The Book of Proverbs

Every Proverb, Verse by Verse, Explained in Full
All 31 Presented One by One

Proverbs 22:20, 21 — Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth?

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The Proverbs at a Glance

All thirty-one chapters of the Book of Proverbs, by number. The chapter in which each division of the book begins is shaded: 1 (Solomon to his son), 10 (the proverbs of Solomon), 22 (the words of the wise, from 22:17), 25 (the proverbs copied by the men of Hezekiah) and 30 (Agur and Lemuel).

In the PDF, click a number to go to that chapter. At the head of every discourse or chapter, click the heading to come back to this page.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	**10**	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	**22**	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	**30**	31	

Shaded: the chapter in which each division begins — 1, 10, 22 (from 22:17), 25, 30.

The Purpose of This Study

> **Nehemiah 8:5, 8** *And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up. . . . So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*
>
> **Proverbs 22:20, 21** *Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?*

When Ezra opened the book, the people stood up. They wanted to hear it, and they wanted to understand it. The Levites did three things: they read it *distinctly*, they *gave the sense*, and they *caused the people to understand*. That is the whole purpose of this study.

The Book of Proverbs is quoted more often than it is read. Many of its sayings have passed into common speech: "Pride goeth before destruction" (16:18); "He that spareth his rod hateth his son" (13:24); "Go to the ant, thou sluggard" (6:6); "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (15:1). But the book itself is seldom read as a book. Its sayings are taken one at a time, out of their places, and many readers have never noticed that it has an order, a speaker, a hearer, and a purpose.

This study sets out to restore what has been lost:

- **The order.** The book is presented in its own divisions, which the book itself marks with its own headings, so that the reader can see who is speaking, to whom, and why.
- **The words.** The Hebrew words for *wisdom* and for *the fool* are explained before the book is read, and the ones the English hides are tagged in the text, so that the reader can tell one kind of fool from another.
- **The sense.** Every verse is presented and explained in full, phrase by phrase, so that every word is understood and every saying is seen in its place.

"Have not I written to thee excellent things," the book asks, "that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth?" (22:20, 21). The aim of this study is the same: that the reader may know the certainty of what is written.

How to Use This Study

The parts. Part One (the eight chapters that follow) opens the book: what a proverb is, who wrote the Proverbs, to whom, how the book is divided, the Hebrew words that carry its teaching, how a proverb is built, and the figures of speech it uses. Read it first. Part Two presents the book itself, division by division and verse by verse. Part Three closes the study with a Conclusion and a chapter called *What We Have Learned*, followed by the appendices, the first of which, Appendix A, is the Subject Index of the Proverbs.

This edition. This edition holds the whole book: all thirty-one chapters, every verse, with Part Three and the appendices.

The text. The Scripture text is the King James Version, printed exactly as it stands. Where the King James Version prints LORD in capitals, the Hebrew has the Name of God, and this study adds that Name after it in green brackets: "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge." Green is used throughout for anything added to the text of Scripture, so that the reader can always tell the two apart.

The tagged words. Where the King James Version uses one English word for several Hebrew words, or hides a word for wisdom under another English word, the Hebrew word is added after it in green brackets: "fools [kesil] hate knowledge"; "the simple [pethi]"; "sound wisdom [tushiyyah]"; "the poor [dal]." Chapter 5 explains every one of these words, and the commentary reminds the reader of its meaning each time it occurs.

Each chapter of single proverbs. From chapter 10 on, each chapter is presented as a unit: its heading, an introduction, an outline of its runs of related sayings, the whole text, and the verse-by-verse commentary. A saying that comes again elsewhere receives the full treatment the first time; the second time, what differs is explained and the reader is pointed back for the rest.

Each discourse. In chapters 1 to 9, Solomon speaks to his son in ten discourses. For each the reader will find, in order: its heading (its place in the division); a short introduction; its structure; the whole text; the verse-by-verse commentary; and a short paragraph looking back. Where a discourse runs on from one chapter into the next, the chapter number is shown in every verse reference.

Questions that are disputed. Where a verse has been read in more than one way, the commentary gives the answer this study has reached, plainly, and points to Appendix F, where the case is set out and weighed.

Part One — Opening the Proverbs

Before a single proverb is read, the reader needs to know what kind of book this is. A man who opens a book of rules expecting promises will be disappointed; a man who opens a book of promises expecting rules will be confused. The Proverbs are neither a collection of clever sayings nor a list of guarantees. They are, as their own opening says, a book written "to know wisdom and instruction" (1:2). These eight chapters are short, and each prepares the ground for what follows.

Chapter 1 — What a Proverb Is

A. The word

The Hebrew title of the book is its first two words, *Mishle Shelomoh*, "The proverbs of Solomon." The word *mashal* (plural *meshalim*), "proverb," is used far more widely in the Old Testament than the English word "proverb" is today:

- Of a short saying that passes from mouth to mouth: "Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:12); "as saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked" (1 Sam. 24:13).
- Of a byword, a name for something held up as an example: "thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword" (Deut. 28:37).
- Of a prophetic discourse: Balaam "took up his parable" (Num. 23:7).
- Of a taunt: "thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon" (Isa. 14:4).
- Of an allegory or parable: "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel" (Ezek. 17:2).

What all these have in common is *likeness*. A *mashal* sets one thing beside another so that the first is seen in the light of the second: the ant beside the sluggard (6:6), the dog beside the fool (26:11), cold water beside good news (25:25). The word most likely comes from the Hebrew root *mashal*, "to be like, to compare," and that is its root sense. Dr. Bullinger, in *The Companion Bible*, connected it rather with the other Hebrew root *mashal*, "to rule," and called the proverbs "Divine rules from heaven for earth." The lexicons place the noun under the first root, not the second, and this study follows them. Yet Bullinger's point is true in substance: a proverb is a word that is meant to govern the life of the one who hears it.

The Greek Old Testament called the book *Paroimiai*, "sayings by the way," and the Latin *Proverbia*, "words put forward." From the Latin comes the English name.

B. The form

Almost every proverb in chapters 10 to 29 is a single verse of two lines. The two lines answer one another (Chapter 6 explains how), and the meaning is found not in either line alone but in the meeting of the two:

> **Proverbs 10:1** *A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.*

A proverb is short so that it can be remembered, and it is sharp so that it will be noticed. It does not argue; it shows. It leaves the hearer to see the point for himself.

Chapters 1 to 9 are different. There Solomon speaks to his son at length, in ten connected discourses, and the proverb is gathered into teaching. Chapters 30 and 31 are different again: the numbered sayings of Agur, the counsel of King Lemuel's mother, and the alphabetical poem of the virtuous woman.

C. Dark sayings

The book itself says that it is written "to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (1:6). The word for "dark sayings" is *chidah*, a riddle, a saying whose meaning has to be worked out. It is the word used of Samson's riddle (Judg. 14:12) and of the "hard questions" with which the Queen of Sheba came to prove Solomon (1 Kings 10:1). A proverb is meant to be thought about. Its meaning is not always on the surface, and the reader who passes over it quickly will miss it. That is one reason why this study gives every verse its full treatment.

D. A rule, not a promise

The most important thing to know about a proverb is what kind of statement it is. A proverb states how things go in the world God has made: what a man sows, he reaps. It states the rule. It does not promise that the rule will hold in every single case without exception, and it does not claim to.

The best-known test is 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is the rule, and it is true as a rule: the child's training shapes the man. But it is not a promise that no child who was well trained has ever gone astray, and the book itself knows it: it speaks of "a foolish son," who is "a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him" (17:25). The same Solomon who wrote 22:6 saw his own son Rehoboam forsake good counsel (1 Kings 12:8).

The book makes the point itself by setting two proverbs side by side that cannot both be applied at once:

> **Proverbs 26:4, 5** *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*

Both are true. Which one applies depends on the fool, the folly, and the moment. That is the point: a proverb is not a machine that works by itself. It needs a wise man to use it, and "the legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools" (26:7).

E. Divine sayings

The Proverbs are not human wisdom collected by a clever king. They are part of the Scripture which is "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The book says so of its own words: "Every word of God is pure" (30:5); "Have not I written to thee excellent things . . . that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth?" (22:20, 21). Solomon's wisdom itself was God's gift: "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much" (1 Kings 4:29). And the book's first word of teaching sets everything that follows under God: "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7).

Chapter 2 — Who Wrote Them, and When

A. What the book itself says

The book names its writers in its own headings:

Heading	Verses	Writer
"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel"	1:1	Solomon (the heading of the book, and of chapters 1–9)
"The proverbs of Solomon"	10:1	Solomon (10:1–22:16)
"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise"	22:17	Wise men, unnamed (22:17–24:22)
"These things also belong to the wise"	24:23	Wise men, unnamed (24:23–34)
"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out"	25:1	Solomon; copied by Hezekiah's men (25:1–29:27)
"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy"	30:1	Agur (chapter 30)
"The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him"	31:1	Lemuel, and his mother (chapter 31)

B. Solomon

Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, reigned over all Israel for forty years (1 Kings 11:42). At the beginning of his reign Jehovah appeared to him at Gibeon and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon asked for "an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad," and God gave him "a wise and an understanding heart," and riches and honour besides (1 Kings 3:5–13). The record of his wisdom follows:

> **1 Kings 4:29, 32–34** *And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. . . . And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.*

Of three thousand proverbs, the Book of Proverbs holds only a part: the 375 sayings of 10:1–22:16 and the 138 verses of chapters 25 to 29, with Solomon's discourses to his son in chapters 1 to 9. What we have is a selection. Ecclesiastes says the same of the Preacher: "he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs" (Eccl. 12:9).

C. The wise, the men of Hezekiah, Agur and Lemuel

The wise. Two sections are "the words of the wise" (22:17–24:22) and "these also belong to the wise" (24:23–34). The writers are not named. They were wise men of Israel whose sayings were gathered with Solomon's. Some modern writers claim that the first of these sections was borrowed from an Egyptian book of instruction. That claim has been examined, and the findings are set out in the introduction to Division 3 (and weighed in Appendix F, Question 11).

The men of Hezekiah. Hezekiah, king of Judah, reigned some two and a half centuries after Solomon. He opened and cleansed the House of Jehovah, restored its worship "according to the commandment of David" (2 Chron. 29:25), and commanded the Levites to sing praise "with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer" (2 Chron. 29:30). His men also "copied out" the proverbs of Solomon in chapters 25 to 29 (25:1): the word means to move or transfer, to copy from one record into another. Solomon's proverbs had been kept, and Hezekiah's scribes brought more of them into the book.

Agur the son of Jakeh (30:1) and **Lemuel** (31:1) are named nowhere else in Scripture. Who they were will be taken up when the study reaches them.

D. "Of" Solomon, or "for" Solomon?

The Companion Bible divides the first twenty-nine chapters into proverbs *by* Solomon and proverbs *for* Solomon. In its Appendix 74 (written by Dr. J. W. Thirtle), it holds that chapters 1 to 9, and again 19:20–24:34 and 27:1–29:27, are "the words of the wise": instruction given by Solomon's teachers to Solomon himself as a young prince, to prepare him to reign. To make this work, it holds that the words "the words of the wise" in 1:6 were wrongly made part of the book's title by the copyists, and that they were meant to stand as the heading of chapters 1 to 9.

This question was to be settled before the study began. It has been, and this is the answer:

"The proverbs of Solomon" means proverbs by Solomon, and chapters 1 to 9 are Solomon's own words to his son. The reasons are these:

- **The headings are the same.** The Hebrew words at 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1 are identical: *mishle Shelomoh*, "proverbs of Solomon." *The Companion Bible* itself reads 10:1 and 25:1 as "by" Solomon. The same words cannot mean "for" Solomon at 1:1 and "by" Solomon at 10:1.
- **No copy of the text supports the change.** No Hebrew manuscript, and no ancient version, places "the words of the wise" anywhere but in 1:6, where it stands as one of the things the book is written to help the reader understand.
- **The speaker of chapter 4 tells us who he is.** "For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words . . . Get wisdom" (4:3–5). The word "tender" (*rak*) is the very word David used of Solomon: "Solomon my son is young and tender" (1 Chr. 22:5; 29:1). "Only beloved" fits the son of whom it is written, "the LORD [Jehovah] loved him" (2 Sam. 12:24). And the grandfather's charge, "Get wisdom," is the very thing Solomon asked for at Gibeon. The speaker of chapter 4

is a father passing on to his son what his own father taught him: Solomon passing on David's teaching.

- **The mother is a real mother.** "Forsake not the law of thy mother" (1:8; 6:20). The word "father" can be used of a teacher (2 Kings 2:12), but a teacher is not a mother. The home is in view: a father and a mother teaching their son.
- **"Also" looks back.** "These are *also* proverbs of Solomon" (25:1). The word "also" counts what went before as Solomon's too.

What *The Companion Bible* and Dr. Thirtle saw is still true and valuable, and it is kept:

- The change of person is real. In chapters 1 to 9 a father speaks *to* "my son," "thou," "thee"; in chapters 10 to 22 the sayings speak mostly *about* "he," "him," "they."
- The son is being prepared to rule. The warnings of chapters 1 to 9 answer, point by point, to the law of the king in Deuteronomy 17: he shall not multiply horses, nor wives, nor silver and gold, and he shall write a copy of the law and read in it all his days (Deut. 17:14–20).
- Solomon's own later life makes these warnings solemn. "King Solomon loved many strange women" (1 Kings 11:1), and "his wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4). The man who wrote "Her house is the way to hell" (7:27) did not keep his own counsel.

Who the son was is not stated. He is spoken to as one son ("my son") and as many ("ye children," 4:1; 5:7; 7:24). The only son of Solomon named in Scripture is Rehoboam, who was a year old when his father began to reign (1 Kings 14:21; 11:42), and whose mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess (1 Kings 14:21), one of the "strange women." What is certain is that the words are written for every son who will hear them.

The case is set out in full, with its weight, in Appendix F, Question 1.

Chapter 3 — To Whom It Was Written

A. Written to Israel, under the Law

The Proverbs were written by Israel's king, in the administration of the Law of Moses. They assume the Law at every turn. "The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light" (6:23). "He that keepeth the law, happy is he" (29:18). The son is to bind his father's commandments upon his fingers and write them upon the table of his heart (7:3), as Israel was to bind the words of the Law upon their hands (Deut. 6:8). The blessings the book holds out are the blessings promised to Israel for obedience under the Law: long life in the land, plenty, honour, and peace.

> **Proverbs 3:1, 2** *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.*
>
> **Deuteronomy 6:2** *That thou mightest fear the LORD [Jehovah] thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.*

The "length of days" of the Proverbs is the "prolonged days" of Deuteronomy. When the book promises riches, honour and life to the one who walks in wisdom, it is speaking the language of the covenant God made with Israel.

B. Written for our learning

The Proverbs were not written *to* the Church, but they were written *for* it. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

The moral sense of a proverb holds in every administration. Pride still goes before destruction; the diligent hand still makes rich; a soft answer still turns away wrath. The New Testament itself quotes the Proverbs to believers, and applies them directly:

Proverbs	Quoted or applied in
1:16 "their feet run to evil"	Romans 3:15 (with Isaiah 59:7)
3:7 "Be not wise in thine own eyes"	Romans 12:16
3:11, 12 "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD [Jehovah]"	Hebrews 12:5, 6 (compare Revelation 3:19)
3:34 "he giveth grace unto the lowly"	James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5
10:12 "love covereth all sins"	1 Peter 4:8 (compare James 5:20)
11:31 "the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth"	1 Peter 4:18
25:6, 7 "better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither"	Luke 14:8–10
25:21, 22 "If thine enemy be hungry"	Romans 12:20
26:11 "As a dog returneth to his vomit"	2 Peter 2:22

C. Reading the Proverbs rightly today

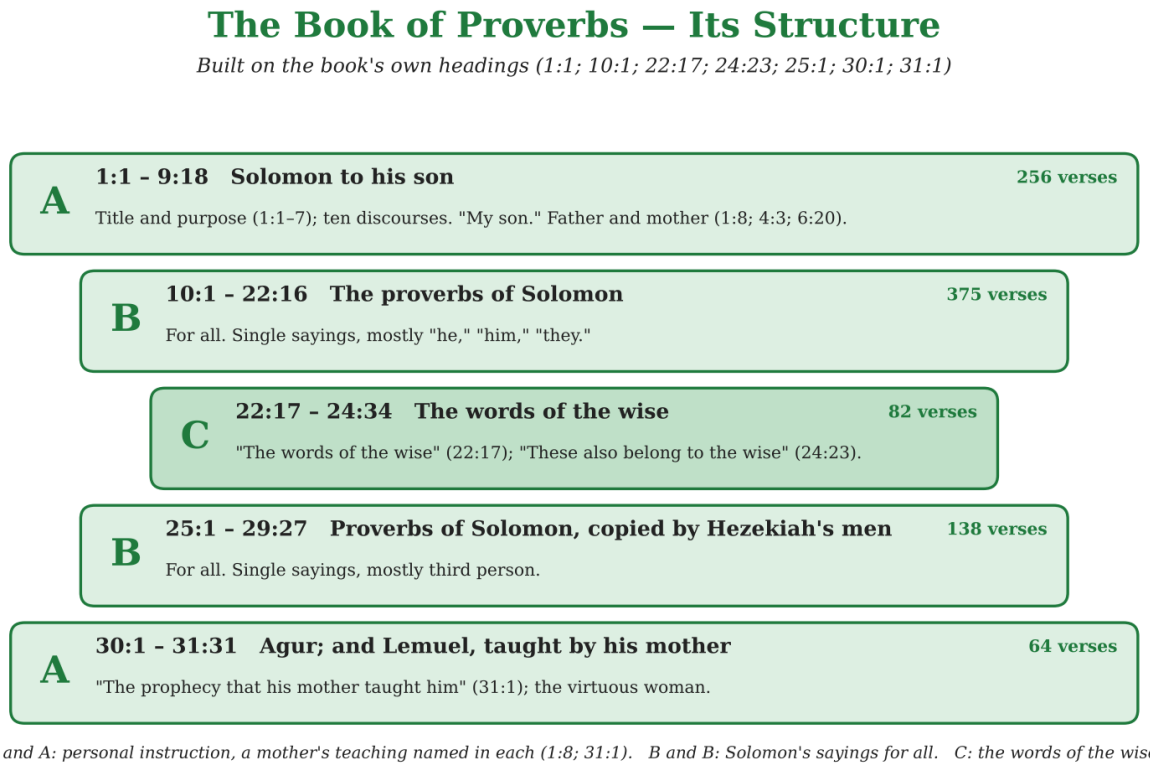
Three things follow, and the commentary will keep them in view:

- **Read the promise in its setting.** Where a proverb promises long life, riches or safety, it is speaking of the blessings of the covenant with Israel, and it states how things go as a rule. It is not a promise that the believer today can claim as a contract.
- **Take the wisdom for what it is.** What a proverb teaches about God, about the heart, about speech, work, money, friendship, anger and pride, is true and always has been.
- **Do not read the grace administration back into the book.** The Proverbs speak of the fear of Jehovah, of keeping the commandment, of reproof and correction. They do not speak of the new birth, of sonship by grace, or of the gift of holy spirit; those were "hid in God" and not yet made known (Eph. 3:5, 9). Where the commentary points forward to the New Testament, it says so plainly.

Chapter 4 — The Structure of the Book

A. The book's own headings

The book marks its own divisions with its own headings, and those headings give it its shape. Set out in order, the five divisions answer one another, the first to the last and the second to the fourth, with the words of the wise at the centre:



The structure of the Book of Proverbs, from its own headings.

- A | 1:1–9:18. Solomon to his son. Personal instruction, "my son." The father's and the mother's teaching (1:8; 4:3; 6:20).
- B | 10:1–22:16. The proverbs of Solomon. For all. Single sayings, mostly third person.
- C | 22:17–24:34. The words of the wise. Personal instruction, "my son."
- *B* | 25:1–29:27. The proverbs of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah. For all. Single sayings, mostly third person.
- *A* | 30:1–31:31. The words of Agur, and of Lemuel. Personal instruction; the mother's teaching (31:1).

The book opens with a father and a mother teaching their son (1:8) and closes with a mother teaching her son, a king (31:1). Between the two stand the two great collections of Solomon's sayings, and at the centre the words of the wise. The fear of Jehovah stands at the beginning, "The fear of the LORD

[Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7), and at the end, "a woman that feareth the LORD [Jehovah], she shall be praised" (31:30).

B. The structure of *The Companion Bible*

The Companion Bible (p. 864) gives a structure of six members, which this study has tested:

- A | 1:1–9:18. "The words of the wise." For Solomon.
- B | C | 10:1–19:19. Proverbs by Solomon. For all.
- D | 19:20–24:34. Proverbs for Solomon. For a prince and a king.
- *B* | *C* | 25:1–26:28. Proverbs by Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah. For all.
- *D* | 27:1–29:27. Proverbs for Solomon. For a prince and a king.
- *A* | 30:1–31:31. The words of Agur and of Lemuel. For Solomon.

It is right in its outer frame (A and *A*) and in seeing the alternation of sayings "for all" and sayings for a son who will rule. It is not followed in two of its boundaries. Its D begins at 19:20, where the text has no heading (Dr. Thirtle himself wrote "or thereabouts"); the text's own boundary is 22:17, where "the words of the wise" are named. And its *D* begins at 27:1, though the heading of 25:1 runs on to the end of chapter 29 and no new heading appears until 30:1. Its reading of "for Solomon" is answered in Chapter 2 above.

C. Division 1 in ten discourses

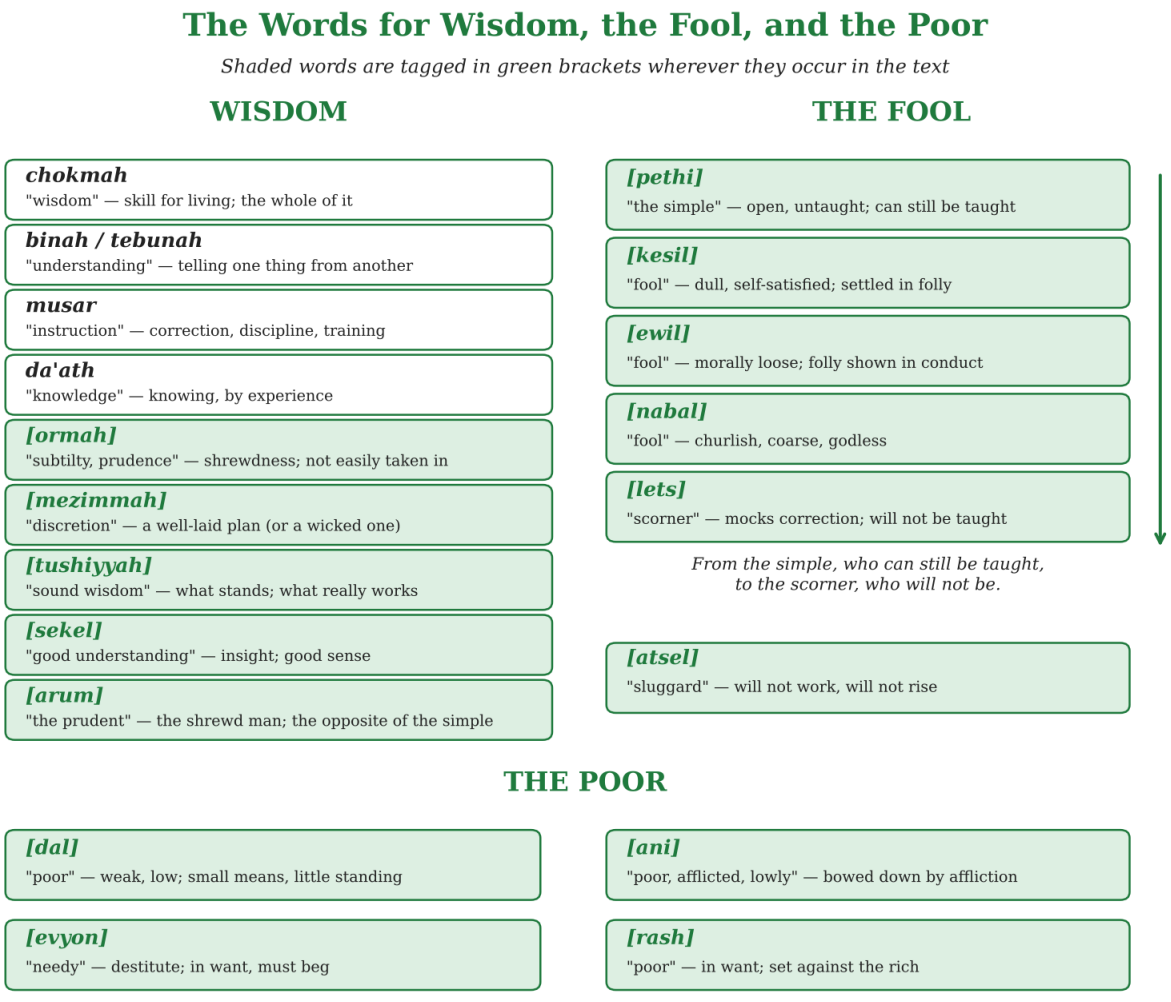
The first division (1:7–9:18, after the title and purpose in 1:1–6) is built of ten discourses that alternate between Wisdom's call and the warning against the strange woman. This structure is from *The Companion Bible*, and it holds:

- A^1 | 1:7–2:15. Wisdom's call.
- B^1 | 2:16–22. The strange woman.
- A^2 | 3:1–4:27. Wisdom's call.
- B^2 | 5:1–23. The strange woman.
- A^3 | 6:1–23. Wisdom's call.
- B^3 | 6:24–35. The strange woman.
- A^4 | 7:1–4. Wisdom's call.
- B^4 | 7:5–27. The strange woman.
- A^5 | 8:1–9:12. Wisdom's call.
- B^5 | 9:13–18. The foolish woman.

Five times the son hears Wisdom; five times he is warned against the woman who would lead him away. At the end, the two women stand side by side, each in her house, each calling to the passer-by with the very same words: "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (9:4, 16). The son must choose.

Chapter 5 — The Words for Wisdom, and the Words for the Fool

As the words for the Word were set out before Psalm 119, so the words for wisdom and for the fool are set out here, once, before the book is read. The Proverbs are built on them. The King James Version renders several different Hebrew words by the same English word, and one Hebrew word by several English words, and so some of the book's finest distinctions are lost in English. This chapter restores them.



The words for wisdom, for the fool, and for the poor.

A. The words for wisdom

- ***chokmah*, "wisdom."** The great word of the book, used of skill of every kind: the skill of the craftsmen who made the Tabernacle (Ex. 28:3; 31:3, 6), the skill of sailors (Ps. 107:27), the skill

of living. Wisdom in the Proverbs is skill for life: knowing what to do, and doing it, in the fear of God. It is not cleverness. A man may be clever and a fool.

- ***binah* and *tebunah*, "understanding."** From the verb *bin*, "to separate, to discern." Understanding is the power to tell one thing from another: good from evil, the true from the false, the wise way from the foolish.
- ***musar*, "instruction."** Correction, discipline, training, the shaping of a son by word and, when needed, by the rod (13:24; 22:15). It is the word used of "the chastening of the LORD [Jehovah]" (3:11). Instruction in the Proverbs is not information; it is correction.
- ***da'ath*, "knowledge."** Knowing, especially knowing by experience. "The knowledge of the holy is understanding" (9:10).
- ***'etsah*, "counsel."** Advice, a plan, the guidance a man is given or gives.

Four more words for wisdom are hidden in the English, because the King James Version renders them in different ways. These are tagged in the text in green brackets:

- **[ormah], "subtilty," "prudence," and once "wisdom."** Shrewdness: the quality of a man who sees through a trick and is not easily taken in. It is the word the book uses when it offers to give "subtilty to the simple" (1:4), and the word Wisdom uses of herself: "I wisdom dwell with prudence [ormah]" (8:12). It can be used in a bad sense too, of craft (Ex. 21:14), as its kin word is used of the serpent, "more subtil than any beast of the field" (Gen. 3:1).
- **[mezimmah], "discretion."** A plan, a purpose, a thought worked out. In a good sense it is discretion, the power to form a sound plan (1:4; 2:11; 3:21; 5:2; 8:12); in a bad sense it is a plot, "wicked devices" (12:2; 14:17).
- **[tushiyyah], "sound wisdom."** That which stands, that which really works; sound, lasting wisdom that brings success (2:7; 3:21; 8:14).
- **[sekel], "good understanding."** Insight, good sense, the wisdom that sees into a matter and acts prudently (3:4; 12:8; 13:15).

One word for the wise man is tagged as well, because he stands opposite the simple:

- **[arum], "the prudent."** The shrewd man, who "looketh well to his going" (14:15), "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself" (22:3).

B. The words for the fool

The Proverbs know several kinds of fool, and they are not the same. Set in order, they form a ladder going down, from the one who can still be taught to the one who will not be:

- **[pethi], "the simple."** From a verb meaning "to be open." The simple man is open to anything: he believes every word (14:15). He is not yet wicked; he is untaught, inexperienced, easily led. He can still be taught, and the book is written for him: "to give subtilty to the simple" (1:4). Wisdom calls to him by name (1:22; 8:5; 9:4).

- **[kesil], "fool."** The commonest word for fool in the book (49 times). The *kesil* is dull and self-satisfied, settled in his folly. He is not stupid in mind; he is closed in heart. "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself" (18:2). Teaching him is hard: "Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words" (23:9).
- **[ewil], "fool."** (Pronounced *eh-VEEL*.) The fool whose folly shows in what he does: morally loose, quick to quarrel, despising correction. "Fools [ewil] despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). His folly is called *'iwweleth*, "foolishness."
- **[nabal], "fool."** Only three times in Proverbs (17:7, 21; 30:22). The churl: coarse, godless, without shame. It is the name of the man who answered David's servants so rudely: "Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Sam. 25:25). "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).
- **[lets], "scorner."** The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught. He is at the bottom of the ladder. "Reprove not a scorner [lets], lest he hate thee" (9:8). When he is punished, it is not he who learns but the simple who see it (19:25; 21:11).

Beside them stands one more:

- **[atsel], "the sluggard."** The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard [atsel]" (6:6).

C. The words for the poor

The King James Version uses "poor" for four different Hebrew words, and "needy," "afflicted" and "lowly" for some of the same. The differences matter, because the Proverbs say different things about each. All four are tagged in the text in green brackets, and the commentary reminds the reader of their meaning each time.

- **[dal], "poor."** Thin, weak, low: the man of small means and little standing, who has no strength to defend himself. It is the word used of Pharaoh's "poor" kine in his dream (Gen. 41:19). "The destruction of the poor [dal] is their poverty" (10:15). The Law forbade favouring him in judgment and forbade oppressing him (Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15).
- **[ani], "poor," "afflicted," "lowly."** Bowed down, pressed down: the man brought low by affliction or oppression. "All the days of the afflicted [ani] are evil" (15:15). The word is close to *'anav*, "humble, meek," and the two are sometimes read one for the other in the Hebrew margin (3:34; 16:19).
- **[evyon], "needy."** The destitute, the one in want who must beg: from a root meaning "to be willing, to long for." "He that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor [evyon]" (14:31). It is used only four times in Proverbs, always beside another word for the poor.
- **[rash], "poor."** The man in want, who lacks: from *rush*, "to be in want, to be impoverished." It is the poor man as the opposite of the rich: "The rich and poor [rash] meet together" (22:2). It is the word the book uses most when it sets poverty and riches side by side, and when a man "becometh poor" by his own doing (10:4).

The book's own nouns for poverty, *resh* ("poverty," 10:15; 6:11) and *machsor* ("want," 6:11; 14:23), are explained where they occur.

D. How the tags are used

The words for the fool, the sluggard, and the four words for the poor ([dal], [ani], [evyon], [rash]) are tagged wherever they occur. Of the words for wisdom, only the four hidden words ([ormah], [mezimmah], [tushiyyah], [sekel]) and the prudent man ([arum]) are tagged. Wherever the King James Version has "wisdom," "understanding," "instruction" or "knowledge" without a tag, the Hebrew word is the usual one (*chokmah*, *binah* or *tebunah*, *musar*, *da'ath*), and the commentary names it where it matters.

The commentary reminds the reader of the meaning of a tagged word each time it occurs, so that the reader need not turn back to this chapter.

Chapter 6 — Hebrew Poetry and the Proverb

A. Lines that answer

Hebrew poetry does not rhyme sounds; it rhymes thoughts. The second line of a verse answers the first, and the answer is the poem. Bishop Robert Lowth set this out in his lectures on Hebrew poetry (1753) and called it *parallelism*. In the Proverbs the answering lines take four main forms.

1. The second line says it again (synonymous). The second line repeats the thought of the first in other words, and so deepens it.

> **Proverbs 16:18** *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

2. The second line says the opposite (antithetic). The second line sets the opposite beside the first, usually joined by "but." Most of chapters 10 to 15 are built this way. The two halves throw light on each other: the wise man is better understood when the fool stands beside him.

> **Proverbs 10:1** *A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.*

3. The second line goes on (synthetic). The second line completes or adds to the thought of the first.

> **Proverbs 15:3** *The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

4. The second line compares (comparative). One thing is set beside another, with "as . . . so" or "better . . . than."

> **Proverbs 25:25** *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*
>
> **Proverbs 15:16** *Better is little with the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] than great treasure and trouble therewith.*

B. Numbered sayings

Some sayings count: "These six things doth the LORD [Jehovah] hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him" (6:16). The first number names some; the second, one more, names the whole, and the last is usually the one that matters most. Agur uses this form again and again in chapter 30 ("three things . . . yea, four," 30:15, 18, 21, 29).

C. Discourses that are built

In chapters 1 to 9, whole discourses are built so that their parts answer one another, the first part matching the last, or the parts alternating, just as the lines of a single proverb do. *The Companion Bible* shows these structures, and this study shows them at the head of each discourse, tested against the text. Where *The Companion Bible* gives none, this study gives one of its own and says so.

D. The alphabet poem

The book ends with a poem in which each of its twenty-two verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from *aleph* to *tav* (31:10–31). The virtuous woman is praised from A to Z.

Chapter 7 — Figures of Speech in the Proverbs

A figure of speech is a word or a sentence put in an unusual form to draw attention to it. The figure is not a lie, and it is not a loss of meaning; it is a gain of emphasis. Dr. Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* names more than two hundred, and the Proverbs use many of them. The commentary names each figure where it occurs. These are the ones that carry the book:

- **Prosopopoeia (Personification).** Things are spoken of as persons. Wisdom is a woman who cries in the streets (1:20), builds a house and sets a table (9:1, 2), and speaks of herself (8:1–36). Folly is a woman too, who sits at her door and calls to the passer-by (9:13–16). The figure makes the choice before the son a choice between two women: the wise and the foolish, the one who leads to life and the one whose "guests are in the depths of hell" (9:18). The great passage of 8:22–31, where Wisdom speaks of being with Jehovah before the world was made, is this figure, and it is explained in its place (Discourse 9) and in Appendix F, Question 3.
- **Simile and Metaphor.** "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (11:22) is a simile (a likeness stated). "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is a fountain of life" (14:27) is a metaphor (a likeness put as a fact).
- **Antithesis.** Opposites set side by side: the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fool, the diligent and the slothful. It is the figure behind every antithetic proverb.
- **Paroemia (Proverb).** The proverb itself is a figure: a well-known saying used to make a point. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (1:17).
- **Erotesis (Question).** A question asked not for an answer but for emphasis. "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (6:27).

- **Metonymy.** One word put for another that is related to it: "the lips" for what is said, "the hand" for what is done, "the heart" for the inner man.
- **Synecdoche.** A part put for the whole: "their feet run to evil" (1:16) means "they run to evil."
- **Paronomasia (Word-play).** Words of like sound set together, which the English cannot always show.

Chapter 8 — How This Study Is Laid Out

A. Part Two, division by division

Part Two presents the book in its five divisions (Chapter 4). It begins with the title and purpose of the book (1:1–6). Each division then opens with its subject, its structure, and its purpose.

B. Each discourse (chapters 1–9 and 30–31)

- **Heading.** Its number, its passage, its subject, and its place in the structure of the division.
- **Introduction.** What it is about, and why it stands where it does.
- **Structure.** How its parts answer one another, tested against the text.
- **The text.** The whole discourse, printed before the commentary.
- **Verse by verse.** Each verse printed again, followed by its commentary: every new word explained, the sense given phrase by phrase, every figure of speech named, cross-references quoted or retold, numbers explained, questions the verse raises answered.
- **Looking back.** A short paragraph tying the discourse to its division.

C. Each chapter (chapters 10–29)

In the collections of single sayings, each chapter is presented as a unit: its heading, a short introduction to its leading subjects, the text of the chapter, and then every proverb, one by one, with the same full treatment.

D. Finding a verse

Every verse is printed with its chapter and verse number, in bold, just before its commentary. *The Proverbs at a Glance*, after the Contents, links to the beginning of every chapter.

Part Two — The Proverbs, Division by Division

The Book as a Whole

A. Its divisions

The book is presented in its five divisions, marked by its own headings (Part One, Chapter 4):

- A | 1:1–9:18. Solomon to his son.
- B | 10:1–22:16. The proverbs of Solomon.
- C | 22:17–24:34. The words of the wise.
- *B* | 25:1–29:27. The proverbs of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah.
- *A* | 30:1–31:31. The words of Agur, and of Lemuel.

B. Its purpose

The book states its own purpose in its first six verses, and those verses are presented next. In a word, it is written to make the simple wise. It takes a young man who knows nothing, who is open to every voice (1:4), and sets before him two ways, two voices, two women, and two ends, until he can tell them apart and choose. It begins with "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]" (1:7) and never leaves it. Everything else in the book is built on that foundation.

The Title and the Purpose (1:1–6)

Place: The opening of the book; the heading of Division 1 and of the whole. **Writer:** Solomon. **Hearer:** the simple, the young man, and the wise (vv. 4, 5).

Introduction

Most books of the Old Testament do not say why they were written. This one does, in its first six verses, before it says anything else. Verse 1 names the book and its writer. Verses 2 to 6 give its purpose, in a chain of short clauses each beginning with "To": to know, to perceive, to receive, to give, to understand. In the middle of the chain (v. 5) the writer turns aside to say that the book is not only for beginners: the wise man will hear it too, and grow wiser.

Structure

This structure is the study's own. *The Companion Bible* gives none for these verses.

- A | 2, 3. To learn: wisdom, instruction, understanding, wise dealing.
- B | 4. For the simple, and the young man.
- *B* | 5. For the wise man, and the man of understanding.
- *A* | 6. To understand: a proverb, its interpretation, the words of the wise.

The first and last members say *what* the book teaches. The two middle members say *whom* it teaches: the beginner (v. 4) and the one already wise (v. 5). No one is too simple for it, and no one is too wise.

The Text

> **1:1** *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*
>
> **1:2** *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;*
>
> **1:3** *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;*
>
> **1:4** *To give subtilty [ormah] to the simple [pethi], to the young man knowledge and discretion [mezimmah].*
>
> **1:5** *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:*
>
> **1:6** *To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*

Verse by verse

> **1:1** *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*

The proverbs. Hebrew *mishle*, the plural of *mashal*, a saying that sets one thing beside another (Part One, Chapter 1). These two words, *Mishle Shelomoh*, are the Hebrew name of the book.

of Solomon. That is, *by* Solomon: he is the writer, as the same words show again at 10:1 and 25:1 (Part One, Chapter 2, and Appendix F, Question 1). His name, *Shelomoh*, comes from *shalom*, "peace." God Himself chose it before he was born: "his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chr. 22:9). His reign was the one long peace of Israel's history, and the wisdom of this book was spoken in it.

the son of David. Not only a family note. Solomon was the son to whom God's promise to David first applied: "I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name" (2 Sam. 7:12, 13). The book comes from the heir of the covenant. And the title "son of David," first borne by Solomon, was borne in its fullness by One who said, "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42).

king of Israel. Of *all* Israel. Solomon reigned before the kingdom was divided (1 Kings 11:42; 12:16–20). The book speaks with a king's authority, and it was written by a king who was preparing a son to reign after him.

> **1:2** *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;*

To know. Hebrew *lada'ath*, from the verb *yada'*, to know by experience. The first purpose is not to know *about* wisdom but to know it, to have it as one's own.

wisdom. Hebrew *chokmah*, skill for living (Part One, Chapter 5). The first of the great words of the book.

and instruction. Hebrew *musar*, correction, discipline, training. Wisdom and instruction are named together because wisdom is not reached without correction. The man who will not be corrected cannot be taught.

to perceive. Hebrew *lehavin*, from *bin*, "to separate, to discern." To see the difference between things.

the words of understanding. Hebrew *imre binah*, "sayings of discernment." The book is made of such sayings. To perceive them is to see what each one is saying, and why.

> **1:3** *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;*

To receive. Hebrew *laqachath*, "to take," as a man takes a gift held out to him. Instruction is offered; it must be taken.

the instruction of wisdom. Here "wisdom" is not *chokmah* but *haskel*, from the verb *sakal*, the root of [sekel]: "wise dealing," the good sense that acts prudently. The phrase means "instruction in wise dealing": training in how to act wisely in the business of life.

justice, and judgment, and equity. Three words for right conduct. *Justice* (*tsedeq*) is righteousness, what is right by God's standard. *Judgment* (*mishpat*) is the right decision, what a judge rules. *Equity* (*mesharim*, plural) is straightness, uprightness, the level and even way. The three appear together again at 2:9, where the son who seeks wisdom is promised that he "shalt understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity." What the book sets out to teach in 1:3, it promises in 2:9. The son who would one day judge Israel needed all three (1 Kings 3:9, 28).

> **1:4** *To give subtilty [ormah] to the simple [pethi], to the young man knowledge and discretion [mezimmah].*

To give. The book does not only offer; it gives. Wisdom is a gift (2:6).

subtilty [ormah]. Shrewdness: the sense that sees through a trick and is not easily taken in (Part One, Chapter 5). "Subtilty" sounds like a fault in modern English, but here it is the very thing the simple man lacks. He needs to learn to look twice.

to the simple [pethi]. The open, untaught one, who believes every word (14:15), who can still be taught. The book is written for him first. The verb behind *pethi* is used in 1:10, "if sinners *entice* thee": the simple man is the one who can be enticed. To give him [ormah] is to close the door that sinners would open.

to the young man. Hebrew *na'ar*, a youth, a lad. Solomon used the same word of himself at the beginning of his reign: "I am but a little child (*na'ar*): I know not how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3:7). The book is for the young, who have their lives before them and their choices still to make.

knowledge. *Da'ath*, knowing by experience.

and discretion [mezimmah]. The power to form a sound plan and keep to it. The young man is full of impulse; discretion gives him a plan. This same discretion will "preserve" him (2:11).

> **1:5** *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:*

A wise man will hear. Or, "Let the wise man hear." The book now turns from the beginner to the one who is already wise. He is not above it. The mark of a wise man is that he still listens: "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser" (9:9). Only the fool thinks he has nothing more to learn: "The way of a fool [ewil] is right in his own eyes" (12:15).

and will increase learning. Hebrew *leqach*, literally "what is received," teaching that has been taken in. The wise man adds to what he has.

and a man of understanding. Hebrew *nabon*, the discerning man, the one who has *binah*.

shall attain unto wise counsels. Hebrew *tachbuloth*, a word found only six times, five of them in Proverbs (1:5; 11:14; 12:5; 20:18; 24:6; and Job 37:12). It comes from *chebel*, a rope, and is akin to *chobel*, the sailor who handles the ropes of a ship, the helmsman (Ezek. 27:8, "pilots"). "Wise counsels" are steerings: the skill to steer a course through life, as a pilot steers a ship. "Where no counsel (*tachbuloth*) is, the people fall" (11:14); "by wise counsel (*tachbuloth*) thou shalt make thy war" (24:6). The man of understanding learns from this book how to steer.

> **1:6** *To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*

To understand a proverb. A proverb must be understood, not merely heard (Part One, Chapter 1).

and the interpretation. Hebrew *melitsah*, a figurative saying, a saying that needs interpreting. It is used once more, of a "taunting proverb" (Hab. 2:6). The reader of Proverbs needs to know how a figure works, and what it means.

the words of the wise. The sayings of wise men. The book holds Solomon's words and, in two sections, the words of other wise men (22:17; 24:23). Here, in the title, the reader is told he will learn to understand both. (*The Companion Bible* holds that these words were meant to stand as the heading of chapters 1 to 9; this study finds that they belong where they stand. See Appendix F, Question 1.)

and their dark sayings. Hebrew *chidoth*, riddles, sayings whose meaning is hidden until it is worked out. It is the word used of the Queen of Sheba's "hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1), and of the "dark sayings of old" which the Psalmist opened in a parable (Ps. 78:2). Solomon answered every one of the Queen's questions: "there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not" (1 Kings 10:3). This book offers the same to its reader.

Looking back

The first six verses tell the reader what he is holding: the sayings of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, written so that the simple may become shrewd, the young man may gain a plan for his life, and the wise may become wiser still. The book does not flatter. It assumes that the reader needs it. The next verse tells him where it all begins.

Division 1 — Solomon to His Son (1:7–9:18)

A. What this division is about

In the first division of the book, a father speaks to his son. Fifteen times he calls him "my son" (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1), and several times he turns to all his sons together, "ye children" (4:1; 5:7; 7:24). He speaks of his own father (4:3, 4) and of the son's mother (1:8; 6:20). This is teaching given at home, from one generation to the next.

The father is Solomon (Part One, Chapter 2). The son is a young man about to go out into the world, and, as Solomon's son, about to be heir to a throne. Before he hears a single proverb of the kind found in chapters 10 to 29, he is given ten discourses which tell him why wisdom matters, where it comes from, what it gives, and what will try to take it from him.

B. Its structure

The ten discourses alternate. Five times Wisdom calls; five times the son is warned against the woman who would lead him away (Part One, Chapter 4):

- A^1 | 1:7–2:15. Wisdom's call.
- B^1 | 2:16–22. The strange woman.
- A^2 | 3:1–4:27. Wisdom's call.
- B^2 | 5:1–23. The strange woman.
- A^3 | 6:1–23. Wisdom's call.
- B^3 | 6:24–35. The strange woman.
- A^4 | 7:1–4. Wisdom's call.
- B^4 | 7:5–27. The strange woman.
- A^5 | 8:1–9:12. Wisdom's call.
- B^5 | 9:13–18. The foolish woman.

The calls of Wisdom grow longer and the warnings grow sharper as the division goes on, until at the end the two women stand side by side. Wisdom has built her house and set her table (9:1–6); Folly sits at the door of hers (9:13–18). Each calls to the passer-by in the same words: "Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither" (9:4, 16). The one leads to life; the other to "the depths of hell" (9:18), the grave.

C. Its purpose

The purpose of the division is to make the son choose. The rest of the book gives him the sayings of wisdom; this division gives him the will to want them. It sets before him the two voices he will hear all his life, the voice of Wisdom and the voice of the one who would draw him away, and it does not let him pretend that he can listen to both.

D. Who is the strange woman?

The woman of the warnings is called by two words: *zarah*, "strange," and *nokriyyah*, "stranger" (2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5). The first means one who is outside, who does not belong; the second, one who is foreign, unknown. The text shows who she is: she has left "the guide of her youth," her husband, and forgotten "the covenant of her God," her marriage vow (2:17); her husband "is not at home, he is gone a long journey" (7:19); she is "the adulteress," "a man's wife" (6:24, 26). She is the woman who belongs to another man: a married woman who sells herself, or the harlot (6:26). She is "strange" because she is outside the son's own marriage. "Drink waters out of thine own cistern" (5:15).

