrett, “Proverbs 30:1–6 and Its Use in the New Testament.”)
- (1) A prophetic oracle (v. 1)
 - (a) The language of “oracle” suggests that we are here reading a prophecy.
 - (b) 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.
 - (2) A stupid man who does know God (vv. 2–3).
 - (a) While the ESV read the second line of v. 3 negatively, such seems forced and unnecessary.

- (b) Instead, while Agur affirms his ignorance (vv. 2–3a), he also stresses that he *does* know the Holy One (v. 3b; cf. Num 24:16), which aligns with the reality that he received an oracle (v. 1). Perhaps significant is the fact that the object of his knowledge is actually “the Holy Ones” (cf. 9:10—“The knowledge of the Holy Ones is understanding”), which may anticipate v. 4, where the sage queries, “What is his name, and what is his son’s name? Surely you know!”
- (c) The implication: His “oracle” rightly expresses the word of God.
- (3) Wisdom’s source and identity in the new creation (v. 4).
- (a) “Who has ascended into heaven and come down [with wisdom]?”
- (i) 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.”
- (ii) Agur may be alluding to Deut 30:12. Of the law, the practice of 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. ¹² **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?’** ¹³ 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?’ ¹⁴ 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.
- (b) “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).
- (c) “What is his name, and what is his son’s name? Surely you know!”
- (i) 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.

- (ii) An intriguing parallel exists between “wisdom,” which was “set up/appointed as representative” in Prov 8:23, and God’s royal Son, who was “set up/appointed as representative” in Ps 2:6 (the only two texts in all of Scripture that use the verb).
 - (iii) 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.
- (4) The set nature of these words (vv. 5–6).
- (a) “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.”
 - (b) “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. Christ as Wisdom. 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 is shown in his teaching, greater than Solomon’s, and proven by his deeds of power (Matt. 11:2, 19; 12:42; 13:54).
 - Matt. 11:2, 19. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples. . . .¹⁹ [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. 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.
 - 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. 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.⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
 - c. 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,² 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,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. . . .⁸ 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,²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . .³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.
- d. 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.
- Col. 1:15–19. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ 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.²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth,²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,²⁹ 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,³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.
- e. OT wisdom imagery is also part of Paul’s portrayal of Christ’s re-exaltation after his resurrection, where he was “declared/appointed to be the Son of God . . . by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4), and where, having obeyed even to the point of death, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9), and he is now “exalted at the right hand of God,” having ascended “into the heavens” (Acts 2:33–34).

IV. Summary: The very wisdom that God appointed his representative in eternity past and that served as God’s craftsman at creation is the wisdom embodied in God’s royal Son, and all who fear the Lord must hear and keep his teaching in order to rest secure and enjoy lasting life and to flee the way of the fool that leads to death.

V. 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?