The Companion Bible (Appendix 74) holds that she is always a foreign woman, a heathen, not an Israelite. The words can carry that meaning (Solomon's foreign wives are called *nokriyyoth*, 1 Kings 11:1), and the warning certainly reached that far. But the text of chapters 2, 6 and 7 is plainest when she is read as the adulteress, whoever she is. This study reads her so, and notes the further warning where it applies. (See Appendix F, Question 2.)

She is also more than one woman. Set opposite Wisdom, she becomes Folly in person (9:13). The son who learns to refuse the one learns to refuse the other.

Discourse 1 — Wisdom's Call: Two Voices in the Street (1:7–2:15)

Place: Division 1; member A^1 (Wisdom's call). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1). Within it, Wisdom herself speaks (1:22–33).

Introduction

The first discourse opens with the motto of the whole book (1:7) and then puts two voices in the son's ears. The first is the voice of sinners, whispering in private: "Come with us" (1:11). The second is the voice of Wisdom, crying aloud in public: "Turn you at my reproof" (1:23). The sinners promise plunder and deliver death (1:19). Wisdom promises safety and delivers it (1:33).

Then the father speaks again. If the son will receive his words and search for wisdom as for hidden treasure, he will find the fear of Jehovah (2:1–5), for Jehovah Himself gives wisdom (2:6), and that wisdom will deliver him from the evil man (2:12–15). The discourse begins with the fear of Jehovah (1:7) and comes back to it (2:5).

Structure

- A | 1:7–9. The fear of Jehovah; the father's and mother's teaching.
- B | 1:10–19. The sinners call: "Come with us." Their way takes the life of those who walk in it.
- *B* | 1:20–33. Wisdom calls: "Turn you at my reproof." Her hearer shall dwell safely.
- *A* | 2:1–15. The father's words received; the fear of Jehovah found; the son delivered from the evil man.

The structure of Wisdom's cry (1:20–33) is from *The Companion Bible*:

- a | 20, 21. The call made.
- b | 22. Expostulation with the simple.
- c | 23. Promise to hearers.
- *a* | 24, 25. The call made, and refused.
- *b* | 26–32. Expostulation with the refusers.
- *c* | 33. Promise to hearers.

The father's words in 2:1–15 (this study's own structure) are one long sentence built on "if . . . then":

- d | 2:1–4. If thou wilt receive, incline, cry, seek.
- e | 2:5–8. Then shalt thou understand the fear of Jehovah.
- *e* | 2:9–11. Then shalt thou understand righteousness.
- *d* | 2:12–15. To deliver thee from the evil man.

The Text

1:7 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge: but fools [ewil] despise wisdom and instruction.*

1:8 *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*

1:9 *For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*

1:10 *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*

1:11 *If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause:*

1:12 *Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit:*

1:13 *We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil:*

1:14 *Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse:*

1:15 *My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:*

1:16 *For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.*

1:17 *Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.*

1:18 *And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.*

1:19 *So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.*

1:20 *Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:*

1:21 *She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,*

1:22 *How long, ye simple ones [pethi], will ye love simplicity [pethi]? and the scorners [lets] delight in their scorning, and fools [kesil] hate knowledge?*

1:23 *Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*

1:24 *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;*

1:25 *But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:*

1:26 *I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;*

1:27 *When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.*

1:28 *Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:*

1:29 *For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]:*

1:30 *They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.*

1:31 *Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

1:32 *For the turning away of the simple [pethi] shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools [kesil] shall destroy them.*

1:33 *But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.*

2:1 *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;*

> **2:2** *So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;*
> **2:3** *Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;*
> **2:4** *If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;*
> **2:5** *Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD [Jehovah], and find the knowledge of God.*
> **2:6** *For the LORD [Jehovah] giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*
> **2:7** *He layeth up sound wisdom [tushiyyah] for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*
> **2:8** *He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.*
> **2:9** *Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.*
> **2:10** *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;*
> **2:11** *Discretion [mezimmah] shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:*
> **2:12** *To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;*
> **2:13** *Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;*
> **2:14** *Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;*
> **2:15** *Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths:*

Verse by verse

> **1:7** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge: but fools [ewil] despise wisdom and instruction.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah]. The motto of the book, and of Hebrew wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 12:13). The Hebrew *yir'ath Jehovah* is reverence: the awe of a creature before his Creator, which takes Him seriously, trusts Him, and will not offend Him. It is not terror; "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is to hate evil" (8:13). The phrase is used fourteen times in Proverbs (1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17). The Name used is Jehovah, the Name of the covenant God of Israel: not a vague religious feeling, but reverence for the God who has spoken.

is the beginning. Hebrew *reshith*, the word of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning." It means both the *first* part and the *chief* part, the starting point and the best. The fear of Jehovah is where knowledge begins, and it is also what knowledge is chiefly about. At 9:10 a different word is used, *techillah*, the starting point only: "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of wisdom." Between the two verses the whole division lies, and the son is told twice that he cannot begin anywhere else.

of knowledge. *Da'ath*, knowing. Without the fear of Jehovah a man may gather facts, but he does not know.

but fools [ewil]. The first fool of the book is the *ewil*, the fool whose folly shows in what he does: morally loose, despising correction (Part One, Chapter 5). He is set against the fear of Jehovah. The opposite of reverence is not ignorance but contempt.

despise. Hebrew *buz*, to hold in contempt, to treat as worthless. Esau "despised" his birthright (Gen. 25:34, a kin word).

wisdom and instruction. *Chokmah* and *musar*, the same pair as 1:2. What the book offers (1:2), the fool despises (1:7). The verse is the first antithetic proverb of the book, and it sets the pattern: the fear of Jehovah on one side, the fool on the other.

1:8 *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*

My son. The first of fifteen times in this division. The words are tender and personal. The teaching that follows is not a lecture to a class but a father's words to his own child.

hear. Hebrew *shema'*, the first word of Israel's creed: "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 6:4). To hear in Scripture is to listen and to obey.

the instruction of thy father. *Musar*, correction, training. In Israel it was the father's duty to teach his children: "thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7).

and forsake not. Hebrew *natash*, to leave, to abandon, to let go. A son can hear and then leave what he has heard behind him.

the law of thy mother. Hebrew *torath immeka*. *Torah* is teaching, direction, instruction, the word used of the Law of Moses itself. A mother's teaching is placed beside a father's and given the same name. Timothy had the Scriptures "from a child," taught by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). The book that begins with a mother's law (1:8) ends with one (31:1).

1:9 *For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*

For they shall be an ornament of grace. Hebrew *livyath chen*, "a wreath of grace," a garland worn on the head. The same words come again at 4:9: wisdom "shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee."

unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. Necklaces. When Pharaoh raised Joseph to rule Egypt, he "put a gold chain about his neck" (Gen. 41:42). A son's obedience to his parents' teaching is not a burden around his neck but a decoration, the mark of honour. The neck that wears the chain is the opposite of the "stiff neck" of the rebel (Ex. 32:9).

1:10 *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*

My son, if sinners. Hebrew *chatta'im*, men who are sinners by habit, whose way of life is to miss the mark. Not a man who has sinned once, but men who live by it.

entice thee. Hebrew *pathah*, to persuade, to open the mind of, to seduce. It is the verb from which [pethi], "the simple," comes. The simple man is the one who can be "opened" by anyone. That is why the book has been written: "To give subtilty [ormah] to the simple [pethi]" (1:4).

consent thou not. Hebrew *abah*, to be willing. The answer to enticement is one word: No. The father does not tell the son to argue with sinners, only to refuse them. Joseph, enticed day by day by Potiphar's wife, "hearkened not unto her" (Gen. 39:10).

> **1:11** *If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause:*

If they say, Come with us. The sinners speak, and their words are given in full (vv. 11–14). The son is to know the voice before he hears it. The invitation is friendly: "with us." Its appeal is belonging.

let us lay wait for blood. To lie in ambush to kill. These are robbers who kill for gain, as was common on the roads of the East (Luke 10:30).

let us lurk privily. Hebrew *tsaphan*, to hide, to lie in hiding. Their way is secret.

for the innocent without cause. Hebrew *chinnam*, "for nothing, freely, without reason." The innocent man has done them no harm. The same word is used of the hatred the Lord Jesus Christ suffered: "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25; Ps. 69:4).

> **1:12** *Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit:*

Let us swallow them up alive as the grave. Hebrew *sheol*, the grave, the place and state of the dead. The grave takes men and does not give them back; the robbers boast that they will be as greedy. The words recall Korah and his company, who "went down alive into the pit (*sheol*)" when the earth opened its mouth (Num. 16:30–33).

and whole, as those that go down into the pit. Hebrew *bor*, a pit dug in the ground, and so the grave. "Whole": entire, all at once. The sinners boast of a quick, complete destruction of their victims. They do not know that they are describing their own end (v. 18).

> **1:13** *We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil:*

We shall find all precious substance. Wealth of every kind.

we shall fill our houses with spoil. Plunder. This is the bait: easy riches, quickly gained. It is the law of the king turned upside down (Deut. 17:17).

> **1:14** *Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse:*

Cast in thy lot among us. Share our fortune; throw in with us.

let us all have one purse. One common bag of money. The offer is partnership and equal shares. It sounds like brotherhood. It is the fellowship of thieves.

> **1:15** *My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:*

My son. The father breaks in. He has let the son hear the sinners' voice; now he gives his answer.

walk not thou in the way with them. Do not take one step on their road. Compare Psalm 1:1: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners."

refrain thy foot from their path. Hebrew *mana'*, hold back, withhold. Keep your foot off it altogether.

> **1:16** *For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.*

For their feet run to evil. "Their feet" is put for the men themselves, by the figure *Synecdoche* (the part for the whole): they run to evil. Hebrew *ra'*, harm, mischief.

and make haste to shed blood. They are eager for it. Isaiah used almost the same words of Israel in his day: "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood" (Isa. 59:7), and Paul brought both together in Romans 3:15 to show that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).

> **1:17** *Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.*

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. A proverb within the proverbs, the figure *Paroemia*. Literally: "Surely for nothing (*chinnam*) is the net spread in the eyes of every owner of a wing." A bird that sees the net being spread has fair warning; a net set in plain view ought to catch nothing. The word "in vain," *chinnam*, is the same word as "without cause" in verse 11. The sinners lie in wait for the innocent *chinnam*, "for nothing"; and the net is spread *chinnam*, "for nothing." The play on the word points to verse 18.

> **1:18** *And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.*

And they lay wait for their own blood. Here is the point. The robbers think they are spreading a net for others. In truth they are spreading it for themselves, and they walk into it with their eyes open. A bird would have more sense. The very words of their boast in verse 11 ("let us lay wait for blood; let us lurk privily") are turned back on them: they lie in wait for *their own* blood, they lurk for *their own* lives. Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it himself (Esth. 7:10).

they lurk privily for their own lives. Hebrew *nephesh*, soul, life.

> **1:19** *So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.*

So are the ways of every one. The father draws the lesson. Not only robbers on the road, but everyone who lives this way.

that is greedy of gain. Hebrew *botsea' betsa'*, "cutting off a cut": taking a share that is not one's own, gain gotten by violence or fraud.

which taketh away the life of the owners thereof. The gain takes the life of the man who owns it. "Owners" is *ba'al*, the same word as "owner of a wing" in verse 17. The bird is the owner of its wing; the robber is the owner of his gain; and the gain owns him in the end. Achan took the gold and lost his life (Josh. 7:21, 25). Ahab took Naboth's vineyard, and the dogs licked his blood (1 Kings 21:19; 22:38). Judas took the thirty pieces of silver, and "falling headlong, he burst asunder" (Acts 1:18).

> **1:20** *Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:*

Wisdom crieth without. Now the second voice. The word "Wisdom" here is not the usual *chokmah* but the plural, *chokmoth*, "Wisdoms." The plural is used of the whole fullness of wisdom, wisdom in its

greatness (it is used again at 9:1, where Wisdom builds her house). Wisdom is pictured as a woman, by the figure *Prosopopoeia* (Personification), as she will be through the rest of the division. "Crieth" is *ranan*, to cry aloud, to ring out, a word often used of a shout of joy. "Without": outdoors, in public.

she uttereth her voice in the streets. Hebrew *rechovoth*, the broad places, the open squares of a town. The sinners whispered in hiding; Wisdom shouts in the open. Wisdom has nothing to hide. "I spake openly to the world," the Lord Jesus Christ said, "and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20).

> **1:21** *She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,*

She crieth in the chief place of concourse. Literally, "at the head of the noisy places," where the crowds are thickest and the noise is loudest. Wisdom makes herself heard over the din.

in the openings of the gates. The city gate was where the elders sat, where judgment was given and business done (Ruth 4:1, 2; Deut. 21:19). Wisdom goes where decisions are made.

in the city she uttereth her words, saying. Her speech follows, to the end of the chapter.

> **1:22** *How long, ye simple ones [pethi], will ye love simplicity [pethi]? and the scorners [lets] delight in their scorning, and fools [kesil] hate knowledge?*

How long. Hebrew *ad-mathay*, a cry of grief and impatience. Wisdom has been calling for some time already.

ye simple ones [pethi]. The open, untaught ones, who can still be taught. Wisdom speaks to them first.

will ye love simplicity [pethi]? The trouble with the simple is not that they lack knowledge but that they are content without it. They love being open to everything and committed to nothing.

and the scorners [lets]. The mockers, who laugh at correction and will not be taught: the bottom of the ladder of fools (Part One, Chapter 5).

delight in their scorning. They enjoy it. Mockery has become their pleasure.

and fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools, settled in their folly.

hate knowledge? Three kinds of men, and three steps down: the simple *love* simplicity, the scorners *delight* in scorning, the fools *hate* knowledge. Contentment hardens into pleasure, and pleasure into hatred. The verse is a picture of where the son will go if he does not turn.

> **1:23** *Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*

Turn you at my reproof. Hebrew *shuv*, to turn back, to return, the great word of repentance in the Old Testament. "Reproof" is *tokachath*, correction with reasons given, a rebuke that shows a man where he is wrong. Wisdom does not flatter. She corrects, and she calls men to turn.

behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you. Hebrew *abbi'ah*, "I will cause to bubble out," from *naba'*, to gush up like a spring. It is used of wisdom again in 18:4: "the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing (*nobea'*) brook." "My spirit" (*ruach*) is Wisdom's own mind and thoughts, which she will pour out freely to those who turn. This is not the promise of the gift of holy spirit, which was not given until the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 33); the next line explains what Wisdom means.

I will make known my words unto you. This is the pouring out: Wisdom will make her words known. Spirit and words are set side by side; her spirit is in her words. As the Lord Jesus Christ said, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

> **1:24** *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;*

Because I have called, and ye refused. Wisdom now speaks of those who would not turn. Her tone changes from invitation to warning.

I have stretched out my hand. The gesture of one who calls another to come near. Jehovah said the same of Israel: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21).

and no man regarded. Hebrew *qashab*, to pay attention, to prick up the ears. No one listened.

> **1:25** *But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:*

But ye have set at nought. Hebrew *para'*, to let go, to let loose, to neglect. They let her counsel drop.

all my counsel. *'Etsah*, advice, a plan.

and would none of my reproof. They were not willing to have it. *Tokachath*, correction (v. 23).

> **1:26** *I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;*

I also will laugh at your calamity. Hebrew *eyd*, disaster, ruin. The words are strong, and must be understood. Wisdom is pictured as a person, by the figure *Prosopopoeia*, and what she "does" is what happens to those who refuse her. When ruin comes on the man who mocked at wisdom, wisdom is proved right and he is proved a fool; there is a terrible fitness in it. The scorner laughed at wisdom; now wisdom laughs at him. So "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" at the kings who set themselves against Jehovah and His anointed (Ps. 2:4).

I will mock when your fear cometh. "Your fear" is put for the thing they feared, the calamity itself, by the figure *Metonymy*.

> **1:27** *When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.*

When your fear cometh as desolation. Hebrew *sho'ah*, a storm, a ruinous crash. *The Companion Bible* renders it "tempest."

and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. Hebrew *suphah*, a storm-wind that sweeps everything away. The calamity comes suddenly and from outside, and nothing can stand against it.

when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Distress (*tsarah*, narrowness, being hemmed in) and anguish (*tsuqah*, pressure). The two words sound alike in Hebrew: the figure *Paronomasia*. There is no room left to move.

> **1:28** *Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:*

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer. Wisdom now speaks *of* them, not *to* them: "they," not "ye." They have put themselves beyond her reach. When the storm comes, they will want wisdom at last, but it will be too late to learn what they refused to learn when it was offered.

they shall seek me early. Hebrew *shachar*, to seek diligently, eagerly, as one rises at dawn to look for something. It is the same word Wisdom uses in her promise: "those that seek me early shall find me" (8:17). The difference is the time. Those who seek her early in life find her; those who seek her only when disaster strikes do not.

but they shall not find me. Israel refused to go up into the land when Jehovah told them to, and then tried to go up when He had told them not to: "and the LORD [Jehovah] would not hearken to your voice" (Deut. 1:45; Num. 14:40–45). Esau "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:17). Saul inquired of Jehovah, "and the LORD [Jehovah] answered him not" (1 Sam. 28:6).

> **1:29** *For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]:*

For that they hated knowledge. The reason is given. They did not lack knowledge; they hated it (v. 22).

and did not choose the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]. The fear of Jehovah is a choice. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15). They chose otherwise.

> **1:30** *They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.*

They would none of my counsel. The words of verse 25 are said again, for emphasis.

they despised all my reproof. Hebrew *na'ats*, to spurn, to treat with scorn. Not one word of her correction was accepted.

> **1:31** *Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way. The punishment is the harvest of the sowing. Wisdom does not need to invent a penalty; the way they chose bears its own fruit, and they must eat it. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

and be filled with their own devices. Hebrew *mo'etsoth*, counsels, plans. They would not have Wisdom's counsel (v. 30); now they will have their own, until they are sick of it. Israel lusted for flesh in the wilderness and was given it "until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you" (Num. 11:20; Ps. 106:15).

> **1:32** *For the turning away of the simple [pethi] shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools [kesil] shall destroy them.*

For the turning away. Hebrew *meshuvah*, a turning back, a backsliding. It is from *shuv*, the same verb as "Turn you" in verse 23. Wisdom called them to turn *to* her; they turned *away*. The same verb, in opposite directions.

of the simple [pethi]. The open, untaught ones. Their openness, left to itself, is their ruin.

shall slay them. It is fatal.

and the prosperity of fools [kesil]. Hebrew *shalvah*, ease, quiet, careless security. The dull fool's comfort lulls him to sleep. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city" (10:15), and he thinks himself safe. The rich fool of the Lord's parable said, "Soul, take thine ease"; and God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:19, 20).

shall destroy them. The simple are slain by their wandering, the fools by their ease.

> **1:33** *But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.*

But whoso hearkeneth unto me. Wisdom ends with a promise, as she began (v. 23). "Hearkeneth" is *shama'*, to hear and obey.

shall dwell safely. Hebrew *betach*, in security, in confidence. The word is used of Israel dwelling "in safety" in the land under God's protection (Lev. 25:18, 19; Deut. 33:28).

and shall be quiet from fear of evil. At ease, not afraid of disaster. The fools had a false ease (*shalvah*, v. 32), and destruction came on them like a whirlwind (v. 27). The man who listens to Wisdom has a true quiet, and does not fear. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD [Jehovah]" (Ps. 112:7).

> **2:1** *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;*

My son. The father speaks again, after Wisdom's cry. The sentence that begins here runs on to the end of verse 15.

if thou wilt receive my words. *Laqach*, to take, to accept, as in 1:3. "Words" is *imrah*, sayings.

and hide my commandments with thee. Hebrew *tsaphan*, to hide, to treasure up, to store away safely. The sinners "hid" themselves to ambush the innocent (1:11, 18: the same word, "lurk privily"). The son is to hide something else: his father's commandments. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11, the same verb).

> **2:2** *So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;*

So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom. Hebrew *qashab*, to attend, to listen closely, the word used of those who did *not* listen in 1:24. The son is to do what the refusers would not.

and apply thine heart to understanding. Hebrew *natah*, to stretch out, to bend toward. The ear listens; the heart reaches out. "Understanding" is *tebunah*, discernment.

> **2:3** *Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;*

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge. Literally, "if thou callest to understanding (*binah*)." Wisdom cried to the son in the streets (1:20, 21); now the son is to cry back to her. The calling goes both ways.

and liftest up thy voice for understanding. *Tebunah* again. The son is to want wisdom aloud, as Solomon did when he asked for it at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:9).

> **2:4** *If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;*

If thou seekest her as silver. As a man seeks silver: eagerly, without giving up.

and searchest for her as for hid treasures. Hebrew *chaphas*, to dig, to search out; *matmonim*, treasures hidden in the ground. The picture is of mining, as in Job 28:1–12, which asks the same question: "But where shall wisdom be found?" The answer here is that it is found by the one who digs for it as men dig for silver. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field" (Matt. 13:44).

> **2:5** *Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD [Jehovah], and find the knowledge of God.*

Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]. The first "then." After four "ifs" (vv. 1–4) comes the reward, and it is the very thing the book began with (1:7). The son who searches for wisdom finds that its beginning was the fear of Jehovah.

and find the knowledge of God. Hebrew *da'ath Elohim*. Not knowledge *about* God only, but knowing Him. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD [Jehovah]" (Jer. 9:24).

> **2:6** *For the LORD [Jehovah] giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

For the LORD [Jehovah] giveth wisdom. Here is the reason the search succeeds. Wisdom is not finally dug out by human effort; it is given by God. The son must seek (vv. 1–4), but Jehovah gives. Both are true. Solomon himself was the proof: he asked, and "God gave Solomon wisdom" (1 Kings 4:29). "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally" (Jas. 1:5).

out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. From what God says. Wisdom comes from God's own words, and so from the Scriptures He has given.

> **2:7** *He layeth up sound wisdom [tushiyyah] for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*

He layeth up. Hebrew *tsaphan*, the same word as "hide" in verse 1. The son hides his father's commandments; God hides sound wisdom for the righteous. The son treasures up the word; God treasures up wisdom for him.

sound wisdom [tushiyyah]. That which stands, that which really works: sound, lasting wisdom that brings success (Part One, Chapter 5). *The Companion Bible* notes that the word may be rendered "that which is," "stability."

for the righteous. Wisdom is stored up for those who are right with God; the wicked cannot find it.

he is a buckler. Hebrew *magen*, a shield. God does not only give wisdom; He protects the one who walks in it.

to them that walk uprightly. Hebrew *tom*, integrity, wholeness, completeness: a life all of one piece.

2:8 *He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.*

He keepeth the paths of judgment. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard, as a watchman guards. He guards the paths of right judgment, so that those who walk in them are safe.

and preserveth the way of his saints. Hebrew *shamar*, to keep, to watch over. "Saints" is *chasidim*, the godly, those who show *chesed*, loyal kindness, to God and man. "The LORD [Jehovah] preserveth the faithful" (Ps. 31:23).

2:9 *Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.*

Then shalt thou understand. The second "then." The first was the fear of Jehovah (v. 5); the second is right conduct.

righteousness, and judgment, and equity. The same three words as 1:3, in the same order: *tsedeq*, *mishpat*, *mesharim*. What the book set out to teach (1:3), the son now understands.

yea, every good path. Hebrew *ma'gal*, a track, a wheel-rut, a path worn smooth by use. Every right way of life.

2:10 *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;*

When wisdom entereth into thine heart. Wisdom is no longer outside, calling in the streets (1:20); she has come in.

and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul. Hebrew *na'em*, pleasant, delightful. The fool hates knowledge (1:22); the son who has searched for it finds it a delight. What was once an effort becomes a pleasure.

2:11 *Discretion [mezimmah] shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:*

Discretion [mezimmah] shall preserve thee. The power to form a sound plan (1:4) now keeps watch over the son. "Preserve" is *shamar*, to watch, to guard.

understanding shall keep thee. *Tebunah*, discernment. "Keep" is *natsar*, to guard. The same two verbs were used of God in verse 8: He "keepeth" and "preserveth." God guards the way of His saints, and He does it by the wisdom and discernment He gives them.

2:12 *To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;*

To deliver thee. Hebrew *natsal*, to snatch away, to rescue. Here is the purpose of the guard.

from the way of the evil man. Hebrew *ra'*, evil, harmful. The sinners of 1:10–19 return in another form.

from the man that speaketh froward things. Hebrew *tahpukoth*, perversities, things turned upside down. The evil man twists what is straight. His words make evil sound good and good sound foolish.

> **2:13** *Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;*

Who leave the paths of uprightness. Hebrew *yosher*, straightness. They once knew the right way, and they have left it.

to walk in the ways of darkness. They prefer the dark. "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

> **2:14** *Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;*

Who rejoice to do evil. They are glad to do it. Sin has become their pleasure, as scorning had become the scorners' (1:22).

and delight in the frowardness of the wicked. *Tahpukoth* again (v. 12), the perversities. They enjoy evil in others too. Paul writes the same of the heathen: they "not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32).

> **2:15** *Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths:*

Whose ways are crooked. Hebrew *'iqqesh*, twisted, bent.

and they froward in their paths. Hebrew *luz*, to turn aside, to be devious. Their road twists, and they twist with it. The father ends this discourse where the son's danger lies: among men whose paths are not straight. The next discourse names the second danger.

Looking back

The first discourse has set the scene for the whole division. There are two voices: the sinners', secret and flattering, offering gain; and Wisdom's, open and plain, offering correction. There are two ends: the sinners' gain takes their own lives (1:19), and those who refuse Wisdom are destroyed by their own choice (1:31, 32); but whoever hears her dwells in safety (1:33). And there is one way to wisdom: to receive the father's words, to seek wisdom like buried silver, and to find that Jehovah gives it, and with it the fear of Himself. The discourse began with "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7) and came round to "Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]" (2:5).

Discourse 2 — The Strange Woman (2:16–22)

Place: Division 1; member B[1] (the strange woman). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son; these verses continue the sentence begun in 2:1.

Introduction

The first warning against the strange woman is short, and it is joined to what goes before. Wisdom, the father has said, will deliver the son "from the way of the evil man" (2:12); now he adds, "To deliver thee from the strange woman" (2:16). The two dangers of a young man's life are named side by side: the men who would draw him into violence for gain, and the woman who would draw him into adultery. The first discourse dealt with the one; this short discourse names the other, and the next four warnings will deal with her at length.

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- a | 16, 17. The strange woman: her flattering words; her broken covenant.
- b | 18, 19. Her end: her house sinks down to death; none return.
- *a* | 20. The way of good men.
- *b* | 21, 22. Their end: the upright dwell in the land; the wicked are rooted out.

The Text

> **2:16** *To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;*
> **2:17** *Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.*
> **2:18** *For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.*
> **2:19** *None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.*
> **2:20** *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.*
> **2:21** *For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.*
> **2:22** *But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.*

Verse by verse

> **2:16** *To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;*

To deliver thee. Hebrew *natsal*, to snatch away, to rescue, as in 2:12. The same wisdom that rescues the son from the evil man rescues him from the strange woman.

from the strange woman. Hebrew *ishshah zarah*. *Zar* means one who is outside, who does not belong: a stranger to the family, to the household, to the marriage. She is the woman who belongs to another man, or to no man (Division 1, D).

even from the stranger. Hebrew *nokriyyah*, a foreign woman, one unknown. The two words are used together of her again at 5:20 and 7:5. Whether she was an Israelite or a foreigner, she was a stranger to the son's own home.

which flattereth with her words. Hebrew *chalaq*, to make smooth, slippery. Her sayings (*imrah*) are smooth. The sinners of chapter 1 enticed with promises of gain; she entices with flattery. Her weapon is her tongue, as the next warnings show (5:3; 6:24; 7:5, 21).

> **2:17** *Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.*

Which forsaketh the guide of her youth. Hebrew *alluph*, a close companion, an intimate friend. It is used of the husband to whom a girl was married in her youth: "My father, thou art the guide (*alluph*) of my youth" (Jer. 3:4). She has left her husband.

and forgetteth the covenant of her God. Her marriage was a covenant made before God, and God was its witness: "the LORD [Jehovah] hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (Mal. 2:14). She has forgotten it. The Hebrew *Eloheha* could be read "her gods," and *The Companion Bible* takes it so, of a heathen woman's god. But the marriage covenant of Malachi 2:14, joined here to "the guide of her youth," makes the plain sense the better one: she has broken the vow she made before God. (See Appendix F, Question 2.)

> **2:18** *For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.*

For her house inclineth unto death. Hebrew *shachah*, to sink down, to bow down. Her house is built on a slope that goes down to death. To enter it is to begin to slide.

and her paths unto the dead. Hebrew *rephaim*, the dead, those who have gone down to the grave. The same word is used in 9:18 and 21:16, and of the dead elsewhere: "Shall the dead (*rephaim*) arise and praise thee?" (Ps. 88:10); "they are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased (*rephaim*), they shall not rise" (Isa. 26:14). Her paths lead to the company of the dead.

> **2:19** *None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.*

None that go unto her return again. The way to her house is easy; the way back is not. The words state the rule: the man who goes in to her is caught, and he does not come out as he went in. David sinned with Bathsheba and repented (Ps. 51), but the sword never departed from his house (2 Sam. 12:10). The way of the adulteress leads down, and its end is the grave, from which no man returns until the resurrection.

neither take they hold of the paths of life. Hebrew *nasag*, to reach, to overtake, to attain. Once on her road, they do not reach the road of life again.

> **2:20** *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.*

That thou mayest walk in the way of good men. The sentence that began in 2:1 reaches its goal. The son who receives his father's words is delivered from the evil man and the strange woman, so that he may walk with good men.

and keep the paths of the righteous. Hebrew *shamar*, to keep, to watch, to hold to.

> **2:21** *For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.*

For the upright shall dwell in the land. Hebrew *erets*, here the land of Israel. Dwelling in the land was the covenant blessing for obedience under the Law (Deut. 4:40; 28:11). "The meek shall inherit the earth (*erets*)" (Ps. 37:11), and the Lord Jesus Christ repeated it (Matt. 5:5).

and the perfect shall remain in it. Hebrew *tamim*, whole, complete, those of integrity; *yathar*, to be left, to remain. When others are removed, they will still be there.

> **2:22** *But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.*

But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth. From the land. Being cut off from the land was the curse of the covenant: "ye shall be plucked from off the land" (Deut. 28:63).

and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it. Hebrew *bogedim*, the treacherous, the faithless, those who break faith. It is the very word Malachi uses of the man who "dealt treacherously" with the wife of his youth (Mal. 2:14–16). The strange woman broke faith with her husband and her God (v. 17); the treacherous are torn out of the land. "Rooted out" is *nasach*, to tear away, to pull up by the roots.

Looking back

The first warning is brief and complete. The strange woman is named, her flattery is noted, her faithlessness is exposed, and her end is shown: her house slides down to death. Against her the father sets the way of good men and its end: the land, and life in it. The son has now heard of both dangers, the violent man and the faithless woman, and of the wisdom that delivers from both.

Discourse 3 — Wisdom's Call: The Father's Teaching (3:1–4:27)

Place: Division 1; member A^2 (Wisdom's call). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son (3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20) and to all his sons (4:1). Within it, Solomon repeats what his own father taught him (4:4–9).

Introduction

This is the longest of the ten discourses, and the richest in teaching. It is made of six short addresses, each opening with a call to hear: "My son" (3:1), "My son" (3:11), "My son" (3:21), "Hear, ye children" (4:1), "Hear, O my son" (4:10), "My son" (4:20).

The first three addresses (chapter 3) speak of the son's dealings with God and man: trust Jehovah, honour Him, accept His correction; prize wisdom above riches; deal rightly with your neighbour. The second three (chapter 4) go deeper into the father's own heart. He tells his sons how his own father taught him, and he passes on the same charge: "Get wisdom" (4:5). He sets the path of the just against the way of the wicked, and he ends by telling the son to guard his heart, his mouth, his eyes and his feet.

The two chapters are built to answer one another, and some of the same words come back in the same places (3:3 and 4:9; 3:21 and 4:21).

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- C | 3:1–10. "My son": keep my commandments; trust and honour Jehovah. Length of days and plenty.
- D | 3:11–20. "My son": receive Jehovah's correction; wisdom's worth; by wisdom Jehovah made the world.
- E | 3:21–35. "My son": let them not depart from thine eyes; walk safely; deal rightly with thy neighbour.
- *C* | 4:1–9. "Hear, ye children": my father's teaching: get wisdom. Honour and a crown.
- *D* | 4:10–19. "Hear, O my son": the way of wisdom, and the way of the wicked.
- *E* | 4:20–27. "My son": let them not depart from thine eyes; keep thy heart; turn not aside.

In *C* and *C* the father speaks of his law and its reward, and the son's neck and head are adorned (3:3; 4:9). In *D* and *D* wisdom's ways are set before him (3:17; 4:11). In *E* and *E* the same words open each address, "let them not depart from thine eyes" (3:21; 4:21), and the son's feet are kept from stumbling (3:23, 26; 4:26, 27).

The structure of the last five verses (4:23–27) is from *The Companion Bible*:

- d | 23. Positive. The heart.
- e | 24. Negative. The mouth.
- *d* | 25. Positive. The eyes.
- *e* | 26, 27. The feet.

The Text

> **3:1** *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:*
> **3:2** *For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.*
> **3:3** *Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:*
> **3:4** *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding [sekel] in the sight of God and man.*
> **3:5** *Trust in the LORD [Jehovah] with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*
> **3:6** *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*
> **3:7** *Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD [Jehovah], and depart from evil.*
> **3:8** *It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*
> **3:9** *Honour the LORD [Jehovah] with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:*
> **3:10** *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*
> **3:11** *My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD [Jehovah]; neither be weary of his correction:*
> **3:12** *For whom the LORD [Jehovah] loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*
> **3:13** *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.*
> **3:14** *For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.*
> **3:15** *She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.*
> **3:16** *Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.*
> **3:17** *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*
> **3:18** *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.*
> **3:19** *The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.*
> **3:20** *By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.*
> **3:21** *My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom [tushiyyah] and discretion [mezimmah]:*
> **3:22** *So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.*
> **3:23** *Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.*
> **3:24** *When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.*

3:25 *Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.*

3:26 *For the LORD [Jehovah] shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.*

3:27 *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.*

3:28 *Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.*

3:29 *Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.*

3:30 *Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.*

3:31 *Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.*

3:32 *For the froward is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but his secret is with the righteous.*

3:33 *The curse of the LORD [Jehovah] is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.*

3:34 *Surely he scorneth the scorners [lets]: but he giveth grace unto the lowly [ani].*

3:35 *The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools [kesil].*

4:1 *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.*

4:2 *For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.*

4:3 *For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.*

4:4 *He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.*

4:5 *Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.*

4:6 *Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.*

4:7 *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*

4:8 *Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.*

4:9 *She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

4:10 *Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.*

4:11 *I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.*

4:12 *When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.*

4:13 *Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.*

4:14 *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.*

4:15 *Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

4:16 *For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.*

4:17 *For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.*

4:18 *But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

4:19 *The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.*

> **4:20** *My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.*
> **4:21** *Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.*
> **4:22** *For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.*
> **4:23** *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*
> **4:24** *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.*
> **4:25** *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.*
> **4:26** *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.*
> **4:27** *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.*

Verse by verse

> **3:1** *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:*

My son, forget not my law. *Torah*, teaching, direction. A father's law, given in love.

but let thine heart keep my commandments. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard. The commandments are to be kept not in a book but in the heart.

> **3:2** *For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.*

For length of days. Hebrew *orek yamim*, long days.

and long life. Literally "years of life": years worth living.

and peace. Hebrew *shalom*, wholeness, well-being. These are the blessings of the covenant under the Law: "Honour thy father and thy mother . . . that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD [Jehovah] thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 5:16; compare Deut. 6:2). Paul cites the fifth commandment as "the first commandment with promise" (Eph. 6:2, 3).

shall they add to thee. The commandments are not a burden laid on the son but a gift added to him.

> **3:3** *Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:*

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee. Hebrew *chesed* and *emeth*. *Chesed* is loyal love, kindness that keeps faith; *emeth* is truth, faithfulness, reliability. The two are often joined in Scripture as the character of God Himself: "plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ex. 34:6); "mercy and truth are met together" (Ps. 85:10). The son is to be like his God.

bind them about thy neck. Wear them where they can be seen (1:9).

write them upon the table of thine heart. Hebrew *luach*, a tablet, the word used of the tables of stone on which the Law was written (Ex. 24:12; 31:18). What God wrote on stone, the son is to write on his heart. The same picture is used by Jeremiah of the new covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33), and by Paul of the believers at Corinth, "written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3).

3:4 *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding [sekel] in the sight of God and man.*

So shalt thou find favour. Hebrew *chen*, grace, goodwill.

and good understanding [sekel]. Insight, good sense; and the good name that goes with it (Part One, Chapter 5).

in the sight of God and man. Both God and men will look on him with favour. It was said of the child Samuel that he "grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD [Jehovah], and also with men" (1 Sam. 2:26), and of the child Jesus that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

3:5 *Trust in the LORD [Jehovah] with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

Trust in the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *batach*, to trust, to rely on, to feel safe in leaning on. It is the trust of a man who puts his whole weight on something he knows will hold. That confidence rests on what Jehovah has said and done; it is not a leap in the dark.

with all thine heart. Not with part of it, keeping something back.

and lean not unto thine own understanding. Hebrew *sha'an*, to lean upon, to support oneself on. A man leans on what he trusts. King Asa was rebuked because he "relied (*sha'an*) on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD [Jehovah] thy God" (2 Chr. 16:7). The son is not to lean on his own *binah*, his own discernment, as if it were enough. This is not a call to stop thinking. It is a call to put God's word above one's own opinion.

3:6 *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

In all thy ways acknowledge him. Hebrew *yada'*, to know. "In all thy ways know Him": have Him in mind in everything, the small things as well as the great.

and he shall direct thy paths. Hebrew *yashar*, to make straight, to make level and smooth. He will make the road straight before you. "Prepare ye the way of the LORD [Jehovah], make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:3).

3:7 *Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD [Jehovah], and depart from evil.*

Be not wise in thine own eyes. The second warning against self-reliance. Paul repeats it: "Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12:16); and Isaiah, "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes" (Isa. 5:21). The fool is the one who is right in his own eyes (12:15).

fear the LORD [Jehovah], and depart from evil. The same pair is used of Job: "one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah], that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28).

3:8 *It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*

It shall be health. Hebrew *riph'uth*, healing, medicine.

to thy navel. Hebrew *shor*, the navel, the centre of the body, put for the whole inner body by the figure *Synecdoche*. The Greek Old Testament reads "to thy body."

and marrow to thy bones. Hebrew *shiqquy*, moisture, refreshment, drink. Dry bones are a picture of sorrow and sickness (17:22; Ps. 32:3). The fear of Jehovah refreshes the whole man, body as well as mind: "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones" (14:30).

> **3:9** *Honour the LORD [Jehovah] with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:*

Honour the LORD [Jehovah] with thy substance. Hebrew *kabed*, to make heavy, to give weight to, to honour. *Hon*, wealth.

and with the firstfruits of all thine increase. Hebrew *reshith*, the word translated "beginning" in 1:7: the first and best part. Under the Law, Israel brought the first of the harvest to Jehovah (Ex. 23:19; Deut. 26:1–11), acknowledging that the land and all it produced were His gift. The principle, that God is honoured first and not last, holds for every believer, though the church gives under grace and not under the Law: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

> **3:10** *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

So shall thy barns be filled with plenty. Hebrew *asamim*, storehouses. The word is used only once more, in the covenant blessing: "The LORD [Jehovah] shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses (*asamim*)" (Deut. 28:8).

and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. The wine-vats will overflow with the new juice of the grapes. This is the blessing of the covenant with Israel (Deut. 28:8–12; Mal. 3:10), the rule by which Jehovah dealt with His people in the land.

> **3:11** *My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD [Jehovah]; neither be weary of his correction:*

My son. The second address.

despise not the chastening of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *ma'as*, to reject, to refuse. "Chastening" is *musar*, the same word as "instruction" (1:2): correction, discipline, training. God's instruction comes in hard ways as well as easy ones.

neither be weary of his correction. Hebrew *quts*, to loathe, to feel sick of, to be vexed with. "Correction" is *tokachath*, reproof (1:23). Do not resent it.

> **3:12** *For whom the LORD [Jehovah] loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*

For whom the LORD [Jehovah] loveth he correcteth. Hebrew *yakach*, to reprove, to set right. Correction is a sign of love, not of anger. A father does not correct a stranger's son.

even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. Hebrew *ratsah*, to take pleasure in. "As a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD [Jehovah] thy God chasteneth thee" (Deut. 8:5).

These two verses are quoted in Hebrews 12:5, 6 from the Greek Old Testament, which reads the second line "and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." The Greek translators read one Hebrew word as a verb, "and He causes pain," instead of *ukh'ab*, "and as a father"; the letters of the two readings are nearly the same. The King James Version follows the Hebrew; Hebrews follows the Greek. The sense is the same: the Lord's discipline is the proof of sonship. Compare "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19).

> **3:13** *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.*

Happy is the man. Hebrew *ashre*, "O the happinesses of," the first word of the Psalms (Ps. 1:1).

that findeth wisdom. *Chokmah*. The man who has searched (2:4) and found.

and the man that getteth understanding. Hebrew *yaphiq*, to draw out, to bring forth, to obtain. *Tebunah*, discernment.

> **3:14** *For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.*

For the merchandise of it. Hebrew *sachar*, trade, the profit of trading. Wisdom is pictured as goods that can be traded.

is better than the merchandise of silver. Trading in wisdom pays better than trading in silver.

and the gain thereof than fine gold. Hebrew *tebu'ah*, yield, produce; *charuts*, gold dug out, fine gold. Job says the same: "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof" (Job 28:15).

> **3:15** *She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.*

She is more precious than rubies. Hebrew *peninim*, a precious stone of reddish colour (Lam. 4:7), perhaps red coral. Wisdom is now spoken of as a woman, "she."

and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Nothing a man could want equals her. The words are repeated in 8:11.

> **3:16** *Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.*

Length of days is in her right hand. Wisdom stands like a woman holding out gifts in both hands. In her right hand, the better hand, is life.

and in her left hand riches and honour. Solomon's own life was the proof. He asked for wisdom, and God gave him wisdom, and added "both riches, and honour"; and He promised, "if thou wilt walk in my ways . . . then I will lengthen thy days" (1 Kings 3:13, 14). Life, riches and honour all came with wisdom, but life came first.

> **3:17** *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

Her ways are ways of pleasantness. Hebrew *no'am*, delight, loveliness. Wisdom's road is not grim.

and all her paths are peace. *Shalom*.

> **3:18** *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.*

She is a tree of life. The tree of life stood in the midst of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). When man sinned, he was driven out, "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever," and the way to it was guarded by the cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen. 3:22, 24). Now Solomon says that wisdom is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. What was lost in Eden is pictured as found in wisdom. The book uses the figure four times (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). The tree itself appears again at the end of Scripture, in the paradise of God, "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14).

to them that lay hold upon her. Hebrew *chazaq*, to seize, to grip firmly.

and happy is every one that retaineth her. Hebrew *tamak*, to hold fast. It is not enough to take hold of wisdom once; the happy man holds on.

> **3:19** *The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.*

The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth. Hebrew *yasad*, to lay a foundation. Here wisdom is not pictured as a woman; it is plainly God's own wisdom, by which He made the world. "O LORD [Jehovah], how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps. 104:24). This verse is worth remembering when the reader reaches 8:22–31. What 8:22–31 says in a figure, with Wisdom speaking as a person, 3:19 says plainly: Jehovah made the earth by His wisdom.

by understanding hath he established the heavens. *Tebunah*; *konen*, to set up firmly. "He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion (*tebunah*)" (Jer. 10:12).

> **3:20** *By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.*

By his knowledge the depths are broken up. Hebrew *tehomoth*, the deeps, the great waters (Gen. 1:2). "Broken up" is *baqa'*, to split open, the very word used of the Flood: "all the fountains of the great deep (*tehom*) broken up" (Gen. 7:11). The God who made the world also governs its waters, to judge as well as to bless.

and the clouds drop down the dew. Hebrew *shechaqim*, the skies, the thin clouds. The dew that waters the land each morning comes by the same knowledge. Wisdom that made the world keeps it. The son who has that wisdom lives in step with the order of God's world.

> **3:21** *My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom [tushiyyah] and discretion [mezimmah]:*

My son. The third address.

let not them depart from thine eyes. Hebrew *luz*, to turn aside, the word translated "froward" in 2:15. Do not let them slip out of sight. "Them" points forward to the two things named next.

keep sound wisdom [tushiyyah] and discretion [mezimmah]. *Tushiyyah* is sound wisdom that stands and works (2:7); *mezimmah* is discretion, the power to form a sound plan (1:4; 2:11).

> **3:22** *So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.*

So shall they be life unto thy soul. Hebrew *nephesh*.

and grace to thy neck. An ornament of grace, as in 1:9.

> **3:23** *Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.*

Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely. Hebrew *betach*, in security, as in 1:33.

and thy foot shall not stumble. Hebrew *nagaph*, to strike against. "They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash (*nagaph*) thy foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:12).

> **3:24** *When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.*

When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid. By day he walks safely (v. 23); by night he sleeps safely.

yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Hebrew *'arab*, pleasant. "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD [Jehovah], only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8).

> **3:25** *Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.*

Be not afraid of sudden fear. Hebrew *pachad pith'om*, sudden terror, the panic of an unexpected disaster.

neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. Hebrew *sho'ah*, the storm, the same word as in 1:27. The storm that comes on the wicked (1:27) does not sweep away the one who walks with wisdom.

> **3:26** *For the LORD [Jehovah] shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.*

For the LORD [Jehovah] shall be thy confidence. Hebrew *kesel*, confidence, hope, that on which one relies. "That they might set their hope (*kesel*) in God" (Ps. 78:7).

and shall keep thy foot from being taken. Hebrew *leked*, capture, being caught in a trap. The net of 1:17 is spread for the wicked; Jehovah keeps the son's foot out of it.

> **3:27** *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.*

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due. Literally, "from its owners" (*ba'alim*), the word used in 1:17, 19. Some good belongs by right to another: wages earned, a debt owed, help that is due. To withhold it is to keep what is his. "At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it" (Deut. 24:15; compare Jas. 5:4).

when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. When you are able. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10).

> **3:28** *Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.*

Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give. Do not put him off.

when thou hast it by thee. When you have it now. "The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning" (Lev. 19:13). Delay, when payment is possible, is a kind of theft. And no man knows that he will have tomorrow: "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (27:1).

> **3:29** *Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.*

Devise not evil against thy neighbour. Hebrew *charash*, to plough, to engrave, and so to plot, to work out in detail.

seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Hebrew *labetach*, in trust, without suspicion. He trusts you; do not betray it. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me . . . But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:12, 13).

> **3:30** *Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.*

Strive not with a man. Hebrew *rib*, to quarrel, to bring a case against.

without cause. Hebrew *chinnam*, for nothing, the word of 1:11 and 1:17. The sinners lie in wait for the innocent *chinnam*; the son is not to quarrel *chinnam*.

if he have done thee no harm. Do not pick a fight with a man who has not wronged you.

> **3:31** *Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.*

Envy thou not the oppressor. Hebrew *ish chamas*, a man of violence. His success may look enviable.

and choose none of his ways. Do not take him as your pattern. "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass" (Ps. 37:1, 2; compare Ps. 73:3, 17).

> **3:32** *For the froward is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but his secret is with the righteous.*

For the froward. Hebrew *naloz*, the devious, the one who turns aside (2:15).

is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *to'evah*, something detestable. The word is used often in Proverbs of what Jehovah hates (6:16; 11:1, 20; 12:22; 15:8, 9, 26; 16:5).

but his secret is with the righteous. Hebrew *sod*, close counsel, the confidential talk of intimate friends. God shares His mind with the upright. "The secret (*sod*) of the LORD [Jehovah] is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Ps. 25:14). "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). "Surely the Lord GOD [Adonai Jehovah] will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret (*sod*) unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

> **3:33** *The curse of the LORD [Jehovah] is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.*

The curse of the LORD [Jehovah] is in the house of the wicked. Hebrew *me'erah*, a curse. It lives in the house, as a guest who will not leave (Zech. 5:3, 4).

but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Hebrew *naveh*, a dwelling, a homestead, often a shepherd's dwelling in the pasture. The humble home of the righteous is blessed; the house of the wicked, however fine, is cursed. "Cursed shalt thou be in the city . . . Blessed shalt thou be in the city" (Deut. 28:16, 3).

> **3:34** *Surely he scorneth the scorners [lets]: but he giveth grace unto the lowly [ani].*

Surely he scorneth the scorners [lets]. The mockers, who laugh at correction and will not be taught (Part One, Chapter 5). God answers them in kind: He scorns those who scorn. "With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward" (Ps. 18:26).

but he giveth grace unto the lowly [ani]. The poor man bowed down by affliction (see Part One, Chapter 5). The Hebrew margin reads *'anawim*, "the humble, the meek," a word very close to it. This verse is quoted twice in the New Testament, from the Greek Old Testament: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). The scorners lift themselves up, and God resists them; the lowly bow down, and God lifts them up.

> **3:35** *The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools [kesil].*

The wise shall inherit glory. Hebrew *kabod*, weight, honour.

but shame shall be the promotion of fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools, settled in their folly. "Promotion" is *merim*, what lifts up. There is irony here: the fool is lifted up, but what he is lifted up into is shame. He is raised high so that all can see his disgrace. The wise inherit honour; the fool is exalted to shame.

> **4:1** *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.*

Hear, ye children. Hebrew *banim*, sons. The father turns from the one son to all his sons.

the instruction of a father. *Musar*.

and attend to know understanding. Hebrew *qashab*, to listen closely (2:2). *Binah*, discernment.

> **4:2** *For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.*

For I give you good doctrine. Hebrew *leqach tov*, good teaching, literally "a good thing received," the word translated "learning" in 1:5. What he gives, they are to receive.

forsake ye not my law. *Torah*.

> **4:3** *For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.*

For I was my father's son. Now the father tells his sons of his own boyhood. He too was a son, and was taught.

tender. Hebrew *rak*, tender, young, delicate. It is the very word David used of Solomon: "Solomon my son is young and tender" (1 Chr. 22:5); "Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender" (1 Chr. 29:1). The speaker is Solomon (Part One, Chapter 2).

and only beloved. Hebrew *yachid*, only, unique, and so beloved. It is the word used of Isaac, "thine only son" (Gen. 22:2), though Abraham had another son; it marks the son who is uniquely loved. Bathsheba had other sons (1 Chr. 3:5), but Solomon was the one Jehovah loved and named Jedidiah, "beloved of Jehovah" (2 Sam. 12:24, 25), and the one for whom his mother sought the throne (1 Kings 1:11–31).

in the sight of my mother. Bathsheba.

> **4:4** *He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.*

He taught me also. Hebrew *yarah*, to point out, to direct, the root of the word *torah*.

and said unto me. David's words follow. Where they end is not marked; they run at least through verse 5, and probably through verse 9. They agree with David's charge to Solomon as recorded in the history: "Keep the charge of the LORD [Jehovah] thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes . . . that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest" (1 Kings 2:3); "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind" (1 Chr. 28:9). Three generations are in this verse: David taught Solomon, and Solomon teaches his sons what David taught him.

Let thine heart retain my words. Hebrew *tamak*, to hold fast, as in 3:18.

keep my commandments, and live. Life in its fullest sense: life in the land, length of days, and life with God. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them" (Lev. 18:5).

> **4:5** *Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.*

Get wisdom. Hebrew *qanah*, to get, to acquire, to buy. Wisdom is to be gained as a man buys something precious: "Buy (*qanah*) the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (23:23). This is the same verb that is used of Jehovah in 8:22, "The LORD [Jehovah] possessed (*qanah*) me." The son is to get wisdom; Jehovah had it from the beginning.

get understanding. *Binah*. The command is repeated for emphasis.

forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Hebrew *natah*, to turn aside. Do not drift away from what you have been taught.

> **4:6** *Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.*

Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee. Wisdom is spoken of as a woman, a bride to be loved and kept. "Preserve" is *shamar*, to watch over.

love her, and she shall keep thee. *Natsar*, to guard. The strange woman will be described in the same terms of love and embrace (5:20; 7:13, 18). The son is to give to Wisdom the love the strange woman wants for herself. The father is preparing him to choose the right woman.

> **4:7** *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*

Wisdom is the principal thing. Hebrew *reshith chokmah*, "The beginning of wisdom." The verse reads literally: "The beginning of wisdom is: Get wisdom." The first step to wisdom is to want it enough to get it, whatever it costs. *Reshith* is the word of 1:7.

therefore get wisdom. *Qanah* again.

and with all thy getting get understanding. Hebrew *qinyan*, possessions, all that one has acquired. "With all you have, buy understanding": give everything for it. The merchant in the Lord's parable, "when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:46).

> **4:8** *Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.*

Exalt her. Hebrew *salsel*, to prize highly, to esteem; the word is used of piling up a highway, lifting it up.

and she shall promote thee. Hebrew *romem*, to lift up, to exalt. Lift her up, and she will lift you up.

she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. Hebrew *chabaq*, to embrace, the word of a husband with his wife. Again Wisdom is the bride.

> **4:9** *She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace. A wreath of grace, the words of 1:9. What the parents' teaching gives (1:9), Wisdom gives.

a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hebrew *atereth tiph'areth*, a crown of beauty. "Deliver" is *magan*, to give as a gift, to bestow. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (16:31). Peter speaks of "a crown of glory that fadeth not away," which the chief Shepherd will give at His appearing (1 Pet. 5:4).

> **4:10** *Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.*

Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings. The fifth address. *Laqach*, to take (1:3; 2:1); *amarim*, sayings.

and the years of thy life shall be many. The promise of 3:2 again.

> **4:11** *I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.*

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom. Hebrew *yarah*, to point out the way (v. 4). The father has done what his father did.

I have led thee in right paths. Hebrew *ma'gele yosher*, tracks of straightness (2:9, 13).

> **4:12** *When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.*

When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened. Hebrew *tsarar*, to be narrowed, hemmed in. The road will be open before you. "Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip" (Ps. 18:36).

and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Hebrew *kashal*, to totter, to trip. Even at a run, he will not fall.

> **4:13** *Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.*

Take fast hold of instruction. Hebrew *chazaq*, to grip (3:18). *Musar*, correction.

let her not go: keep her. *Natsar*, to guard.

for she is thy life. Instruction is not a hindrance to life; it is life itself.

> **4:14** *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.*

Enter not into the path of the wicked. Hebrew *resha'im*, the lawless, those who will not be ruled by God.

and go not in the way of evil men. Hebrew *ashar*, to walk straight on, to go forward. Do not even set out on it.

> **4:15** *Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. Four commands, one after another, each a different verb: *para'*, let it alone (the word of 1:25); do not cross over to it; *satah*, turn aside from it; cross over and go on. The piling up of commands is for emphasis. The father does not want his son to go near it, to linger by it, or to look at it.

> **4:16** *For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.*

For they sleep not, except they have done mischief. Evil has become their appetite. They cannot rest until they have done harm. "He deviseth mischief upon his bed" (Ps. 36:4); "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds!" (Mic. 2:1).

and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. Hebrew *kashal*, the word of verse 12. The son will not stumble; the wicked cannot sleep until they have made someone else stumble. Contrast the sweet sleep of 3:24.

> **4:17** *For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.*

For they eat the bread of wickedness. Their bread is got by wickedness; and wickedness itself is their bread, the food they live on.

and drink the wine of violence. Hebrew *chamasim*, violence of every kind. Their table is spread with the fruits of what they have taken (1:13).

> **4:18** *But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

But the path of the just. Hebrew *tsaddiqim*, the righteous.

is as the shining light. Hebrew *or nogah*, the light of dawn, the first brightness of morning.

that shineth more and more. Literally, "going on and growing bright." The light of dawn grows steadily stronger.

unto the perfect day. Hebrew *nekon hayyom*, "the established day," the full noon, when the sun stands at its height. The life of the righteous man is like a sunrise: it begins faintly and grows brighter until it reaches its noon. "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds" (2 Sam. 23:4).

> **4:19** *The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.*

The way of the wicked is as darkness. Hebrew *'aphelah*, thick darkness, the darkness of the ninth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10:22).

they know not at what they stumble. Hebrew *kashal* again. They trip and cannot see over what. "If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (John 11:10; compare 1 John 2:11). The just walk into a growing light; the wicked walk into a darkness so deep they cannot see what is bringing them down.

> **4:20** *My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.*

My son, attend to my words. The sixth and last address of the discourse. *Qashab*, to listen closely.

incline thine ear unto my sayings. Hebrew *natah*, to bend toward.

> **4:21** *Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.*

Let them not depart from thine eyes. Hebrew *luz*, to slip aside, the words of 3:21.

keep them in the midst of thine heart. At the centre.

> **4:22** *For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.*

For they are life unto those that find them. The father's words, like Wisdom herself, are life (4:13).

and health to all their flesh. Hebrew *marpe'*, healing, medicine (compare 3:8).

> **4:23** *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

Keep thy heart. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard. The heart in Scripture is the inner man: the mind, the will, the affections, the seat of a man's thoughts and choices.

with all diligence. Hebrew *mikkol mishmar*, "above all keeping," more than anything else you guard. Guard your heart more carefully than your money, your house or your life.

for out of it are the issues of life. Hebrew *totsa'oth*, the outgoings, the sources from which things flow out (the word is used of the outer limits of a land, and of the springs from which water goes out). Everything a man says and does flows from his heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34); "those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart" (Matt. 15:18).

> **4:24** *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.*

Put away from thee a froward mouth. Hebrew *'iqqeshuth*, crookedness (2:15). From the heart, the father moves outward to the mouth.

and perverse lips put far from thee. Hebrew *lezuth*, deviousness, turning aside (2:15; 3:21).

> **4:25** *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.*

Let thine eyes look right on. Hebrew *nokach*, straight ahead. Do not look aside at what would draw you off the road. Lot's wife looked back (Gen. 19:26). "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. *Yashar*, straight. The same word as "direct" in 3:6.

> **4:26** *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.*

Ponder the path of thy feet. Hebrew *pallés*, to make level, to weigh out. Look at the road before you take it, and make it level. The Greek Old Testament reads "make straight paths for thy feet," and Hebrews quotes it in that form: "make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way" (Heb. 12:13).

and let all thy ways be established. Hebrew *kun*, to be firm, settled.

> **4:27** *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.*

Turn not to the right hand nor to the left. These are the words of the law of the king: he shall read in the Law all the days of his life, "that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left" (Deut. 17:20; compare Deut. 5:32; Josh. 1:7). The father is training a future king.

remove thy foot from evil. The discourse ends where 3:7 began: depart from evil.

Looking back

The father's longest call has shown the son what wisdom is and what it does. It trusts Jehovah and does not lean on its own understanding (3:5). It honours Him with the first and best (3:9). It accepts His correction as a son accepts a father's (3:11, 12). It is worth more than silver, gold or precious stones, and it is a tree of life (3:14–18). It is the very wisdom by which Jehovah made the world (3:19). It deals honestly with its neighbour (3:27–31). And it is a gift passed from father to son: what David taught Solomon, Solomon teaches his sons, "Get wisdom" (4:5). The discourse closes with the son's whole person under guard, his heart above all, and his feet set on a straight road that turns neither to the right nor to the left.

Discourse 4 — The Strange Woman: Drink From Thine Own Cistern (5:1–23)

Place: Division 1; member B^2 (the strange woman). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son (5:1, 20) and to all his sons (5:7).

Introduction

The second warning against the strange woman is a whole chapter. It does three things. It shows the son what she is: sweet at first and bitter at the end (5:3–6). It shows him what she will cost him: his honour, his years, his wealth, his health, and at last his good name before the whole congregation (5:7–14). And it shows him the better way: not a life without love, but love at home, with the wife of his youth (5:15–19). The father does not only forbid; he points to what is good.

The chapter ends by lifting the son's eyes to Jehovah, who sees every path (5:21), and by showing that the man who will not be held by his own wife's love will be held by the cords of his own sins (5:22, 23).

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- a | 1, 2. Attend to wisdom; let thy lips keep knowledge.
- b | 3–6. The strange woman: her lips sweet; her end bitter.
- c | 7–14. Keep far from her: what she will cost thee, and the cry of regret.
- *c* | 15–19. Drink from thine own cistern: the joy of thine own wife.
- *b* | 20. Why be ravished with a strange woman?
- *a* | 21–23. Jehovah sees all; the wicked dies without instruction.

The discourse begins with instruction kept (vv. 1, 2) and ends with a man who dies "without instruction" (v. 23). In the middle, the two halves turn on one choice: her house (vv. 7–14) or your own (vv. 15–19).

The Text

> **5:1** *My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding:*
> **5:2** *That thou mayest regard discretion [mezimmah], and that thy lips may keep knowledge.*
> **5:3** *For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil:*
> **5:4** *But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword.*
> **5:5** *Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.*
> **5:6** *Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.*
> **5:7** *Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth.*

5:8 *Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house:*

5:9 *Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel:*

5:10 *Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger;*

5:11 *And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,*

5:12 *And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;*

5:13 *And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!*

5:14 *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.*

5:15 *Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.*

5:16 *Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.*

5:17 *Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.*

5:18 *Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.*

5:19 *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.*

5:20 *And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?*

5:21 *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD [Jehovah], and he pondereth all his goings.*

5:22 *His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.*

5:23 *He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.*

Verse by verse

5:1 *My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding:*

My son, attend unto my wisdom. Hebrew *qashab*, listen closely. "My wisdom": the father's own, learned from his father and from God.

and bow thine ear to my understanding. Hebrew *natah*, to bend toward. *Tebunah*, discernment.

5:2 *That thou mayest regard discretion [mezimmah], and that thy lips may keep knowledge.*

That thou mayest regard discretion [mezimmah]. Hebrew *shamar*, to keep, to watch over. *Mezimmah* is discretion, the power to form a sound plan (1:4). The young man needs a plan before the temptation comes, not after.

and that thy lips may keep knowledge. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard. The son's lips are to be guards set over knowledge. The next verse explains why lips are named: her lips are the danger.

5:3 *For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil:*

For the lips of a strange woman. *Zarah*, the woman outside the son's own marriage (2:16).

drop as an honeycomb. Hebrew *nopheth*, the honey that drips from the comb, the sweetest thing known. Her words are sweet.

and her mouth is smoother than oil. Hebrew *chek*, the palate, the mouth as the organ of speech. "Smoother": *chalaq*, the word of 2:16, "flattereth." The same picture is used in the Psalms of a false friend: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Ps. 55:21).

> **5:4** *But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword.*

But her end. Hebrew *acharith*, the latter end, what comes after. The father makes the son look past the beginning to the end.

is bitter as wormwood. Hebrew *la'anah*, a plant proverbial for its bitterness (Deut. 29:18; Amos 5:7; Rev. 8:11). Honey at the beginning (v. 3), wormwood at the end.

sharp as a twoedged sword. Literally "a sword of mouths," a sword with two edges. The oil of verse 3 turns into the sword of verse 4, as in Psalm 55:21. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4:12): the sword of her mouth wounds, the sword of God's mouth heals.

> **5:5** *Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.*

Her feet go down to death. Her whole course runs downhill (2:18).

her steps take hold on hell. Hebrew *sheol*, the grave. "Take hold on": her steps head straight for it and grip it. The English word "hell" in the King James Version of the Old Testament renders *sheol*, the grave, the state of the dead. Every step she takes is a step toward the grave, and she takes her lovers with her.

> **5:6** *Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.*

Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life. Hebrew *pallés*, to make level, to weigh; the word of 4:26, "Ponder the path of thy feet." The Hebrew of this verse can be read in two ways, because the same verb form can mean "thou" or "she." The King James Version reads it of the son: she keeps her ways shifting so that he will not stop to weigh where they lead. Many read it of the woman: "She pondereth not the path of life; her ways are unstable, and she knoweth it not." Either way the point is the same: no one on her road stops to think where it goes.

her ways are moveable. Hebrew *nu'a*, to wander, to stagger, to be unsteady. Her paths have no fixed direction.

that thou canst not know them. Or, "she knoweth it not." She herself does not know where she is going.

> **5:7** *Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth.*

Hear me now therefore, O ye children. The father turns to all his sons (4:1).

and depart not from the words of my mouth. Do not turn aside from them.

5:8 *Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house:*

Remove thy way far from her. Keep your road a long way from hers.

and come not nigh the door of her house. Do not go near. The young man of chapter 7 went "near her corner" and "the way to her house" (7:8), and that was enough. The safest place is far away. "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18); "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). Joseph "left his garment in her hand, and fled" (Gen. 39:12).

5:9 *Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel:*

Lest thou give thine honour unto others. Hebrew *hod*, vigour, splendour, the best of a man's strength. He would spend it on others.

and thy years unto the cruel. Hebrew *akhzari*, the cruel one, the merciless. The years of his life would be given to someone who has no pity: the woman who uses him, or the husband who will take his revenge (6:34, 35).

5:10 *Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger;*

Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth. Hebrew *zarim*, strangers, outsiders. *Koach*, strength, and so the wealth a man's strength has earned.

and thy labours be in the house of a stranger. Hebrew *'etsev*, painful toil; *nokri*, a foreigner. What a man has worked hard for ends up in someone else's house. The prodigal son "wasted his substance with riotous living" and "devoured thy living with harlots" (Luke 15:13, 30).

5:11 *And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,*

And thou mourn at the last. Hebrew *naham*, to groan, to growl like a beast. *Acharith*, the latter end (v. 4).

when thy flesh and thy body are consumed. Wasted away, worn out. The sin that promised pleasure leaves the body ruined.

5:12 *And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;*

And say. The father lets the son hear what he will say at the end, as he let him hear the sinners (1:11–14). This is the cry of regret.

How have I hated instruction. *Musar*, correction.

and my heart despised reproof. Hebrew *na'ats*, to spurn. *Tokachath*, reproof. These are the very words of Wisdom about the refusers in 1:25, 30: "ye . . . would none of my reproof"; "they despised all my reproof." The man is now saying of himself what Wisdom said of him.

5:13 *And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!*

And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers. Hebrew *morim*, from *yarah*, those who pointed out the way (4:4, 11). He had teachers, and he knew it.

nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. Hebrew *melammedim*, those who taught. He did not lack teaching; he lacked the will to listen.

> **5:14** *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.*

I was almost in all evil. Hebrew *ra'*, evil, harm, calamity. The words mean: "I came near to utter ruin." He came close to the worst that could befall him.

in the midst of the congregation and assembly. Hebrew *qahal* and *'edah*, the whole people gathered. Under the Law adultery was a crime punished before the congregation (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). The man looks back and sees how near he came to public disgrace and judgment before all Israel. His sin was secret; its exposure was public. (*The Companion Bible*, Appendix 75, lists this verse among those that gain "new light" from a careful reading of the Hebrew; this study reads it so.)

> **5:15** *Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.*

Drink waters out of thine own cistern. Hebrew *bor*, a cistern, a pit dug to hold water (the same word as "pit" in 1:12). In a dry land a man's own cistern was precious. His wife is pictured as his own source of water, of refreshment and delight. The Song of Songs uses the same picture: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed . . . a well of living waters" (Song 4:12, 15).

and running waters out of thine own well. Hebrew *be'er*, a well fed by a spring. The love of a man's own wife is fresh and flowing, not stolen.

> **5:16** *Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.*

Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. The Hebrew can be read as a question, as many translations take it: "Should thy fountains be scattered abroad, and streams of water in the streets?" The next verse requires this sense: "Let them be only thine own." Should a man scatter what belongs to his own marriage among strangers in the street, and have children by women who are not his wife? The answer is no.

> **5:17** *Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.*

Let them be only thine own. The springs of a man's love and of his children are for his own home.

and not strangers' with thee. Not shared with *zarim*, outsiders.

> **5:18** *Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.*

Let thy fountain be blessed. Hebrew *maqor*, a spring, a fountain. The father now blesses what he has guarded. Married love is not a concession; it is a blessing from God.

and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. The wife he married when he was young. "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity" (Eccl. 9:9). The strange woman forsook "the guide of her youth" (2:17); the son is to rejoice with "the wife of his youth." The phrase is used by Malachi of the wife whom men had betrayed (Mal. 2:14, 15).

> **5:19** *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.*

Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe. Hebrew *ayyeleth ahavim*, "a hind of loves," and *ya'alath chen*, "a doe of grace," the wild she-goat of the mountains. Both were known for their grace and beauty.

let her breasts satisfy thee at all times. Hebrew *ravah*, to drink one's fill, to be saturated: the water picture of verse 15 again.

and be thou ravished always with her love. Hebrew *shagah*, to reel, to stagger, to be intoxicated, to go astray. The word is chosen with care. It is used three times in this chapter: "be thou ravished (*shagah*) always with her love" (v. 19); "why wilt thou . . . be ravished (*shagah*) with a strange woman?" (v. 20); "in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray (*shagah*)" (v. 23). A man will be carried away by something. Let it be his wife's love, and not a stranger's, or at last his own folly.

> **5:20** *And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?*

And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman. *Shagah* again: carried away, intoxicated. The question has no good answer. Why go to a stranger, when there is a well at home?

and embrace the bosom of a stranger? Hebrew *cheq*, the bosom, the lap. *Nokriyyah*, a foreign woman. The word *cheq* returns in 6:27: "Can a man take fire in his bosom (*cheq*)?"

> **5:21** *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD [Jehovah], and he pondereth all his goings.*

For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD [Jehovah]. The reason is not only the cost to the son, but the eyes of God. Nothing done in secret is hidden from Him. David took Bathsheba in secret, and Nathan said, "thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel" (2 Sam. 12:12). "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

and he pondereth all his goings. Hebrew *pallés*, the same verb as 4:26 and 5:6. The son was told to ponder (*pallés*) the path of his feet (4:26); the woman does not ponder (*pallés*) the path of life (5:6); but Jehovah ponders (*pallés*) every path of every man. "Goings" is *ma'gal*, the track, the same word in all three verses. If the son will not weigh his paths, God will.

> **5:22** *His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.*

His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself. Hebrew *lakad*, to capture, to trap (the noun of 3:26). The wicked man is caught, not by a hunter, but by his own sins.

and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. Hebrew *tamak*, to hold fast (3:18; 4:4); *chevel*, a rope. The man who would not "retain" wisdom (*tamak*, 3:18) is "retained" by his sins. He wove the ropes himself, and now they bind him. Samson, bound by the Philistines after Delilah's betrayal, is the picture (Judg. 16:21).

> **5:23** *He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.*

He shall die without instruction. Hebrew *be'ein musar*, "for lack of instruction." The man who said, "How have I hated instruction" (v. 12), dies for want of it.

and in the greatness of his folly. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, the folly of the [ewil], the fool whose folly shows in his conduct (1:7).

he shall go astray. *Shagah*, the third time (vv. 19, 20). The son was told to be "ravished" with his wife's love; this man was "ravished" by a stranger, and now his folly carries him away to his death.

Looking back

The second warning has done more than forbid. It has weighed the strange woman's honey against her wormwood, counted the cost of her house (honour, years, wealth, health, and a good name), let the son hear the groan of the man who did not listen, and then set before him something better: the blessed fountain of his own home and the joy of the wife of his youth. Above all of it stands Jehovah, who weighs every path. The son is not asked to give up love. He is asked to keep it where it belongs.

Discourse 5 — Wisdom's Call: Surety, Sloth, and the Seven Things (6:1–23)

Place: Division 1; member A^3 (Wisdom's call). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son (6:1, 3, 20).

Introduction

Between the second and third warnings against the strange woman stands a call of a different kind. It names four dangers that are not about women at all: the rash pledge that puts a man in another's power (6:1–5); the laziness that lets poverty creep up on him (6:6–11); the worthless man who stirs up trouble with secret signs (6:12–15); and the seven things that Jehovah hates (6:16–19). Then the father returns to his own commandment and his mother's law, which will lead, keep and talk with the son by day and by night (6:20–23), and which will keep him from the evil woman (6:24).

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- A | 1–5. The surety: "Give not sleep to thine eyes" till thou art free.
- *A* | 6–11. The sluggard: "How long wilt thou sleep?"
- B | 12–15. The worthless man: his mouth, eyes, feet, fingers, heart; he soweth discord.
- *B* | 16–19. What Jehovah hates: eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet; he that soweth discord.
- C | 20–23. Keep thy father's commandment: a lamp and a light.

The first two members turn on sleep: the man in debt must not sleep (v. 4); the sluggard does nothing else (vv. 9, 10). The second two match part for part: the members of the worthless man's body, used for evil in verses 12 to 14, are the very members Jehovah hates in verses 16 to 19, and both end with the man who sows discord.

The Text

> **6:1** *My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,*
> **6:2** *Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.*
> **6:3** *Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.*
> **6:4** *Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.*
> **6:5** *Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.*
> **6:6** *Go to the ant, thou sluggard [atsel]; consider her ways, and be wise:*
> **6:7** *Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,*
> **6:8** *Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.*
> **6:9** *How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard [atsel]? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?*

> **6:10** *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:*
> **6:11** *So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.*
> **6:12** *A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.*
> **6:13** *He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers;*
> **6:14** *Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.*
> **6:15** *Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.*
> **6:16** *These six things doth the LORD [Jehovah] hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:*
> **6:17** *A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*
> **6:18** *An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,*
> **6:19** *A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*
> **6:20** *My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*
> **6:21** *Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.*
> **6:22** *When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.*
> **6:23** *For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:*

Verse by verse

> **6:1** *My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,*

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend. Hebrew *'arav*, to pledge oneself, to stand as security for another's debt. "Friend" is *rea'*, neighbour, any other man.

if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger. To strike hands was to seal a bargain, as a handshake does (Job 17:3). "Stranger" is *zar*, an outsider. The son has promised to pay another man's debt if that man fails to pay.

The Law commanded Israel to lend to a poor brother freely (Lev. 25:35–37; Deut. 15:7, 8). What the Proverbs warn against is the rash pledge: binding oneself to pay a debt one cannot control, for a man one does not know well (11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26, 27; 27:13). A surety can be noble: Judah became surety for Benjamin and offered himself in his place (Gen. 43:9; 44:32, 33), and Paul wrote to Philemon, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account" (Philem. 18). But a pledge made lightly puts a man's goods, and even his freedom, into another man's hands.

> **6:2** *Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.*

Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth. Hebrew *yaqosh*, to be trapped like a bird in a snare.

thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Hebrew *lakad*, captured. The words are said twice, for emphasis. His own words trapped him.

> **6:3** *Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.*

Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself. Hebrew *natsal*, to snatch away (2:12). Get out at once.

when thou art come into the hand of thy friend. You are in his power now.

go, humble thyself. Hebrew *hithrapes*, to trample oneself down, to humble oneself. Swallow your pride.

and make sure thy friend. Hebrew *rahav*, to press, to urge, to importune. Go and plead with him, keep on at him, until he lets you go.

6:4 *Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.*

Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Do not rest until it is done. David used the same words of his resolve to find a place for the ark: "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD [Jehovah]" (Ps. 132:4, 5).

6:5 *Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.*

Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter. Hebrew *tsevi*, a gazelle. The words "of the hunter" are added by the translators; the Hebrew says only "from the hand." The gazelle that is caught struggles with all its strength to get free.

and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Hebrew *yaqush*, the bird-catcher (v. 2, "snared"). "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped" (Ps. 124:7).

6:6 *Go to the ant, thou sluggard [atsel]; consider her ways, and be wise:*

Go to the ant, thou sluggard [atsel]. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise (Part One, Chapter 5). He is sent to school, and his teacher is an insect. "Ant" is *nemalah*.

consider her ways, and be wise. Watch how she lives, and learn. The harvester ants of the land of Israel gather seeds in the summer and store them in chambers underground. Some writers once doubted that ants stored food, until their storing was observed and described in detail in the nineteenth century. Agur says the same of them: "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer" (30:25).

6:7 *Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,*

Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler. Three words for men in authority: *qatsin*, a chief or captain; *shoter*, an officer, a foreman; *moshel*, a ruler (from *mashal*, to rule). No one stands over the ant to make her work. The sluggard, who needs a master to drive him and still will not move, is shamed by a creature that needs no master at all.

6:8 *Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.*

Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. She works in the season for working, and lays up for the season when nothing can be gathered. "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame" (10:5).

6:9 *How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard [atsel]? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?*

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard [atsel]? The lazy man. "How long" is Wisdom's cry to the simple (1:22). The question has no answer, because the sluggard never sets a time.

when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? He means to get up. He never does.

> **6:10** *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:*

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. These are the sluggard's own words, or the father mimicking them. "A little . . . a little . . . a little": each time he asks for only a little more, and each little adds up. "Folding of the hands": clasping them, the posture of rest. The same two verses come again, word for word, at the end of the sluggard's field (24:33, 34).

> **6:11** *So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.*

So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth. Hebrew *mehallek*, a walker, a vagabond, a prowler on the road. Poverty comes on without hurrying, step by step, but it comes.

and thy want as an armed man. Literally "a man with a shield." When it arrives, it cannot be resisted. The sluggard is not robbed in a moment; he is robbed while he sleeps, a little at a time.

> **6:12** *A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.*

A naughty person. Hebrew *adam beliya'al*, "a man of Belial": a worthless man, a good-for-nothing. The word is used of Nabal, "this man of Belial" (1 Sam. 25:25), and of the sons of Eli (1 Sam. 2:12). In the New Testament, Belial is a name for the adversary (2 Cor. 6:15).

a wicked man. Hebrew *ish aven*, a man of iniquity, of trouble.

walketh with a froward mouth. Hebrew *'iqqeshuth*, crookedness (4:24). His speech is twisted.

> **6:13** *He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers;*

He winketh with his eyes. Hebrew *qarats*, to narrow the eyes, to wink, a secret sign to an accomplice. "He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow" (10:10).

he speaketh with his feet. Hebrew *molel*, to scrape, to rub; he signals by shuffling his feet.

he teacheth with his fingers. Hebrew *moreh*, from *yarah*, to point (4:4, 11). The father points the way of wisdom; this man points with his fingers to mischief. All his signals are secret, given behind the back of the one he means to harm.

> **6:14** *Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.*

Frowardness is in his heart. Hebrew *tahpukoth*, perversities, things turned upside down (2:12, 14). The signals come from the heart (4:23).

he deviseth mischief continually. Hebrew *charash*, to plough, to plot (3:29). *Ra'*, evil. He is always at it.

he soweth discord. Hebrew *shalach midanim*, he sends out strifes. He sets men against one another.

> **6:15** *Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.*

Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly. Hebrew *'eyd*, disaster (1:26).

suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. Hebrew *ein marpe'*, no healing (the word of 4:22, "health"). The same words close 29:1: "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

6:16 *These six things doth the LORD [Jehovah] hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:*

These six things doth the LORD [Jehovah] hate: yea, seven. A numbered saying (Part One, Chapter 6). The first number names some; the second, one more, names the whole. Six is the number of man, and of man's work apart from God; seven is the number of what is complete and full, spiritual perfection (Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*). The list is complete: these are what Jehovah hates, all of them, and the seventh, sowing discord among brethren, is the one the list builds up to.

are an abomination unto him. Literally "to His soul": hated to the depth of His being. *To'evah* (3:32).

6:17 *A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

A proud look. Literally "high eyes," eyes that look down on others. "Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer" (Ps. 101:5); "thou . . . wilt bring down high looks" (Ps. 18:27). Pride heads the list.

a lying tongue. A tongue of falsehood.

and hands that shed innocent blood. The sinners of 1:11, 16.

6:18 *An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,*

An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations. Hebrew *charash*, to plot (v. 14); *machshevoth aven*, thoughts of iniquity. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

feet that be swift in running to mischief. The feet of 1:16.

6:19 *A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

A false witness that speaketh lies. Hebrew *yaphiach*, he breathes out lies, as easily as breathing. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16). The false witness is a separate person from the lying tongue of verse 17: the one lies in conversation, the other in court, where a man's life and goods are at stake (19:5, 9).

and he that soweth discord among brethren. The seventh, the climax. The worthless man "soweth discord" (v. 14); Jehovah hates him that "soweth discord among brethren." Set side by side, the two lists show that the worthless man of verses 12 to 14 is exactly what Jehovah hates: his eyes (v. 13; v. 17), his mouth and tongue (v. 12; v. 17), his fingers and hands (v. 13; v. 17), his heart that devises (v. 14; v. 18), his feet (v. 13; v. 18), and the discord he sows (v. 14; v. 19). The son is to see the man and know how God sees him.

6:20 *My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*

My son, keep thy father's commandment. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard. *Mitsvah*, commandment.

and forsake not the law of thy mother. The words of 1:8. The father ends this call where he began the division.

> **6:21** *Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.*

Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. As in 3:3. "Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes" (Deut. 6:8).

> **6:22** *When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.*

When thou goest, it shall lead thee. Hebrew *nachah*, to guide.

when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee. Hebrew *shamar*, to watch over.

and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. Hebrew *siach*, to talk, to muse, to meditate. The father's teaching goes with the son through the whole day: walking, sleeping, waking. These are the very occasions of Deuteronomy 6:7: "thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." What the parents talked of, the son will find talking to him.

> **6:23** *For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:*

For the commandment is a lamp. Hebrew *ner*, a lamp, a small light for the next step. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105).

and the law is light. *Or*, light, the light of day. The lamp shows the next step; the light shows the whole way.

and reproofs of instruction are the way of life. Hebrew *tokchoth musar*, the corrections that discipline brings. Correction is not the way to misery but the way of life.

Looking back

This call of Wisdom has taken the son out of the house and into the business of daily life: the pledge given too quickly, the work put off till tomorrow, the trouble-maker with his winks and signs. It has shown him how God sees such things, by setting the worthless man beside the seven things Jehovah hates. And it has brought him back to his father's commandment and his mother's law, a lamp by night and a light by day, which will now keep him from the strange woman.

Discourse 6 — The Strange Woman: Fire in the Bosom (6:24–35)

Place: Division 1; member B^3 (the strange woman). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son; the sentence runs on from 6:23.

Introduction

The third warning is joined to the last line of the call before it: the commandment and the law are a lamp and a light, "to keep thee from the evil woman" (6:24). This time the father does not describe her house or her end. He reasons with the son, plainly, about what adultery costs. A harlot costs a man his money; another man's wife costs him his life (6:26). Fire held to the chest will burn (6:27, 28). Even a starving thief must repay what he took (6:30, 31); how much more the man who takes his neighbour's wife (6:32, 33). And no gift will buy off the husband's fury (6:34, 35).

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- a | 24, 25. The warning: lust not after her beauty.
- b | 26. Her price: a piece of bread; the precious life.
- c | 27–29. Fire in the bosom: he shall not be innocent.
- *b* | 30–33. The thief's price, and the adulterer's: he destroyeth his own soul.
- *a* | 34, 35. The husband: no ransom.

The Text

> **6:24** *To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.*
> **6:25** *Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.*
> **6:26** *For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.*
> **6:27** *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*
> **6:28** *Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?*
> **6:29** *So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.*
> **6:30** *Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry;*
> **6:31** *But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.*
> **6:32** *But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.*
> **6:33** *A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.*
> **6:34** *For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.*

> **6:35** *He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.*

Verse by verse

> **6:24** *To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.*

To keep thee from the evil woman. Hebrew *eshet ra'*, "a woman of evil." The Greek Old Testament read the same letters as *eshet re'a*, "a neighbour's wife," which agrees with verse 29. Either way, she is the woman who belongs to another man.

from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Hebrew *chelqath*, smoothness (2:16; 5:3). *Nokriyyah*, a foreign woman. Her tongue is smooth.

> **6:25** *Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.*

Lust not after her beauty in thine heart. Hebrew *chamad*, to desire, to covet. It is the word of the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet (*chamad*) thy neighbour's wife" (Ex. 20:17). The sin begins in the heart, before any act. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

neither let her take thee with her eyelids. Hebrew *aph'appayim*, the eyelids, the eyelashes: her glances, perhaps painted, as Jezebel "painted her face" (literally, her eyes, 2 Kings 9:30). "Take" is *laqach*: do not let her capture you with a look.

> **6:26** *For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.*

For by means of a whorish woman. Hebrew *zonah*, a harlot.

a man is brought to a piece of bread. Hebrew *kikkar lechem*, a round loaf. The harlot will take his money until he is left with a crust. The prodigal son, who spent his living on harlots, ended feeding swine and longing for their husks (Luke 15:13–16, 30).

and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Hebrew *eshet ish*, "a man's wife." She hunts (*tsud*) for something more costly than money: *nephesh yeqarah*, the precious life. The harlot costs a man his bread; another man's wife costs him his life.

> **6:27** *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*

Can a man take fire in his bosom. Hebrew *chathah*, to scoop up, as coals are scooped from a hearth. "Bosom" is *cheq*, the very word of 5:20: "why wilt thou . . . embrace the bosom (*cheq*) of a stranger?" To take her into his bosom is to take fire into it. The question is the figure *Erotesis*: it expects the answer "No."

and his clothes not be burned? He cannot.

> **6:28** *Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?*

Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? Hebrew *gechalim*, glowing coals. The second question says the same as the first, from the other end of the body. No.

> **6:29** *So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.*

So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife. The meaning of the pictures. "Goeth in" is the plain Hebrew word for a man coming to a woman in marriage or sin.

whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Hebrew *naqah*, to be clear, to go unpunished. He will not get away with it. Under the Law, both the adulterer and the adulteress were to die (Lev. 20:10).

> **6:30** *Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry;*

Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry. People understand a hungry man who steals bread. They pity him; they do not hold him in contempt.

> **6:31** *But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.*

But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold. Even so, he must pay. "Sevenfold" is *shiv'athayim*: a full, complete repayment, seven being the number of completeness (6:16). The Law required a thief to repay double, or four- or fivefold for an animal killed or sold (Ex. 22:1–4); "sevenfold" says that he must repay in full, whatever it takes.

he shall give all the substance of his house. Everything he owns, if that is what it takes.

> **6:32** *But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.*

But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding. Hebrew *chasar lev*, "lacking heart," without sense. The thief had a reason, hunger; the adulterer has none. He is simply a fool.

he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. Hebrew *mashchith*, he ruins. *Nephesh*, his own life. The thief can repay and be done; the adulterer destroys himself.

> **6:33** *A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.*

A wound and dishonour shall he get. Hebrew *nega'*, a stroke, a blow; *qalon*, disgrace.

and his reproach shall not be wiped away. Hebrew *cherpah*, reproach, shame. The thief pays, and his debt is gone. The adulterer's shame stays with his name. Of David, a man after God's own heart, it is written that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] . . . all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). Even David's reproach was not wiped away.

> **6:34** *For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.*

For jealousy is the rage of a man. Hebrew *qin'ah*, jealousy; *chemah*, heat, fury; *gever*, a strong man. The wronged husband burns.

therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. Hebrew *naqam*, vengeance. When his day comes, he will show no mercy.

> **6:35** *He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.*

He will not regard any ransom. Literally "he will not lift up the face of any ransom": he will not look at it. *Kopher*, a ransom, the price paid to redeem a life (Ex. 21:30).

neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts. Hebrew *shochad*, a gift, a bribe. The thief could pay sevenfold (v. 31); the adulterer can pay nothing that the husband will accept. Money cannot buy back what he took.

Looking back

The third warning has reasoned with the son as a man. It has weighed a harlot's price and an adulteress's price, fire and coals, a thief's debt and an adulterer's. Every comparison comes out the same way: the adulterer loses more than he can ever repay, and the wound to his name will not heal. The son who will not covet in his heart (6:25) will never have to find this out.

Discourse 7 — Wisdom's Call: My Sister (7:1–4)

Place: Division 1; member A^4 (Wisdom's call). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son (7:1).

Introduction

The shortest of the ten discourses is four verses long. It stands just before the longest and most vivid warning (7:5–27), and it arms the son for it. The father asks for three things: keep my words, bind them on you, and make Wisdom your closest companion. Then the woman of the street can be faced.

Structure

This structure is the study's own.

- a | 1. Keep my words; lay up my commandments.
- b | 2. Keep them, and live; as the apple of thine eye.
- *a* | 3. Bind them; write them.
- *b* | 4. Call Wisdom thy sister.

The Text

> **7:1** *My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.*
> **7:2** *Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.*
> **7:3** *Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.*
> **7:4** *Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman:*

Verse by verse

> **7:1** *My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.*

My son, keep my words. Hebrew *shamar*, to keep, to watch over. *Amarim*, sayings.

and lay up my commandments with thee. Hebrew *tsaphan*, to treasure up, to hide away (2:1, 7).

> **7:2** *Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.*

Keep my commandments, and live. The words David spoke to Solomon (4:4), now spoken by Solomon to his son.

and my law as the apple of thine eye. Hebrew *ishon*, "the little man of the eye," the pupil, where a man sees his own reflection small in another's eye. It is the most guarded part of the body: the eyelid closes over it at the least threat. Jehovah kept Israel "as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10); David prayed, "Keep me as the apple of the eye" (Ps. 17:8). The son is to guard his father's law as instinctively as he guards his own eye. The same word *ishon* comes again in 7:9, of the blackest part of the night.

> **7:3** *Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.*

Bind them upon thy fingers. Where they will be seen every time the hand is used. "Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand" (Deut. 6:8).

write them upon the table of thine heart. As in 3:3: what God wrote on tables of stone, the son writes on his heart.

> **7:4** *Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman:*

Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister. "Sister" was a word of tender love, used by a husband of his bride: "my sister, my spouse" (Song 4:9, 10, 12). Wisdom is to be as near and dear to the son as the woman he loves. If his heart is already full of her, there is no room for the stranger.

and call understanding thy kinswoman. Hebrew *moda'*, a near relative, an intimate friend, one well known. It is the word used of Boaz, Naomi's "kinsman" (Ruth 2:1). *Binah*, discernment.

Looking back

Four verses are enough to set the guard. The son treasures his father's words, guards them as his eye, wears them on his hand, writes them on his heart, and calls Wisdom his sister. The next verse says why: "That they may keep thee from the strange woman" (7:5).

Discourse 8 — The Strange Woman: The Young Man at the Window (7:5–27)

Place: Division 1; member B^4 (the strange woman). **Speaker:** Solomon to his son, and to all his sons (7:24).

Introduction

The fourth warning is told as a story. The father stands at the window of his house and watches. He sees a young man among the simple, without sense, drifting at dusk toward a certain street corner. He sees the woman come out to meet him, dressed for her trade. He hears every word she says. He watches the young man give in and follow her, like an ox to the slaughter. Then he turns to his own sons: "Let not thine heart decline to her ways" (7:25). The story is the more powerful because it is not explained until the end. The son sees it all happen before he is told what it means.

Structure

This structure is from *The Companion Bible*.

- f | 5. The woman.
- g | 6–9. The young man.
- *f* | 10–21. The woman.
- *g* | 22–27. The young man.

The Text

> **7:5** *That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.*
> **7:6** *For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,*
> **7:7** *And beheld among the simple ones [pethi], I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,*
> **7:8** *Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,*
> **7:9** *In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:*
> **7:10** *And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.*
> **7:11** *(She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house:*
> **7:12** *Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)*
> **7:13** *So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him,*
> **7:14** *I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows.*
> **7:15** *Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.*
> **7:16** *I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt.*

> **7:17** *I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.*
>
> **7:18** *Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves.*
>
> **7:19** *For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey:*
>
> **7:20** *He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed.*
>
> **7:21** *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.*
>
> **7:22** *He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool [ewil] to the correction of the stocks;*
>
> **7:23** *Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.*
>
> **7:24** *Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.*
>
> **7:25** *Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.*
>
> **7:26** *For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.*
>
> **7:27** *Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

Verse by verse

> **7:5** *That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.*

That they may keep thee from the strange woman. The father's words and Wisdom herself (7:1–4) are the son's guard.

from the stranger which flattereth with her words. The words of 2:16, almost exactly. Her weapon is her smooth tongue.

> **7:6** *For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,*

For at the window of my house. Hebrew *challon*. The father becomes a watcher.

I looked through my casement. Hebrew *eshnav*, a lattice, a window screen through which one could see without being seen.

> **7:7** *And beheld among the simple ones [pethi], I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,*

And beheld among the simple ones [pethi]. The open, untaught ones, who can still be taught but have not yet been. The young man is one of them.

I discerned among the youths. Hebrew *banim*, sons, young men. "Discerned" is *bin*: the father used understanding to pick him out.

a young man void of understanding. Hebrew *na'ar chasar lev*, a lad lacking heart, without sense. The same words are used of the adulterer in 6:32. He is not wicked yet; he is empty. And an empty heart is open to whatever comes to fill it.

7:8 *Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,*

Passing through the street near her corner. Hebrew *shuq*, a street, a market lane; *pinnah*, a corner. He does not go to her door; he only passes near her corner. That is how it begins. The father had warned, "come not nigh the door of her house" (5:8).

and he went the way to her house. Hebrew *tsa'ad*, to step, to stroll, to pace slowly. He is not hurrying anywhere. He is drifting, step by step, in her direction.

7:9 *In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:*

In the twilight, in the evening. Hebrew *neshef*, dusk; *'erev yom*, the evening of the day.

in the black and dark night. Literally "in the pupil (*ishon*) of the night, and darkness": the very centre of the night, its blackest part. *Ishon* is the word of 7:2, "the apple of thine eye." The young man who did not keep the law as the apple of his eye is out in the apple of the night. The words also show time passing: dusk, evening, black night. He has been loitering for hours. *'Aphelah*, "dark," is the thick darkness of the way of the wicked (4:19).

7:10 *And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.*

And, behold, there met him a woman. "Behold": the father calls the son to look.

with the attire of an harlot. Hebrew *shith zonah*, the dress of a harlot. When Tamar wished to be taken for a harlot, she put on such a dress and a veil (Gen. 38:14, 15). This woman, though a wife (v. 19), is dressed to be known for what she is offering.

and subtil of heart. Hebrew *netsurath lev*, "guarded of heart." The son was told to guard (*natsar*) his heart (4:23); she guards hers too, but for a different reason. She keeps her real purpose hidden. She shows him her dress; she does not show him her heart.

7:11 *(She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house:*

(She is loud and stubborn. Hebrew *homiyyah*, noisy, restless, turbulent (the word is used of Folly in 9:13, "clamorous"); *sorereth*, rebellious, unruly, the word used of the stubborn son of Deuteronomy 21:18. The father breaks into his story with a description of her.

her feet abide not in her house. She cannot stay at home. The virtuous woman of 31:27 "looketh well to the ways of her household"; this woman is never there.

7:12 *Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)*

Now is she without, now in the streets. Hebrew *rechovoth*, the broad places, the very places where Wisdom cries (1:20). The two women are both in the street.

and lieth in wait at every corner.) Hebrew *'arav*, to lie in ambush, the word of the sinners in 1:11, 18: "let us lay wait." She is a hunter (6:26).

7:13 *So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him,*

So she caught him. Hebrew *chazaq*, to seize, to grip (3:18, where the son is told to "lay hold" on Wisdom).

and kissed him. Openly, in the street.

and with an impudent face said unto him. Hebrew *he'ezah paneha*, "she made her face strong": brazen, unashamed.

> **7:14** *I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows.*

I have peace offerings with me. Hebrew *shelamim*, the peace offerings of the Law. Part of a peace offering was eaten by the one who brought it, and it had to be eaten the same day or the next (Lev. 7:15, 16). She has meat at home from the sacrifice. She uses the worship of Jehovah as the bait for her sin.

this day have I payed my vows. She has done her religious duty. Her conscience, she implies, is clear. There is no more dangerous sinner than the one who has made religion a cover.

> **7:15** *Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.*

Therefore came I forth to meet thee. The flattery begins: "It was you I came out for."

diligently to seek thy face. Hebrew *shachar*, to seek eagerly, the word of 1:28 and 8:17. Wisdom says, "those that seek me early (*shachar*) shall find me" (8:17); the strange woman says she has sought *him* early.

and I have found thee. As if he were special. She would have said the same to any young man at that corner.

> **7:16** *I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt.*

I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry. Hebrew *ravad*, to spread; *marvaddim*, coverlets.

with carved works. Or "striped cloths."

with fine linen of Egypt. Hebrew *'etun mitsrayim*, Egyptian yarn, the finest and most costly. Everything is ready, and everything is luxurious.

> **7:17** *I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.*

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. The costly perfumes of the East, used for the garments of a king at his wedding (Ps. 45:8) and of the bride in the Song of Songs (Song 4:14). She has dressed her sin in the scents of marriage.

> **7:18** *Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves.*

Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning. Hebrew *ravah*, to drink one's fill, the very word of 5:19: "let her breasts satisfy (*ravah*) thee at all times." What the father offered the son in his own wife, the stranger offers in her bed.

let us solace ourselves with loves. Hebrew *'alas*, to delight, to enjoy. She calls it love. It is not.

> **7:19** *For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey:*

For the goodman is not at home. Literally "the man is not at home." She does not even call him "my husband."

he is gone a long journey. He is far away. They are safe, she says.

> **7:20** *He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed.*

He hath taken a bag of money with him. He has gone on a long business journey.

and will come home at the day appointed. Hebrew *yom hakkese*, the day of the full moon (Ps. 81:3, "the time appointed," set beside "the new moon"). She knows exactly when he will be back, and it is not soon. She has planned this.

> **7:21** *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.*

With her much fair speech. Hebrew *leqach*, "learning, teaching," the word of 1:5 and 4:2: "I give you good doctrine (*leqach*)." The father gave his son good *leqach*; she gives him hers. The young man must choose whose teaching he will receive.

she caused him to yield. Hebrew *natah*, to bend, to turn aside. The son was told to bend (*natah*) his ear to wisdom (2:2; 4:20; 5:1); this young man bends to her.

with the flattering of her lips she forced him. Hebrew *chelek*, smoothness (2:16; 5:3; 6:24); *nadach*, to push, to drive. Her smooth words drive him.

> **7:22** *He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool [ewil] to the correction of the stocks;*

He goeth after her straightway. Hebrew *pith'om*, suddenly. After all his loitering, he goes all at once.

as an ox goeth to the slaughter. Unknowing, following, to its death. The ox does not know where it is being led.

or as a fool [ewil] to the correction of the stocks. The fool whose folly shows in his conduct (1:7). "Correction" is *musar*, the word for instruction; "stocks" is *'ekes*, an anklet, a fetter. The fool would not have *musar* when it was offered as instruction; now he gets it as punishment, and goes to it in chains. The Hebrew of this line is difficult, and the Greek Old Testament reads it differently, but the sense of the King James Version is plain enough: he goes to his punishment as unaware as a fool.

> **7:23** *Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.*

Till a dart strike through his liver. Hebrew *chets*, an arrow; *kaved*, the liver, thought of as the seat of life (Lam. 2:11). The wound is mortal.

as a bird hasteth to the snare. Hebrew *pach*, a trap. The bird and the net of 1:17 come back. The bird hurries to the bait.

and knoweth not that it is for his life. *Nephesh*. The bird thinks the snare is for its food. It is for its life.

> **7:24** *Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.*

Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children. Hebrew *banim*, sons. The story is over. The father turns from the window to his own sons.

and attend to the words of my mouth. *Qashab*, listen closely.

> **7:25** *Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.*

Let not thine heart decline to her ways. Hebrew *satah*, to turn aside. It is the word used in the Law of a wife who is unfaithful: "If any man's wife go aside (*satah*)" (Num. 5:12). Let not your heart go aside to her. It begins in the heart (4:23; 6:25).

go not astray in her paths. Hebrew *ta'ah*, to wander, to lose one's way.

> **7:26** *For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.*

For she hath cast down many wounded. Hebrew *chalalim*, the slain, the pierced.

yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Hebrew *'atsumim*, mighty, numerous. Strength is no protection. Samson was the strongest man in Israel, and Delilah brought him down (Judg. 16). David was a mighty man of war, and he fell with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11). And the writer of these words was himself among the slain: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God . . . nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin" (Neh. 13:26).

> **7:27** *Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

Her house is the way to hell. Hebrew *sheol*, the grave. Her house is not a destination; it is a road, and the road goes down.

going down to the chambers of death. Hebrew *chadre maveth*, the inner rooms of death. Her bedroom (vv. 16, 17) is an inner room; the father shows the son what that inner room really is. *The Companion Bible* notes that "chambers" here is "an explanation of Sheol": the grave is the inner room where the dead lie.

Looking back

The story is told so that the son will never have to live it. He has watched a young man without sense drift to the corner at dusk, be caught by a brazen woman who had her religion, her bed, her perfumes and her excuses all ready, and follow her like an ox to the butcher. And he has heard his father say: many strong men have died this way. Do not let your heart turn aside to her.

Discourse 9 — Wisdom's Call: Wisdom Speaks for Herself (8:1–9:12)

Place: Division 1; member A^5 (Wisdom's call). **Speaker:** Wisdom herself, from 8:4 to 9:12, except where her house and her call are described (9:1–3).

Introduction

The father now steps aside, and Wisdom speaks for herself. The last discourse ended with the strange woman lurking at the corners in the dark; this one opens with Wisdom standing at the gates in the open (8:1–3). Everything about her is the opposite of the stranger: her words are true and straight, not smooth (8:6–9); her gifts are lasting, not stolen (8:18–21); and her house leads to life, not to death (8:35; 9:6).

At the centre of the discourse is the passage for which the chapter is best known (8:22–31). Wisdom tells how she was with Jehovah before the world was made, beside Him as He set the heavens, the seas and the foundations of the earth, His daily delight, rejoicing in the world and in the sons of men. The passage has been read in more than one way, and the reading given here is set out plainly in its place and weighed in Appendix F, Question 3. Its point, in the flow of the discourse, is clear: the wisdom that calls to the simple in the street is the very wisdom by which God made the world. The son who finds her finds life (8:35).

Then Wisdom builds her house, prepares her feast, sends out her maidens, and calls: "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (9:1–6).

Structure

This structure is from *The Companion Bible*.

- C | 8:1. Wisdom's call.
- D | E | 8:2, 3. From high places.
- F | 8:4–6. To the simple.
- G | 8:7–9. Reasons.
- H | 8:10–31. Wisdom self-commended.
- *C* | 8:32–36. Wisdom's call.
- *D* | *E* | 9:1–3. From high places.
- *F* | 9:4–6. To the simple.
- *G* | 9:7–9. Reasons.
- *H* | 9:10–12. Wisdom self-commended.

The long member H (8:10–31) is built in two parts. In the first (8:10–21), Wisdom commends her worth: her prudence (vv. 12–14), her rule (vv. 15, 16), her riches (vv. 18, 19), her righteousness (v. 20), and her reward to those who love her (vv. 17, 21). In the second (8:22–31), which *The Companion Bible* heads "Wisdom personified," she tells of her place with Jehovah:

- O | 8:22. In eternity past. With Jehovah.
- P | 8:23–29. Before the creation of man.
- *O* | 8:30. In eternity past. With Jehovah.
- *P* | 8:31. After the creation of man.

The Text

> **8:1** *Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?*
> **8:2** *She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.*
> **8:3** *She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.*
> **8:4** *Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.*
> **8:5** *O ye simple [pethi], understand wisdom [ormah]: and, ye fools [kesil], be ye of an understanding heart.*
> **8:6** *Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.*
> **8:7** *For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.*
> **8:8** *All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.*
> **8:9** *They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.*
> **8:10** *Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.*
> **8:11** *For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.*
> **8:12** *I wisdom dwell with prudence [ormah], and find out knowledge of witty inventions [mezimmah].*
> **8:13** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.*
> **8:14** *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom [tushiyyah]: I am understanding; I have strength.*
> **8:15** *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.*
> **8:16** *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.*
> **8:17** *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*
> **8:18** *Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.*
> **8:19** *My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.*
> **8:20** *I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:*
> **8:21** *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*
> **8:22** *The LORD [Jehovah] possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.*
> **8:23** *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

8:24 *When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.*

8:25 *Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:*

8:26 *While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.*

8:27 *When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:*

8:28 *When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:*

8:29 *When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:*

8:30 *Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;*

8:31 *Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.*

8:32 *Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.*

8:33 *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.*

8:34 *Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.*

8:35 *For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD [Jehovah].*

8:36 *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.*

9:1 *Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:*

9:2 *She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.*

9:3 *She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city,*

9:4 *Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,*

9:5 *Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*

9:6 *Forsake the foolish [pethi], and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

9:7 *He that reproveth a scorner [lets] getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot.*

9:8 *Reprove not a scorner [lets], lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.*

9:9 *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.*

9:10 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*

9:11 *For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.*

9:12 *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*

Verse by verse

8:1 *Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?*

Doth not wisdom cry? The figure *Erotesis*: a question that expects the answer "Yes, she does." After the whispers of the strange woman (7:13–20), Wisdom's open cry.

and understanding put forth her voice? *Tebunah*, discernment, also pictured as a woman calling.

> **8:2** *She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.*

She standeth in the top of high places. Hebrew *merom*, the heights, where she can be seen and heard.

by the way in the places of the paths. Literally "at the house of the paths," where roads meet: the crossroads, where every traveller must choose his way.

> **8:3** *She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.*

She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Where people come and go, where business is done and judgment given (1:21). The strange woman lies in wait at corners in the dark (7:9, 12); Wisdom stands at the gates in the light.

> **8:4** *Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.*

Unto you, O men, I call. Hebrew *ishim*, men, often men of standing.

and my voice is to the sons of man. Hebrew *bene adam*, mankind, all men. Wisdom calls to great and small alike. The same words, "the sons of men," end her account of creation in verse 31: she delights in them, and so she calls to them.

> **8:5** *O ye simple [pethi], understand wisdom [ormah]: and, ye fools [kesil], be ye of an understanding heart.*

O ye simple [pethi]. The open, untaught ones (1:4).

understand wisdom [ormah]. Not *chokmah* here but *'ormah*, shrewdness, the sense that sees through a trick (1:4). What the simple need first is to stop believing every word (14:15).

and, ye fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools, settled in their folly (1:22). Even to them Wisdom calls.

be ye of an understanding heart. Hebrew *havinu lev*, "get a heart," get sense. The young man of 7:7 was "void of heart"; Wisdom offers a heart.

> **8:6** *Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.*

Hear; for I will speak of excellent things. Hebrew *negidim*, princely things, things that lead, as a prince leads.

and the opening of my lips shall be right things. Hebrew *mesharim*, straight things, the "equity" of 1:3 and 2:9.

> **8:7** *For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.*

For my mouth shall speak truth. Hebrew *chek*, the palate, the mouth: the very word used of the strange woman, whose "mouth is smoother than oil" (5:3). Her mouth flatters; Wisdom's speaks truth (*emeth*, 3:3). "Speak" is *hagah*, to utter, to murmur, the word for meditating aloud (Ps. 1:2).

and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. Hebrew *resha'*, lawlessness. Wisdom cannot say what is wrong.

> **8:8** *All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.*

All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. Every one of them.

there is nothing froward or perverse in them. Hebrew *niphtal*, twisted, wrestled into a crooked shape; *'iqqesh*, crooked (2:15). Nothing in her words is bent.

> **8:9** *They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.*

They are all plain to him that understandeth. Hebrew *nekochim*, straight ahead, straightforward (the word of 4:25, "look right on"). To the man of understanding, Wisdom's words are clear.

and right to them that find knowledge. Hebrew *yesharim*, upright, level. "The statutes of the LORD [Jehovah] are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 19:8).

> **8:10** *Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.*

Receive my instruction, and not silver. If you must choose, choose *musar*.

and knowledge rather than choice gold. As 3:14 said.

> **8:11** *For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.*

For wisdom is better than rubies. The words of 3:15. "Better" is *tov*, the word of the "better . . . than" sayings that run through the book (Part One, Chapter 6).

and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. Nothing equals her.

> **8:12** *I wisdom dwell with prudence [ormah], and find out knowledge of witty inventions [mezimmah].*

I wisdom dwell with prudence [ormah]. Hebrew *shakan*, to dwell, to abide, the word from which *mishkan*, the Tabernacle, comes. Wisdom lives with *'ormah*, shrewdness (v. 5). The figure *Prosopopoeia* is plain here: wisdom is a woman, and prudence is her house-mate, as understanding is her "kinswoman" (7:4).

and find out knowledge of witty inventions [mezimmah]. "Witty" in old English meant "wise" (from *wit*, to know). *Mezimmoth* is discretion, sound plans (1:4). Wisdom finds out the knowledge of how to plan well.

> **8:13** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is to hate evil. A definition. The fear of Jehovah is not a feeling only; it is a hatred of what He hates (6:16–19).

pride, and arrogancy. Hebrew *ge'ah* and *ga'on*, two words from the same root, set together by the figure *Paronomasia*: pride and proud-ness.

and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. *Tahpukoth*, perversity (2:12). Wisdom hates what Jehovah hates: pride, evil conduct, twisted speech.

> **8:14** *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom [tushiyyah]: I am understanding; I have strength.*

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom [tushiyyah]. *'Etsah*, counsel, and *tushiyyah*, the sound wisdom that stands and works (2:7).

I am understanding. *Binah*.

I have strength. Hebrew *gevurah*, might. These are the gifts named in Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah: "And the spirit of the LORD [Jehovah] shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might" (Isa. 11:2). God would give to His anointed one the very things Wisdom here says are hers.

> **8:15** *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.*

By me kings reign. A king without wisdom cannot rule well. Solomon knew it, and asked for "an understanding heart to judge thy people" (1 Kings 3:9). "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise" (Dan. 2:21).

and princes decree justice. Hebrew *rozenim*, rulers; *chaqaq*, to engrave, to enact. Just laws come from wisdom.

> **8:16** *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.*

By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. Hebrew *sarim*, princes; *nedivim*, nobles. Some Hebrew copies read "judges of righteousness" instead of "judges of the earth," as *The Companion Bible* notes. Every rightful ruler governs by wisdom.

> **8:17** *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*

I love them that love me. Wisdom answers love with love.

and those that seek me early shall find me. Hebrew *shachar*, to seek eagerly (1:28; 7:15). To the refusers, Wisdom said, "they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (1:28). The difference is the time of seeking. Those who seek her in youth, in good time, find her.

> **8:18** *Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.*

Riches and honour are with me. As in 3:16.

yea, durable riches and righteousness. Hebrew *'atheq*, enduring, long-lasting. The riches of the strange woman's house are gone by morning (7:18); Wisdom's last.

8:19 *My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.*

My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold. Hebrew *charuts* (3:14) and *paz*, refined gold.

and my revenue than choice silver. Hebrew *tevu'ah*, yield, income (3:14).

8:20 *I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:*

I lead in the way of righteousness. Hebrew *halakh*, I walk. Wisdom walks the road herself.

in the midst of the paths of judgment. In the middle, not at the edges. She does not walk near the line; she walks down the centre of the right road.

8:21 *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*

That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance. Hebrew *yesh*, "that which is": real substance, true wealth, as opposed to what only seems to be (compare *tushiyyah*, "that which is," 2:7).

and I will fill their treasures. Their storehouses.

8:22 *The LORD [Jehovah] possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.*

The LORD [Jehovah] possessed me. Hebrew *qanah*, to get, to acquire, to possess. It is the word used of the son in 4:5, 7: "Get (*qanah*) wisdom." The son must get wisdom; Jehovah had it already. The Greek Old Testament rendered the word "created," and the early church argued fiercely over that rendering, both sides assuming that Wisdom here was the Son of God. But the verse is not about the creation of a person. Wisdom is pictured as a woman throughout these chapters (1:20; 4:6–8; 7:4; 9:1), set opposite Folly, who is also a woman (9:13). The figure is *Prosopopoeia*, as *The Companion Bible* itself labels the passage in its structure: "Wisdom personified." What 3:19 says plainly, "The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth," this passage says in a figure. God has never been without His wisdom. (See Appendix F, Question 3.)

in the beginning of his way. Hebrew *reshith darko*, "the beginning of His way." *Reshith* is the word of 1:7 and Genesis 1:1. Before Jehovah did anything, wisdom was His.

before his works of old. Before anything was made.

The New Testament calls Jesus Christ "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and says that He "of God is made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30), and that in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). God's wisdom, by which He made the world, is shown in Christ, and is given to those who are in Him. Christ is the fulfilment of what Wisdom pictures. But the Proverbs are not describing a second Person beside God. They are describing God's own wisdom, as a woman, so that the son will love her.

8:23 *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

I was set up from everlasting. Hebrew *nissakhti*, "I was installed," the word used of a king set on his throne: "Yet have I set (*nasakh*) my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6). "From everlasting" is *me'olam*, from of old, from the farthest past.

from the beginning. Hebrew *merosh*, from the head, the first.

or ever the earth was. Before the earth existed.

> **8:24** *When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.*

When there were no depths. Hebrew *tehomoth*, the deeps (3:20).

I was brought forth. Hebrew *cholalti*, from *chul*, a word used of the pains of birth. The figure continues: Wisdom speaks as one born. The same word is used of the making of the earth itself: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed (*chul*) the earth and the world" (Ps. 90:2). Birth is a picture of origin, used of the mountains and the earth as well as of wisdom.

when there were no fountains abounding with water. Hebrew *ma'yanoth*, springs; "abounding" is "heavy," laden with water.

> **8:25** *Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:*

Before the mountains were settled. Hebrew *tava'*, to sink in, as a foundation is sunk (Job 38:6).

before the hills was I brought forth. *Chul* again.

> **8:26** *While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.*

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields. Hebrew *chutsoth*, the open country.

nor the highest part of the dust of the world. Hebrew *rosh*, the head, the first part, the sum; *tevel*, the habitable world. Before the first grain of dust.

> **8:27** *When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:*

When he prepared the heavens, I was there. Hebrew *kun*, to set up, to establish. Wisdom was present at every step.

when he set a compass upon the face of the depth. Hebrew *chug*, a circle, the circle of the horizon set on the face of the waters. "It is he that sitteth upon the circle (*chug*) of the earth" (Isa. 40:22); "He hath compassed the waters with bounds" (Job 26:10).

> **8:28** *When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:*

When he established the clouds above. Hebrew *amats*, to make firm; *shechaqim*, the skies (3:20).

when he strengthened the fountains of the deep. Hebrew *'azaz*, to make strong. He set the springs of the deep in their place.

> **8:29** *When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:*

When he gave to the sea his decree. Hebrew *choq*, a statute, a boundary set by law.

that the waters should not pass his commandment. Literally "His mouth." The sea stops where God says. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11; compare Ps. 104:9; Jer. 5:22).

when he appointed the foundations of the earth. Hebrew *chaqaq*, to mark out, to engrave, the word of verse 15, "decree."

> **8:30** *Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;*

Then I was by him. Hebrew *etslo*, beside Him.

as one brought up with him. Hebrew *'amon*. The word is found only here in this form, and it has been read three ways: as "one brought up," a child nursed and raised (the King James Version); as "a master workman," a skilled craftsman (the Revised Version; compare *'omman*, "a cunning workman," Song 7:1); and as "constantly, faithfully" (*The Companion Bible*). Each reading keeps the same picture: Wisdom was beside Jehovah, close to Him, as He made all things.

and I was daily his delight. Hebrew *sha'ashu'im*, delights. Day by day, through the days of creation.

rejoicing always before him. Hebrew *mesacheqeth*, playing, laughing, rejoicing. The picture is of a child playing happily in the presence of her father while he works. Creation was not grim labour; it was done with joy.

> **8:31** *Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.*

Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth. *Mesacheqeth* again; *tevel*, the inhabited world.

and my delights were with the sons of men. Hebrew *bene adam*, the sons of Adam, mankind. Wisdom delighted in the world, and most of all in man, the last and highest of God's works. That is why she calls to the sons of men (v. 4). The wisdom that made the world wants to live with men.

> **8:32** *Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.*

Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children. Hebrew *banim*, sons. Wisdom now speaks as the father has spoken (4:1; 5:7; 7:24). "Now therefore": because of all she has said of herself.

for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hebrew *ashre*, "O the happinesses" (3:13).

> **8:33** *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.*

Hear instruction, and be wise. *Musar*.

and refuse it not. Hebrew *para'*, to let go, to neglect (1:25; 4:15).

> **8:34** *Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.*

Blessed is the man that heareth me. *Ashre*.

watching daily at my gates. Hebrew *shaqad*, to be wakeful, to keep watch. He comes early and waits.

waiting at the posts of my doors. Hebrew *mezuzoth*, the doorposts, where Israel wrote the words of the Law (Deut. 6:9). He waits at her door like a lover, or like a servant waiting for his master's word. "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10). The young man of 7:8 waited near the strange woman's corner; the blessed man waits at Wisdom's door.

> **8:35** *For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD [Jehovah].*

For whoso findeth me findeth life. The opposite of 7:27.

and shall obtain favour of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *ratson*, goodwill, acceptance. The words are the same as 18:22: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah]." Wisdom is the bride worth finding.

> **8:36** *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.*

But he that sinneth against me. Hebrew *chote'i*, "he that misses me," the root of the word for sin: missing the mark.

wrongeth his own soul. Hebrew *chamas*, to do violence to. He harms himself.

all they that hate me love death. Not that they want to die, but that what they love leads there. To hate wisdom is, in the end, to choose death.

> **9:1** *Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:*

Wisdom hath builded her house. Hebrew *chokmoth*, "Wisdoms," the plural of fullness, as in 1:20. Wisdom, who walked the streets, now has a house of her own, and she invites guests to it. "Every wise woman buildeth her house" (14:1, also *chokmoth*).

she hath hewn out her seven pillars. Hebrew *chatsav*, to hew, to cut stone. Seven is the number of completeness and spiritual perfection. Her house is complete, well built, and spacious, a great house with a pillared hall for guests. Many writers have tried to name the seven pillars (seven gifts, seven virtues, seven assemblies); the text names none, and the number is enough: nothing is lacking.

> **9:2** *She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.*

She hath killed her beasts. Hebrew *tavach*, to slaughter for a feast.

she hath mingled her wine. Hebrew *masak*, to mix, to blend with spices for richness.

she hath also furnished her table. Hebrew *'arak*, to set in order. The feast is ready.

> **9:3** *She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city,*

She hath sent forth her maidens. Hebrew *na'aroth*, young women, servants. The Lord Jesus Christ told of a king who made a marriage feast and "sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden" (Matt. 22:3).

she crieth upon the highest places of the city. Hebrew *gappe meromé qareth*, the heights of the town. As in 8:2, she calls from where all can hear.

> **9:4** *Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,*

Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither. The open, untaught one, who can still be taught. Wisdom's invitation is to him first, as the book's first purpose was (1:4). "Turn in" is *sur*, to turn aside: come off the road and into my house. Folly will use the same words (9:16).

as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him. Hebrew *chasar lev*, lacking heart, without sense: the very words used of the young man at the window (7:7). Wisdom invites the very man the strange woman caught.

> **9:5** *Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*

Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. The feast of wisdom is free. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1).

> **9:6** *Forsake the foolish [pethi], and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

Forsake the foolish [pethi], and live. Not "the foolish" but "the simple ones," *pethayim*, the same word as verse 4. Leave the company of the untaught, and leave your own simpleness behind. To stay simple is to stay in danger; to leave it is to live.

and go in the way of understanding. Hebrew *ashar*, to walk straight on (4:14). *Binah*.

> **9:7** *He that reproveth a scorner [lets] getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot.*

He that reproveth a scorner [lets] getteth to himself shame. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught (1:22). Reproving him brings nothing but insult on the one who tries.

and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Hebrew *mum*, a blemish, a stain. The scorner will repay the rebuke by smearing the name of the one who gave it. These verses (9:7–9) explain why Wisdom calls the simple and not the scorner: there is no use calling one who will not hear.

> **9:8** *Reprove not a scorner [lets], lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.*

Reprove not a scorner [lets], lest he hate thee. The scorner turns reproof into hatred. The Lord Jesus Christ taught the same: "neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matt. 7:6).

rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. The test of a wise man is how he takes correction. David was rebuked by Nathan and answered, "I have sinned against the LORD [Jehovah]" (2 Sam. 12:13). "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness" (Ps. 141:5).

> **9:9** *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.*

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser. The word "instruction" is supplied by the translators; "Give to a wise man" is enough. Whatever you give him, he grows by it (1:5).

teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. *Leqach*, teaching received (1:5).

> **9:10** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of wisdom. Hebrew *techillath*, the starting point. In 1:7 the word was *reshith*, the first and chief part; here it is the place where wisdom starts. The division began with the fear of Jehovah (1:7) and comes back to it at the end.

and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Hebrew *qedoshim*, "the holy," plural, the plural of majesty used of the Holy One, God Himself (as in 30:3; Hos. 11:12). To know the Holy One is understanding.

> **9:11** *For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.*

For by me thy days shall be multiplied. Wisdom speaks again (8:35).

and the years of thy life shall be increased. The promise of 3:2, 16 and 4:10.

> **9:12** *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*

If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself. The benefit of wisdom comes to the one who has it.

but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. Hebrew *lits*, to scorn, the verb of the scorner (*lets*, v. 7). No one else can carry the consequences for him. "Every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:5; compare Ezek. 18:20). Wisdom's last word in the division is personal: the choice, and its result, are yours.

Looking back

Wisdom has spoken for herself. Her words are true and straight; her gifts are better than gold and they last; kings rule by her; she was with Jehovah before the world began, His delight, rejoicing in the world He made and in the sons of men. And she has built her house and set her table, and she calls to the simple: come in, eat, drink, and live. The discourse has answered the question the son might ask: why should I want wisdom? Because she is the wisdom of God, and whoever finds her finds life.

Discourse 10 — The Foolish Woman (9:13–18)

Place: Division 1; member B^5 (the foolish woman).

Introduction

The last discourse of the division is the last warning, and it is a mirror. Wisdom has built her house and called to the simple (9:1–6); now Folly sits at the door of hers and calls to them too (9:13–18). She sits in the same high places, she uses the very same words, and she offers food and drink. But her bread is stolen and her water is secret, and the guests in her house are dead.

The strange woman of the earlier warnings has become Folly in person. The son who has learned to refuse the one has learned to refuse the other.

Structure

This structure is from *The Companion Bible*.

- Q | 13. Her character.
- R | S | 14. From high places.
- T | 15. From the right way.
- *Q* | 16. Her call.
- *R* | *T* | 17. To the wrong way.
- *S* | 18. To the lowest place.

She calls from the high places (v. 14), and she leads to the lowest (v. 18). She calls those who are going the right way (v. 15), and she invites them into the wrong one (v. 17).

The Text

> **9:13** *A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.*
> **9:14** *For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,*
> **9:15** *To call passengers who go right on their ways:*
> **9:16** *Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,*
> **9:17** *Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.*
> **9:18** *But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.*

Verse by verse

> **9:13** *A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.*

A foolish woman. Hebrew *eshet kesiluth*, "a woman of folly," Folly herself pictured as a woman, as Wisdom was. *Kesiluth* is the folly of the [kesil], the dull, self-satisfied fool (1:22).

is clamorous. Hebrew *homiyyah*, noisy, restless, turbulent: the word used of the strange woman, "loud and stubborn" (7:11). Wisdom "crieth"; Folly makes noise.

she is simple. Hebrew *pethayyuth*, simpleness itself, from the same root as [pethi]. Folly is open to everything and committed to nothing.

and knoweth nothing. She knows nothing at all. Wisdom was with Jehovah when He made the world (8:22–31); Folly does not know anything.

> **9:14** *For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,*

For she sitteth at the door of her house. She does not need to build; she sits. Wisdom builds, prepares and sends (9:1–3); Folly sits and waits.

on a seat in the high places of the city. Hebrew *kisse*, a seat, a throne. She has taken a place in the heights, as Wisdom did (9:3). She copies Wisdom.

> **9:15** *To call passengers who go right on their ways:*

To call passengers. Hebrew *'overe derekh*, those passing along the road.

who go right on their ways. Hebrew *hameyashrim*, those going straight. She calls to people who are on the right road, to turn them off it. The young man of chapter 7 was drifting; Folly goes after those who are not.

> **9:16** *Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,*

Whoso is simple [pethi], let him turn in hither. The open, untaught one. Her words are exactly Wisdom's (9:4). Folly does not announce herself as Folly; she sounds like Wisdom. The simple man, who believes every word (14:15), cannot tell them apart. That is why he needs [ormah], shrewdness (1:4; 8:5).

and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him. *Chasar lev*, without sense (7:7; 9:4).

> **9:17** *Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.*

Stolen waters are sweet. The strange woman's offer, put in a proverb. The son was told to drink from his own cistern (5:15); Folly offers water from someone else's, and says that it tastes sweeter because it is stolen.

and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Hebrew *sethārim*, secret places. Wisdom offered bread and wine openly, from her own table (9:5); Folly offers bread eaten in hiding. The thrill is in the secrecy. It is the oldest lie: that what God forbids must be sweeter than what He gives (Gen. 3:4–6).

> **9:18** *But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.*

But he knoweth not that the dead are there. Hebrew *rephaim*, the dead (2:18). Folly "knoweth nothing" (v. 13), and the one who listens to her does not know either.

and that her guests are in the depths of hell. Hebrew *qeru'eha*, "her invited ones"; *'imqe sheol*, the depths of the grave. Wisdom said, "Forsake the simple, and live" (9:6); Folly's guests are dead. The division ends where the house of the strange woman always led: "the chambers of death" (7:27).

Looking back

The two women stand side by side at the end of the division. Both have a house; both sit or stand in the high places; both call to the simple with the same words; both offer food and drink. One offers what she has prepared, openly, and her guests live; the other offers what is stolen, in secret, and her guests are in the grave. The son must choose, and he now knows enough to do it.

Looking Back on Division 1

The first division of the book has done what it set out to do. A father has spoken to his son, and through him to every son who will listen.

He has shown him two voices. The sinners whisper, "Come with us" (1:11); Wisdom cries aloud, "Turn you at my reproof" (1:23). The strange woman flatters in the dark (7:13–20); Wisdom speaks the truth at the gates (8:6–9). At the end, Folly copies Wisdom's very words (9:4, 16), and only the son who has listened carefully can tell them apart.

He has shown him two ends. The way of the sinners takes the life of those who walk in it (1:19). The house of the strange woman slopes down to death (2:18); her steps take hold on the grave (5:5); her house is the way to the chambers of death (7:27); her guests are in the depths of the grave (9:18). But whoever hearkens to Wisdom dwells safely (1:33); her ways are pleasantness and her paths are peace (3:17); she is a tree of life (3:18); and whoever finds her finds life (8:35).

He has shown him where wisdom begins and where it comes from. It begins with the fear of Jehovah (1:7; 9:10). It is found by the son who receives his father's words and searches for it as for hidden treasure (2:1–4); and it is given by Jehovah, out of whose mouth come knowledge and understanding (2:6). It is the very wisdom by which Jehovah founded the earth (3:19; 8:22–31).

He has passed on what he was given. "Get wisdom" was David's charge to Solomon (4:4, 5), and it is Solomon's charge to his son. The teaching of a father and a mother (1:8; 6:20) is a lamp and a light (6:23), and it goes with the son by day and by night (6:22).

He has warned him of what he himself did not escape. The warnings against the strange woman answer to the law of the king (Deut. 17:17), and the man who wrote them was later turned aside by "outlandish women" (Neh. 13:26). The father's failure does not make his words less true. It makes them more urgent.

He has named the kinds of men. The simple [pethi], who can still be taught; the fool [kesil], settled in his folly; the fool [ewil], whose folly shows in what he does; the scorner [lets], who will not be taught at all; and the sluggard [atsel], who will not rise. The son has met them all, and learned what each becomes.

With the choice made, the son is ready for the proverbs themselves. The next division begins: "The proverbs of Solomon" (10:1).

Division 2 — The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)

A. What this division is about

"The proverbs of Solomon" (10:1). With these words the book changes its form. The ten discourses of Division 1 are over, and the single sayings begin: 375 verses, nearly every one a proverb of two lines that stands complete in itself. The speaker no longer addresses "my son" (the words come only once in the whole division, at 19:27); the sayings speak *about* men, "he," "him," "they," and they are for everyone.

The son was made to choose in Division 1. Now he is given the wisdom he chose, saying by saying, for every part of life: work and idleness, speech and silence, wealth and poverty, friends and enemies, anger and patience, the king and his court, the home, the market, the gate.

B. Its two halves

The division falls into two halves, at the turn of chapter 16:

- A | 10:1–15:33. The righteous and the wicked set side by side. Mostly antithetic sayings: the second line says the opposite of the first, joined by "but."
- B | 16:1–22:16. Jehovah and the king. Mostly synonymous and synthetic sayings: the second line says again or goes on. Jehovah's rule over men's plans (16:1–9) and the king's rule (16:10–15) open it.

The change can be counted: in chapters 10 to 15 nearly nine sayings in ten are antithetic; in chapters 16 onward they are a minority. *The Companion Bible* sees the same change. It heads 10:1–15:33 "The Pious and the Ungodly. With reference to others" and 16:1–19:19 "With reference to God," and it gives each chapter a title:

- 10 | Their life and conduct (general).
- 11 | With reference to one's neighbours.
- 12 | With reference to domestic and public vocations.
- 13 | With reference to temporal and eternal good.
- 14 | With reference to wise and foolish; rich and poor; masters and servants.
- 15 | With reference to other relations in the religious sphere.
- 16 | Personal confidence in God.
- 17 | Personal contentment and peace.
- 18 | Personal virtues in social life.
- 19:1–19 | Personal character: humility, meekness, gentleness.

These titles are a fair guide to the leading subject of each chapter, though no chapter keeps to one subject throughout. (*The Companion Bible* ends this section at 19:19; this study follows the book's own heading and continues it to 22:16. See Part One, Chapter 4.)

C. How the sayings are arranged

The sayings of this division are not arranged by subject, as a modern book would be. They are arranged in runs: two, three or more sayings on one subject, or sayings linked by a shared word, and then a turn to another subject. Each chapter's runs are shown at its head, as this study's own outline. The *Subject Index* at the end of the study will gather every saying on each subject from the whole book.

D. Repeated proverbs

Some sayings are repeated, in whole or in part, in this division or elsewhere in the book. At its first occurrence a saying receives the full treatment. When it comes again, what differs is explained fully, and the reader is pointed back for the words that are the same. Sometimes the very same line means something different in its new setting, and that is explained (10:6, 11).

Part A — The Righteous and the Wicked Set Side by Side (10:1–15:33)

These six chapters are built almost entirely of contrasts. The righteous man and the wicked, the wise and the fool, the diligent and the sluggard, the rich and the poor, the truthful lip and the lying tongue are set side by side, line against line, until the reader can see each one clearly by the light of its opposite. The great question of Division 1, which way will you go?, is now answered a hundred and eighty times, one saying at a time.

Proverbs 10 — The Wise Son and the Righteous Man

Place: Division 2; Part A; the first chapter of the proverbs of Solomon. *The Companion Bible:* "Their life and conduct (general)." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

The first chapter of Solomon's proverbs is a survey of the whole ground. It begins at home, with a son who gladdens his father or grieves his mother (v. 1), and then sets the righteous man against the wicked again and again: in what he has (vv. 2–5), in what is said of him (vv. 6, 7), in what comes out of his mouth (vv. 8–21), and in how he ends (vv. 22–30). Two subjects run through it all: work and the tongue. Of its thirty-two verses, twelve speak of the mouth, the lips or the tongue.

The words "the righteous" and "the just" come thirteen times in this chapter, more than in any other chapter of the book. The righteous man is usually spoken of in the singular, and the wicked often in the plural (vv. 3, 6, 7, 11): one man against many.

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1. The son, and his father and mother.
- 2–5. Wealth and work: what profits and what does not.
- 6, 7. The head and the name: blessing and rot.
- 8–14. The heart and the mouth: the wise who receive, the fool who prates.
- 15–17. Wealth, wages and instruction.
- 18–21. The tongue: hidden hatred, many words, choice silver.
- 22–25. The blessing of Jehovah, and the whirlwind.
- 26. The sluggard.
- 27–30. The fear of Jehovah, and the end of the two men.
- 31, 32. The mouth of the just.

The Text

> **10:1** *The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish [kesil] son is the heaviness of his mother.*
>
> **10:2** *Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.*
>
> **10:3** *The LORD [Jehovah] will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.*

10:4 *He becometh poor [rash] that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

10:5 *He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.*

10:6 *Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.*

10:7 *The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.*

10:8 *The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool [ewil] shall fall.*

10:9 *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.*

10:10 *He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool [ewil] shall fall.*

10:11 *The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.*

10:12 *Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.*

10:13 *In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.*

10:14 *Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is near destruction.*

10:15 *The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor [dal] is their poverty.*

10:16 *The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.*

10:17 *He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.*

10:18 *He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool [kesil].*

10:19 *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

10:20 *The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.*

10:21 *The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools [ewil] die for want of wisdom.*

10:22 *The blessing of the LORD [Jehovah], it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.*

10:23 *It is as sport to a fool [kesil] to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.*

10:24 *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.*

10:25 *As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.*

10:26 *As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard [atsel] to them that send him.*

10:27 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*

10:28 *The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.*

10:29 *The way of the LORD [Jehovah] is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.*

10:30 *The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.*

10:31 *The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.*

> **10:32** *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.*

Verse by verse

> **10:1** *The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish [kesil] son is the heaviness of his mother.*

The proverbs of Solomon. The heading of the division. The same words began the book (1:1); here they begin Solomon's collection of single sayings, and they show that what follows is by him (Appendix F, Question 1).

A wise son. Hebrew *ben chakham*. The son of Division 1 has grown up into the subject of the proverbs. The book's single sayings begin where its discourses began: with a son and his parents (1:8).

maketh a glad father. Hebrew *yesammach*, makes to rejoice. A father's joy is bound up with his son's wisdom. "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine" (23:15).

but a foolish [kesil] son. The dull, self-satisfied fool, settled in his folly (Part One, Chapter 5). The first fool of the proverbs is a son who will not learn.

is the heaviness of his mother. Hebrew *tugah*, grief, sorrow that weighs down. The verse is antithetic: wise against foolish, glad against heaviness, father against mother. The two parents are not set against each other; both are named so that the whole home is in view. What gladdens the one grieves the other, and both carry the result. The line returns in 15:20 ("a foolish man despiseth his mother") and the thought in 17:21, 25; 19:13; 23:24, 25; and 29:3.

> **10:2** *Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.*

Treasures of wickedness. Hebrew *otsroth resha'*, treasures got by lawlessness: wealth gained by fraud, theft or violence. The plunder the sinners promised in 1:13.

profit nothing. Hebrew *lo yo'ilu*, they do not help, they are of no use. They cannot buy what matters.

but righteousness delivereth from death. Hebrew *tsedaqah*, right conduct, right standing before God; *natsal*, to snatch away (2:12). The rich fool of the Lord's parable had treasures, and God said, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20). Under the Law, righteousness was the way of life and the way out of the death the Law threatened (Deut. 30:15, 16). The words do not say that the righteous never die; they say that righteousness rescues where wealth cannot. The second line is repeated in 11:4, where the first line names the occasion: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath."

> **10:3** *The LORD [Jehovah] will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.*

The LORD [Jehovah] will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish. Hebrew *ra'ev*, to hunger. *Nephesh*, the soul, the life. The righteous man is in the singular. Jehovah provides for him. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). This is the rule of His dealings with His people, as the covenant promised (Deut. 28:1–14).

but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. Hebrew *hawwath resha'im*, "the craving of the wicked" (plural): what they greedily desire. "Casteth away" is *hadaph*, to thrust away, to push off. Jehovah feeds the righteous man's hunger and thrusts back the wicked men's greed. The King James Version's "substance" gives the sense of what they crave and gather; the Hebrew stresses the craving itself.

> **10:4** *He becometh poor [rash] that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

He becometh poor [rash]. The man in want, who lacks (Part One, Chapter 5). *Rash* is the word the book uses when it sets poverty against riches. Here a man becomes poor by his own doing.

that dealeth with a slack hand. Literally "a palm of slackness," *kaph remiyyah*. *Remiyyah* means slackness, and also deceit: the lazy hand and the false hand are the same hand, doing less than it pretends.

but the hand of the diligent maketh rich. Hebrew *charutsim*, the diligent, literally "the sharp, the keen." It is the same root as *charuts*, "fine gold" (3:14; 8:19): the keen hand turns up the gold. As with every proverb, this is the rule, not a promise for every case (Part One, Chapter 1); the book knows of the poor man who is upright (19:1) and the rich man who is wicked (28:6). But as a rule, work makes rich and sloth makes poor (6:6–11).

> **10:5** *He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.*

He that gathereth in summer. Hebrew *'ager*, to gather in, to store. *Qayits*, summer, the season of the late harvest. He does what the ant does (6:8).

is a wise son. Hebrew *ben maskil*, a son who acts wisely, from *sakal*, the root of [sekel]: the good sense that sees what must be done and does it in time.

but he that sleepeth in harvest. Hebrew *nirdam*, to sleep heavily, the deep sleep of Jonah in the ship (Jonah 1:5). *Qatsir*, harvest, the busiest weeks of the year, when every hand is needed and a day lost may not come again.

is a son that causeth shame. Hebrew *mevish*, he brings shame, on himself and on his father. Verse 1 spoke of a son who grieves his mother; verse 5 shows one way he does it.

> **10:6** *Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.*

Blessings are upon the head of the just. Hebrew *tsaddiq*, the righteous man, singular. Blessings rest on his head, as a crown (4:9) or as the hands of a father in blessing (Gen. 48:14). God blesses him, and men speak well of him.

but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. Hebrew *chamas*, violence, wrong done by force; *resha'im*, the wicked, plural. The Hebrew can be read two ways: "violence covereth the mouth of the wicked," or "the mouth of the wicked covereth violence." Here, set against blessings on the head of the

just, the first reading fits: as blessings come down upon the head of the righteous, so the violence the wicked have done comes back upon them and covers their mouths, stopping them, as shame covers the face (Ps. 69:7; Hab. 2:17, "the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee"). The same line comes again in verse 11, where the other reading fits better (see there).

10:7 *The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.*

The memory of the just is blessed. Hebrew *zekher tsaddiq livrakhah*, "the memory of the righteous one is for a blessing." When he is gone, his name is spoken with thanks. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps. 112:6). The Jews still say "of blessed memory" of the righteous dead, from this verse.

but the name of the wicked shall rot. Hebrew *raqav*, to rot, to decay, like wood that crumbles (12:4; 14:30). Their name is not remembered with blessing, and in time it is not remembered at all. "Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever" (Ps. 9:5).

10:8 *The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool [ewil] shall fall.*

The wise in heart. Hebrew *chakham lev*, wise of heart. Wisdom begins inside (4:23).

will receive commandments. Hebrew *yiqqach*, he takes, he accepts (1:3; 2:1). The wise man is the one who is willing to be told. He does not need to be persuaded to listen.

but a prating fool [ewil]. The fool whose folly shows in what he does, despising correction (1:7). "Prating" is supplied from the Hebrew *'ewil sephathayim*, "a fool of lips": a fool who is all talk. The wise man takes in; the fool pours out. He will not receive commandments because he is too busy talking.

shall fall. Hebrew *yillavet*, he shall be thrown down, come to ruin. The word is found only here, in verse 10, and in Hosea 4:14 ("the people that doth not understand shall fall").

10:9 *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.*

He that walketh uprightly. Hebrew *battom*, in integrity, in wholeness (2:7). His life is all of one piece; what he seems is what he is.

walketh surely. Hebrew *betach*, in security, safely (1:33; 3:23). He has nothing to hide, so he has nothing to fear.

but he that perverteth his ways. Hebrew *me'aqqesh*, he who makes his ways crooked, twisted (2:15). He takes the hidden, winding road.

shall be known. He will be found out. What is crooked cannot stay hidden. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

10:10 *He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool [ewil] shall fall.*

He that winketh with the eye. Hebrew *qorets 'ayin*, narrowing the eye, the secret signal of the worthless man (6:13).

causeth sorrow. Hebrew *'atsseveth*, pain, grief. His secret signs cause trouble for others.

but a prating fool [ewil] shall fall. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. This line is the same, word for word, as the second line of verse 8; see there for "prating fool" and "shall fall." What differs is the line it answers. In verse 8 the prating fool was set against the wise man who receives commandments: the fool talks instead of listening. Here he is set beside the man who winks: the one does harm in silence with his eye, the other does harm out loud with his lips, and both come to grief. The verse is not antithetic but synthetic: two kinds of mischief, one end. (The Greek Old Testament has a different second line, "but he that rebuketh openly maketh peace," which gives an antithesis; the Hebrew text, as printed in the King James Version, is followed here.)

> **10:11** *The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.*

The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life. Hebrew *meqor chayyim*, a fountain of life, a spring that gives life. His words refresh and keep alive those who hear them, as a spring does in a dry land. The same figure is used of the law of the wise (13:14), of the fear of Jehovah (14:27), and of understanding (16:22). "For with thee is the fountain of life (*meqor chayyim*): in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. The same words as the second line of verse 6; see there for *chamas*, violence. But here the line answers "the mouth of a righteous man," and so the other reading of the Hebrew fits better: "the mouth of the wicked covereth (conceals) violence." The righteous man's mouth pours out life; the wicked man's mouth hides violence behind its words. "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart" (Ps. 55:21). The same words, set in a new place, show a new side of the wicked man: in verse 6 his violence covers him; in verse 11 he covers his violence.

> **10:12** *Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.*

Hatred stirreth up strifes. Hebrew *te'orer*, wakes up, rouses. *Medanim*, strifes, quarrels (6:14, 19). Hatred will not let old quarrels sleep; it digs them up and starts them again.

but love covereth all sins. Hebrew *kasah*, to cover, the same verb as in verses 6 and 11. *Pesha'im*, transgressions, offences. Love does not stir up the offence; it covers it, does not spread it abroad, and forgives it. "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (17:9). Peter applies the verse to believers: "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8; compare Jas. 5:20). Love does not call sin anything but sin; it refuses to make a public matter of a wrong it can forgive in private. The wicked man covers violence (v. 11); love covers sins.

> **10:13** *In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.*

In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found. Hebrew *navon*, the discerning man (1:5). When he speaks, wisdom is there to be found; men go to him for it.

but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding. Hebrew *chasar lev*, lacking heart, without sense (7:7; 9:4). The man of understanding is taught by words; the man without sense must be taught by the rod. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's [kesil] back" (26:3). Words are wasted on him, so blows must do what words could not.

> **10:14** *Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is near destruction.*

Wise men lay up knowledge. Hebrew *tsaphan*, to store up, to treasure (2:1, 7; 7:1). They gather knowledge and keep it until it is needed. They do not spend it as soon as they get it.

but the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is near destruction. The fool whose folly shows in what he does (1:7). He does not store; he spills. His mouth is always open, and it is always near to ruin, his own and others'. "Near destruction" is *mechittah qerovah*, ruin close at hand.

> **10:15** *The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor [dal] is their poverty.*

The rich man's wealth is his strong city. Hebrew *qiryath 'uzzo*, his fortified town. His money is his defence; it shields him from many troubles.

the destruction of the poor [dal] is their poverty. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). "Destruction" is *mechittah*, ruin, the word of verse 14. "Poverty" is *resh*, want (6:11). The poor man has no walls; every trouble that strikes him strikes home. The verse states a fact of life, without praise or blame. Its second half is a call to pity; its first half is answered in 18:11, where the same words go on: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall *in his own conceit*." The wall is real, but it is not as high as he thinks (11:4, 28).

> **10:16** *The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.*

The labour of the righteous tendeth to life. Hebrew *pe'ullah*, wages, the reward of work. What the righteous man earns goes toward life: it feeds his house and supports what is good.

the fruit of the wicked to sin. Hebrew *tevu'ah*, produce, income (3:14). What the wicked man gains only gives him more means to sin. Two men may earn the same; what decides its worth is what it serves.

> **10:17** *He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.*

He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction. Hebrew *shomer musar*, he who keeps correction (1:2). To keep it is to be on the road of life (6:23, "reproofs of instruction are the way of life").

but he that refuseth reproof erreth. Hebrew *'ozev tokachath*, he who leaves reproof (1:23). "Erreth" is *mat'eh*, he causes to wander: he goes astray, and leads others astray with him. The Hebrew can be read either way, and both are true; a man who will not be corrected does not wander alone.

> **10:18** *He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool [kesil].*

He that hideth hatred with lying lips. He smiles and speaks kindly while he hates. Joab took Amasa by the beard "to kiss him," and smote him with the sword (2 Sam. 20:9, 10).

and he that uttereth a slander. Hebrew *motsi dibbah*, he who brings out an evil report, as the ten spies "brought up an evil report (*dibbah*)" of the land (Num. 13:32).

is a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Whether he hides his hatred under lies or lets it out in slander, he is a fool either way. The verse is not antithetic but synthetic: two wrong ways of dealing with hatred, and one name for both. The right way is the one of verse 12: love covers.

> **10:19** *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin. Where there are many words, sin is never lacking. The more a man talks, the more likely he is to say what is false, unkind or foolish. "A fool's voice is known by multitude of words" (Eccl. 5:3).

but he that refraineth his lips is wise. Hebrew *chosekh*, he who holds back, restrains (the word of 11:24; 13:24, "spareth"). "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19). The figure of speech is *Meiosis*: "there wanteth not sin" means "there is sure to be much sin."

> **10:20** *The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.*

The tongue of the just is as choice silver. Hebrew *kesef nivchar*, choice, tested silver, refined and pure. His words are valuable, and there is no dross in them. "The words of the LORD [Jehovah] are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6).

the heart of the wicked is little worth. *Kim'at*, like a little thing, worth almost nothing. The just man's *tongue* is set against the wicked man's *heart*: the just man's least part is worth more than the wicked man's chief part. What comes out of the mouth shows what is in the heart (4:23).

> **10:21** *The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools [ewil] die for want of wisdom.*

The lips of the righteous feed many. Hebrew *yir'u*, they shepherd, they pasture. His words feed and guide others, as a shepherd feeds his flock.

but fools [ewil] die for want of wisdom. The fools whose folly shows in what they do. Literally "for want of heart," *chasar lev*. The righteous man feeds many; the fools cannot even feed themselves, and starve.

> **10:22** *The blessing of the LORD [Jehovah], it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.*

The blessing of the LORD [Jehovah], it maketh rich. The rich are not made rich by their own hand only (v. 4), but by the blessing of Jehovah. "Thou shalt remember the LORD [Jehovah] thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18).

and he addeth no sorrow with it. Hebrew *'etsev*, toil, pain (5:10). The wealth that comes from God's blessing does not come loaded with grief. The sentence can also be read, "and toil adds nothing to it": man's anxious labour adds nothing to what God's blessing gives (Ps. 127:2, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows"). Both readings agree: the riches worth having are those God gives, and they come without the sorrow that wealth gotten otherwise brings (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

> **10:23** *It is as sport to a fool [kesil] to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.*

It is as sport to a fool [kesil] to do mischief. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Sport" is *sechoq*, laughter, play (the word of 8:30, 31, where Wisdom "rejoiced," played, before Jehovah). Wisdom's play is creation; the fool's play is mischief, *zimmah*, a wicked plan, often of lewdness.

but a man of understanding hath wisdom. The second line is shortened; the sense is, "as mischief is sport to the fool, so wisdom is delight to the man of understanding." Each enjoys what he is.

> **10:24** *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.*

The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him. What he dreads will come. He knows, beneath all his boldness, what he deserves; and it comes. "The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me" (Job 3:25, said by a righteous man in his trial; here the dread of the wicked is just).

but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. God gives it. "Delight thyself also in the LORD [Jehovah]; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4).

> **10:25** *As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.*

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more. Hebrew *suphah*, the storm-wind of 1:27. When it has gone by, the wicked man has gone with it; he is swept away.

but the righteous is an everlasting foundation. Hebrew *yesod 'olam*, a foundation that lasts. The storm passes over the righteous man and he is still there. The Lord Jesus Christ told of the house built on the rock: "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. 7:25).

> **10:26** *As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard [atsel] to them that send him.*

As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes. Two small, sharp miseries: the sour sting of vinegar on the teeth and the burning of smoke in the eyes. Neither will kill you; both are hard to bear.

so is the sluggard [atsel] to them that send him. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. Send him on an errand and he will set your teeth on edge and bring tears to your eyes. Compare the faithful messenger of 25:13: "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him." This is the first "as . . . so" proverb of the division (Part One, Chapter 6).

> **10:27** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] prolongeth days. The promise of 3:2, 16; 9:11: length of days, the blessing of the covenant (Deut. 6:2). *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 75) lists this among the verses where "length of days" is promised. Under the Law it was promised and given as the rule of God's dealing with Israel.

but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. As a rule, the wicked man's way shortens his life: violence, drink, folly and judgment cut it off. "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (Ps. 55:23).

> **10:28** *The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.*

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness. Hebrew *tocheleth*, expectation, waiting hope. What he waits for will end in joy.

but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. Hebrew *tiqwath*, hope (the word of the "line" of scarlet thread, Josh. 2:18, a cord one holds to). What the wicked man hopes for comes to nothing. The same words are used in 11:7.

> **10:29** *The way of the LORD [Jehovah] is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.*

The way of the LORD [Jehovah] is strength to the upright. Jehovah's way, His dealings, His ways of governing the world, are a stronghold (*ma'oz*) to the man of integrity (*tom*, 10:9).

but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. Hebrew *mechittah*, ruin (v. 14). The same way of Jehovah that shelters the upright ruins the wicked. "The ways of the LORD [Jehovah] are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hos. 14:9).

> **10:30** *The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.*

The righteous shall never be removed. Hebrew *bal yimmot*, shall not be shaken, shall not totter. "He that doeth these things shall never be moved" (Ps. 15:5).

but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth. Hebrew *erets*, the land. The promise of 2:21, 22: the upright dwell in the land; the wicked are rooted out. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD [Jehovah], they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9).

> **10:31** *The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.*

The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom. Hebrew *yanuv*, it bears fruit, it sprouts, like a tree. Wisdom grows out of his mouth.

but the froward tongue shall be cut out. Hebrew *lashon tahpukoth*, a tongue of perversities (2:12). The figure continues: as a fruitless branch is cut off, so the tongue that bears only twisted words will be cut out.

> **10:32** *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.*

The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable. Hebrew *ratson*, what pleases, what is welcome (8:35). He knows the right word for the moment. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (25:11).

but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness. *Tahpukoth*, perversities (v. 31). The chapter ends as it ran: with the mouth of the righteous and the mouth of the wicked, one fruitful and welcome, the other twisted.

Looking back

The first chapter of Solomon's proverbs has drawn the two men in full. The righteous man is a wise son, a diligent worker, a giver of blessing; his mouth is a well of life, his tongue choice silver, his lips food for many; he covers sins with love; he stands when the whirlwind has passed, and his name is remembered with blessing. The wicked man has treasures that do not help, a mouth that hides violence, a heart worth little, and an end like the passing storm. Between them stands the fool, all talk and no hearing, who dies for want of sense. The rest of Part A will take each part of this picture and look at it more closely.

Proverbs 11 — Righteousness Delivers

Place: Division 2; Part A. *The Companion Bible:* "With reference to one's neighbours." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 11 turns from the man himself to the man among others: his customers (v. 1), his neighbours (vv. 9, 12, 13), his city (vv. 10, 11), his household (vv. 17, 29), the hungry who need grain (v. 26), and the people he may win (v. 30). Its great word is "deliver": righteousness delivers from death (v. 4), delivers the upright (v. 6), delivers out of trouble (vv. 8, 9, 21). The chapter also gives the book's teaching on giving: the man who scatters grows richer, and the liberal soul is made fat (vv. 24–26).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1. Honest weights.
- 2–8. Pride and integrity; righteousness delivers.
- 9–14. The neighbour and the city: the mouth that destroys, the tongue that keeps silent, the counsel that saves.
- 15. The surety.
- 16–23. Kindness and cruelty, and their wages.
- 24–26. Scattering and withholding.
- 27–31. Seeking good; the tree of life; the righteous and the wicked repaid.

The Text

> **11:1** *A false balance is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but a just weight is his delight.*
>
> **11:2** *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*
>
> **11:3** *The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.*
>
> **11:4** *Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.*
>
> **11:5** *The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.*
>
> **11:6** *The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness.*
>
> **11:7** *When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth.*
>
> **11:8** *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.*
>
> **11:9** *An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.*

> **11:10** *When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting.*
>
> **11:11** *By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.*
>
> **11:12** *He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.*
>
> **11:13** *A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*
>
> **11:14** *Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*
>
> **11:15** *He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.*
>
> **11:16** *A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches.*
>
> **11:17** *The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.*
>
> **11:18** *The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.*
>
> **11:19** *As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.*
>
> **11:20** *They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but such as are upright in their way are his delight.*
>
> **11:21** *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.*
>
> **11:22** *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.*
>
> **11:23** *The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.*
>
> **11:24** *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.*
>
> **11:25** *The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*
>
> **11:26** *He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*
>
> **11:27** *He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.*
>
> **11:28** *He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.*
>
> **11:29** *He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool [ewil] shall be servant to the wise of heart.*
>
> **11:30** *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*
>
> **11:31** *Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.*

Verse by verse

> **11:1** *A false balance is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but a just weight is his delight.*

A false balance. Hebrew *mo'zne mirmah*, scales of deceit: scales rigged to cheat the buyer.

is abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. *To'evah*, a thing detested (3:32). Cheating in the market is not a small matter of business; Jehovah hates it. The Law commanded, "Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have" (Lev. 19:36), and called the man who used two kinds of weights an abomination (Deut. 25:13–16). The prophets condemned the merchants who made "the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit" (Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11).

but a just weight is his delight. Hebrew *even shelemah*, a whole stone, a full weight (weights were stones). Honest dealing in the smallest matters pleases God. The saying comes back in 16:11 and 20:10, 23.

> **11:2** *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

When pride cometh, then cometh shame. Hebrew *zadon*, presumption, arrogance; *qalon*, disgrace. The two arrive together; where the one goes in, the other follows close behind. In Hebrew the two words sound alike, the figure *Paronomasia*. Haman's pride brought him to the gallows (Esth. 7:10); Uzziah's to leprosy (2 Chr. 26:16–21).

but with the lowly is wisdom. Hebrew *tsenu'im*, the modest, those who walk humbly. The verb is used only once elsewhere: "and to walk humbly (*tsana'*) with thy God" (Mic. 6:8). The proud man is shamed because he will not learn; the humble man is wise because he will. The same truth is said in 16:18; 18:12; and 29:23.

> **11:3** *The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.*

The integrity of the upright shall guide them. Hebrew *tummah*, wholeness, integrity (2:7; 10:9); *nachah*, to lead, to guide (6:22). An upright man does not need to calculate every step; his integrity shows him the way.

but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. Hebrew *selef*, crookedness, twisting; *bogedim*, the treacherous, the faithless (2:22). Their crooked dealing is what ruins them. "Destroy" is *shadad*, to lay waste.

> **11:4** *Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.*

Riches profit not in the day of wrath. Hebrew *'evrah*, overflowing wrath. The day of wrath is the day of God's judgment, when He deals with sin. "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's [Jehovah's] wrath" (Zeph. 1:18; Ezek. 7:19).

but righteousness delivereth from death. The same words as the second line of 10:2; see there. What differs is the first line. In 10:2 it was "treasures of wickedness," wealth wrongly gained; here it is "riches," wealth of any kind. Even honest riches cannot help in the day of wrath. Only righteousness can.

> **11:5** *The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.*

The righteousness of the perfect. Hebrew *tamim*, the whole, the blameless (2:21).

shall direct his way. Hebrew *yashar*, to make straight, the word of 3:6, "he shall direct thy paths." His righteousness levels the road before him.

but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. *Rish'ah*. The wicked man needs no enemy; his own wickedness trips him.

> **11:6** *The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness.*

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them. *Natsal*, to snatch away (2:12).

but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. Hebrew *bogedim*, the treacherous (v. 3); *lakad*, to be caught in a trap (5:22; 6:2). "Naughtiness" is *hawwah*, greedy desire, craving, the word of 10:3. They are caught by their own lusts. Verses 5 and 6 say the same thing twice, the figure *Synonymia*, so that it will not be missed: what a man is will either save him or snare him.

> **11:7** *When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth.*

When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish. Hebrew *tiqwah*, hope (10:28). All that he hoped for was in this life, and death ends it.

and the hope of unjust men perisheth. Hebrew *tocheleth*, waiting hope (10:28). "Unjust men" is *'onim*, which may mean "the wicked" or "strength": "the hope of strength perisheth," the hope he placed in his power. Either way, death takes it. The righteous man's hope does not end at death; it waits for the resurrection (14:32; Dan. 12:2). The wicked man's hope was never more than this life could hold.

> **11:8** *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.*

The righteous is delivered out of trouble. Hebrew *tsarah*, distress, a tight place (1:27).

and the wicked cometh in his stead. The trouble meant for the righteous man falls on the wicked one. Haman was hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai (Esth. 7:10). Daniel's accusers were thrown into the den from which Daniel had been brought up (Dan. 6:23, 24).

> **11:9** *An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.*

An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour. Hebrew *chaneph*, the godless, the profane man, who pretends to be what he is not. "Destroyeth" is *shachath*, to ruin, to corrupt. He ruins his neighbour with words: flattery, lies, slander.

but through knowledge shall the just be delivered. Hebrew *da'ath*. The righteous man sees through the hypocrite's words, and so escapes them. Knowledge is the defence against a lying tongue.

> **11:10** *When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting.*

When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth. Hebrew *'alats*, to exult. When the righteous prosper, everyone benefits, and the town knows it.

and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. Hebrew *rinnah*, a ringing cry of joy. When the wicked fall, the town is relieved. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (29:2; compare 28:12, 28). When Haman fell and Mordecai rose, "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad" (Esth. 8:15).

> **11:11** *By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.*

By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted. The good words and good deeds of upright men, and God's blessing that rests on them, lift a whole town.

but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. A town can be ruined by words: lies, slander, false counsel, stirring up of strife. Verse 10 spoke of the city's feelings; verse 11 speaks of its fortunes.

> **11:12** *He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.*

He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour. Hebrew *chasar lev*, without sense (10:21). "Despiseth" is *baz*, holds in contempt (1:7). The senseless man looks down on his neighbour and says so.

but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. Hebrew *tevunoth*, understandings; *charash*, to be silent. He may see his neighbour's faults as clearly as the fool does, but he keeps quiet. "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise" (17:28).

> **11:13** *A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*

A talebearer revealeth secrets. Hebrew *holekh rakhil*, "one who goes about as a peddler": a man who trades in other people's affairs, carrying stories from house to house. "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer (*rakhil*) among thy people" (Lev. 19:16). "Secrets" is *sod*, confidential counsel (3:32).

but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter. Hebrew *ne'eman ruach*, faithful, trustworthy, the word from which "Amen" comes. "Concealeth" is *kasah*, to cover (10:12). He can be trusted with a secret.

> **11:14** *Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

Where no counsel is, the people fall. Hebrew *tachbuloth*, steerings, the pilot's skill (1:5). A nation without wise guidance runs aground.

but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. Hebrew *teshu'ah*, deliverance, victory. Not many voices for their own sake, but many wise advisers, whose counsel is weighed together. Solomon's own son Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men who had stood before Solomon, and lost ten tribes (1 Kings 12:6–16). The thought returns at 15:22 and 24:6.

> **11:15** *He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.*

He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it. Hebrew *ra' yeroa'*, "evil, he shall suffer evil": the sound of the words is doubled for emphasis (*Paronomasia*). "Stranger" is *zar*, an outsider (6:1). To pledge oneself for a man one does not know is to ask for trouble.

and he that hateth suretiship is sure. Hebrew *toqe'im*, "strikings," the striking of hands to seal a pledge (6:1); *boteach*, secure, safe. See 6:1–5 for the fuller warning.

> **11:16** *A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches.*

A gracious woman retaineth honour. Hebrew *eshet chen*, a woman of grace, of charm and kindness; *tamak*, to hold fast (3:18). She gains honour, and keeps it.

and strong men retain riches. Hebrew *'aritsim*, violent men, ruthless men, tyrants. The verse sets two ways of getting something: grace and force. The ruthless man may seize riches and hold them; the gracious woman gains honour, which is worth more (22:1). (The Greek Old Testament adds two lines to this verse; they are not in the Hebrew.)

> **11:17** *The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.*

The merciful man doeth good to his own soul. Hebrew *ish chesed*, a man of loyal kindness (3:3). When he is kind to others, he does good to himself. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh. Hebrew *akhzari*, the cruel, the merciless (5:9); *'okher*, he troubles, brings disaster upon. It is the word used of Achan, who "troubled" Israel, and was himself "troubled" in the valley of Achor, "trouble" (Josh. 7:25, 26). "His own flesh" is *she'er*, his own body, or his own kin. The cruel man wounds himself and his family.

> **11:18** *The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.*

The wicked worketh a deceitful work. Hebrew *po'el pe'ullath shaqer*, "he earneth wages of falsehood": wages that deceive him, that do not last.

but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. Hebrew *sekher emeth*, true wages, wages that hold. In Hebrew *shaqer* ("deceit") and *sekher* ("reward") sound alike, the figure *Paronomasia*: false wages and faithful wages. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy" (Hos. 10:12); "he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

> **11:19** *As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.*

As righteousness tendeth to life. Hebrew *ken*, "so," "truly": righteousness is truly on the way to life.

so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. He chases evil, and it leads him to death. He thinks he is the hunter; he is running to his own end.

> **11:20** *They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but such as are upright in their way are his delight.*

They that are of a froward heart. Hebrew *'iqqeshe lev*, the crooked of heart (2:15).

are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. *To'evah* (v. 1).

but such as are upright in their way are his delight. Hebrew *temime derekh*, the whole, the blameless in their way. The words "abomination" and "delight" come together again, as in verse 1: Jehovah hates the false balance and the crooked heart; He delights in the just weight and the upright way.

> **11:21** *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.*

Though hand join in hand. Hebrew *yad leyad*, "hand to hand." The phrase may mean "though they join hands," wicked men banding together for strength; or it may be a pledge, "my hand upon it," that is, "be assured." Either way the sense is the same: the wicked shall not escape.

the wicked shall not be unpunished. Hebrew *lo yinnaqeh*, shall not be held innocent (6:29).

but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered. Hebrew *malat*, to escape, to slip away. Not only the righteous man, but his children, share in his deliverance. "His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Ps. 112:2).

> **11:22** *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.*

As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. Hebrew *nezem zahav*, a gold nose-ring, the jewel Abraham's servant put on Rebekah's face (Gen. 24:47). Put it in a pig's snout and it is still gold, but it is wasted and absurd. The swine was an unclean animal under the Law (Lev. 11:7), rooting in the mud.

so is a fair woman which is without discretion. Hebrew *ta'am*, taste, judgment, good sense; literally, "turned aside from discretion." Beauty without sense is as wasted as gold in mud. Compare the gracious woman of verse 16, and the virtuous woman of 31:30: "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD [Jehovah], she shall be praised."

> **11:23** *The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.*

The desire of the righteous is only good. What the righteous man longs for is good, and it ends in good.

but the expectation of the wicked is wrath. Hebrew *tiqwah*, hope (v. 7); *'evrah*, wrath (v. 4). What the wicked man waits for will turn out to be wrath.

> **11:24** *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.*

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth. Hebrew *mephazzer*, one who scatters, as a sower scatters seed, or as a generous man gives freely. "He hath dispersed (*pizzar*), he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever" (Ps. 112:9), quoted by Paul of Christian giving (2 Cor. 9:9). The more he gives, the more he has.

and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. Hebrew *chosekh*, he who holds back (10:19); *miyyosher*, more than is right. He keeps back what he should give, and still ends in *machsor*, want (6:11). The figure is *Antithesis* with a paradox: the giver gains; the keeper loses.

> **11:25** *The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*

The liberal soul shall be made fat. Hebrew *nephesh berakhah*, "a soul of blessing," one who blesses others with gifts. "Made fat" is *dushan*, to prosper, to be enriched, fatness being the picture of plenty in a hungry land.

and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Hebrew *marveh*, he who waters; *yoreh*, he shall be watered as with rain. He who refreshes others will be refreshed. "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6); "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38).

> **11:26** *He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*

He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him. Hebrew *bar*, grain. The man who hoards grain in a time of shortage, waiting for the price to rise, is cursed by the hungry. "Curse" is *naqav*, to pierce, to curse openly. Amos condemned the merchants who waited for the sabbath to pass "that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small" (Amos 8:5).

but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. He who opens his granary when it is needed is blessed. Joseph "opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians" (Gen. 41:56). The verse does not forbid selling at a price; it forbids hoarding to profit from hunger.

> **11:27** *He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.*

He that diligently seeketh good. Hebrew *shocher*, he who seeks early, eagerly (1:28; 8:17).

procureth favour. Hebrew *yevaqqesh ratson*, he seeks (and finds) goodwill (8:35; 10:32). He who seeks good for others finds favour for himself.

but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. Hebrew *doresh ra'ah*, he who seeks evil. He will find it, but it will find him first. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein" (26:27).

> **11:28** *He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.*

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall. Hebrew *boteach*, he who trusts, leans on (3:5). Riches are a poor thing to lean on (10:15; 18:11). "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God" (1 Tim. 6:17).

but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. Hebrew *'aleh*, a leaf, green foliage; *parach*, to sprout, to bud. The rich man falls like a dead tree; the righteous man sprouts like a green leaf. "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever" (Ps. 52:7, 8; compare Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:7, 8).

> **11:29** *He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool [ewil] shall be servant to the wise of heart.*

He that troubleth his own house. Hebrew *'okher*, the word of verse 17, used of Achan. He brings trouble on his own household by greed, harshness or folly.

shall inherit the wind. He will be left with nothing: *ruach*, wind, emptiness. "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hos. 8:7).

and the fool [ewil] shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fool whose folly shows in what he does (1:7). The man who ruins his own house ends by working for a wiser man. The fool loses his inheritance and becomes a servant.

> **11:30** *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. What the righteous man produces, his life and words and deeds, is like the tree of life (3:18): it gives life to those who take of it. The figure appears four times in the book (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4).

and he that winneth souls is wise. Hebrew *loqeach nephashoth*, "he that taketh souls." The verb *laqach* is used of taking, of capturing, and also of winning, drawing to oneself. In 1:19 greed "taketh away the life (*nephesh*)" of its owners, and in 6:26 the adulteress hunts "the precious life (*nephesh*)." The wise man also "takes souls," but for their good: he wins people, draws them, and gives them life by the fruit of his life. The verse is often quoted of winning men to God, and the principle holds; Paul, in his own administration, made himself servant of all "that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19). But in its own setting the verse is about the wise man's influence: his life draws others to the life it bears.

> **11:31** *Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.*

Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth. Hebrew *yeshullam*, he shall be repaid. Even the righteous man is paid back in this life for his faults: he is corrected, chastened, made to reap what he sowed. David was forgiven, but the sword did not depart from his house (2 Sam. 12:10–14).

much more the wicked and the sinner. If the righteous man is dealt with on earth, how much more surely the wicked. Peter quotes this verse from the Greek Old Testament, which reads, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18). The Greek translators read "recompensed" as "hardly saved," passing through trouble. Peter uses it as the verse is meant: "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). The argument of both is the same: from the less to the greater.

Looking back

The chapter has followed the righteous man out into his town. He uses honest weights, keeps secrets, holds his tongue when he could despise, seeks counsel, is kind, gives freely and sells grain in a famine. And in each place his righteousness delivers him, and blesses the people around him: the city rejoices, the hungry bless him, the souls he wins find life. The wicked man in the same town cheats, slanders, hoards and trusts in riches, and in each place he is caught by his own doing.

Proverbs 12 — Words That Wound and Words That Heal

Place: Division 2; Part A. *The Companion Bible:* "With reference to domestic and public vocations." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 12 moves through the daily places of life: the home, where a wife is a crown or a rot in the bones (v. 4); the farm, where a man tends his beasts and tills his land (vv. 10, 11); the hunt, where the lazy man will not even cook what he caught (v. 27); the court, where a true witness and a false one speak (v. 17); and above all the tongue, which pierces like a sword or heals (v. 18). Half its verses speak of words. It ends with one of the great sayings of the book: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death" (v. 28).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–4. Instruction loved; favour with Jehovah; the root that stands; the crown of a husband.
- 5–8. Thoughts, words, houses, and good name.
- 9–11. Work: the humble master, the righteous farmer, the tiller of the land.
- 12–14. The net, the snare of the lips, the fruit of the mouth.
- 15, 16. The fool's way and the fool's anger.
- 17–23. Truth and lies.
- 24–28. Diligence and sloth; heaviness and a good word; the way of life.

The Text

> **12:1** *Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.*
>
> **12:2** *A good man obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah]: but a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] will he condemn.*
>
> **12:3** *A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.*
>
> **12:4** *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.*
>
> **12:5** *The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.*
>
> **12:6** *The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.*
>
> **12:7** *The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.*

> **12:8** *A man shall be commended according to his wisdom [sekel]: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.*
>
> **12:9** *He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.*
>
> **12:10** *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.*
>
> **12:11** *He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.*
>
> **12:12** *The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.*
>
> **12:13** *The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.*
>
> **12:14** *A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.*
>
> **12:15** *The way of a fool [ewil] is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*
>
> **12:16** *A fool's [ewil] wrath is presently known: but a prudent man [arum] covereth shame.*
>
> **12:17** *He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.*
>
> **12:18** *There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.*
>
> **12:19** *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*
>
> **12:20** *Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.*
>
> **12:21** *There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.*
>
> **12:22** *Lying lips are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but they that deal truly are his delight.*
>
> **12:23** *A prudent man [arum] concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools [kesil] proclaimeth foolishness.*
>
> **12:24** *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.*
>
> **12:25** *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*
>
> **12:26** *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.*
>
> **12:27** *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.*
>
> **12:28** *In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.*

Verse by verse

> **12:1** *Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.*

Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge. *Musar*, correction (1:2). To love knowledge is to love being corrected, because there is no learning without it.

but he that hateth reproof is brutish. Hebrew *ba'ar*, stupid as a beast, like cattle that have no understanding. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Ps. 73:22); "A brutish man knoweth not" (Ps. 92:6). A man who hates correction puts himself on the level of an ox.

> **12:2** *A good man obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah]: but a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] will he condemn.*

A good man obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *yaphiq*, he draws out, he obtains (3:13). *Ratson*, goodwill (8:35).

but a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] will he condemn. Here *mezimmah* is used in its bad sense: not discretion, the sound plan (1:4), but the plot, the scheme laid against others (Part One, Chapter 5). The same word that means the wise man's plan means the schemer's plot; what decides which it is, is the heart behind it. "Condemn" is *yarshia'*, He will declare him guilty.

> **12:3** *A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.*

A man shall not be established by wickedness. Hebrew *kun*, to be firm, settled. Nothing built on wickedness stands.

but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. Hebrew *shoresh*, root; *bal yimmot*, shall not be shaken (10:30). The tree of the righteous may be shaken in its branches, but not at the root.

> **12:4** *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.*

A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband. Hebrew *eshet chayil*, a woman of strength, of worth, of ability. It is the phrase of the great poem at the end of the book: "Who can find a virtuous woman (*eshet chayil*)?" (31:10). Boaz said it of Ruth: "all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman" (Ruth 3:11). She is her husband's crown: his honour and glory before others.

but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. Hebrew *mevishah*, she who brings shame (10:5); *raqav*, rot (10:7). She does not shame him in public only; she rots him from within, where no one sees.

> **12:5** *The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.*

The thoughts of the righteous are right. Hebrew *machshevoth*, thoughts, plans; *mishpat*, just, right judgment.

but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. Hebrew *tachbuloth*, steerings, the pilot's skill (1:5; 11:14). The wicked steer too, but they steer by deceit.

> **12:6** *The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.*

The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood. Their speech is an ambush: false witness, slander, lies that take a life. The words of the sinners in 1:11, "let us lay wait for blood," now describe all that the wicked say.

but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them. "Them" may be the upright themselves, whose own words save them from the snare; or the victims of the wicked, whom the upright rescue by speaking up for them, as Jonathan spoke for David to Saul (1 Sam. 19:4, 5). Both are true.

> **12:7** *The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.*

The wicked are overthrown, and are not. Hebrew *haphokh*, to overturn, the word used of the overthrow of Sodom (Gen. 19:25). "And are not": they are gone.

but the house of the righteous shall stand. The house of the man who hears and does is built on the rock (Matt. 7:24, 25; 10:25 above).

> **12:8** *A man shall be commended according to his wisdom [sekel]: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.*

A man shall be commended according to his wisdom [sekel]. Insight, good sense (3:4). Men praise a man for his good sense, and rightly.

but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. Hebrew *na'aweh lev*, twisted of heart. He is held in contempt (*buz*, 1:7).

> **12:9** *He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.*

He that is despised, and hath a servant. Hebrew *niqleh*, lightly esteemed, of no great account. He is a plain man who makes no show, yet he can afford a servant. (The Greek and Latin read "and serveth himself," which gives the same sense: he does his own work and has enough.)

is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread. Hebrew *mitkabbed*, he who plays the great man, puts on airs. He keeps up appearances and has nothing to eat. A "better . . . than" saying (Part One, Chapter 6): better to be little thought of and have enough, than to be thought great and go hungry.

> **12:10** *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.*

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast. Hebrew *yodea' nephesh behemto*, "he knoweth the soul of his beast": he knows what his animal needs, and cares for it. The Law commanded it: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4); the ox and the ass were to rest on the sabbath (Ex. 23:12). God Himself cared for "much cattle" in Nineveh (Jonah 4:11). Righteousness reaches down to the animals.

but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Hebrew *rachamim*, compassions; *akhzari*, cruel (5:9). Even the wicked man's kindness is cruel. If his best is cruel, what is his worst?

> **12:11** *He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.*

He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread. The plain reward of plain work.

but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding. Hebrew *reqim*, empty things, or empty men, idlers, adventurers. Abimelech hired "vain (*reqim*) and light persons" (Judg. 9:4); Jephthah gathered "vain men" (Judg. 11:3). The man who leaves his field to chase empty schemes or empty company is *chasar lev*, without sense (10:13). The saying returns in 28:19, with a sharper end: "shall have poverty enough."

> **12:12** *The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.*

The wicked desireth the net of evil men. Hebrew *chamad*, to covet (6:25); *metsod*, a net, or the prey caught in it. The wicked man envies what other evil men have caught by their nets, and wants a share of it (1:13, 14).

but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit. The righteous man needs no net. His root gives (*yitten*) fruit of itself, as a living tree does (v. 3).

> **12:13** *The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.*

The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips. Hebrew *moqesh*, a snare; *pesha'*, transgression. His own words trap him. "A fool's [kesil] mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (18:7).

but the just shall come out of trouble. *Tsarah*, distress (11:8). His words do not trap him, and he escapes the trouble that catches the liar.

> **12:14** *A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.*

A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth. His good words come back to him as good. "A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth" (18:20; compare 13:2).

and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him. Hebrew *gemul*, what is dealt out, a man's deeds; *yashuv*, it shall return. What his hands have done comes back to him. Words (the mouth) and deeds (the hands) both return to the one who spoke and did them. "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

> **12:15** *The way of a fool [ewil] is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

The way of a fool [ewil] is right in his own eyes. The fool whose folly shows in what he does, despising correction (1:7). He does not ask advice because he cannot imagine he is wrong. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD [Jehovah] pondereth the hearts" (21:2; compare 3:7; 16:2).

but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. *'Etsah*, advice. The wise man listens, because he knows he might be wrong.

> **12:16** *A fool's [ewil] wrath is presently known: but a prudent man [arum] covereth shame.*

A fool's [ewil] wrath is presently known. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. "Wrath" is *ka'as*, vexation, irritation; "presently" is *bayyom*, "in the day," at once, the same day. When he is annoyed, everyone knows it immediately.

but a prudent man [arum] covereth shame. The shrewd man, the opposite of the simple (Part One, Chapter 5). "Shame" is *qalon*, the insult, the disgrace done to him. He covers it: he does not flare up, he lets it pass. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression" (19:11).

> **12:17** *He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.*

He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness. Hebrew *yaphiach 'emunah*, he who breathes out faithfulness (6:19). In court, his truthful witness shows what is right.

but a false witness deceit. The false witness shows only deceit. The ninth commandment is in view (Ex. 20:16; 6:19).

> **12:18** *There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.*

There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword. Hebrew *boteh*, one who speaks rashly, who blurts out (Lev. 5:4, "pronouncing with his lips"); *madqeroth*, thrusts, stabs. Careless words wound like a sword.

but the tongue of the wise is health. Hebrew *marpe'*, healing (4:22). The wise man's words heal the wounds the rash man made. "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (15:4).

> **12:19** *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

The lip of truth shall be established for ever. Hebrew *la'ad*, for ever. Truth lasts.

but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Hebrew *'ad-argi'ah*, "while I wink," the time it takes to blink. A lie may last a little while; then it is found out.

> **12:20** *Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.*

Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil. Hebrew *charash*, to plough, to plot (3:29; 6:14). Deceit lives in the heart of the plotter; and in the end he deceives himself.

but to the counsellors of peace is joy. Hebrew *yo'atse shalom*, those who give counsel for peace. They have joy, while the plotter has only deceit. "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9).

> **12:21** *There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.*

There shall no evil happen to the just. Hebrew *'awen*, trouble, mischief; *ye'unneh*, it shall befall. As a rule, the righteous man is kept from the harm that the wicked bring on themselves. "There shall no evil befall thee" (Ps. 91:10). It is the rule, not a promise that no righteous man ever suffers (Part One, Chapter 1): Job was righteous, and he suffered (Job 1:1, 13–22).

but the wicked shall be filled with mischief. Hebrew *ra'*, evil, harm. They are full of it, the very thing they plotted.

> **12:22** *Lying lips are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but they that deal truly are his delight.*

Lying lips are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. *To'evah* (11:1). The lying tongue was among the seven things He hates (6:17).

but they that deal truly are his delight. Hebrew *'ose 'emunah*, those who do faithfulness. Not only speaking the truth, but doing it.

> **12:23** *A prudent man [arum] concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools [kesil] proclaimeth foolishness.*

A prudent man [arum] concealeth knowledge. The shrewd man (v. 16). He does not show off what he knows. He keeps it until it is needed, and then uses it well.

but the heart of fools [kesil] proclaimeth foolishness. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Proclaimeth" is *qara'*, calls out, as a herald. "Foolishness" is *'iwweleth*, folly. The fool cannot keep anything in; he announces his folly to the world. "Every prudent man [arum] dealeth with knowledge: but a fool [kesil] layeth open his folly" (13:16).

> **12:24** *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.*

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule. Hebrew *charutsim*, the keen, the diligent (10:4). "Bear rule" is *mashal*, the very word from which the word for "proverb" may be thought to come (Part One, Chapter 1). Diligence leads to authority.

but the slothful shall be under tribute. Hebrew *remiyyah*, slackness (10:4); *mas*, forced labour, the labour gang. The Canaanites left in the land were put "under tribute" (Josh. 16:10), and Solomon raised a levy of forced labour (1 Kings 9:21). The lazy man ends up working anyway, for someone else, under compulsion.

> **12:25** *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop. Hebrew *de'agah*, anxiety, worry; *shachah*, to bow down. Worry bends a man's heart double.

but a good word maketh it glad. A kind, encouraging word lifts it. "The Lord GOD [Adonai Jehovah] hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isa. 50:4). The cure for heaviness is often not advice but a good word.

> **12:26** *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.*

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. The Hebrew word *yater* is hard. The King James Version reads it from *yathar*, "to excel." Many read it from *tur*, "to search out, to spy out," and render: "The righteous is a guide to his neighbour," or "The righteous searcheth out (chooseth) his friend." The second line favours the reading "guide": the righteous man shows his neighbour the way,

but the way of the wicked seduceth them. Hebrew *ta'ah*, to cause to wander. The wicked lead their neighbours astray, and wander themselves. One guides, the other misleads.

> **12:27** *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.*

The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting. Hebrew *remiyyah*, slack (v. 24). He went out and caught his game, and then could not be bothered to cook it. (The verb *charakh* is found only here; it may mean "roast," or "start," that is, he does not even rouse his game.) Either way, the lazy man wastes even what he has. Compare the sluggard who will not lift his hand from the dish to his mouth (19:24).

but the substance of a diligent man is precious. Hebrew *hon*, wealth; *yaqar*, precious, valued. The diligent man values what he has, and so it is worth something.

> **12:28** *In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.*

In the way of righteousness is life. The road of righteousness leads to life. Under the Law, Jehovah set before Israel "life and good, and death and evil" (Deut. 30:15), and righteousness was the way of life.

and in the pathway thereof there is no death. Hebrew *'al-maweth*, "no death." The path of righteousness does not lead to death; its end is life. The words do not say that the righteous man will not die; the book knows that he does (14:32). They say that his road does not end in death. The life it leads to, in its fullest sense, is the life of the resurrection, when "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life" (Dan. 12:2). (Some read the Hebrew *'el* instead of *'al*, "unto death," as the Greek does, and take the second line as a contrast: "but the devious path leads to death." The Hebrew as it stands is followed here. See Appendix F.)

Looking back

Chapter 12 has shown the righteous man at home, in the field and in the court, and above all in his speech. His thoughts are right, his root holds, his wife is his crown, his beasts are cared for, his field is tilled, his anger is covered, his words heal and stand for ever, and his road does not end in death. The fool's anger shows the same day, his tongue blurts, his lies last as long as a blink, and the lazy man will not even cook his catch.

Proverbs 13 — Hope Deferred, and the Tree of Life

Place: Division 2; Part A. *The Companion Bible:* "With reference to temporal and eternal good." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 13 is about what a man has and what he hopes for. It weighs riches that are real against riches that are only pretended (v. 7), wealth gotten quickly against wealth gathered by hand (v. 11), and the inheritance a good man leaves against the hoard a sinner loses (v. 22). It speaks of the heart made sick by waiting and made alive by the thing it waited for (v. 12). And it begins and ends with the son: the wise son who hears his father (v. 1), and the son whose father loves him enough to correct him early (v. 24).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–3. Hearing, and the guarded mouth.
- 4. The sluggard's empty desire.
- 5, 6. Righteousness keeps the upright.
- 7–11. Riches, real and pretended, safe and lost.
- 12–19. Hope and desire; the word, the law of the wise, good understanding.
- 20–25. Companions, inheritance, the rod, and the table.

The Text

> **13:1** *A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner [lets] heareth not rebuke.*
>
> **13:2** *A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.*
>
> **13:3** *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.*
>
> **13:4** *The soul of the sluggard [atsel] desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*
>
> **13:5** *A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.*
>
> **13:6** *Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.*
>
> **13:7** *There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor [rash], yet hath great riches.*
>
> **13:8** *The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor [rash] heareth not rebuke.*
>
> **13:9** *The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.*

> **13:10** *Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.*
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> **13:11** *Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.*
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> **13:12** *Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.*
>
> **13:13** *Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.*
>
> **13:14** *The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*
>
> **13:15** *Good understanding [sekel] giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.*
>
> **13:16** *Every prudent man [arum] dealeth with knowledge: but a fool [kesil] layeth open his folly.*
>
> **13:17** *A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.*
>
> **13:18** *Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.*
>
> **13:19** *The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools [kesil] to depart from evil.*
>
> **13:20** *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools [kesil] shall be destroyed.*
>
> **13:21** *Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.*
>
> **13:22** *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.*
>
> **13:23** *Much food is in the tillage of the poor [rash]: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.*
>
> **13:24** *He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.*
>
> **13:25** *The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.*

Verse by verse

> **13:1** *A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner [lets] heareth not rebuke.*

A wise son heareth his father's instruction. The Hebrew has no verb in the first line: "A wise son, his father's instruction." The figure is *Ellipsis*, and the word "heareth" is rightly supplied from the second line. The wise son and his father's *musar* belong together.

but a scorner [lets] heareth not rebuke. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught (1:22). "Rebuke" is *ge'arah*, a sharp rebuke, even a threat. The scorner does not hear even that. The chapter opens where the division opened (10:1): with a son, and whether he will hear.

> **13:2** *A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.*

A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth. As in 12:14: good words come back to the speaker as good.

but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence. Hebrew *nephesh*, the soul, here the appetite; *bogedim*, the treacherous (2:22). What they hunger for is *chamas*, violence, and violence is what they will be fed.

> **13:3** *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.*

He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life. Hebrew *notser*, guards; *shomer*, keeps. To guard the mouth is to guard the life. "Set a watch, O LORD [Jehovah], before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). The thought returns in 21:23.

but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction. Hebrew *pasaq*, to open wide, to gape. The man whose mouth hangs open, who says everything, comes to ruin (*mechittah*, 10:14). "The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (Jas. 3:5).

> **13:4** *The soul of the sluggard [atsel] desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*

The soul of the sluggard [atsel] desireth, and hath nothing. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise (6:6). "Desireth" is *mit'avvah*, he craves. He wants as much as anyone; he simply will not work for it. "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour" (21:25).

but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. Hebrew *charutsim*, the keen (10:4); *dushan*, enriched (11:25). Both men desire; one works, and is filled.

> **13:5** *A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.*

A righteous man hateth lying. Hebrew *devar sheqer*, a word of falsehood. He does not merely avoid it; he hates it, as Jehovah does (6:17).

but a wicked man is loathsome. Hebrew *yav'ish*, he makes a stench, he makes himself odious. Jacob said of his sons' violence at Shechem, "Ye have . . . made me to stink (*hav'ish*) among the inhabitants of the land" (Gen. 34:30).

and cometh to shame. Hebrew *yachpir*, he brings shame, he is put to confusion.

> **13:6** *Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.*

Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard (2:11); *tam-derekh*, the whole, the blameless of way. Righteousness stands guard over him.

but wickedness overthroweth the sinner. Hebrew *salaph*, to twist, to overturn, the root of *selef*, "perverseness" (11:3). His crookedness twists him over. "The sinner" is literally "sin," the abstract put for the man who practises it (the figure *Metonymy*).

> **13:7** *There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor [rash], yet hath great riches.*

There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing. Hebrew *mith'ashsher*, he makes himself out to be rich, he puts on riches. He keeps up the show, and has nothing behind it.

there is that maketh himself poor [rash], yet hath great riches. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). This man makes himself out to be poor, and has great wealth. The verse can be read in two ways. As an observation: some men pretend to riches they do not have, and some hide riches they do have; appearances deceive. Or as a deeper saying: one man piles up goods and is poor toward God (Luke 12:21; "thou sayest, I am rich . . . and knowest not that thou art . . . poor," Rev. 3:17); another gives his goods away and is truly rich, "as poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor. 6:10). Either way, the wise man looks past what a man seems to be.

> **13:8** *The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor [rash] heareth not rebuke.*

The ransom of a man's life are his riches. Hebrew *kopher*, a ransom (6:35). A rich man can buy his way out: pay a fine, satisfy a kidnapper, settle a suit.

but the poor [rash] heareth not rebuke. The man in want. "Rebuke" is *ge'arah*, a threat (v. 1). No one threatens him, because he has nothing worth taking. Riches protect a man, and riches also make him a target. The poor man has no ransom, but he needs none.

> **13:9** *The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.*

The light of the righteous rejoiceth. Hebrew *yismach*, it rejoices, it burns brightly. The light of his life and household burns cheerfully.

but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Hebrew *ner*, a lamp. The lamp in the house was the sign of life, and of a family that continued; Jehovah gave David "a light (*nir*) alway before me in Jerusalem" (1 Kings 11:36). The wicked man's lamp goes out: his life ends, and his line with it (20:20; 24:20; Job 18:5, 6).

> **13:10** *Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.*

Only by pride cometh contention. Hebrew *zadon*, presumption (11:2); *matstsah*, strife. Pride is behind every quarrel: someone will not give way.

but with the well advised is wisdom. Hebrew *no'atsim*, those who take counsel, who let themselves be advised. Pride will not take advice; wisdom seeks it (12:15).

> **13:11** *Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.*

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished. Hebrew *mehevel*, from a vapour, from emptiness: money made from nothing, quickly, by speculation, fraud or dishonest means. It dwindles as quickly as it came.

but he that gathereth by labour shall increase. Hebrew *'al-yad*, "by hand," little by little, a handful at a time. Wealth gathered slowly by work grows. "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (28:22).

> **13:12** *Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.*

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Hebrew *tocheleth*, waiting hope (10:28); *memushshakhah*, drawn out, prolonged. When what a man hopes for is put off and put off, his heart grows faint. Abraham waited twenty-five years for the son of promise (Gen. 12:4; 21:5); Hannah wept year after year (1 Sam. 1:7).

but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. Hebrew *ta'avah*, the thing longed for. When it comes at last, it revives the heart like the fruit of the tree of life (3:18; 11:30). Sarah laughed for joy: "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6).

> **13:13** *Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.*

Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed. Hebrew *davar*, the word, here the word of God and of His commandment (the next line). "Destroyed" is *yechavel*, he shall be bound by it, held to it as by a pledge: the word he despised will hold him to account. "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words . . . till there was no remedy" (2 Chr. 36:16).

but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded. Hebrew *yeshullam*, he shall be repaid (11:31). To fear the commandment is to take it seriously.

> **13:14** *The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

The law of the wise is a fountain of life. Hebrew *torah*, teaching; *meqor chayyim*, a spring of life (10:11). The teaching of the wise man is like a spring in the desert.

to depart from the snares of death. It leads its hearer away from the traps that death has set. The same words come again at 14:27, where it is "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]" that is the fountain of life. The two say the same thing from two sides: the wise man's teaching is the fear of Jehovah put into words.

> **13:15** *Good understanding [sekel] giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.*

Good understanding [sekel] giveth favour. Insight, good sense (3:4). *Chen*, grace, goodwill. Men like and trust a man of good sense.

but the way of transgressors is hard. Hebrew *bogedim*, the treacherous; *'ethan*, hard, rough, unyielding, like a rocky valley (Deut. 21:4). Their road is hard going, and it does not soften.

> **13:16** *Every prudent man [arum] dealeth with knowledge: but a fool [kesil] layeth open his folly.*

Every prudent man [arum] dealeth with knowledge. The shrewd man (Part One, Chapter 5). He acts with knowledge: he finds out before he acts.

but a fool [kesil] layeth open his folly. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Layeth open" is *paras*, to spread out, as a pedlar spreads his goods on a cloth. He displays his folly for all to see (12:23).

> **13:17** *A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.*

A wicked messenger falleth into mischief. Hebrew *mal'akh rasha'*, a bad messenger. He gets himself and those who sent him into trouble.

but a faithful ambassador is health. Hebrew *tsir 'emunim*, an envoy of faithfulness; *marpe'*, healing (12:18). A faithful envoy heals relations between those he goes between. "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him" (25:13; compare 10:26). Paul called himself and his fellows "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20).

> **13:18** *Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.*

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction. Hebrew *resh*, poverty (10:15); *qalon*, disgrace; *pore'a*, he who lets go, neglects (1:25). He who will not be corrected loses both wealth and honour.

but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured. Hebrew *shomer tokachath*, he who keeps reproof (10:17).

> **13:19** *The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools [kesil] to depart from evil.*

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul. Hebrew *ta'avah nihyah*, desire come to pass (v. 12).

but it is abomination to fools [kesil] to depart from evil. The dull, self-satisfied fools. They want what they want, and what they want is evil; to turn from it is hateful (*to'evah*) to them. So they never taste the sweetness of a good desire fulfilled. The two lines belong together: desire fulfilled is sweet, but the fool's desire is evil, and he will not give it up.

> **13:20** *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools [kesil] shall be destroyed.*

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise. A man becomes like his company. Walk with the wise and you will catch their wisdom.

but a companion of fools [kesil] shall be destroyed. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Companion" is *ro'eh*, one who feeds, who grazes with; "shall be destroyed" is *yeroa'*, he shall be broken, suffer harm. The two Hebrew words sound alike, the figure *Paronomasia*: "he who feeds with fools shall fare ill." "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33; compare Ps. 1:1).

> **13:21** *Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.*

Evil pursueth sinners. Hebrew *radaph*, to chase. Their own evil runs after them and catches them (11:19).

but to the righteous good shall be repayed. Hebrew *yeshallem*, He shall repay. Good comes back to the righteous.

> **13:22** *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.*

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children. His goods and his good name last into the third generation.

and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. Hebrew *tsaphun*, stored up, hidden away (2:7). As a rule, ill-gotten wealth does not stay in the sinner's family; in God's ordering it passes in the end to others. "Though he heap up silver as the dust . . . the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver" (Job 27:16, 17); "to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God" (Eccl. 2:26). This is the rule of God's government, stated as a proverb, not a promise for believers to claim the world's wealth.

> **13:23** *Much food is in the tillage of the poor [rash]: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.*

Much food is in the tillage of the poor [rash]. The man in want. "Tillage" is *nir*, newly broken ground. Even the poor man's small plot, worked hard, can bring in much food.

but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment. Hebrew *belo mishpat*, "without justice." The King James Version's "judgment" can mean good sense or justice; here it is justice. The poor man's harvest could feed him, but injustice takes it: the oppressor, the corrupt judge, the unfair landlord. Poverty is not always the fault of the poor (compare 10:4).

> **13:24** *He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.*

He that spareth his rod hateth his son. Hebrew *chosekh*, he who holds back (10:19; 11:24); *shevet*, a rod, a staff, the father's instrument of correction. The father who never corrects his son does not love him; he hates him, because he leaves him to his folly. Eli did not restrain his sons, and they perished (1 Sam. 3:13); David "had not displeased him at any time" in Adonijah, and Adonijah rebelled (1 Kings 1:6).

but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. Hebrew *shicharo musar*, "seeketh him early with correction." The verb is *shachar*, to seek early, eagerly, the word of 1:28 and 8:17. The loving father seeks his son early, while correction can still shape him. Correction is an act of love, as God's is: "whom the LORD [Jehovah] loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (3:12; Heb. 12:6–11). It is given in love, not in anger: "ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4). The theme returns at 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; and 29:15, 17.

> **13:25** *The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.*

The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul. Hebrew *sova'*, fullness. He has enough.

but the belly of the wicked shall want. Hebrew *techsar*, shall lack. The chapter that began with the fruit of a man's mouth (v. 2) ends with his table: the righteous is filled, the wicked goes hungry (10:3).

Looking back

Chapter 13 has looked behind appearances. A man may seem rich and be poor, or seem poor and be rich (v. 7). Riches may ransom a life, or make it a target (v. 8). Quick money melts; slow money grows (v. 11). Hope long delayed sickens the heart, and hope fulfilled is a tree of life (v. 12). And the father who seems kind by never correcting is in truth unkind, while the one who corrects early loves (v. 24). Wisdom sees what is, not what seems.

Proverbs 14 — The Way That Seemeth Right

Place: Division 2; Part A. *The Companion Bible:* "With reference to wise and foolish; rich and poor; masters and servants." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 14 is the longest chapter of Part A (thirty-five verses), and it gathers almost every kind of man into one place: the wise woman and the foolish, the faithful witness and the false, the scorner and the man of understanding, the simple and the prudent, the hot-tempered and the patient, the rich man with many friends and the poor man with none, the king and his servants. In the middle stands one of the most searching sayings of the book: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (v. 12). And near the end stands the hope of the righteous, even in death (v. 32).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–4. The house, the mouth, and the ox.
- 5–9. Witnesses, scorners, and fools.
- 10–14. The heart, and the way that seems right.
- 15–19. The simple and the prudent.
- 20, 21. The poor man and his neighbour.
- 22–25. Devising, labouring, witnessing.
- 26, 27. The fear of Jehovah.
- 28–35. The king, the temper, the poor, death, and the nation.

The Text

> **14:1** *Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.*
>
> **14:2** *He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD [Jehovah]: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.*
>
> **14:3** *In the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.*
>
> **14:4** *Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.*
>
> **14:5** *A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.*
>
> **14:6** *A scorner [lets] seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.*
>
> **14:7** *Go from the presence of a foolish [kesil] man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.*

14:8 *The wisdom of the prudent [arum] is to understand his way: but the folly of fools [kesil] is deceit.*

14:9 *Fools [ewil] make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour.*

14:10 *The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*

14:11 *The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.*

14:12 *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

14:13 *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

14:14 *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

14:15 *The simple [pethi] believeth every word: but the prudent man [arum] looketh well to his going.*

14:16 *A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool [kesil] rageth, and is confident.*

14:17 *He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] is hated.*

14:18 *The simple [pethi] inherit folly: but the prudent [arum] are crowned with knowledge.*

14:19 *The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.*

14:20 *The poor [rash] is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.*

14:21 *He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor [ani], happy is he.*

14:22 *Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.*

14:23 *In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.*

14:24 *The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools [kesil] is folly.*

14:25 *A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.*

14:26 *In the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.*

14:27 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

14:28 *In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.*

14:29 *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*

14:30 *A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.*

14:31 *He that oppresseth the poor [dal] reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor [evyon].*

14:32 *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.*

14:33 *Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools [kesil] is made known.*

14:34 *Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

14:35 *The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.*

Verse by verse

> **14:1** *Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.*

Every wise woman buildeth her house. Hebrew *chakhmoth nashim*, "the wise ones of women," using the plural form *chokmoth* that the book uses of Wisdom herself (1:20; 9:1). As Wisdom "hath builded her house" (9:1), so the wise woman builds hers: her family, her home, its order and its peace.

but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, folly, here Folly in person, the foolish woman. "Plucketh down" is *haras*, to tear down. She does not need an enemy; she wrecks her own home herself. The verse echoes the two houses of 9:1–6 and 9:13–18.

> **14:2** *He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD [Jehovah]: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.*

He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *yosher*, straightness (2:13). A man's walk shows whether he fears God. Reverence is seen in conduct.

but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him. Hebrew *naloz*, devious, turning aside (2:15; 3:32). Whatever he says, his crooked ways show contempt for God.

> **14:3** *In the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.*

In the mouth of the foolish [ewil] is a rod of pride. The fool whose folly shows in what he does (1:7). "Rod" is *choter*, a shoot, a branch, a switch (the word of Isa. 11:1, "a rod out of the stem of Jesse"). His proud talk is like a switch: it sprouts from his mouth and comes back on his own back (10:13).

but the lips of the wise shall preserve them. Hebrew *shamar*, to keep. The wise man's words keep him safe.

> **14:4** *Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.*

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean. Hebrew *evus*, a manger, a feeding trough; *bar*, clean, empty. No ox, no mess, no feed to buy, no stall to clean.

but much increase is by the strength of the ox. No ox, no harvest either. The ox costs food and makes work, but he ploughs the field. A man who wants the harvest must put up with the stable. Anything worth having costs something to keep.

> **14:5** *A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.*

A faithful witness will not lie. Hebrew *'ed 'emunim*, a witness of faithfulness.

but a false witness will utter lies. Hebrew *yaphiach*, breathes out (6:19; 12:17). In court, a man's character decides his witness. A man who lies in his daily life will lie under oath.

> **14:6** *A scorner [lets] seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.*

A scorner [lets] seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught (1:22). He may go looking for wisdom, out of curiosity or to argue, but he does not find it,

because he will not humble himself to receive it. "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7).

but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth. Hebrew *naqal*, light, easy; *navon*, the discerning man (1:5). To the man who already discerns, more comes easily. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given" (Matt. 13:12).

> **14:7** *Go from the presence of a foolish [kesil] man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.*

Go from the presence of a foolish [kesil] man. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Get away from him.

when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge. The Hebrew reads, "for thou wilt not know lips of knowledge": you will learn nothing there. There is nothing to gain from his company, and much to lose (13:20).

> **14:8** *The wisdom of the prudent [arum] is to understand his way: but the folly of fools [kesil] is deceit.*

The wisdom of the prudent [arum] is to understand his way. The shrewd man (Part One, Chapter 5). His wisdom is practical: he knows where he is going and why. "Understand" is *havin*, to discern (1:2).

but the folly of fools [kesil] is deceit. The dull, self-satisfied fools. Their folly (*'iwweleth*) is *mirmah*, deceit: they deceive others, and above all themselves. The prudent man sees his way clearly; the fool fools himself about his.

> **14:9** *Fools [ewil] make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour.*

Fools [ewil] make a mock at sin. The fools whose folly shows in what they do. "Sin" is *'asham*, guilt, and also the guilt offering, by which a man under the Law confessed his wrong, made restitution, and was forgiven (Lev. 5:14–6:7). The fool laughs at guilt; he will not admit it or put it right. (The Hebrew can also be read, "guilt mocketh fools": the very offering they make is a mockery when they will not change.)

but among the righteous there is favour. Hebrew *ratson*, goodwill, acceptance (8:35). Among the upright, wrongs are owned and put right, and goodwill follows: with God, and between men.

> **14:10** *The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*

The heart knoweth his own bitterness. Literally "the bitterness of its own soul." Every man carries griefs that no one else fully knows. Solomon prayed for the man who "shall know every man the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:38). "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11).

and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy. Hebrew *zar*, an outsider; *yith'arav*, share, mix in. Joy, like grief, is a man's own. There is a loneliness in every heart that only God enters fully (Ps. 139:1–4).

> **14:11** *The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.*

The house of the wicked shall be overthrown. Hebrew *yishshamed*, shall be destroyed.

but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. Hebrew *ohel*, a tent; *yaphriach*, it shall bud, blossom. There is irony in the contrast: the wicked man's solid *house* falls; the upright man's flimsy *tent* flourishes like a plant. What lasts is not the building but the man in it.

> **14:12** *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man. Hebrew *yashar*, straight, upright. It looks straight. It feels right. The man is sincere.

but the end thereof are the ways of death. Hebrew *acharith*, the latter end (5:4). The road looks straight at the start; its end is death. Sincerity does not change where a road goes. In the days of the judges "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). Saul kept the best of the spoil "to sacrifice unto the LORD [Jehovah]," and it seemed right to him; Samuel answered, "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:21, 22). Uzzah put out his hand to steady the ark, and it seemed right; he died (2 Sam. 6:6, 7). The only safe test of a way is not how it seems, but what God has said. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction" (Matt. 7:13). The verse is repeated word for word at 16:25.

> **14:13** *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful. Hebrew *sechoq*, laughter; *yik'av*, it is in pain. A man may laugh and hurt at the same time. The face does not always show the heart (v. 10).

and the end of that mirth is heaviness. Hebrew *acharith*, the end (v. 12); *simchah*, joy; *tugah*, grief (10:1). Mirth that is only on the surface ends in grief. "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:3); "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25).

> **14:14** *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways. Hebrew *sug lev*, one turned back in heart: the man who has turned away from God inwardly, whatever he shows outwardly. He will have his fill of his own ways (1:31), until he is sick of them.

and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. Hebrew *me'alav*, from what is his: from his own good ways. Each man is filled with what his ways produce.

> **14:15** *The simple [pethi] believeth every word: but the prudent man [arum] looketh well to his going.*

The simple [pethi] believeth every word. The open, untaught one, who can still be taught (Part One, Chapter 5). This is the book's clearest picture of him: he believes whatever he is told. His trouble is not that he believes, but that he believes without testing. The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1).

but the prudent man [arum] looketh well to his going. The shrewd man. "Looketh well" is *yavin*, he discerns, he considers; "his going" is *'ashuro*, his step. He watches every step he takes. This is the [ormah] the book promised to give the simple (1:4).

> **14:16** *A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool [kesil] rageth, and is confident.*

A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil. He is wary; when he sees danger, he turns from it (3:7; 22:3).

but the fool [kesil] rageth, and is confident. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Rageth" is *mith'abber*, he is overbearing, he rushes on in arrogance; "is confident" is *boteach*, he trusts (in himself). He charges ahead, sure of himself, into the danger the wise man avoided.

> **14:17** *He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] is hated.*

He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly. Hebrew *qetsar appayim*, "short of nostrils," quick-tempered (the nostrils flare in anger). He acts in *'iwweleth*, folly. Moses, provoked, spoke unadvisedly and struck the rock (Num. 20:10–12; Ps. 106:33).

and a man of wicked devices [mezimmah] is hated. Here *mezimmah* is used in its bad sense: the plot, the scheme (12:2). The hot-tempered man acts foolishly, but in the open; the cold schemer plans his harm in secret, and he is hated for it. Of the two, the schemer is worse.

> **14:18** *The simple [pethi] inherit folly: but the prudent [arum] are crowned with knowledge.*

The simple [pethi] inherit folly. The open, untaught ones. If they stay simple, folly (*'iwweleth*) is what they will inherit. Simpleness, left alone, does not stay innocent; it grows into folly.

but the prudent [arum] are crowned with knowledge. The shrewd. "Crowned" is *yakhtiru*, they are encircled, crowned. Knowledge is their crown, as riches are the crown of the wise (v. 24).

> **14:19** *The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.*

The evil bow before the good. In the end the wicked bow before the righteous. Joseph's brothers "bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth" (Gen. 42:6). Haman led Mordecai through the city on the king's horse (Esth. 6:11).

and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. They come to his door as beggars or suppliants. It is the rule of God's government, often delayed but sure.

> **14:20** *The poor [rash] is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.*

The poor [rash] is hated even of his own neighbour. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). A sad fact of life, stated plainly: poverty loses a man his friends. His neighbours avoid him in case he asks for something.

but the rich hath many friends. Literally "many are the lovers of the rich." Money draws friends, or those who call themselves friends (19:4, 6, 7).

> **14:21** *He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor [ani], happy is he.*

He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth. The next verse answers the last. What is common, despising the poor neighbour, is sin.

but he that hath mercy on the poor [ani], happy is he. The poor man bowed down by affliction (Part One, Chapter 5). (The Hebrew margin reads *'anawim*, "the humble.") "Hath mercy" is *chonen*, shows grace, is kind. "Happy" is *ashre*, "O the happinesses" (3:13). The man who does what others will not, who is kind to the poor man everyone else avoids, is blessed. "Blessed are the merciful" (Matt. 5:7).

> **14:22** *Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.*

Do they not err that devise evil? Hebrew *yit'u*, they wander, go astray; *charash*, to plot (3:29). The question (*Erotesis*) expects the answer, "Yes, they do."

but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. *Chesed* and *emeth* (3:3). Those who plan good for others find kindness and faithfulness, from God and men.

> **14:23** *In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.*

In all labour there is profit. Hebrew *'etsev*, toil (5:10); *mothar*, profit, surplus. Every honest bit of work yields something.

but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. Hebrew *devar sefathayim*, mere talk; *machsor*, want (6:11). The man who talks about work, plans it, discusses it and never does it, ends in want.

> **14:24** *The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools [kesil] is folly.*

The crown of the wise is their riches. Their wealth, gained by wisdom, adorns them and is put to good use.

but the foolishness of fools [kesil] is folly. The dull, self-satisfied fools. The words are repeated for force: their *'iwweleth* is *'iwweleth*. The wise have a crown; the fools have nothing but their folly, and if they gain riches, their folly remains folly. (The Greek reads "the crown of fools is folly," which gives a closer parallel.)

> **14:25** *A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.*

A true witness delivereth souls. Hebrew *'ed emeth*, a witness of truth; *matsil nephashoth*, he rescues lives. In a court where a man's life hangs on the testimony, a true witness saves it. Compare 11:30, where the wise man "taketh souls" to give them life.

but a deceitful witness speaketh lies. *Yaphiach*, breathes out (v. 5). And by his lies the innocent die, as Naboth did (1 Kings 21:13).

> **14:26** *In the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.*

In the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is strong confidence. Hebrew *mivtach 'oz*, a strong ground of trust, a fortress to rely on.

and his children shall have a place of refuge. Hebrew *machseh*, a shelter. "His" may refer to the man who fears Jehovah, whose children are sheltered by his reverence; or to Jehovah, whose children find refuge in Him. Both are true. A father's fear of God is a shelter for his family.

> **14:27** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. These are the words of 13:14, with one change: there it was "the law of the wise"; here it is "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]." See 13:14 for "fountain of life" and "snares of death." The change shows where the wise man's law comes from: his teaching is a spring of life because it flows from the fear of Jehovah (1:7).

> **14:28** *In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.*

In the multitude of people is the king's honour. A king's glory is a large, thriving people. "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry" (1 Kings 4:20).

but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. Hebrew *ephes*, an end, a lack; *razon*, a ruler. A king who drives his people away by oppression ruins himself. Rehoboam's harsh answer cost him ten tribes (1 Kings 12:13–16).

> **14:29** *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding. Hebrew *'erekh appayim*, "long of nostrils," patient, slow to anger. It is the very phrase used of God Himself: "The LORD [Jehovah], The LORD [Jehovah] God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering (*'erekh appayim*)" (Ex. 34:6). The patient man is like God.

but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. Hebrew *qetsar ruach*, short of spirit (v. 17); *merim*, lifts up, puts on display (3:35). His temper puts his folly on a pedestal for all to see. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty" (16:32); "slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jas. 1:19).

> **14:30** *A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.*

A sound heart is the life of the flesh. Hebrew *lev marpe'*, a heart of healing, a calm and wholesome heart (4:22; 12:18). A quiet heart keeps the body well.

but envy the rottenness of the bones. Hebrew *qin'ah*, jealousy (6:34); *raqav*, rot (10:7; 12:4). Envy eats a man from inside. The book knew long ago what physicians have since observed: the state of the heart affects the body (3:8; 17:22).

> **14:31** *He that oppresseth the poor [dal] reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor [evyon].*

He that oppresseth the poor [dal] reproacheth his Maker. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). "Reproacheth" is *cheref*, insults, taunts. The poor man is made by God as

surely as the rich; to crush him is to insult the God who made him. "The rich and poor [rash] meet together: the LORD [Jehovah] is the maker of them all" (22:2; compare 17:5).

but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor [evyon]. The destitute, the one in want who must beg. "Him" is the Maker. To be kind to the needy is to honour God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

> **14:32** *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.*

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness. Hebrew *yiddacheh*, he is thrust down, pushed away; *bera'atho*, in his evil, or in his calamity. When disaster comes, the wicked man is swept away by it, and has nowhere to turn.

but the righteous hath hope in his death. Hebrew *chosheh bemoto*, "he takes refuge in his death": even in death he has a shelter. The righteous man dies, as all men die (12:28); but death does not take away his refuge, which is God and the hope of the resurrection. "I know that my redeemer liveth . . . and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb. 11:13); they were looking for "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The verse does not say that the righteous man goes to heaven at death; it says that he has hope in death, and that hope is the resurrection (Dan. 12:2). (The Greek Old Testament reads "in his integrity" instead of "in his death"; the Hebrew words *motho* and *tummo* have nearly the same letters. The Hebrew as it stands is followed here. See Appendix F.)

> **14:33** *Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools [kesil] is made known.*

Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding. Hebrew *tanuach*, it rests, settles down quietly. In the discerning man, wisdom is at home, and stays there quietly until it is needed (12:23).

but that which is in the midst of fools [kesil] is made known. The dull, self-satisfied fools. Whatever little they have inside comes out at once; they cannot keep it in (12:23; 13:16). (The Greek and some others read "is not known": "in the heart of fools it is not known." The Hebrew is followed here.)

> **14:34** *Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

Righteousness exalteth a nation. Hebrew *goy*, a nation; *teromem*, it lifts up. Under the Law, Israel's righteousness was the ground of her greatness (Deut. 4:6–8; 28:1), and her sin the cause of her fall. The principle holds for every people: right dealing lifts a nation, and wrong dealing brings it down.

but sin is a reproach to any people. Hebrew *chesed*, here in its rare sense of "shame, disgrace" (Lev. 20:17, "a wicked thing"). The same letters usually mean "kindness"; here they mean the opposite. Sin disgraces any nation, Israel or Gentile. The verse states a truth about nations; it is not a programme for using the power of the state to make men righteous.

> **14:35** *The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.*

The king's favour is toward a wise servant. Hebrew *'eved maskil*, a servant who acts wisely, from *sakal*, the root of [sekel]. Joseph (Gen. 41:38–40) and Daniel (Dan. 6:3) were raised by kings because they served wisely.

but his wrath is against him that causeth shame. Hebrew *mevish*, one who brings shame (10:5; 12:4). The servant who disgraces his master feels his anger. The chapter ends with the king, and so prepares for the sayings about kings that open Part B (16:10–15).

Looking back

Chapter 14 has gathered the whole cast of the book onto one stage, and set each pair side by side: the wise woman building and the foolish one tearing down, the true witness and the false, the simple who believes everything and the prudent who watches his step, the hot-tempered and the patient, the oppressor of the poor and the one who has mercy on them. At its centre stands the warning that a way can seem right and end in death (v. 12); near its end stands the hope of the righteous, which death itself cannot take away (v. 32).

Proverbs 15 — A Soft Answer

Place: Division 2; Part A, its last chapter. *The Companion Bible:* "With reference to other relations in the religious sphere." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 15 closes Part A, and the Name of Jehovah fills it: nine times, as often as in any chapter before it. Jehovah sees everywhere (v. 3), even the grave (v. 11); He hates the sacrifice of the wicked and delights in the prayer of the upright (v. 8); He is far from the wicked and hears the righteous (v. 29); He tears down the house of the proud and sets up the widow's boundary (v. 25). Alongside this, the chapter teaches the right use of the tongue, beginning with the best-known saying of the book on the subject: "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (v. 1). It ends where all wisdom begins: "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility" (v. 33).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–7. The tongue: the soft answer, the healing tongue; the eyes of Jehovah.
- 8–11. What Jehovah hates and loves; the grave open before Him.
- 12–15. The scorner; the merry heart and the broken spirit.
- 16, 17. Better a little.
- 18–23. Temper, sloth, the foolish son, counsel, and the word in season.
- 24–29. The way upward; the proud and the widow; gifts; the answer weighed; the prayer heard.
- 30–33. Good news, reproof, and humility.

The Text

> **15:1** *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*
>
> **15:2** *The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools [kesil] poureth out foolishness.*
>
> **15:3** *The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*
>
> **15:4** *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.*
>
> **15:5** *A fool [ewil] despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.*
>
> **15:6** *In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.*
>
> **15:7** *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish [kesil] doeth not so.*
>
> **15:8** *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

15:9 *The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.*

15:10 *Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.*

15:11 *Hell and destruction are before the LORD [Jehovah]: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?*

15:12 *A scorner [lets] loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.*

15:13 *A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.*

15:14 *The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools [kesil] feedeth on foolishness.*

15:15 *All the days of the afflicted [ani] are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.*

15:16 *Better is little with the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] than great treasure and trouble therewith.*

15:17 *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.*

15:18 *A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.*

15:19 *The way of the slothful man [atsel] is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.*

15:20 *A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish [kesil] man despiseth his mother.*

15:21 *Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.*

15:22 *Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*

15:23 *A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!*

15:24 *The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*

15:25 *The LORD [Jehovah] will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.*

15:26 *The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.*

15:27 *He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.*

15:28 *The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.*

15:29 *The LORD [Jehovah] is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

15:30 *The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.*

15:31 *The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.*

15:32 *He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.*

15:33 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.*

Verse by verse

> **15:1** *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*

A soft answer turneth away wrath. Hebrew *rakh*, tender, gentle (the word of 4:3); *heshiv*, turns back. A gentle reply turns anger back the way it came. When the men of Ephraim quarrelled with Gideon, he answered them gently, "and their anger was abated toward him" (Judg. 8:1–3). Abigail turned away David's wrath against Nabal's house with a soft answer (1 Sam. 25:23–35).

but grievous words stir up anger. Hebrew *'etsev*, a painful, hurting word; *ya'aleh*, makes it rise. A harsh word makes anger climb. Rehoboam "answered the people roughly," and the kingdom was torn in two (1 Kings 12:13–16).

> **15:2** *The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools [kesil] poureth out foolishness.*

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright. Hebrew *teitiv*, makes good: it uses knowledge well, at the right time, in the right measure.

but the mouth of fools [kesil] poureth out foolishness. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Poureth out" is *yabbia'*, to gush, to bubble up, the word Wisdom used of pouring out her spirit (1:23). Wisdom pours out life; the fool pours out *'iwweleth*, folly, in a constant stream.

> **15:3** *The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] are in every place. Nothing is hidden from Him. "For the eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chr. 16:9).

beholding the evil and the good. Hebrew *tsophoth*, watching, as a watchman on a wall. He sees both, and He will deal with both. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

> **15:4** *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.*

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life. Hebrew *marpe'*, healing (12:18). A tongue that heals gives life to those who hear it, like the fruit of the tree of life (3:18).

but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. Hebrew *selef*, crookedness (11:3); *shever*, a break, a wound. A twisted tongue breaks the spirit of the one it strikes.

> **15:5** *A fool [ewil] despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.*

A fool [ewil] despiseth his father's instruction. The fool whose folly shows in what he does, despising correction (1:7). "Despiseth" is *yin'ats*, spurns (1:30).

but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. Hebrew *shomer*, he who keeps; *ya'rim*, he grows shrewd, he becomes prudent. The verb is from the root of [ormah] and [arum]: the man who heeds correction gains the shrewdness the simple lack (1:4).

> **15:6** *In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.*

In the house of the righteous is much treasure. Hebrew *chosen*, a store, wealth laid up.

but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. Hebrew *tevu'ah*, income; *ne'kareth*, troubled, the word of Achan (11:17, 29). The wicked man's income brings trouble with it.

> **15:7** *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish [kesil] doeth not so.*

The lips of the wise disperse knowledge. Hebrew *zarah*, to scatter, to winnow, to sow. The wise man scatters knowledge like seed, freely, so that others may grow.

but the heart of the foolish [kesil] doeth not so. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Literally "is not so": his heart has nothing to scatter, or is not right, not steady. He sows nothing because there is nothing in him to sow.

> **15:8** *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *zevach*, a sacrifice offered on the altar. Under the Law, sacrifice was commanded; but a sacrifice offered by a man who holds on to his wickedness is detestable to God. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22); "Bring no more vain oblations" (Isa. 1:13; compare Amos 5:21–24). The saying returns in 21:27 and 28:9.

but the prayer of the upright is his delight. Hebrew *tephillah*, prayer; *ratson*, delight. The upright man's prayer, with or without a sacrifice, pleases Him. God wanted the heart, not the animal.

> **15:9** *The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.*

The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]. Not only his sacrifice (v. 8), but his whole way of life.

but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness. Hebrew *meraddeph*, he who pursues, chases. Not one who has arrived, but one who runs after it. "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Tim. 6:11).

> **15:10** *Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.*

Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way. Hebrew *musar ra'*, correction is evil, harsh, to him. The man who has left the right road hates being called back to it.

and he that hateth reproof shall die. *Tokachath* (1:23). If he will not be corrected, he will go on to the end of his road (14:12).

> **15:11** *Hell and destruction are before the LORD [Jehovah]: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?*

Hell and destruction are before the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *sheol* and *'abaddon*: the grave, and the place of destruction, of perishing. Both are words for the realm of the dead. Even that is open before

Jehovah. "Hell (*sheol*) is naked before him, and destruction (*'abaddon*) hath no covering" (Job 26:6). The words do not describe a place of conscious torment; they describe the grave and the ruin of death, where the dead lie, which no man can see into, and which lies open to God (Ps. 139:8).

how much more then the hearts of the children of men? Hebrew *bene adam*. If He sees into the grave, He sees into the heart. The argument is from the greater to the less: nothing in a man is hidden from Him (Jer. 17:10).

> **15:12** *A scorner [lets] loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.*

A scorner [lets] loveth not one that reproveth him. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught (1:22). "Reproveth" is *hokheach*, to set right (3:12). He does not love the man who corrects him; he hates him (9:8).

neither will he go unto the wise. He avoids them. He will not put himself where correction might reach him.

> **15:13** *A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.*

A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance. Hebrew *lev sameach*, a glad heart; *yetiv*, makes good. The face shows the heart.

but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. Hebrew *'atsseveth*, pain, grief (10:10); *nekheah*, stricken, crushed. Grief in the heart breaks the spirit. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (17:22; compare 18:14).

> **15:14** *The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools [kesil] feedeth on foolishness.*

The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge. The discerning man is always looking for more (14:6).

but the mouth of fools [kesil] feedeth on foolishness. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Feedeth" is *yir'eh*, grazes, pastures (10:21). The righteous man's lips feed others (10:21); the fools graze on folly like cattle, and are content with it.

> **15:15** *All the days of the afflicted [ani] are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.*

All the days of the afflicted [ani] are evil. The poor man bowed down by affliction (Part One, Chapter 5). His days are hard, every one of them.

but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Hebrew *tov lev*, good of heart; *mishteh tamid*, a feast always. The contrast is not between two men's outward lots only, but between two hearts. Even the afflicted man, if his heart is glad, has a feast that circumstances cannot take away. Paul and Silas, beaten and in the stocks, "prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

15:16 *Better is little with the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] than great treasure and trouble therewith.*

Better is little with the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]. A "better . . . than" saying (Part One, Chapter 6).

than great treasure and trouble therewith. Hebrew *mehumah*, turmoil, tumult, the anxiety and disorder that come with great wealth. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Ps. 37:16). "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

15:17 *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.*

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is. Hebrew *'aruchath*, a portion, a meal; *yaraq*, green vegetables. A plain meal of greens, eaten in love.

than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. Hebrew *shor avus*, an ox fattened at the manger (*evus*, 14:4), the best meat of a feast. A rich dinner eaten in hatred is worse than a poor one eaten in love. It is the company, not the food, that makes the meal (17:1).

15:18 *A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.*

A wrathful man stirreth up strife. Hebrew *ish chemah*, a man of heat, of fury; *yegareh*, he provokes. *Madon*, strife (6:14).

but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife. Hebrew *'erekh appayim*, long of nostrils, patient (14:29); *yashqit*, he quiets, he calms. One man lights quarrels; the other puts them out. The thought of verse 1 is repeated in a different form.

15:19 *The way of the slothful man [atsel] is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.*

The way of the slothful man [atsel] is as an hedge of thorns. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. "An hedge of thorns" is *mesukhath chedeq*, a way fenced with briers. To the sluggard, every task looks blocked; there is always a reason not to go on. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way" (26:13; 22:13).

but the way of the righteous is made plain. Hebrew *yesharim*, the upright; *selulah*, built up, made into a highway (the verb of 4:8, "exalt"). The opposite of the lazy man is not "the diligent" but "the upright": laziness is a moral fault, not only a weakness. The upright man's road is a raised highway, clear and open.

15:20 *A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish [kesil] man despiseth his mother.*

A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish [kesil] man despiseth his mother. The first line is the same as 10:1; see there. What differs is the second line. In 10:1 the foolish son was "the heaviness of his mother": he grieved her. Here the foolish man "despiseth his mother" (*bozeh*, holds her in contempt, 1:7). He has gone further; he no longer only grieves her, he looks down on her. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out" (30:17).

15:21 *Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.*

Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, folly; *chasar lev*, without sense (10:13, 21). He enjoys his folly (10:23).

but a man of understanding walketh uprightly. Hebrew *yashar lakheth*, he goes straight. The senseless man finds pleasure in folly; the man of understanding finds his way and keeps to it.

> **15:22** *Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*

Without counsel purposes are disappointed. Hebrew *sod*, consultation, taking counsel together (3:32; 11:13); *machashavoth*, plans; *haper*, they are broken, frustrated. Plans made alone fail.

but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. Hebrew *taqum*, they stand. The thought of 11:14, applied to a man's own plans.

> **15:23** *A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!*

A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth. A man is glad when he has answered well.

and a word spoken in due season, how good is it! Hebrew *davar be'itto*, a word in its time. The right word at the right moment is a good thing. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (25:11). There is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7).

> **15:24** *The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*

The way of life is above to the wise. Hebrew *lema'lah*, upward; *maskil*, the man who acts wisely. The road of life goes up.

that he may depart from hell beneath. Hebrew *sheol*, the grave; *mattah*, below. The grave lies below, and the way of life climbs away from it. The verse sets the two directions side by side: life goes up, death goes down (2:18; 5:5; 7:27). It does not speak of going up to heaven at death and of a hell of torment below; it speaks of the road that leads away from an early grave. Under the Law, that was length of days in the land; in its fullest sense, it is the life that death cannot hold, the resurrection.

> **15:25** *The LORD [Jehovah] will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.*

The LORD [Jehovah] will destroy the house of the proud. Hebrew *yissach*, tear down; *ge'im*, the proud.

but he will establish the border of the widow. Hebrew *gevul*, a boundary, the landmark stone that marked the edge of a family's field. The widow had no husband to defend her land, and greedy neighbours moved her landmarks. The Law cursed it: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark" (Deut. 27:17; 19:14). Jehovah Himself defends her boundary. "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee" (23:10, 11). He is "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows" (Ps. 68:5).

> **15:26** *The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.*

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. Not only his deeds (v. 9) but his thoughts (*machshevoth*).

but the words of the pure are pleasant words. Hebrew *tehorim*, the clean; *imre no'am*, words of pleasantness. The Hebrew may be read, "but pleasant words are pure" in His sight. Jehovah sees the thought behind the word, and the clean thought behind the kind word pleases Him.

> **15:27** *He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.*

He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house. Hebrew *botsea' betsa'*, he who cuts off a cut, the man of unjust gain (1:19); *'okher*, troubles, the word of Achan (11:17, 29). Achan's greed brought death on his whole house (Josh. 7:24, 25). Gehazi's greed brought leprosy on him and his seed (2 Kings 5:20–27).

but he that hateth gifts shall live. Hebrew *mattanoth*, gifts, here bribes. "Thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise" (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19). Samuel could say to all Israel, "of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" (1 Sam. 12:3).

> **15:28** *The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.*

The heart of the righteous studieth to answer. Hebrew *yehgeh*, he meditates, ponders (8:7). He thinks before he speaks. "Be ready always to give an answer . . . with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. *Yabbia'*, gushes (v. 2). The wicked man does not think; he pours.

> **15:29** *The LORD [Jehovah] is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

The LORD [Jehovah] is far from the wicked. Not that He cannot see them (v. 3), but that He does not come near to help them.

but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. "The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (Ps. 34:15; compare Ps. 145:18). The verse completes verse 8: Jehovah delights in the prayer of the upright, and He hears it.

> **15:30** *The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.*

The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart. Hebrew *me'or 'eynayim*, the light of the eyes: a bright, kind look from a friend, or the sight of what is good.

and a good report maketh the bones fat. Hebrew *shemu'ah tovah*, good news; *tedashen*, makes fat, refreshes (11:25). Good news strengthens a man to the bones. "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (25:25).

> **15:31** *The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.*

The ear that heareth the reproof of life. Hebrew *tokachath chayyim*, the correction that gives life (6:23).

abideth among the wise. Hebrew *talin*, he lodges, he makes his home. The man who listens to correction finds his home among the wise, because that is how wise men are made.

> **15:32** *He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.*

He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul. Hebrew *pore'a*, he lets go (1:25); *mo'es*, he rejects; *nephesh*, his own life. To refuse correction is to throw away one's own life.

but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. Hebrew *qoneh lev*, he acquires heart, gets sense. *Qanah*, the verb of 4:5, "Get wisdom." The way to get it is to hear correction.

> **15:33** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the instruction of wisdom. The fear of Jehovah is the *musar*, the training, the school in which wisdom is learned (1:7; 9:10). Part A ends where the book began.

and before honour is humility. Hebrew *'anawah*, humility, meekness. Humility comes first; honour follows. The words are repeated in 18:12. "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). The Lord Jesus Christ "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8, 9): He was raised from the dead and taken up into heaven to sit at God's right hand (Eph. 1:20). Before honour, humility.

Looking back

Chapter 15 has closed Part A with Jehovah in view at every turn: His eyes in every place, His hatred of the wicked man's sacrifice and His delight in the upright man's prayer, His sight into the grave and into the heart, His defence of the widow's field. Around this the chapter has taught the gentle answer, the healing tongue, the glad heart, the plain meal eaten in love, and the word in season. And it ends with the order that runs through all of Scripture: humility first, then honour.

Looking Back on Part A

Six chapters of contrasts have set the righteous man and the wicked, the wise and the fool, side by side in a hundred and eighty-four sayings. The pattern is now clear:

- **The tongue** decides much of a man's life. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life (10:11), his tongue choice silver (10:20), his soft answer turns away wrath (15:1), his wholesome tongue is a tree of life (15:4). The fool's mouth pours out folly (15:2), his lips are his snare (12:13), and his wrath is known the same day (12:16).
- **Work and wealth** follow rules. The diligent hand makes rich (10:4); quick money melts (13:11); riches do not help in the day of wrath (11:4); the liberal soul is made fat (11:25); better a little with the fear of Jehovah than great treasure with trouble (15:16).
- **Correction** marks the line between wise and foolish. The wise son hears his father (13:1); whoever loves correction loves knowledge (12:1); the father who loves his son corrects him early (13:24); the man who hates reproof is brutish (12:1) and shall die (15:10).
- **The poor** are made by God, and to oppress them is to insult Him; to have mercy on them is to honour Him (14:31).
- **The end** of each man's way is fixed by the way itself. The righteous man's road does not end in death (12:28), and he has hope even in his death (14:32); the way that only seems right ends in death (14:12).
- **Jehovah** sees all (15:3, 11), weighs all, hates the false balance and the proud heart, and delights in the upright.

Part B will turn from the contrast of two men to the rule of two thrones: Jehovah's, and the king's.

Part B — Jehovah and the King (16:1–22:16)

The second half of Division 2 opens with a run of sayings unlike anything in Part A. Nine verses in a row speak of Jehovah's rule over men's hearts and plans (16:1–9), and six more speak of the king's rule over his people (16:10–15). The two thrones stand side by side: the throne of Jehovah, who weighs the spirits and directs the steps, and the throne of His king, who judges in His name.

The form of the sayings changes too. In Part A nearly every proverb set two opposites against each other with "but." In Part B most proverbs say a thing and then say it again, or go on to complete it. The contrasts give way to a fuller picture of one thing at a time.

This volume presents Part B as far as the end of chapter 19. The rest of it, 20:1–22:16, follows in the next volume.

Proverbs 16 — The Lot Is Cast Into the Lap

Place: Division 2; Part B, its first chapter. *The Companion Bible:* "Personal confidence in God." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 16 is the chapter of God's sovereignty. Jehovah's Name occurs in it eleven times, more than in any other chapter of the book. It begins with the plans of a man's heart and the answer that comes from Jehovah (v. 1), and it ends with the lot cast into the lap and the decision that comes from Jehovah (v. 33). Between the two, men plan, speak, work, quarrel, rule and grow old; and over all of it Jehovah weighs the spirits (v. 2) and directs the steps (v. 9). The chapter also holds the most quoted proverb of all: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (v. 18).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–9. Jehovah's rule over men's hearts, plans and ways.
- 10–15. The king: his sentence, his weights, his throne, his wrath and his favour.
- 16–19. Wisdom better than gold; the highway; pride and the humble spirit.
- 20–24. The wise heart and pleasant words.
- 25. The way that seemeth right.
- 26–30. The labourer, and four troublemakers.
- 31–33. Grey hair, self-rule, and the lot.

The Text

> **16:1** *The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD [Jehovah].*
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> **16:2** *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD [Jehovah] weigheth the spirits.*
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> **16:3** *Commit thy works unto the LORD [Jehovah], and thy thoughts shall be established.*
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> **16:4** *The LORD [Jehovah] hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*
>
> **16:5** *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.*
>
> **16:6** *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] men depart from evil.*
>
> **16:7** *When a man's ways please the LORD [Jehovah], he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*
>
> **16:8** *Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.*

16:9 *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD [Jehovah] directeth his steps.*

16:10 *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.*

16:11 *A just weight and balance are the LORD's [Jehovah's]: all the weights of the bag are his work.*

16:12 *It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.*

16:13 *Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.*

16:14 *The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it.*

16:15 *In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.*

16:16 *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!*

16:17 *The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.*

16:18 *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

16:19 *Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly [ani], than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

16:20 *He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD [Jehovah], happy is he.*

16:21 *The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.*

16:22 *Understanding [sekel] is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools [ewil] is folly.*

16:23 *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*

16:24 *Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*

16:25 *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

16:26 *He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.*

16:27 *An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.*

16:28 *A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.*

16:29 *A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good.*

16:30 *He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.*

16:31 *The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.*

16:32 *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD [Jehovah].*

Verse by verse

16:1 *The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD [Jehovah].*

The preparations of the heart in man. Hebrew *ma'arkhe lev*, the arrangements of the heart, the setting in order of plans, as soldiers are set in array or a table is set. *Le'adam*, "belong to man."

and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD [Jehovah]. The Hebrew reads: "To man belong the plans of the heart; but from Jehovah is the answer of the tongue." The King James Version, by joining both lines under one verb, makes both come from Jehovah; *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 75) lists this verse among those that gain new light from the Hebrew, and supplies the missing verbs correctly: "To man pertain the plans of his heart; but from Jehovah comes the final decree." Man makes his plans; Jehovah has the last word. Balaam set out to curse Israel, and when he opened his mouth, blessing came out (Num. 23:11, 12; 24:10–13). Joseph's brothers planned evil, "but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20). The thought is repeated in verse 9 and in 19:21.

> **16:2** *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD [Jehovah] weigheth the spirits.*

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes. Hebrew *zakh*, pure. Every man thinks his own motives are clean (12:15).

but the LORD [Jehovah] weigheth the spirits. Hebrew *tokhen*, to weigh, to measure, to test. Man looks at the ways; Jehovah weighs what lies behind them. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD [Jehovah] looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). "I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:4). The saying comes again in 21:2 and 24:12.

> **16:3** *Commit thy works unto the LORD [Jehovah], and thy thoughts shall be established.*

Commit thy works unto the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *gol*, "roll": roll them onto Him, as a man rolls a heavy load off his own back. "Commit (*gol*) thy way unto the LORD [Jehovah]; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5); "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

and thy thoughts shall be established. Hebrew *machshevoth*, plans; *yikkonu*, they shall be made firm. The plans that are rolled onto Jehovah stand.

> **16:4** *The LORD [Jehovah] hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

The LORD [Jehovah] hath made all things for himself. Hebrew *pa'al*, He has worked, made; *lamma'anehu*, "for its answer," that is, for its purpose, its fitting end. The word is *ma'aneh*, "answer," the word of verse 1. The King James Version reads it "for himself"; the Hebrew says that everything Jehovah has made has its own answer, its proper end, its place in His order.

yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. The wicked man too has his fitting end: the day of calamity. The verse does not say that God made the wicked man wicked. "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29). God does not create men to sin and then destroy them. What the verse says is that nothing falls outside His order: the wicked man, who has chosen his way, will meet the end that answers to it, as surely as everything else meets its end. The day of evil is not his creation; it is his harvest (1:31). (See Appendix F.)

> **16:5** *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.*

Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *gevah lev*, high of heart; *to'evah* (3:32). The proud look headed the seven things Jehovah hates (6:17).

though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. These words are the same as the first half of 11:21; see there. What differs is the man: in 11:21 it was "the wicked"; here it is the proud. Pride is enough to bring a man under judgment, however strong his allies.

> **16:6** *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] men depart from evil.*

By mercy and truth iniquity is purged. Hebrew *chesed* and *emeth*, loyal love and faithfulness (3:3); *yekhuppar*, it is covered, atoned for. *Kaphar* is the great word of atonement under the Law (Lev. 16:30). Under the Law, atonement was made by sacrifice: "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). But the sacrifice of a man without mercy and truth was an abomination (15:8). This verse speaks of what God looks for in the one who is forgiven: true kindness and faithfulness, the fruit of a heart that has turned. "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor" (Dan. 4:27); "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6). It is also God's own mercy and truth that cover sin, for He provides the atonement. In the fullness of time He provided it in Christ, who was delivered for our offences, raised again for our justification, and set at His right hand (Rom. 3:24, 25; 4:25; Heb. 10:12).

and by the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] men depart from evil. Mercy and truth deal with sin past; the fear of Jehovah keeps a man from sin to come (3:7; 8:13).

> **16:7** *When a man's ways please the LORD [Jehovah], he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

When a man's ways please the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *birtsoth*, when Jehovah takes pleasure in them (*ratson*).

he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Hebrew *yashlim*, He makes them at peace. Abimelech, who had driven Isaac away, came to make a covenant with him: "We saw certainly that the LORD [Jehovah] was with thee" (Gen. 26:27–29). Esau, who had sworn to kill Jacob, ran to meet him and embraced him (Gen. 33:4). It is the rule of God's dealings, not a promise that a godly man will have no enemies; the Lord Jesus Christ pleased the Father always and was hated (John 15:25), and "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

> **16:8** *Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.*

Better is a little with righteousness. A "better . . . than" saying, like 15:16.

than great revenues without right. Hebrew *tevu'oth*, income; *belo mishpat*, without justice (13:23). A small honest income is better than a great dishonest one.

> **16:9** *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD [Jehovah] directeth his steps.*

A man's heart deviseth his way. Hebrew *yechashev*, he plans, thinks out. A man makes his plans.

but the LORD [Jehovah] directeth his steps. Hebrew *yakhin*, He makes firm, He determines. Verse 1 said it of the words; this verse says it of the road. Man plans the journey; Jehovah orders each step. "O LORD [Jehovah], I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). "Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (Jas. 4:15).

> **16:10** *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.*

A divine sentence is in the lips of the king. Hebrew *qesem*, divination, an oracle. The word is used of the forbidden practice of divination (Deut. 18:10), but here it is used as a figure: the king's judgment should be as final and as sure as an oracle. When the people saw Solomon's judgment between the two women, "they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment" (1 Kings 3:28).

his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. Hebrew *lo yim'al*, he does not act faithlessly. Because his word carries such weight, he must not betray it. These verses (10–15) describe the king as he ought to be, under Jehovah; they do not say that kings never err. The book knows of wicked rulers too (28:15; 29:12).

> **16:11** *A just weight and balance are the LORD's [Jehovah's]: all the weights of the bag are his work.*

A just weight and balance are the LORD's [Jehovah's]. Hebrew *peles*, the balance, the steelyard; *mo'zne mishpat*, scales of justice. Honest measures belong to Jehovah. He set the standard in His Law (Lev. 19:35, 36; 11:1).

all the weights of the bag are his work. Hebrew *avne kis*, the stones of the purse, the weights a merchant carried in his bag. Every honest weight is His work. The king who upholds honest weights (2 Sam. 14:26, "after the king's weight") upholds Jehovah's standard.

> **16:12** *It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.*

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness. A righteous king hates wickedness, in himself and in his court.

for the throne is established by righteousness. Hebrew *yikkon*, it is made firm. A throne stands on justice. "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (25:5; compare 29:14). Of the Messiah it is written, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David . . . to establish it with judgment and with justice" (Isa. 9:7).

> **16:13** *Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.*

Righteous lips are the delight of kings. Hebrew *siphthe tsedeq*, lips of righteousness. A good king wants honest counsel, not flattery.

and they love him that speaketh right. Hebrew *yesharim*, straight things. Daniel spoke straight to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, and was honoured (Dan. 2:48; 5:29).

> **16:14** *The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it.*

The wrath of a king is as messengers of death. Hebrew *mal'akhe maveth*. When an absolute king is angry, death follows his word. Nebuchadnezzar in his fury commanded the wise men of Babylon to be destroyed (Dan. 2:12, 13).

but a wise man will pacify it. Hebrew *yekhapperennah*, he will cover it, atone for it, the verb *kaphar* of verse 6. Daniel "answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch," and the wrath was turned (Dan. 2:14–16). Abigail pacified David (1 Sam. 25:32, 33).

> **16:15** *In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.*

In the light of the king's countenance is life. When the king's face shines on a man, it brings him life and favour.

and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain. Hebrew *ratson*, favour; *malqosh*, the latter rain, the spring rain that falls in March and April and fills out the grain before harvest. Without it the harvest fails; with it the land is full. "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain" (Deut. 11:14). Of the Messiah it is written, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass" (Ps. 72:6).

> **16:16** *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!*

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! Hebrew *qanoh*, to get, to acquire (4:5); *charuts*, fine gold (3:14). The figure *Ecphonesis*, an exclamation.

and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! *Binah*. The comparison of 3:14 and 8:10, 19, given as an exclamation of wonder.

> **16:17** *The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.*

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. Hebrew *mesillah*, a raised road, a built highway (15:19). The upright man's road is a highway, and its direction is away from evil.

he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Hebrew *notser*, guards; *shomer*, keeps (13:3). Guard the road, and the road keeps you.

> **16:18** *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

Pride goeth before destruction. Hebrew *ga'on*, pride, arrogance; *shever*, a breaking, a crash (15:4).

and an haughty spirit before a fall. Hebrew *govah ruach*, a high spirit; *kishalon*, a stumbling. The two lines say the same thing twice (synonymous): pride goes first, and the crash follows. Nebuchadnezzar walked on his palace roof and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . . by the might of my power?" and while the word was in his mouth he was driven from men (Dan. 4:30–33). Herod accepted the people's cry, "It is the voice of a god," and "immediately the angel of the Lord smote him" (Acts 12:22, 23). (The common saying "Pride comes before a fall" shortens this verse.)

> **16:19** *Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly [ani], than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly [ani]. Hebrew *shephal ruach*, low of spirit. The poor man bowed down by affliction (Part One, Chapter 5); the Hebrew margin reads *'anawim*, "the humble." Better to be poor and humble with the poor and humble,

than to divide the spoil with the proud. Hebrew *ge'im*, the proud. Better to be poor with the humble than rich with the proud. "For thus saith the high and lofty One . . . I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. 57:15). "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3).

> **16:20** *He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD [Jehovah], happy is he.*

He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good. Hebrew *maskil 'al-davar*, "he that giveth heed to the word." The words can mean "he that deals wisely with a matter," as the King James Version has it, or "he that gives heed to the word," that is, to God's word, as the next line suggests. Both find good.

and whoso trusteth in the LORD [Jehovah], happy is he. Hebrew *boteach*, he who trusts (3:5); *ashre*, "O the happinesses" (3:13). The two lines belong together: the man who heeds the word and trusts Jehovah is blessed.

> **16:21** *The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.*

The wise in heart shall be called prudent. Hebrew *navon*, discerning (1:5). Men will recognise his discernment.

and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Hebrew *metheq sephathayim*, sweetness of lips; *leqach*, teaching (1:5). Kind, gracious speech makes teaching easier to receive. Truth spoken sweetly is learned more readily than truth spoken harshly. "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6).

> **16:22** *Understanding [sekel] is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools [ewil] is folly.*

Understanding [sekel] is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it. Insight, good sense (3:4). "A wellspring of life" is *meqor chayyim*, the fountain of 10:11; 13:14; 14:27. "Him that hath it" is *be'alav*, "its owners" (1:19; 3:27): to the man who owns good sense, it is a spring that never runs dry.

but the instruction of fools [ewil] is folly. The fools whose folly shows in what they do (1:7). "Instruction" is *musar*, correction. Either the only correction fools receive is their own folly, which punishes them; or the instruction fools give to others is folly. Both are true: their folly is their teacher, and their teaching is folly.

> **16:23** *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*

The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth. Hebrew *yaskil*, makes wise, from *sakal*, the root of [sekel]. His mouth learns from his heart; he speaks what he has thought (15:28).

and addeth learning to his lips. *Leqach*, teaching. What he says carries teaching to others.

16:24 *Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*

Pleasant words are as an honeycomb. Hebrew *imre no'am*, words of pleasantness (15:26); *tsuph devash*, the honeycomb. The strange woman's lips dropped honey (5:3), sweet at first and bitter at the end; pleasant words are sweet and stay sweet.

sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. Hebrew *marpe'*, healing (4:22). Kind words refresh the inner man and strengthen the body.

16:25 *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. These words are the same as 14:12; see there. What differs is the setting. In chapter 14 the saying stood among sayings about the heart that knows its own bitterness and the laughter that hides sorrow (14:10–13). Here it stands in a chapter about a man's plans (vv. 1, 2, 9) and right after a verse in praise of pleasant words (v. 24). A man's own plans may seem clean to him (v. 2), and a way may be recommended with sweet words; neither makes it right. Only the end shows the way, and Jehovah weighs it before the end comes.

16:26 *He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.*

He that laboureth laboureth for himself. Literally "the soul of the labourer labours for him." His own need drives his work.

for his mouth craveth it of him. Hebrew *akaph*, to press, to urge. Hunger presses him to work. "All the labour of man is for his mouth" (Eccl. 6:7). Need is a good teacher; "if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10).

16:27 *An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.*

An ungodly man diggeth up evil. Hebrew *ish beliya'al*, a worthless man (6:12); *koreh*, he digs, as a man digs a pit for others to fall into (26:27). He works hard at mischief.

and in his lips there is as a burning fire. His words scorch. "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity" (Jas. 3:6).

16:28 *A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.*

A froward man soweth strife. Hebrew *ish tahpukoth*, a man of perversities (2:12); *yeshallach madon*, sends out strife (6:14, 19).

and a whisperer separateth chief friends. Hebrew *nirgan*, a whisperer, a gossip, a murmurer; *alluph*, a close friend (the word of 2:17, "the guide of her youth"). The gossip can part the closest of friends with a whisper. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (26:20; compare 17:9; 18:8).

16:29 *A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good.*

A violent man enticeth his neighbour. Hebrew *ish chamas*, a man of violence; *yephatteh*, he entices, the verb of 1:10 from which [pethi], "the simple," comes. He looks for an open mind to lead astray.

and leadeth him into the way that is not good. As the sinners tried to do with the son (1:10–14). The figure *Tapeinosis*, understatement: "not good" means very evil.

> **16:30** *He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.*

He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things. Hebrew *'otseh*, narrowing, closing; *lachshov tahpukoth*, to plan perversities. He half-closes his eyes, scheming.

moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass. Hebrew *qorets*, pressing, biting his lips (the word of "winketh," 6:13; 10:10). A look and a lip, and the evil is done. Four troublemakers have been named in verses 27–30: the digger of evil, the sower of strife, the enticer, and the schemer.

> **16:31** *The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.*

The hoary head is a crown of glory. Hebrew *sevah*, grey hair, old age; *'atereth tiph'areth*, a crown of beauty (4:9). "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Lev. 19:32).

if it be found in the way of righteousness. Long life was the reward of righteousness under the Law (3:2, 16), and grey hair found on the road of righteousness is its crown. "The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head" (20:29).

> **16:32** *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty. Hebrew *'erekh appayim*, patient (14:29); *gibbor*, a mighty man, a warrior.

and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. Hebrew *moshel*, he who rules. To rule oneself is a greater victory than to capture a city. The man who cannot rule his own spirit is himself "like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (25:28). Moses, who led Israel and brought down Pharaoh, is remembered as "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

> **16:33** *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD [Jehovah].*

The lot is cast into the lap. Hebrew *goral*, the lot, a marked stone or stick; *yutal*, it is hurled, shaken out; *cheq*, the fold of the robe at the lap (5:20; 6:27), where the lots were shaken before they were drawn.

but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *mishpat*, the decision, the judgment. Under the Law, Israel used the lot to divide the land (Num. 26:55; Josh. 18:10), to choose the goat for Jehovah on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8), and to find Achan (Josh. 7:14–18); and the decision was Jehovah's. The last use of the lot in Scripture is the choice of Matthias, before the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:26); after the gift of holy spirit was given, the church never used it again, for God's people now had another way of knowing His will. The principle of the verse stands for every age: nothing falls out by

chance outside God's knowledge and rule. The chapter that began with man's plans and Jehovah's answer (v. 1) ends with man's lot and Jehovah's decision. "The lot causeth contentions to cease" (18:18).

Looking back

Chapter 16 has set Jehovah over everything: the plans of the heart and the answer of the tongue, the ways a man thinks are clean, the works he rolls onto Him, the wicked man's end, the steps of every traveller, the king's sentence and the merchant's weights, and the lot shaken in the lap. Under that rule, the chapter has praised what lasts: wisdom above gold, the humble spirit above the spoil, pleasant words, grey hair on the road of righteousness, and the man who rules his own spirit. And it has warned again that pride goes first, and the fall follows.

Proverbs 17 — A Friend Loveth at All Times

Place: Division 2; Part B. *The Companion Bible:* "Personal contentment and peace." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 17 opens and closes with quietness: a dry crust eaten in peace (v. 1), and the fool who is thought wise because he keeps quiet (v. 28). Between them it deals with what breaks peace and what keeps it: strife, which starts like a leak in a dam (v. 14); the gossip, who separates friends (v. 9); the bribe, which bends justice (vv. 8, 23); the fool, more dangerous than a bear robbed of her cubs (v. 12); and the friend who loves at all times (v. 17). Twice it speaks of the grief of a foolish son (vv. 21, 25), using two of the book's words for the fool in one verse (v. 21).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–6. Home and household: quiet, the wise servant, the refining of hearts, the mocker of the poor, the generations.
- 7–15. Words, gifts and justice: fine speech, the bribe, covering and repeating, reproof, rebellion, the bear, evil for good, strife, unjust judges.
- 16–20. The fool's money, the true friend, the surety, the high gate, the crooked heart.
- 21–28. The fool's father, the merry heart, the bribe, the wandering eyes, the grieving parents, unjust punishment, and the value of silence.

The Text

> **17:1** *Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.*
>
> **17:2** *A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.*
>
> **17:3** *The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD [Jehovah] trieth the hearts.*
>
> **17:4** *A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.*
>
> **17:5** *Whoso mocketh the poor [rash] reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.*
>
> **17:6** *Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*
>
> **17:7** *Excellent speech becometh not a fool [nabal]: much less do lying lips a prince.*
>
> **17:8** *A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.*
>
> **17:9** *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.*
>
> **17:10** *A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool [kesil].*

> **17:11** *An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.*
>
> **17:12** *Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool [kesil] in his folly.*
>
> **17:13** *Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.*
>
> **17:14** *The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.*
>
> **17:15** *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah].*
>
> **17:16** *Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool [kesil] to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?*
>
> **17:17** *A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*
>
> **17:18** *A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend.*
>
> **17:19** *He loveth transgression that loveth strife: and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*
>
> **17:20** *He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.*
>
> **17:21** *He that begetteth a fool [kesil] doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool [nabal] hath no joy.*
>
> **17:22** *A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*
>
> **17:23** *A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.*
>
> **17:24** *Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool [kesil] are in the ends of the earth.*
>
> **17:25** *A foolish [kesil] son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.*
>
> **17:26** *Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.*
>
> **17:27** *He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.*
>
> **17:28** *Even a fool [ewil], when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.*

Verse by verse

> **17:1** *Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.*

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith. Hebrew *path charevah*, a dry piece of bread, without even oil or sauce to dip it in; *shalvah*, quiet, ease (here in its good sense, compare 1:32).

than an house full of sacrifices with strife. Hebrew *zivche-riv*, "sacrifices of strife." The meat of the peace offerings was eaten at a feast in the home (7:14); a house "full of sacrifices" is a house full of feasting. Better a dry crust in peace than a banquet in a quarrelling house. The saying is like 15:17.

> **17:2** *A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.*

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame. Hebrew *'eved maskil*, a servant who acts wisely (14:35); *mevish*, one who brings shame (10:5). In a household, ability counts in the end more than birth. Abraham, before Isaac was born, expected his steward Eliezer to be his heir (Gen. 15:2, 3); Sheshan, who had no sons, gave his daughter to his Egyptian servant Jarha (1 Chr. 2:34, 35).

and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. The faithful servant may share the inheritance with the sons, or take the place of the son who disgraced it.

> **17:3** *The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD [Jehovah] trieth the hearts.*

The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold. Hebrew *matsref*, a crucible, a melting pot; *kur*, a smelting furnace. Metals are tested by fire, and the dross is burned off.

but the LORD [Jehovah] trieth the hearts. Hebrew *bochen*, He tests, He proves. What fire does to silver, Jehovah does to hearts: He tests them to show what they are, and to purify them. "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried" (Ps. 66:10). "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise" (1 Pet. 1:7). Compare 27:21.

> **17:4** *A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.*

A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips. Hebrew *mera'*, an evildoer; *maqshiv*, he pays attention (2:2); *sephath aven*, lips of iniquity.

and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue. Hebrew *lashon havvoth*, a tongue of destruction, of mischief. Like listens to like. A man shows what he is by what he is willing to hear. The wicked are glad to hear wickedness; the liar enjoys lies.

> **17:5** *Whoso mocketh the poor [rash] reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.*

Whoso mocketh the poor [rash] reproacheth his Maker. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). "Mocketh" is *lo'eg*, laughs at, derides. To laugh at a poor man is to insult the God who made him (14:31).

and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. Hebrew *'eyd*, calamity (1:26); *lo yinnaqeh*, shall not be held innocent (6:29). To rejoice at another man's ruin is a sin. Edom rejoiced over Judah's fall, and was judged for it: "Thou shouldest not have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction" (Obad. 12; compare Job 31:29).

> **17:6** *Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*

Children's children are the crown of old men. Hebrew *zeqenim*, the old. Grandchildren are an old man's crown, his joy and honour. "Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Ps. 128:6).

and the glory of children are their fathers. Hebrew *tiph'ereth*, beauty, glory. Children are proud of good fathers. The verse runs both ways: a good line honours its old men, and good old men honour their line.

> **17:7** *Excellent speech becometh not a fool [nabal]: much less do lying lips a prince.*

Excellent speech becometh not a fool [nabal]. The churl: coarse, godless, without shame (Part One, Chapter 5). This is the first time the word *nabal* is used in the book. "Excellent speech" is *sephath yether*, a lip of excess, lofty, eloquent speech. Fine words do not suit a churl; they sound false in his mouth. Nabal, whose very name was this word, spoke roughly and foolishly to David's men (1 Sam. 25:10, 11, 25).

much less do lying lips a prince. Hebrew *nadiv*, a noble, a generous man. If fine words do not suit a churl, lying words suit a noble man even less. Truth is expected of those in high places.

> **17:8** *A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.*

A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it. Hebrew *shochad*, a bribe (15:27); *even chen*, "a stone of grace," a lucky charm. "Him that hath it" is *be'alav*, its owner, the man who gives it.

whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth. The man who gives bribes thinks of his bribe as a lucky stone: it opens every door for him. The verse describes how bribes work and how the briber thinks; it does not approve of them. Verse 23 shows what the bribe really does: it bends justice. "Thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise" (Ex. 23:8).

> **17:9** *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.*

He that covereth a transgression seeketh love. Hebrew *mekhasseh*, covers (10:12); *pesha'*, a transgression, an offence. The man who lets an offence drop, who does not spread it, is seeking love: he wants to keep the friendship.

but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. Hebrew *shoneh*, he repeats, he harps on it, brings it up again and again; *alluph*, a close friend (16:28). Raking up an old offence, or telling it to others, parts the closest of friends. "Love covereth all sins" (10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8).

> **17:10** *A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool [kesil].*

A reproof entereth more into a wise man. Hebrew *ge'arah*, a rebuke (13:1); *techath*, it goes down, it sinks in. One rebuke sinks deep into a wise man. When Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man," David answered, "I have sinned against the LORD [Jehovah]" (2 Sam. 12:7, 13).

than an hundred stripes into a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. The Law allowed no more than forty stripes (Deut. 25:3); "an hundred" is the figure *Hyperbole*: beat him as much as you like, he will not learn. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool [ewil] in a mortar . . . yet will not his foolishness depart from him" (27:22).

> **17:11** *An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.*

An evil man seeketh only rebellion. Hebrew *meri*, rebellion, defiance. He lives to resist authority.

therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. Hebrew *mal'akh akhzari*, a merciless messenger (5:9). In the end the king sends an officer who will show no mercy. Sheba the son of Bichri rebelled against David, and his head was thrown over the wall (2 Sam. 20:22). Adonijah plotted against Solomon, and Benaiah was sent (1 Kings 2:25).

> **17:12** *Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool [kesil] in his folly.*

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man. Hebrew *dov shakkul*, a bereaved she-bear, the most furious beast a man could meet in Israel. "They be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field" (2 Sam. 17:8; compare Hos. 13:8).

rather than a fool [kesil] in his folly. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Folly" is *'iwweleth*. A raging bear is dangerous; a fool in the middle of his folly is worse. The bear acts by instinct and can be avoided; the fool acts by choice and drags others with him.

> **17:13** *Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.*

Whoso rewardeth evil for good. Hebrew *meshiv ra'ah tachath tovah*, he who returns evil in place of good. Nabal returned evil to David for the good David's men had done him (1 Sam. 25:21). Saul pursued David, who had served him (1 Sam. 24:17).

evil shall not depart from his house. It will stay there. David himself, who had received nothing but loyalty from Uriah, repaid him with death; and Nathan said, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house" (2 Sam. 12:10). The very words of the proverb came true in the house of the king who was Solomon's father.

> **17:14** *The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.*

The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water. Hebrew *poter mayim*, one who opens water, lets it out through a breach. A small crack in a dam lets out a trickle; the trickle widens the crack; soon the whole dam goes. A quarrel starts small and grows beyond anyone's control.

therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with. Hebrew *hithgalla'*, it breaks out. Stop the quarrel before it bursts out. Abraham said to Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee . . . for we be brethren" (Gen. 13:8).

> **17:15** *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah].*

He that justifieth the wicked. Hebrew *matsdiq rasha'*, he who declares the wicked man righteous, as a corrupt judge acquits the guilty.

and he that condemneth the just. Hebrew *marshia' tsaddiq*, he who declares the righteous man guilty.

even they both are abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. Both are perversions of justice. The Law commanded judges to "justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked" (Deut. 25:1). "Woe unto them . . . which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from

him!" (Isa. 5:22, 23). The reader may ask how, then, God "justifieth the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). He does it not by calling sin righteousness, but through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:24–26): Christ died, was raised, and is at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34). The sin is not overlooked; it is paid for.

> **17:16** *Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool [kesil] to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?*

Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool [kesil] to get wisdom. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Price" is *mechir*, money, payment; "to get" is *liqnoth*, to buy (4:5, 7). He has the fee in his hand, as if wisdom could be bought from a teacher like goods in the market.

seeing he hath no heart to it? Hebrew *lev ayin*, there is no heart: no sense, no desire. Money cannot buy wisdom for a man who does not want it. Simon the sorcerer offered the apostles money for power, and was told, "Thy money perish with thee . . . thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:20, 21). Wisdom is bought with the heart, not with silver (4:7; 23:23).

> **17:17** *A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

A friend loveth at all times. Hebrew *rea'*, a friend, a neighbour; *bekhol 'eth*, at every time, in good times and bad. A true friend's love does not depend on his friend's fortunes (contrast 14:20; 19:4, 7).

and a brother is born for adversity. Hebrew *tsarah*, distress (1:27). A brother is there for the hard times; that is what brothers are for. The two lines may be read as saying the same thing twice: the true friend is a brother in trouble. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1), even when it cost him his father's favour. Ruth would not leave Naomi in her widowhood: "whither thou goest, I will go" (Ruth 1:16). Compare 18:24.

> **17:18** *A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend.*

A man void of understanding striketh hands. Hebrew *chasar lev*, without sense (7:7); *toqea' kaph*, striking the palm, sealing a pledge (6:1; 11:15).

and becometh surety in the presence of his friend. Hebrew *'arev 'arubbah*, he pledges a pledge, in front of his neighbour. The warning of 6:1–5, given a third time. The verse follows the praise of the true friend (v. 17): to love a friend does not mean to sign away one's goods for him rashly.

> **17:19** *He loveth transgression that loveth strife: and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*

He loveth transgression that loveth strife. Hebrew *pesha'*, transgression; *matstsah*, strife (13:10). The quarrelsome man loves sin, whether he knows it or not; strife and sin go together.

and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction. Hebrew *magbiah pithcho*, he who makes his doorway high: he builds a grand entrance to show off his wealth. King Jehoiakim built himself a great house with wide chambers, and Jeremiah pronounced woe on him (Jer. 22:13–15). The "door" may also be the mouth (Mic. 7:5, "keep the doors of thy mouth"): the man who opens his mouth in boasting. Either way, the proud man invites a crash (*shever*, 16:18).

> **17:20** *He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.*

He that hath a froward heart findeth no good. Hebrew *'iqqesh lev*, crooked of heart (11:20).

and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief. Hebrew *nehpakh bilshono*, turned about in his tongue, twisting his words. Crooked heart, crooked tongue, and both end in trouble.

> **17:21** *He that begetteth a fool [kesil] doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool [nabal] hath no joy.*

He that begetteth a fool [kesil] doeth it to his sorrow. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Sorrow" is *tugah*, grief (10:1).

and the father of a fool [nabal] hath no joy. The churl: coarse, godless, without shame. Two words for the fool are set in one verse. The father of a *kesil*, a son who will not learn, has grief; the father of a *nabal*, a son who is godless and shameless, has no joy at all. The second is worse.

> **17:22** *A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. Hebrew *lev sameach*, a glad heart (15:13); *yetiv gehah*, "makes healing good," is good medicine. The word *gehah* is found only here. A cheerful heart helps the body heal.

but a broken spirit drieth the bones. Hebrew *ruach nekheah*, a stricken spirit (15:13); *teyabbesh*, dries up. Grief withers a man to the bone (compare 3:8; 14:30; 15:13).

> **17:23** *A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.*

A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom. Hebrew *shochad*, a bribe; *mecheq*, from the fold of the robe (16:33), where it was hidden and passed secretly.

to pervert the ways of judgment. Hebrew *lehattoth*, to bend, to turn aside. This is what the "lucky stone" of verse 8 really does: it bends justice. Samuel's sons "turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (1 Sam. 8:3).

> **17:24** *Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool [kesil] are in the ends of the earth.*

Wisdom is before him that hath understanding. Hebrew *eth-pene*, before his face. The discerning man keeps wisdom in front of him, in plain view, close at hand.

but the eyes of a fool [kesil] are in the ends of the earth. The dull, self-satisfied fool. His eyes wander everywhere except where wisdom is: to far places, new schemes, distant dreams. Wisdom is near; he looks far away. "The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:8).

> **17:25** *A foolish [kesil] son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.*

A foolish [kesil] son is a grief to his father. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Grief" is *ka'as*, vexation (12:16).

and bitterness to her that bare him. Hebrew *memer*, bitterness. The thought of 10:1 and 17:21 comes again; see 10:1. What differs is that here both parents are named in each line's grief: he vexes his father and embitters his mother. "Her that bare him" reminds the reader what the mother went through to bring him into the world.

> **17:26** *Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.*

Also to punish the just is not good. Hebrew *'anosh*, to fine, to punish. A court that punishes the innocent does great wrong. The figure *Tapeinosis*, understatement: "not good" means very evil (16:29).

nor to strike princes for equity. Hebrew *nedivim*, the noble (v. 7); *'al-yosher*, for uprightness. To strike a noble man because he is upright, as Jeremiah was smitten and put in the stocks for speaking the truth (Jer. 20:2), is a wrong of the same kind.

> **17:27** *He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.*

He that hath knowledge spareth his words. Hebrew *chosekh*, he holds back (10:19). The man who knows much says little.

and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. The Hebrew text reads *qar-ruach*, "cool of spirit"; the margin reads *yeqar-ruach*, "precious of spirit." The first is likely: the man of understanding keeps a cool head. He does not boil over (14:17, 29).

> **17:28** *Even a fool [ewil], when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.*

Even a fool [ewil], when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. "Holdeth his peace" is *macharish*, keeps silent (11:12). If he keeps quiet, no one can tell he is a fool. "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom" (Job 13:5).

and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding. Hebrew *'otem*, he closes, stops up. The chapter ends with a smile: silence is so much a mark of wisdom that even a fool who keeps silent is taken for wise.

Looking back

Chapter 17 has been about peace and what breaks it. It has praised a dry crust eaten in quiet, the friend who loves at all times, the man who covers an offence, and the cool spirit that spares its words. And it has named the breakers of peace: the strife that starts like a leak, the gossip who parts friends, the bribe that bends justice, the evil returned for good, and the fool, more dangerous than a she-bear.

Proverbs 18 — The Name of the LORD Is a Strong Tower

Place: Division 2; Part B. *The Companion Bible:* "Personal virtues in social life." **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 18 is about a man among other men: the man who cuts himself off (v. 1), the fool who only wants to air his views (v. 2), the judge who favours the wicked (v. 5), the gossip (v. 8), the man who answers before he hears (v. 13), the two sides of a lawsuit (v. 17), the brother who has been wronged (v. 19), the wife (v. 22), the poor man pleading with the rich (v. 23), and the friend who sticks closer than a brother (v. 24). Its great saying is about two refuges: "The name of the LORD [Jehovah] is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (v. 10), set against the rich man's wall, which is high only "in his own conceit" (v. 11). And it holds the warning that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (v. 21).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–3. The man who separates himself; the fool who only talks; the contempt that comes with the wicked.
- 4–8. Words: deep waters, the unjust judge, the fool's lips, the gossip's morsels.
- 9–12. The slothful man; the strong tower and the rich man's wall; pride and humility.
- 13–15. Hearing before answering; the wounded spirit; the ear that seeks.
- 16–19. The gift; both sides of a case; the lot; the offended brother.
- 20, 21. The fruit of the lips; death and life in the tongue.
- 22–24. The wife, the poor man's plea, and the friend.

The Text

> **18:1** *Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom [tushiyyah].*
>
> **18:2** *A fool [kesil] hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.*
>
> **18:3** *When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.*
>
> **18:4** *The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.*
>
> **18:5** *It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.*
>
> **18:6** *A fool's [kesil] lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.*
>
> **18:7** *A fool's [kesil] mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.*

> **18:8** *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*
>
> **18:9** *He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.*
>
> **18:10** *The name of the LORD [Jehovah] is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*
>
> **18:11** *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.*
>
> **18:12** *Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.*
>
> **18:13** *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*
>
> **18:14** *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*
>
> **18:15** *The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*
>
> **18:16** *A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.*
>
> **18:17** *He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.*
>
> **18:18** *The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.*
>
> **18:19** *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*
>
> **18:20** *A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.*
>
> **18:21** *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*
>
> **18:22** *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah].*
>
> **18:23** *The poor [rash] useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.*
>
> **18:24** *A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

Verse by verse

> **18:1** *Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom [tushiyyah].*

Through desire a man, having separated himself. Hebrew *niphrad*, one who separates himself, who withdraws from others; *lera'avah*, for his own desire.

seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom [tushiyyah]. Sound wisdom, that which stands and works (2:7). The King James Version takes the verse in a good sense, of a man who withdraws from others to devote himself to the study of wisdom. The Hebrew points the other way. The verb "intermeddleth" is *yithgalla'*, "breaks out," the word used of a quarrel bursting out (17:14; 20:3). The verse reads: "He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire, and breaketh out against all sound wisdom." The man who cuts himself off from others to please himself ends by quarrelling with all good sense. He will take counsel from no one (11:14; 15:22). The Hebrew is followed here.

> **18:2** *A fool [kesil] hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.*

A fool [kesil] hath no delight in understanding. The dull, self-satisfied fool. He does not want to understand anything.

but that his heart may discover itself. Hebrew *hithgalloth*, to reveal itself, to show itself. He wants only to show what is in his own heart: to air his opinions. He does not come to a conversation to learn but to talk (12:23; 13:16).

> **18:3** *When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.*

When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt. Hebrew *buz*, contempt. Wherever the wicked man goes, scorn of what is good comes with him; and in the end, contempt for himself.

and with ignominy reproach. Hebrew *qalon*, disgrace (3:35); *cherpah*, reproach (6:33). Shameful conduct brings shameful reproach.

> **18:4** *The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.*

The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters. Hebrew *mayim 'amuqqim*. A wise man's words have depth: there is more in them than appears at first, and they must be drawn out. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out" (20:5).

and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook. Hebrew *maqor*, a spring; *nachal novea'*, a gushing stream (the verb of 1:23). Wisdom's words are deep like a well and fresh like a running stream.

> **18:5** *It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.*

It is not good to accept the person of the wicked. Hebrew *s'eth pene*, "to lift up the face": to show partiality, to favour a man because of who he is. "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great" (Deut. 1:17; Lev. 19:15).

to overthrow the righteous in judgment. Hebrew *lehattoth*, to bend aside (17:23). Favouring the wicked always means wronging the righteous. The figure *Tapeinosis*: "not good" means very evil. The saying comes again in 24:23 and 28:21.

> **18:6** *A fool's [kesil] lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.*

A fool's [kesil] lips enter into contention. The dull, self-satisfied fool. His lips walk straight into quarrels.

and his mouth calleth for strokes. Hebrew *mahalumoth*, blows, beatings. His mouth invites a beating (10:13; 19:29).

> **18:7** *A fool's [kesil] mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.*

A fool's [kesil] mouth is his destruction. Hebrew *mechittah*, ruin (10:14). Verse 6 said he gets others' blows; verse 7 says his mouth ruins him itself.

and his lips are the snare of his soul. Hebrew *moqesh*, a snare (12:13); *nephesh*, his life. He sets the trap with his own lips and walks into it.

> **18:8** *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

The words of a talebearer are as wounds. Hebrew *nirgan*, a whisperer, a gossip (16:28). The word "wounds" is *mithlahamim*, found only here and in 26:22, where the verse is repeated. The King James Version takes it from a root meaning "to strike"; many take it from a root meaning "to swallow greedily," and render "dainty morsels." The second fits the next line better: gossip is like a tasty bite that people swallow eagerly.

and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Hebrew *chadre veten*, the inner rooms of the body (compare "the chambers of death," 7:27). Once swallowed, gossip sinks deep and stays there. Both readings are true: gossip is relished, and it wounds. The hearer enjoys it, and the one it is about is hurt by it.

> **18:9** *He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.*

He also that is slothful in his work. Hebrew *mithrappeh*, one who lets his hands go slack, who slackens off.

is brother to him that is a great waster. Hebrew *ba'al mashchith*, "a master of destruction," a destroyer. The lazy man and the vandal are brothers: one ruins by doing nothing, the other by doing harm, and the result is the same. A house left unrepaired falls as surely as a house knocked down (Eccl. 10:18).

> **18:10** *The name of the LORD [Jehovah] is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*

The name of the LORD [Jehovah] is a strong tower. Hebrew *migdal 'oz*. The Name of Jehovah is all that He has made known of Himself: "The LORD [Jehovah], The LORD [Jehovah] God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). His Name is His revealed character, His power and His promises. "For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy" (Ps. 61:3). When Abimelech attacked Thebez, "there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women" (Judg. 9:51).

the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. Hebrew *nisgav*, he is set on high, lifted out of reach. The righteous man does not build his tower; he runs into the one Jehovah provides, and is lifted above the reach of his enemies. "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee" (Ps. 20:1).

> **18:11** *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.*

The rich man's wealth is his strong city. The first line is the same as 10:15; see there.

and as an high wall in his own conceit. Hebrew *maskith*, imagination, a picture in the mind. What differs is the second line, and its place right after verse 10. In 10:15 the rich man's wealth was a real defence, set against the ruin of the poor. Here it is a wall "in his own imagination." The righteous man runs into a real tower, the Name of Jehovah; the rich man hides behind a wall that exists mostly in his mind (11:4, 28). "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20).

> **18:12** *Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.*

Before destruction the heart of man is haughty. Hebrew *shever*, a crash (16:18); *yigbah*, it is high. The thought of 16:18: pride goes first, and the crash follows.

and before honour is humility. These words are the same as the second line of 15:33; see there. What differs is the first line: in 15:33 it was "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the instruction of wisdom"; here it is the haughty heart before destruction. Set together, the two lines show the two roads: the high heart goes down, and the low heart is lifted up.

> **18:13** *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it. He replies before the other man has finished, or judges a case before he has heard it.

it is folly and shame unto him. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, folly; *kelimmah*, shame. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19). Nicodemus asked the rulers, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51).

> **18:14** *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity. Hebrew *yekhalkel*, holds up, endures; *machaleh*, sickness. A man's inner strength can carry him through bodily illness.

but a wounded spirit who can bear? Hebrew *ruach nekheah*, a stricken spirit (15:13; 17:22). When the spirit itself is crushed, what is there to carry it? The question (*Erotesis*) expects the answer, "No one." Only God can bear up a broken spirit: "The LORD [Jehovah] is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

> **18:15** *The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*

The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge. Hebrew *navon*, the discerning (1:5); *yiqneh*, acquires (4:5).

and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. The wise man is never done learning. His heart gets knowledge, and his ear goes looking for more (14:6; 15:14). Contrast the fool of verse 2, who wants only to talk.

> **18:16** *A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.*

A man's gift maketh room for him. Hebrew *mattan*, a gift; *yarchiv*, it widens, makes space. A gift opens doors. The word here is not *shochad*, "bribe" (17:8, 23), but the ordinary word for a present.

and bringeth him before great men. Jacob sent a present ahead to Esau: "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me" (Gen. 32:20). Abigail brought a present to David (1 Sam. 25:27). Jacob sent "a little balm, and a little honey" to the ruler of Egypt (Gen. 43:11). The verse describes how gifts work in the world. A courtesy gift is not wrong; a bribe that bends justice is (17:23).

> **18:17** *He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.*

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just. Hebrew *harishon berivo*, the first in his lawsuit. The man who tells his side first always sounds right.

but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him. Hebrew *chaqar*, to examine, to probe. Then the other side comes and questions him, and the case looks different. Ziba told David that Mephibosheth had

stayed in Jerusalem hoping for the throne, and David gave Ziba all his master's land; when Mephibosheth came and told his side, the matter appeared otherwise (2 Sam. 16:1–4; 19:24–30). Hear both sides. "Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously" (Deut. 1:16).

> **18:18** *The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.*

The lot causeth contentions to cease. Hebrew *midyanim*, quarrels. When a dispute cannot be settled, the lot settles it, and both sides accept the decision as Jehovah's (16:33). The land of Canaan was divided by lot (Num. 26:55, 56).

and parteth between the mighty. Hebrew *yaphrid*, it separates; *'atsumim*, the strong (7:26). Between powerful men who might otherwise fight, the lot keeps the peace. (On the lot today, see 16:33.)

> **18:19** *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city. Hebrew *ach niphsha'*, a brother wronged, transgressed against. The words "is harder to be won" are supplied by the translators; the Hebrew reads, "A brother offended, more than a strong city." A wronged brother is harder to win back than a fortified town is to take. Esau hated Jacob for twenty years (Gen. 27:41). Absalom waited two years to kill Amnon (2 Sam. 13:22, 23, 28).

and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. Hebrew *midyanim*, quarrels (v. 18); *beriach armon*, the bar of a fortress gate. Quarrels between brothers lock the doors between them. The nearer the relationship, the harder the breach; and so the more careful a man must be not to make it (17:14).

> **18:20** *A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.*

A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth. What a man says comes back to feed him (12:14; 13:2).

and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Hebrew *tevu'ath*, produce, harvest. His words are a crop, and he eats what he sowed, good or bad.

> **18:21** *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Literally "in the hand of the tongue." A false witness can kill an innocent man (Naboth, 1 Kings 21:13); a true witness can save one (14:25). Words can crush a spirit (15:4) or heal it (12:18).

and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Those who love to use the tongue, the talkers, will eat what it produces, for death or for life (v. 20). "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). The verse is sometimes used to teach that a man can bring things into being by speaking them, as if his words had creative power. That is not what it says. It says that words have consequences, for others and for the speaker. Only God "calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

18:22 *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah].*

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing. Hebrew *tov*. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The verse means a good wife, as the rest of the book makes plain (12:4; 19:14; 31:10); it also warns of the contentious one (21:9, 19).

and obtaineth favour of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *yaphiq ratson*. These are the very words of 8:35, where Wisdom said, "whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD [Jehovah]." A good wife is a gift of Jehovah, as Wisdom is. "A prudent wife is from the LORD [Jehovah]" (19:14).

18:23 *The poor [rash] useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.*

The poor [rash] useth intreaties. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). "Intreaties" is *tachanunim*, pleas for mercy. He must ask humbly.

but the rich answereth roughly. Hebrew *'azzoth*, hard things. The rich man can afford to be rude. Nabal answered David's young men roughly (1 Sam. 25:10, 11). The verse states a fact of life; the book condemns it elsewhere (14:31; 17:5).

18:24 *A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly. Here, as in verse 1, the King James Version has given a sense the Hebrew does not bear. The Hebrew reads *ish re'im lehithro'ea'*: "A man of many companions is to be broken," or "comes to ruin." The verb is from *ra'a'*, to break, with a play on *re'im*, "companions." The Revised Version renders it, "He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction." A man who collects many companions, who is friends with everyone, may be ruined by them: they flatter, borrow, lead astray, and leave in hard times (19:4, 6, 7). The King James Version's saying, that a man must be friendly to have friends, is true in itself, but it is not what this verse says.

and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Hebrew *ohev*, one who loves; *daveq*, cleaving, clinging. It is the word of Genesis 2:24, "shall cleave unto his wife," and of Ruth, who "clave unto" Naomi (Ruth 1:14). Many companions may ruin a man; one true friend who loves him clings closer than a brother. Jonathan was such a friend to David (1 Sam. 18:1–3; 20:17). The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends" (John 15:13, 14). (See Appendix F.)

Looking back

Chapter 18 has looked at a man among others and asked what kind of company he keeps and what kind of company he is. The isolated man quarrels with all wisdom; the fool only talks; the gossip feeds others poison as a treat; the judge favours the wicked; the hasty man answers before he hears. Against them stand the man who hears both sides, the wise ear that seeks knowledge, the good wife who is a gift of Jehovah, and the one true friend who clings closer than a brother. Over all of them stands the strong tower of Jehovah's Name, the only refuge that is not imaginary.

Proverbs 19 — The Counsel of the LORD Shall Stand

Place: Division 2; Part B. *The Companion Bible:* "Personal character: humility, meekness, gentleness" (19:1–19). **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 19 is a chapter of the poor and the proud, the home and the court. The poor man appears five times (vv. 1, 4, 7, 17, 22): honest but friendless, hated even by his brothers, and yet the one to whom a kind man lends on Jehovah's account. The false witness appears three times (vv. 5, 9, 28). In the home there is a foolish son and a nagging wife (v. 13), a prudent wife who is Jehovah's gift (v. 14), a son to be corrected while there is hope (v. 18), and a son who robs his father and drives out his mother (v. 26). Over all of it stands the great saying of verse 21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD [Jehovah], that shall stand." The chapter also holds the only "my son" of the whole division (v. 27).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–3. Integrity, haste, and the man who blames Jehovah for his own folly.
- 4–7. Wealth and friends; the false witness; the poor man deserted.
- 8–12. Getting wisdom; the false witness again; the unfit ruler; patience; the king's wrath and favour.
- 13–15. The home: the foolish son, the contentious wife, the prudent wife, the idle soul.
- 16, 17. Keeping the commandment; lending to Jehovah.
- 18–20. Correcting the son; the man of great wrath; hearing counsel.
- 21–23. Jehovah's counsel; kindness; the fear of Jehovah.
- 24–29. The sluggard, the scorner, the shameful son, the misleading teaching, the worthless witness, and the judgment prepared.

The Text

> **19:1** *Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool [kesil].*
>
> **19:2** *Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.*
>
> **19:3** *The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD [Jehovah].*
>
> **19:4** *Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor [dal] is separated from his neighbour.*
>
> **19:5** *A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.*

19:6 *Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.*

19:7 *All the brethren of the poor [rash] do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.*

19:8 *He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.*

19:9 *A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.*

19:10 *Delight is not seemly for a fool [kesil]; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.*

19:11 *The discretion [sekel] of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.*

19:12 *The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass.*

19:13 *A foolish [kesil] son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.*

19:14 *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD [Jehovah].*

19:15 *Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.*

19:16 *He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.*

19:17 *He that hath pity upon the poor [dal] lendeth unto the LORD [Jehovah]; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.*

19:18 *Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.*

19:19 *A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.*

19:20 *Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.*

19:21 *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD [Jehovah], that shall stand.*

19:22 *The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man [rash] is better than a liar.*

19:23 *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.*

19:24 *A slothful man [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.*

19:25 *Smite a scorner [lets], and the simple [pethi] will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.*

19:26 *He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.*

19:27 *Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.*

19:28 *An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.*

19:29 *Judgments are prepared for scorners [lets], and stripes for the back of fools [kesil].*

Verse by verse

> **19:1** *Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool [kesil].*

Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his integrity. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). "Integrity" is *tom*, wholeness (2:7; 10:9).

than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool [kesil]. Hebrew *'iqqesh*, crooked (2:15). The dull, self-satisfied fool. One would expect "than a rich man," and the saying comes again in that form at 28:6. Here the contrast is with a fool of crooked speech, who may be rich or not: whatever he has, the honest poor man is better. Poverty with integrity is better than anything with folly.

> **19:2** *Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.*

Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good. The figure *Tapeinosis*: "not good" means very bad. Zeal without knowledge is dangerous. Israel had "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2).

and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth. Hebrew *ats*, hurries; *chote'*, misses. The verb for "sin" means at root to miss the mark, as the slingers of Benjamin who "could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss" (Judg. 20:16). The man who rushes ahead without knowing the way misses it.

> **19:3** *The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD [Jehovah].*

The foolishness of man perverteth his way. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, folly; *tesallef*, twists, overturns (11:3; 13:6). A man's own folly wrecks his life.

and his heart fretteth against the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *yiz'aph*, rages. Then he blames God for it. Adam said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree" (Gen. 3:12). The fool ruins himself and then is angry with Jehovah. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God" (Jas. 1:13).

> **19:4** *Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor [dal] is separated from his neighbour.*

Wealth maketh many friends. Literally "wealth adds many friends." Money attracts company (14:20).

but the poor [dal] is separated from his neighbour. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). "Separated" is *yippared*: even the one neighbour he had leaves him. The verse states the sad fact; verses 6 and 7 add to it, and verse 17 answers it.

> **19:5** *A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.*

A false witness shall not be unpunished. Hebrew *'ed sheqarim*, a witness of lies; *lo yinnaqeh*, shall not be held innocent (6:29). The Law commanded that a false witness receive the very punishment he sought to bring on the accused: "then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother" (Deut. 19:16–19).

and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. Hebrew *yaphiach*, breathes out (6:19); *lo yimmalet*, shall not slip away (11:21). The saying is repeated in verse 9, with a different end.

> **19:6** *Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.*

Many will intreat the favour of the prince. Hebrew *yechallu pene*, "they stroke the face," they court his favour; *nadiv*, a generous noble (17:7).

and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. Hebrew *ish mattan*, a man of gifts (18:16). The generous rich man has crowds of friends. Whether they love him or his gifts, time will tell (v. 7).

> **19:7** *All the brethren of the poor [rash] do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.*

All the brethren of the poor [rash] do hate him. The man in want. Even his own brothers avoid him, for fear he will ask for help.

how much more do his friends go far from him? If his brothers hate him, his friends will certainly leave. The figure *Erotesis*.

he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him. Hebrew *meraddeph amarim*, he chases them with words, with pleas; *lo-hemmah*, "they are not": he calls after them, and they are gone. This is the only proverb in 10:1–22:16 with three lines; *The Companion Bible* notes it. The third line adds the picture of the poor man running after his friends, calling, and finding no one there. Compare the friend who loves at all times (17:17).

> **19:8** *He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.*

He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul. Hebrew *qoneh lev*, he who gets heart, gets sense (15:32). To get wisdom is to love oneself rightly. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (8:36).

he that keepeth understanding shall find good. Hebrew *shomer tevunah*, he who keeps discernment.

> **19:9** *A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.*

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. The first line and the beginning of the second are the same as verse 5; see there. What differs is the end: in verse 5 the liar "shall not escape"; here he "shall perish" (*yoved*). Verse 5 says he will be caught; verse 9 says he will be destroyed. Between the two verses stand the flatterers of the rich and the friends who desert the poor (vv. 6, 7); in such a world, a witness can be bought. The repeated warning is the answer: whoever bought him, the false witness will be caught and will perish.

> **19:10** *Delight is not seemly for a fool [kesil]; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.*

Delight is not seemly for a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Delight" is *ta'anug*, luxury, soft living; "seemly" is *naveh*, fitting. Luxury does not suit a fool; he cannot handle it.

much less for a servant to have rule over princes. Hebrew *sarim*, princes. An unworthy servant raised over his masters is worse still. "For three things the earth is disquieted . . . for a servant when he

reigneth; and a fool [nabal] when he is filled with meat" (30:21, 22; compare Eccl. 10:5–7). This is different from the wise servant of 17:2, who rises by his own worth.

> **19:11** *The discretion [sekel] of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.*

The discretion [sekel] of a man deferreth his anger. Insight, good sense (3:4). "Deferreth" is *he'erikh*, makes long: his good sense makes him slow to anger (14:29).

and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. Hebrew *tiph'arto*, his beauty, his glory; *'avor 'al pesha'*, to pass over a transgression. It is the very phrase used of God Himself: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression (*'over 'al pesha'*) of the remnant of his heritage?" (Mic. 7:18). The man who overlooks an offence is like God (12:16).

> **19:12** *The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass.*

The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion. Hebrew *naham*, a growl (5:11; 20:2); *kephir*, a young lion. A lion's roar strikes fear before the attack (16:14).

but his favour is as dew upon the grass. Hebrew *ratson*, favour; *tal*, dew. In a land with no summer rain, the night's dew kept the grass alive. The king's favour refreshes like dew. "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (Hos. 14:5; compare 16:15).

> **19:13** *A foolish [kesil] son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.*

A foolish [kesil] son is the calamity of his father. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Calamity" is *havvoth*, ruins, disasters (plural). A foolish son is not one trouble to his father but a string of them (10:1; 17:21, 25).

and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. Hebrew *midyene ishah*, the quarrels of a wife; *delef tored*, a steady drip, like rain through a leaking roof. It never stops, and it wears a man down. "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike" (27:15).

> **19:14** *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD [Jehovah].*

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers. A man may inherit a house and wealth from his father.

and a prudent wife is from the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *ishah maskaleth*, a wife who acts wisely, from *sakal*, the root of [sekel]. No father can leave his son a good wife; she comes from Jehovah. Abraham's servant prayed, and Jehovah led him to Rebekah (Gen. 24:12–14, 27). The verse answers verse 13: the contentious wife is a constant drip; the prudent wife is a gift of God (18:22).

> **19:15** *Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.*

Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep. Hebrew *'atslah*, laziness, the noun from [atsel], the sluggard. "Deep sleep" is *tardemah*, the very word used of the sleep God caused to fall on Adam (Gen. 2:21). Laziness is like a heavy sleep that a man cannot shake off.

and an idle soul shall suffer hunger. Hebrew *nephesh remiyyah*, a slack soul (10:4; 12:24). The sleeper wakes up hungry.

> **19:16** *He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.*

He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul. Hebrew *shomer mitsvah shomer naphsho*: the same verb twice. Keep the commandment, and it keeps you (6:22; 13:3).

but he that despiseth his ways shall die. Hebrew *bozeh derakhav*, he who holds his ways in contempt, who is careless of how he lives. (Some take "his ways" as Jehovah's ways.) The Hebrew text and its margin differ by one letter here: "shall die," or "shall be put to death." Either way, he dies.

> **19:17** *He that hath pity upon the poor [dal] lendeth unto the LORD [Jehovah]; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.*

He that hath pity upon the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). "Hath pity" is *chonen*, shows grace (14:21, 31).

lendeth unto the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *malveh*, he lends. The man who gives to the poor is not giving away; he is lending, and the borrower is Jehovah Himself. The poor man cannot repay, so Jehovah stands as his surety. "Thou shalt surely give him . . . because that for this thing the LORD [Jehovah] thy God shall bless thee in all thy works" (Deut. 15:10). "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

and that which he hath given will he pay him again. Hebrew *gemulo*, his deed, his good turn; *yeshallem*, He will repay. Jehovah pays His debts. This verse answers verse 4 and verse 7: men leave the poor; Jehovah takes their side.

> **19:18** *Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.*

Chasten thy son while there is hope. Hebrew *yasser*, discipline, correct, from the root of *musar*. "While there is hope" is *ki yesh tiqwah*: there is still hope while he is young, and correction can still shape him (13:24; 22:15).

and let not thy soul spare for his crying. The Hebrew reads, *we'el-hamitho al-tissa naphshekha*: "and to his death set not thy soul," that is, do not set your heart on putting him to death. The King James Version's "for his crying" does not render these words. The Hebrew can be taken in two ways, and both protect the son. First, it limits correction: discipline him, but never in anger to the point of destroying him; correction is for his good, not for his harm (Eph. 6:4). Second, it warns against neglect: do not, by refusing to correct him, make yourself the cause of his death, for an uncorrected son goes to ruin (23:13, 14: "he shall not die . . . thou shalt deliver his soul from hell"). The father who corrects in time saves his son's life; the father who corrects in fury, or not at all, endangers it. (See Appendix F.)

> **19:19** *A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.*

A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment. Hebrew *gedol chemah* (as the margin reads), great of fury; *'onesh*, a penalty, a fine (17:26). The hot-tempered man keeps getting into trouble.

for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again. If you rescue him from the results of his temper, you will only have to rescue him again. Until he learns, he will keep paying, and the man who keeps paying for him will keep paying too.

> **19:20** *Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.*

Hear counsel, and receive instruction. *'Etsah* and *musar*.

that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. Hebrew *be'acharithekha*, at your end, in the end. Wisdom is a lifetime's work; a man who listens now will be wise when he is old. Compare 5:11, where the man who would not listen mourns "at the last."

> **19:21** *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD [Jehovah], that shall stand.*

There are many devices in a man's heart. Hebrew *machashavoth*, plans, schemes. A man has many plans.

nevertheless the counsel of the LORD [Jehovah], that shall stand. Hebrew *'etsah*, counsel, purpose; *taqum*, it shall rise up and stand. Of all a man's many plans, only Jehovah's purpose is sure. "The LORD [Jehovah] bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought . . . The counsel of the LORD [Jehovah] standeth for ever" (Ps. 33:10, 11). "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). Gamaliel told the council, "if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:38, 39). The thought of 16:1, 9.

> **19:22** *The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man [rash] is better than a liar.*

The desire of a man is his kindness. Hebrew *ta'avath adam chasdo*: "what is desired in a man is his kindness." What makes a man worth having is his *chesed*, his loyal kindness (3:3). The words can also mean "a man's desire is to show kindness."

and a poor man [rash] is better than a liar. The man in want. A poor man who would be kind if he could, and is honest about what he cannot give, is better than a rich man who promises and does not keep his word. The friends of verse 7 called themselves friends and were not there.

> **19:23** *The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.*

The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] tendeth to life. It leads to life (10:27; 14:27).

and he that hath it shall abide satisfied. Hebrew *yalin*, he lodges for the night (15:31); *savea'*, satisfied. He lies down at night content.

he shall not be visited with evil. Hebrew *bal yippaqed ra'*, evil will not come calling on him. As a rule, the man who fears Jehovah is kept (12:21; Ps. 91:10).

> **19:24** *A slothful man [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.*

A slothful man [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. The word translated "bosom" is *tsallachath*, a dish, a bowl (2 Kings 21:13, "as a man wipeth a dish"). The picture is of a man at dinner who puts his hand into the dish,

and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. He is too lazy even to feed himself. The figure is *Hyperbole*, a comic exaggeration, and it makes the point: laziness grows until it will not do even what it most wants. The saying comes again at 26:15. Compare the slothful hunter who will not cook his catch (12:27).

> **19:25** *Smite a scorner [lets], and the simple [pethi] will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.*

Smite a scorner [lets], and the simple [pethi] will beware. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught; and the open, untaught one, who can still be taught (Part One, Chapter 5). "Will beware" is *ya'rim*, he grows shrewd, from the root of [ormah] (15:5). The scorner will not learn from his punishment, but the simple man who sees it will. "And all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut. 13:11); "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20). The thought returns at 21:11.

and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge. Hebrew *navon*, the discerning man. He does not need to be beaten; a word is enough (17:10).

> **19:26** *He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.*

He that wasteth his father. Hebrew *meshadded*, he who ruins, robs. He strips his father of his goods (28:24).

and chaseth away his mother. Hebrew *yavriach*, drives away. He turns his widowed mother out of the house.

is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach. Hebrew *mevish*, he brings shame (10:5); *machpir*, he brings disgrace (13:5). The Law punished the son who struck or cursed his parents with death (Ex. 21:15, 17). This is the worst of the foolish sons of the book.

> **19:27** *Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.*

Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. The only time "my son" is spoken in the whole of 10:1–22:16. Hebrew *lishgoth*, to wander, to go astray, the word of 5:19, 20, 23 (*shagah*). The Hebrew can be read in two ways. As the King James Version reads it: stop listening to teaching that leads you away from knowledge. Or, as an ironic warning: "Cease, my son, to hear instruction, only to stray from the words of knowledge": if you stop listening to correction, you will wander from knowledge. Either way, the son is warned: what he listens to will decide where he goes (17:4).

> **19:28** *An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.*

An ungodly witness scorneth judgment. Hebrew *'ed beliya'al*, a worthless witness (6:12); *yalits*, he mocks (the verb of [lets]). He makes a mockery of the court.

and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity. Hebrew *yeballa' 'awen*, swallows mischief. He gulps down wickedness like a man who loves the taste. "How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:16).

> **19:29** *Judgments are prepared for scorners [lets], and stripes for the back of fools [kesil].*

Judgments are prepared for scorners [lets]. The mockers. "Judgments" is *shephatim*, penalties, punishments; "prepared" is *nakhonu*, made ready. The scorner who mocked the court (v. 28) will find a penalty waiting for him.

and stripes for the back of fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Stripes" is *mahalumoth*, blows (18:6). The rod for the back of the senseless (10:13; 26:3). This volume ends where Part A began: the fool must be taught by the rod, because he would not be taught by words.

Looking back

Chapter 19 has looked at a world in which money buys friends and false witnesses, the poor are deserted by their brothers, a fool can blame God for his own folly, and a son can rob his father and turn out his mother. Against that world it sets Jehovah, who takes the poor man's debt as His own (v. 17), whose counsel stands when all a man's plans have failed (v. 21), and the fear of whom lets a man lie down at night content (v. 23). It sets also the man who is like Jehovah: slow to anger, passing over a wrong (v. 11), kind to the poor, and honest even when he has nothing to give (v. 22).

Proverbs 20 — The Spirit of Man Is the Candle of the LORD

Place: Division 2; Part B. **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 20 is a chapter of the throne and the heart. The king appears four times (vv. 2, 8, 26, 28): his anger like a lion's roar, his eye that winnows out evil, his throne upheld by mercy. Jehovah appears as the One who made the ear and the eye (v. 12), who orders a man's steps (v. 24), and who searches his inmost parts by the lamp of his own spirit (v. 27). Between them stands a man who cannot say "I have made my heart clean" (v. 9), and who is tempted by wine (v. 1), cheating (vv. 10, 14, 23), rash pledges and rash vows (vv. 16, 25), deceit (v. 17), gossip (v. 19), and revenge (v. 22).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1. Wine and strong drink.
- 2–4. The king's anger; ceasing from strife; the sluggard in the cold.
- 5–7. Deep counsel; the faithful man; the just man's children.
- 8–12. The king's eye; the heart no man can cleanse; false weights; the child; the ear and the eye.
- 13–19. Sleep and bread; the buyer's talk; the precious lips; the surety's garment; the bread of deceit; counsel for war; the talebearer.
- 20–25. Cursing parents; hasty inheritance; vengeance left to Jehovah; false weights; steps ordered by Jehovah; rash vows.
- 26–30. The king winnows; the lamp of Jehovah; mercy and truth; strength and grey hair; the stripes that cleanse.

The Text

> **20:1** *Wine is a mocker [lets], strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*
>
> **20:2** *The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.*
>
> **20:3** *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool [ewil] will be meddling.*
>
> **20:4** *The sluggard [atsel] will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*
>
> **20:5** *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.*
>
> **20:6** *Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?*
>
> **20:7** *The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.*

20:8 *A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.*

20:9 *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*

20:10 *Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD [Jehovah].*

20:11 *Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.*

20:12 *The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD [Jehovah] hath made even both of them.*

20:13 *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.*

20:14 *It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*

20:15 *There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.*

20:16 *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*

20:17 *Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.*

20:18 *Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.*

20:19 *He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*

20:20 *Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*

20:21 *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.*

20:22 *Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD [Jehovah], and he shall save thee.*

20:23 *Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]; and a false balance is not good.*

20:24 *Man's goings are of the LORD [Jehovah]; how can a man then understand his own way?*

20:25 *It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.*

20:26 *A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.*

20:27 *The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD [Jehovah], searching all the inward parts of the belly.*

20:28 *Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.*

20:29 *The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.*

20:30 *The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.*

Verse by verse

20:1 *Wine is a mocker [lets], strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

Wine is a mocker [lets]. The scorner, who laughs at correction and will not be taught (Part One, Chapter 5). Wine is personified as one: it makes a man scoff at what he would otherwise respect.

strong drink is raging. Hebrew *shekhar*, fermented drink; *homeh*, noisy, brawling (the word of the strange woman, "loud," 7:11). It makes a man a brawler.

and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Hebrew *shogeh*, he who staggers, who goes astray: the verb *shagah* of 5:19, 20, 23. Drink makes a man reel in body and in mind. Noah lay uncovered in his tent (Gen. 9:21); Lot did not know what his daughters did (Gen. 19:33, 35). Priests were forbidden wine when they served (Lev. 10:9), and kings were warned against it (31:4, 5). "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess" (Eph. 5:18). The fullest warning comes in 23:29–35.

> **20:2** *The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.*

The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion. Hebrew *emah*, terror. The terror a king inspires is like a lion's roar before it springs (19:12).

whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul. Hebrew *mith'abbero*, he who angers him; *chote naphsho*, he misses (wrongs) his own life. To provoke the king is to put one's own life at risk.

> **20:3** *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool [ewil] will be meddling.*

It is an honour for a man to cease from strife. Hebrew *sheveth*, to sit still, to stay away. There is honour in walking away from a quarrel. The world calls it weakness; Scripture calls it honour (19:11).

but every fool [ewil] will be meddling. The fool whose folly shows in what he does, despising correction (1:7). "Meddling" is *yithgalla'*, he breaks out (17:14; 18:1). He cannot keep out of a fight.

> **20:4** *The sluggard [atsel] will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*

The sluggard [atsel] will not plow by reason of the cold. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. In Israel the ground is ploughed in the autumn, when the first rains soften it and the weather turns cold (*choreph*, the winter season). The cold is his excuse (22:13).

therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. Hebrew *sha'al*, he asks. At harvest he looks for a crop he never sowed, or asks his neighbours for grain, and finds nothing. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing" (13:4).

> **20:5** *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water. Hebrew *'etsah*, counsel, purpose. A man's real plans and thoughts lie deep inside him, like water at the bottom of a well (18:4).

but a man of understanding will draw it out. Hebrew *dalah*, to draw water with a bucket (Ex. 2:16, 19). A discerning man knows how to draw out what another man means, by patient questions and careful listening. He can also draw out the wisdom in his own heart.

> **20:6** *Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?*

Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness. Hebrew *chesed*, kindness, loyalty. Many men announce how kind and loyal they are. The Pharisee in the temple told God his own goodness (Luke 18:11, 12).

but a faithful man who can find? Hebrew *ish emunim*, a man of faithfulness. Talk of loyalty is common; a man who is actually faithful is rare. "Help, LORD [Jehovah]; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Ps. 12:1). The same form of question is asked of the virtuous woman (31:10).

> **20:7** *The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.*

The just man walketh in his integrity. Hebrew *tom*, wholeness (10:9).

his children are blessed after him. His life leaves a blessing on those who come after. "His seed is blessed" (Ps. 37:26; 112:2). Jehovah blessed Isaac "for my servant Abraham's sake" (Gen. 26:24).

> **20:8** *A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.*

A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment. The king as judge (16:10).

scattereth away all evil with his eyes. Hebrew *mezareh*, winnowing, scattering, as a farmer throws grain into the wind and the chaff blows away. A just king's searching look sifts out the guilty. The same picture returns in verse 26. Of the coming King it is written, "whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor" (Matt. 3:12).

> **20:9** *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*

Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? Hebrew *zikkiti*, I have made clean; *taharti*, I am pure. The figure *Erotesis*: the answer is "No one." No man can clean his own heart. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20; 1 Kings 8:46). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). The verse stands after the king who winnows out evil (v. 8): if every man has evil in his heart, who can stand before the judge? Only God can make the heart clean: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10).

> **20:10** *Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD [Jehovah].*

Divers weights, and divers measures. Hebrew *even va'even*, "a stone and a stone"; *ephah ve'ephah*, "an ephah and an ephah": two sets, a heavy one for buying and a light one for selling. "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small" (Deut. 25:13).

both of them are alike abomination to the LORD [Jehovah]. *To'evah* (11:1; 16:11).

> **20:11** *Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.*

Even a child is known by his doings. Hebrew *na'ar*, a boy; *yithnakker*, he makes himself known. Even a child shows by what he does what he is.

whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. Hebrew *zakh*, pure (16:2); *yashar*, upright. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16). The verse follows verse 9: no man can claim a clean heart, but every man, even a child, shows his heart by his deeds.

> **20:12** *The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD [Jehovah] hath made even both of them.*

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD [Jehovah] hath made even both of them. "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD [Jehovah]?" (Ex. 4:11). Two lessons follow. The God who made the ear and the eye hears and sees all: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Ps. 94:9). And the ear and eye He gave are to be used for Him: to hear instruction and to see the right way (vv. 13, 18).

> **20:13** *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.*

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty. Hebrew *tiwwaresh*, lest thou be dispossessed, made poor (the root of [rash]). Not sleep itself, but the love of it (6:9–11; 19:15).

open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. Wake up and work, and you will eat. The "seeing eye" of verse 12 is meant to be open.

> **20:14** *It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer. Hebrew *ra' ra'*, "bad, bad." The buyer runs down the goods to get the price lower. The repetition is the buyer's own: he says it twice.

but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth. Hebrew *yithhallal*, he praises himself. Once he has his bargain, he boasts of the fine thing he got so cheaply. The verse shows a small dishonesty that most men think nothing of; the book calls it what it is.

> **20:15** *There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.*

There is gold, and a multitude of rubies. Gold is plentiful, and precious stones (*peninim*, 3:15) are many.

but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. Hebrew *keli yeqar*, a precious vessel, an ornament of great price. Gold and jewels can be found in many places; a man whose lips speak knowledge is rare (3:15; 8:11).

> **20:16** *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger. Hebrew *zar*, an outsider (6:1). The verse speaks to the lender: when a man has rashly pledged himself for a stranger's debt, make sure of your security. Take his cloak as a pledge. Under the Law, a poor man's cloak taken in pledge had to be returned by sunset, for he slept in it (Ex. 22:26, 27); but the rash surety has brought this on himself.

and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. Hebrew *chavlehu*, take a pledge from him. The written text has *nokriyyah*, "a strange woman"; the margin has *nokrim*, "strangers." A man who stands surety for a stranger, or for a loose woman's debts, is a bad risk; secure the loan. The verse is repeated at 27:13. Behind it stands the warning of 6:1–5: do not be that man.

> **20:17** *Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.*

Bread of deceit is sweet to a man. Hebrew *lechem shaqer*, bread of falsehood: food got by lying or cheating. It tastes sweet at first, like "stolen waters" (9:17).

but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. Hebrew *chatsats*, gravel, grit. What tasted like bread turns to grit in the mouth, breaking the teeth. "He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones" (Lam. 3:16). The sweetness of sin is at the beginning; the gravel is at the end (5:3, 4).

> **20:18** *Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.*

Every purpose is established by counsel. Hebrew *machashavoth*, plans; *'etsah*, counsel. Plans stand when they have been talked through (15:22).

and with good advice make war. Hebrew *tachbuloth*, steerings, wise guidance (1:5; 11:14; 24:6). War is the gravest plan a king can make; make it only with counsel. "What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able?" (Luke 14:31).

> **20:19** *He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*

He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets. These are the words of 11:13; see there. What differs is the second line.

therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips. Hebrew *lo tith'arav*, do not mix with him (14:10); *potheh sephathav*, "him that opens wide his lips," the babbler. The verb is *pathah*, the root of [pethi], "the simple": the open-mouthed man. In 11:13 the talebearer was set against the faithful man who keeps a secret; here the son is told to stay away from him. The man who tells you others' secrets will tell others yours.

> **20:20** *Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*

Whoso curseth his father or his mother. Hebrew *meqallel*, he who makes light of, treats with contempt, curses. The Law made it a capital crime: "he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). The Lord Jesus Christ quoted it against those who used religion to avoid supporting their parents (Matt. 15:4–6).

his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. Hebrew *ishon choshekh*, "the pupil of darkness," the blackest darkness (the phrase of 7:9). His lamp, his life and his line, will go out (13:9).

> **20:21** *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.*

An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning. The written text reads *mevocheleth*, gotten greedily; the margin reads *mevoheleth*, hastened. Either way, the inheritance is grabbed too soon: seized before its time, or taken from a father still living. The prodigal son said, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me" (Luke 15:12).

but the end thereof shall not be blessed. The prodigal "wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:13). What is grabbed early is not blessed at the end (13:11).

> **20:22** *Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD [Jehovah], and he shall save thee.*

Say not thou, I will recompense evil. Hebrew *ashallemah ra'*, "I will pay back evil." Do not even say it.

but wait on the LORD [Jehovah], and he shall save thee. Hebrew *qavveh*, wait, hope, look to; *yosha'*, He shall deliver. Leave the wrong with Jehovah. "Recompense to no man evil for evil . . . avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:17, 19; Deut. 32:35). David would not lift his hand against Saul, but left him to Jehovah (1 Sam. 24:12; 26:10).

> **20:23** *Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]; and a false balance is not good.*

Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD [Jehovah]; and a false balance is not good. The third time the book condemns false weights (11:1; 20:10); see 20:10. What differs is the end: "not good," the figure *Tapeinosis*, understatement for "very evil." The repetition, three times in the book and twice in this chapter, shows how much Jehovah cares about honesty in small things.

> **20:24** *Man's goings are of the LORD [Jehovah]; how can a man then understand his own way?*

Man's goings are of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *mits'ade gever*, the steps of a strong man. Even the strongest man's steps are ordered by Jehovah (16:9).

how can a man then understand his own way? Hebrew *adam*, a man. If Jehovah orders the steps, no man fully understands where his own road leads. He must trust the One who does (3:5, 6). "O LORD [Jehovah], I know that the way of man is not in himself" (Jer. 10:23).

> **20:25** *It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.*

It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy. Hebrew *yala'*, to speak rashly, to blurt out; *qodesh*, "Holy!" The man rashly cries out, "It is holy!", dedicating something to God on the spur of the moment.

and after vows to make enquiry. Hebrew *levaqqer*, to reconsider, to look into it. He vows first and thinks afterwards. Jephthah vowed rashly and lived to grieve it (Judg. 11:30–35). "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it . . . Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:4, 5; Deut. 23:21–23).

> **20:26** *A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.*

A wise king scattereth the wicked. Hebrew *mezareh*, winnows (v. 8).

and bringeth the wheel over them. Hebrew *ophan*, a wheel, the wheel of the threshing cart that was driven over the grain to separate it from the husk (Isa. 28:27, 28). The wise king threshes and winnows the wicked out of his kingdom.

> **20:27** *The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD [Jehovah], searching all the inward parts of the belly.*

The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *neshamah*, breath, the breath of life that God breathed into man (Gen. 2:7); *ner*, a lamp. The inner life God gave a man, his understanding and conscience, is Jehovah's lamp. "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration (*neshamah*) of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8).

searching all the inward parts of the belly. Hebrew *chadre veten*, the inner rooms (18:8). By this lamp God searches a man's inmost thoughts, and the man is searched by his own conscience. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11). The verse speaks of what every man has from creation; it is not speaking of the gift of holy spirit, which was given first on the day of Pentecost.

> **20:28** *Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.*

Mercy and truth preserve the king. Hebrew *chesed* and *emeth* (3:3); *yitsseru*, they guard. A king is guarded best not by soldiers but by loyal kindness and faithfulness.

and his throne is upholden by mercy. Hebrew *sa'ad*, to support, to prop up. "In mercy shall the throne be established" (Isa. 16:5; compare 16:12; 29:14).

> **20:29** *The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.*

The glory of young men is their strength. Hebrew *bachurim*, young men in their prime.

and the beauty of old men is the gray head. Hebrew *hadar*, splendour; *sevah*, grey hair (16:31). Each age has its own glory: the young their strength, the old their wisdom and years. Neither should despise the other.

> **20:30** *The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.*

The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil. Hebrew *chavvuroth*, stripes, welts, the marks of a beating; *tamriq*, scours, polishes. Painful correction scours away evil.

so do stripes the inward parts of the belly. Hebrew *makkoth*, blows; *chadre veten*, the inner rooms (v. 27). The blows that hurt the body can cleanse the heart. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). The word *chavurah*, "stripe," is the word of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant: "with his stripes (*chavurah*) we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). The stripes of correction cleanse the one who bears them; the stripes Christ bore healed others. He was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:22).

Looking back

Chapter 20 has placed a man between two searching eyes: the king's, which winnows out evil (vv. 8, 26), and Jehovah's lamp, which searches his inmost parts (v. 27). No man can say his heart is clean (v. 9); every man shows his heart by what he does, even a child (v. 11). So the chapter calls for honesty in weights and bargains, care in vows and pledges, patience instead of revenge, and a willingness to be corrected, even by stripes, for the cleansing they bring.

Proverbs 21 — The King's Heart Is in the Hand of the LORD

Place: Division 2; Part B. **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

Chapter 21 opens and closes with Jehovah's rule over the great. The king's heart is in His hand like a water channel in a farmer's (v. 1); no wisdom, counsel or army can stand against Him (vv. 30, 31). Between those two sayings the chapter weighs what pleases God and what does not: justice rather than sacrifice (v. 3), the sacrifice of the wicked brought with a wicked purpose (v. 27), the cry of the poor that a hard man refuses to hear (v. 13). It names the scorner by his true name, pride (v. 24), and twice speaks of the contentious wife, a man's misery at home (vv. 9, 19).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–4. The king's heart, the heart weighed, justice better than sacrifice, the lamp of the proud.
- 5–8. Haste, lies, robbery, and the crooked way.
- 9–13. The brawling wife; the wicked man's craving; the scorner punished; the Righteous One's judgment; the cry of the poor.
- 14–18. The secret gift; joy in justice; resting among the dead; the lover of pleasure; the ransom.
- 19–23. The contentious wife again; the wise man's store; pursuing righteousness; wisdom stronger than walls; the guarded mouth.
- 24–31. The scorner named; the sluggard's craving; the wicked man's sacrifice; the false witness; the hard face; no counsel against Jehovah; the horse and the battle.

The Text

> **21:1** *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD [Jehovah], as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*
>
> **21:2** *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD [Jehovah] pondereth the hearts.*
>
> **21:3** *To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD [Jehovah] than sacrifice.*
>
> **21:4** *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.*
>
> **21:5** *The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.*
>
> **21:6** *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.*
>
> **21:7** *The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.*

> **21:8** *The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.*
>
> **21:9** *It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*
>
> **21:10** *The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.*
>
> **21:11** *When the scorner [lets] is punished, the simple [pethi] is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.*
>
> **21:12** *The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.*
>
> **21:13** *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor [dal], he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.*
>
> **21:14** *A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.*
>
> **21:15** *It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.*
>
> **21:16** *The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.*
>
> **21:17** *He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.*
>
> **21:18** *The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.*
>
> **21:19** *It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.*
>
> **21:20** *There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish [kesil] man spendeth it up.*
>
> **21:21** *He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.*
>
> **21:22** *A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.*
>
> **21:23** *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*
>
> **21:24** *Proud and haughty scorner [lets] is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*
>
> **21:25** *The desire of the slothful [atsel] killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.*
>
> **21:26** *He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*
>
> **21:27** *The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?*
>
> **21:28** *A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.*
>
> **21:29** *A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way.*
>
> **21:30** *There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD [Jehovah].*
>
> **21:31** *The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD [Jehovah].*

Verse by verse

> **21:1** *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD [Jehovah], as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD [Jehovah]. The most powerful man in the land, whose word is life and death (16:14, 15), is himself in Jehovah's hand.

as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. Hebrew *palge mayim*, channels of water, the irrigation ditches of a field. A farmer turns the water this way and that with a stroke of his hoe, to where it is needed. *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 75) lists this verse among those that gain new light from the Hebrew: the picture is not of great rivers, but of small channels directed by a gardener's hand. So Jehovah directs the king's heart. He "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to send the Jews home (Ezra 1:1); He "put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD [Jehovah]" (Ezra 7:27); He moved Artaxerxes to grant Nehemiah's request (Neh. 2:4–8).

> **21:2** *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD [Jehovah] pondereth the hearts.*

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD [Jehovah] pondereth the hearts. These are almost the words of 16:2; see there. What differs is the wording: there the ways were "clean" and Jehovah weighed the "spirits"; here they are "right" (*yashar*) and He weighs the "hearts." The saying now follows the king's heart in Jehovah's hand (v. 1): every man, king or commoner, thinks his way is right, and every heart is weighed by Jehovah.

> **21:3** *To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD [Jehovah] than sacrifice.*

To do justice and judgment. Hebrew *tsedaqah umishpat*, righteousness and right dealing (1:3).

is more acceptable to the LORD [Jehovah] than sacrifice. Hebrew *nivchar*, chosen, preferred. Under the Law sacrifice was commanded; but God always wanted the life behind it more than the offering. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD [Jehovah] require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8). The Lord Jesus Christ twice quoted Hosea: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Hos. 6:6).

> **21:4** *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.*

An high look, and a proud heart. Hebrew *rum 'eynayim*, high eyes (6:17); *rechav lev*, a wide, swollen heart.

and the plowing of the wicked, is sin. The Hebrew word *nir* can mean newly broken ground, "tillage" (13:23), as the King James Version takes it; or "lamp," a form of *ner*, as the Revised Version takes it: "even the lamp of the wicked, is sin." *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 75) lists this verse among those that gain new light. The lamp of the wicked is his life and prosperity (13:9; 20:20). The sense is the same either way: when pride is in the heart, everything the wicked man does, his ploughing as well as his shining, is sin. What he does may look ordinary or even good; it is spoiled by the pride behind it.

> **21:5** *The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.*

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness. Hebrew *machshevoth*, plans; *charuts*, the keen, diligent (10:4); *mothar*, surplus, profit (14:23). Careful planning plus steady work leads to plenty.

but of every one that is hasty only to want. Hebrew *'ats*, he who hurries (19:2); *machsor*, want. Haste, without plan or patience, leads to poverty (28:22).

> **21:6** *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.*

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue. Riches gained by fraud and lies.

is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death. Hebrew *hevel niddaph*, a vapour blown away; *mevaqshe maveth*, of those who seek death. Such wealth is a breath in the wind, and the men who chase it are, without knowing it, chasing death (8:36; 21:16). (The Greek reads "snares of death.")

> **21:7** *The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.*

The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them. Hebrew *shod*, violence, plunder; *yegorem*, it shall drag them away, as a net drags fish. The violence they did will carry them off.

because they refuse to do judgment. They will not do what is right, and so their own wrong takes them (1:18, 19).

> **21:8** *The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.*

The way of man is froward and strange. Hebrew *hafakhpakh*, very crooked, twisting and turning; *wazar*, a rare word, found only here, which probably means "guilty," "laden with guilt." The verse is best read: "The way of the guilty man is very crooked."

but as for the pure, his work is right. Hebrew *zakh*, pure, clean (16:2; 20:11). The guilty man twists and turns to hide what he has done; the pure man's conduct is straight, because he has nothing to hide.

> **21:9** *It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*

It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop. Hebrew *pinnath gag*, a corner of the flat roof, open to the sun by day and the rain and cold by night. Houses in Israel had flat roofs, sometimes with a small room built on them (2 Kings 4:10).

than with a brawling woman in a wide house. Hebrew *midyanim*, contentions (6:14); *beth chaver*, a shared house, a house in company. Better to live alone in discomfort on the roof than share a fine house with a quarrelsome wife (19:13). The saying comes again at 25:24, and in another form in verse 19.

> **21:10** *The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.*

The soul of the wicked desireth evil. Hebrew *iwwethah*, it craves. His very soul hungers for harm.

his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes. Hebrew *yuchan*, he is shown no pity. Even his neighbour gets no mercy from him.

> **21:11** *When the scorner [lets] is punished, the simple [pethi] is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.*

When the scorner [lets] is punished, the simple [pethi] is made wise. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught; and the open, untaught one, who can still be taught (Part One, Chapter 5). This is the saying of 19:25; see there. What differs is the wording: "punished" (*'anash*, fined)

for "smite"; and in the second line, "when the wise is instructed" for "reprove one that hath understanding."

and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge. Hebrew *behaskil*, when he is given insight, from *sakal*, the root of [sekel]. The simple learn from the scorner's punishment; the wise learn from instruction alone.

> **21:12** *The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.*

The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked. Hebrew *tsaddiq*, the righteous one; *maskil*, he gives careful thought to. The words "man" and "God" in this verse are supplied by the translators. The verse reads, "The Righteous One considers the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked to ruin." The Righteous One is God Himself (Job 34:17, "him that is most just"): He watches the house of the wicked, and in His time overturns it.

but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness. Hebrew *mesalleph*, twisting, overturning (13:6). The same One who considers, overthrows.

> **21:13** *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor [dal], he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.*

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). "Stoppeth" is *'otem*, closes up (17:28). "Cry" is *za'aqah*, a cry for help.

he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. The man who would not hear will not be heard. The rich man who let Lazarus lie at his gate cried out in his turn, and was told, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things" (Luke 16:24, 25). "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy" (Jas. 2:13).

> **21:14** *A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.*

A gift in secret pacifieth anger. Hebrew *mattan basseter*, a gift given quietly; *yikhpeh*, it subdues, bends down. A quiet present can calm an angry man (18:16; Gen. 32:20).

and a reward in the bosom strong wrath. Hebrew *shochad*, a bribe; *cheq*, the fold of the robe (17:23). Here the gift slides into a bribe, passed secretly. The verse describes what gifts and bribes do; the book has already said what God thinks of the bribe that bends justice (17:23).

> **21:15** *It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.*

It is joy to the just to do judgment. A righteous man does right gladly; it is his pleasure.

but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. These are the words of the second line of 10:29; see there. What differs is the first line: in 10:29 it was Jehovah's way that was strength to the upright; here it is the joy the just man takes in doing right. The same justice that delights the righteous is ruin to the wicked.

> **21:16** *The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.*

The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding. Hebrew *to'eh*, wandering, straying (7:25); *haskel*, good sense (1:3).

shall remain in the congregation of the dead. Hebrew *yanuach*, he shall rest; *qehal rephaim*, the assembly of the dead (2:18; 9:18). There is a bitter irony: he wandered, and he will at last find rest, among the dead. The way of Folly's guests ends where this man's ends (9:18).

> **21:17** *He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.*

He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man. Hebrew *simchah*, mirth, merrymaking; *ish machsor*, a man of want. The man who lives for parties will end in want.

he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. Wine and oil were the luxuries of the feast; oil was used to anoint the head at banquets (Ps. 23:5; 104:15; Amos 6:6). The rich man of the parable "fared sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19), and the prodigal spent everything (Luke 15:13).

> **21:18** *The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.*

The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous. Hebrew *kopher*, a ransom (6:35; 13:8). The trouble meant for the righteous falls on the wicked instead, as if paid in their place (11:8). Haman went to the gallows built for Mordecai (Esth. 7:10). "I gave Egypt for thy ransom" (Isa. 43:3).

and the transgressor for the upright. Hebrew *boged*, the treacherous (2:22). The verse speaks of God's justice in human affairs; it is not speaking of the sacrifice of Christ, who was not wicked, and who gave Himself, the just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18).

> **21:19** *It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.*

It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman. The thought of verse 9; see there. What differs is the place and the woman. The man has gone further than the corner of the roof: now he would rather live in the desert (*erets midbar*), with no house at all. And the woman is not only "brawling" but *ka'as*, "vexing," given to anger.

> **21:20** *There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish [kesil] man spendeth it up.*

There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise. Hebrew *otsar*, a store; *shemen*, oil. The wise man saves, and has something laid by.

but a foolish [kesil] man spendeth it up. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Spendeth it up" is *yeballe'ennu*, swallows it (19:28). Whatever he gets, he eats at once, and nothing is left for tomorrow.

> **21:21** *He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.*

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy. Hebrew *rodeph*, he who pursues (15:9); *tsedaqah* and *chesed*.

findeth life, righteousness, and honour. He chases righteousness and kindness, and finds not only what he chased, but life and honour besides. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

> **21:22** *A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.*

A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty. Hebrew *'alah*, goes up; *gibborim*, mighty men, warriors.

and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof. Hebrew *mivtach*, the stronghold in which they trusted. Wisdom is stronger than walls. "There was a little city . . . and there came a great king against it . . . Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city" (Eccl. 9:14, 15). "Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (Eccl. 9:18).

> **21:23** *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles. Hebrew *shomer*, he who keeps (twice); *tsaroth*, distresses. The thought of 13:3, with "troubles" for "destruction."

> **21:24** *Proud and haughty scorner [lets] is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*

Proud and haughty scorner [lets] is his name. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught. Here the book gives him his full name: *zed*, proud, presumptuous; *yahir*, arrogant; *lets*, scorner. Pride is the root of scoffing.

who dealeth in proud wrath. Hebrew *'evrath zadon*, an overflowing of insolence. The scorner is a man so full of himself that his pride spills over in contempt. This is why he cannot be taught (9:7, 8): to learn, a man must admit he did not know.

> **21:25** *The desire of the slothful [atsel] killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.*

The desire of the slothful [atsel] killeth him. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. His desire (*ta'avah*) is not small; he wants as much as anyone (13:4).

for his hands refuse to labour. Hebrew *me'anu*, they refuse. Wanting without working kills him by slow starvation, and his unsatisfied desire torments him.

> **21:26** *He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*

He coveteth greedily all the day long. Hebrew *hith'avvah ta'avah*, "he craves a craving." The sluggard of verse 25 spends his days wanting.

but the righteous giveth and spareth not. Hebrew *lo yachsokh*, he does not hold back (10:19; 11:24). The lazy man wants all day and has nothing; the righteous man works, and has enough to give freely. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

> **21:27** *The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?*

The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination. The first line of 15:8; see there.

how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind? Hebrew *bezimmah*, with a wicked plan, a scheme (from the same root as [mezimmah]). What differs from 15:8 is this second line. A wicked man's sacrifice is detestable even when he simply goes through the motions; it is worse when he brings it to cover a plan of evil. The harlot of chapter 7 had her peace offerings ready to cover her sin (7:14).

> **21:28** *A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.*

A false witness shall perish. Hebrew *'ed kezavim*, a witness of lies (19:5, 9).

but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. Hebrew *ish shomea'*, a man who listens; *lanetsach yedabber*, he shall speak for ever. The true witness is the man who actually heard what he testifies about. His testimony stands; the liar's perishes with him.

> **21:29** *A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way.*

A wicked man hardeneth his face. Hebrew *he'ez*, he makes it strong, brazen (7:13). He brazens it out.

but as for the upright, he directeth his way. The written text reads *yakhin*, he makes firm; the margin reads *yavin*, he considers. The upright man does not need a hard face; he thinks about his way and keeps it straight.

> **21:30** *There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD [Jehovah].*

There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD [Jehovah]. All the wisdom, discernment and planning of men together cannot stand against Him. Ahithophel's counsel "was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God," but "the LORD [Jehovah] had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel" (2 Sam. 16:23; 17:14). "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought" (Isa. 8:10). "If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:39).

> **21:31** *The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD [Jehovah].*

The horse is prepared against the day of battle. The horse was the war machine of the ancient world. Men must prepare; the verse does not forbid it.

but safety is of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *teshu'ah*, deliverance, victory. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD [Jehovah] our God" (Ps. 20:7). "An horse is a vain thing for safety" (Ps. 33:17). The law of the king forbade him to "multiply horses to himself" (Deut. 17:16), and Solomon himself gathered horses from Egypt in great numbers (1 Kings 10:26–29). His own proverb stood against him.

Looking back

Chapter 21 has set every man under the hand of Jehovah, from the king whose heart He turns like a water channel to the army that prepares its horses for a battle He alone decides. Under that hand the chapter has weighed men's hearts: the proud, whose every act is sin; the hasty and the liar, chasing vapour and death; the man who will not hear the poor; the sluggard who craves and will not work; the wicked who brings sacrifice as cover. And it has shown the man who pleases God: the one who does

justice gladly, pursues righteousness and mercy, saves, gives, keeps his tongue, and knows that no counsel can stand against the LORD.

Proverbs 22:1–16 — A Good Name

Place: Division 2; Part B, its last sixteen verses: the end of the first collection of Solomon's proverbs. **Writer:** Solomon.

Introduction

The first collection of Solomon's proverbs ends with sixteen sayings that gather up its chief themes: a good name worth more than riches (v. 1), the rich and poor made by one Maker (v. 2), the prudent and the simple (v. 3), humility and the fear of Jehovah (v. 4), the training of a child and the folly bound in his heart (vv. 6, 15), the borrower and the lender (v. 7), the bountiful eye (v. 9), the scorner cast out (v. 10), the sluggard's lion (v. 13), and the strange woman's mouth (v. 14). It ends where so many of its sayings began, with the poor (v. 16).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–5. A good name; rich and poor; the prudent and the simple; the reward of humility; the thorny way.
- 6–9. Training a child; the borrower; sowing iniquity; the bountiful eye.
- 10–12. The scorner cast out; the pure heart and the king; the eyes of Jehovah.
- 13–16. The sluggard's lion; the deep pit; folly bound in a child; oppressing the poor.

The Text

> **22:1** *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.*
>
> **22:2** *The rich and poor [rash] meet together: the LORD [Jehovah] is the maker of them all.*
>
> **22:3** *A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished.*
>
> **22:4** *By humility and the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] are riches, and honour, and life.*
>
> **22:5** *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.*
>
> **22:6** *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*
>
> **22:7** *The rich ruleth over the poor [rash], and the borrower is servant to the lender.*
>
> **22:8** *He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.*
>
> **22:9** *He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor [dal].*
>
> **22:10** *Cast out the scorner [lets], and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.*
>
> **22:11** *He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*

> **22:12** *The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.*
>
> **22:13** *The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.*
>
> **22:14** *The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD [Jehovah] shall fall therein.*
>
> **22:15** *Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*
>
> **22:16** *He that oppresseth the poor [dal] to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.*

Verse by verse

> **22:1** *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.*

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. The Hebrew says simply "a name," *shem*; "good" is supplied, rightly, from the sense: a name that stands for honesty and kindness. "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccl. 7:1). Riches can be lost and regained; a name, once lost, is hard to recover (6:33).

and loving favour rather than silver and gold. Hebrew *chen tov*, good grace, goodwill. To be well thought of is worth more than wealth.

> **22:2** *The rich and poor [rash] meet together: the LORD [Jehovah] is the maker of them all.*

The rich and poor [rash] meet together. The man in want, set against the rich (Part One, Chapter 5). "Meet together" is *nifgashu*, they meet, they come face to face. In the street, the market, the gate, rich and poor cross paths.

the LORD [Jehovah] is the maker of them all. Whatever divides them, one thing unites them: both were made by Jehovah. The rich man has no right to despise the poor (14:31; 17:5), and the poor man no reason to think himself less in God's sight. "Did not he that made me in the womb make him?" (Job 31:15). The thought returns at 29:13.

> **22:3** *A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished.*

A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself. The shrewd man, the opposite of the simple (Part One, Chapter 5). He sees trouble coming and takes cover. Noah, "warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark" (Heb. 11:7). Joseph stored grain in the years of plenty (Gen. 41:47–49).

but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished. The open, untaught ones, who believe every word (14:15). They walk straight on into it, and pay (*ne'enashu*, are fined, punished). The saying is repeated at 27:12.

> **22:4** *By humility and the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] are riches, and honour, and life.*

By humility and the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *'eqev 'anawah*, "the reward of humility." The verse reads: "The reward of humility, the fear of Jehovah, is riches, and honour, and life." Humility and the fear of Jehovah are set side by side as one thing: the humble man is the one who fears God, and the man who fears God is humble (15:33; 18:12).

are riches, and honour, and life. The three blessings Wisdom held in her hands (3:16; 8:18): the reward of the covenant under the Law.

> **22:5** *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.*

Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward. Hebrew *tsinnim*, thorns; *pachim*, snares, traps; *'iqqesh*, the crooked (2:15). The crooked man's road is full of hidden hurts.

he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Hebrew *shomer naphsho*, he who guards his life. He keeps away from that road altogether (4:14, 15).

> **22:6** *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

Train up a child in the way he should go. Hebrew *chanokh*, to dedicate, to initiate, to start off. The word is used of dedicating a new house (Deut. 20:5) and the temple (1 Kings 8:63); it is the root of the name Enoch. To "train up" a child is to start him off, to set him on his road. "In the way he should go" is *'al-pi darko*, literally "according to his way," "at the mouth of his way." It may mean the right way, the way he ought to go, as the King James Version takes it; or the way suited to him, fitted to his age and nature. Both are true and both are needed: the right road, taught in a way the child can take in.

and when he is old, he will not depart from it. As a rule, the training of youth holds through life. This is the verse most often taken as a promise, and it is the clearest example of a proverb that states the rule, not a guarantee for every case (Part One, Chapter 1). The book itself knows of foolish sons who grieve good parents (17:21, 25). What the verse promises is that early training shapes a life; it does not take away the son's own choice.

> **22:7** *The rich ruleth over the poor [rash], and the borrower is servant to the lender.*

The rich ruleth over the poor [rash]. The man in want. "Ruleth" is *yimshol*: the rich man has power over him.

and the borrower is servant to the lender. Hebrew *loveh*, the borrower; *'eved*, a servant, a slave; *malveh*, the lender, the word of 19:17 ("lendeth unto the LORD"). Debt makes a man another man's servant. Under the Law, a man who could not pay might sell himself into service (Lev. 25:39). Jehovah promised Israel, "thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow" (Deut. 15:6; 28:12). "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another" (Rom. 13:8).

> **22:8** *He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.*

He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity. Hebrew *'awlah*, wrongdoing; *'awen*, trouble, emptiness. "They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8; Gal. 6:7).

and the rod of his anger shall fail. Hebrew *shevet 'evratho*, the rod of his fury; *yikhleh*, it shall come to an end. The rod with which he beat others in his anger will be broken. His power to oppress will not last.

> **22:9** *He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor [dal].*

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed. Hebrew *tov 'ayin*, "good of eye": a generous man, who looks on others' need with kindness. The opposite is the "evil eye," the grudging, greedy look (23:6; 28:22). "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22).

for he giveth of his bread to the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. He does not give what he does not need; he gives "of his bread," from his own table (19:17).

> **22:10** *Cast out the scorner [lets], and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.*

Cast out the scorner [lets], and contention shall go out. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught. "Cast out" is *garesh*, drive out. The scorner cannot be corrected (9:7, 8), so he must be removed. When Ishmael was seen "mocking" at Isaac's weaning feast, Sarah said, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son" (Gen. 21:9, 10).

yea, strife and reproach shall cease. Hebrew *din*, quarrelling, litigation; *qalon*, disgrace. Remove the mocker and the quarrels stop with him (26:20).

> **22:11** *He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*

He that loveth pureness of heart. Hebrew *tehor lev*, a clean heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8).

for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend. Hebrew *chen*, grace. A pure heart and gracious speech win the king's friendship. So it was with Joseph before Pharaoh, Daniel before Darius, and Nehemiah before Artaxerxes (Gen. 41:37–40; Dan. 6:3; Neh. 2:1–6).

> **22:12** *The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.*

The eyes of the LORD [Jehovah] preserve knowledge. Hebrew *natsar*, to guard. Jehovah watches over the truth and keeps it. "The word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa. 40:8).

and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. Hebrew *yesalleph*, He twists, overturns (13:6; 21:12); *boged*, the treacherous. Lies may prosper for a while; Jehovah overturns them.

> **22:13** *The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.*

The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion without. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. Hebrew *chuts*, outside, in the open.

I shall be slain in the streets. Hebrew *rechovoth*, the open squares of the town (1:20). The excuse is absurd: a lion in the town square. But the sluggard always has an excuse, and the more absurd it is, the more plainly it shows that he simply does not want to go out (15:19; 20:4). The saying returns at 26:13.

> **22:14** *The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD [Jehovah] shall fall therein.*

The mouth of strange women is a deep pit. Hebrew *zaroth*, strange women (2:16); *shuchah 'amuqqah*, a deep pit, a trap dug in the ground for animals. Her flattering mouth (5:3; 7:21) is the mouth of a pit. (This verse stands in Solomon's own collection of sayings; the warning against the strange woman is not found only in chapters 1 to 9. See Appendix F, Question 1.)

he that is abhorred of the LORD [Jehovah] shall fall therein. Hebrew *ze'um*, under the indignation of Jehovah. The man who has already turned from God falls into her pit; his fall is part of his judgment. "Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Eccl. 7:26). God gives up those who will not have Him to the lusts of their own hearts (Rom. 1:24).

> **22:15** *Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child. Hebrew *'iwweleth*, folly; *qeshurah*, tied, bound fast. Folly is not learned; it is there from the start, knotted into the heart. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity" (Ps. 51:5).

but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. Hebrew *shevet musar*, the rod of instruction. Correction, given in love (3:12; 13:24), loosens the knot and drives folly out. It is the same truth as verse 6, from the other side: training sets the child on the right road; correction drives out what would pull him off it.

> **22:16** *He that oppresseth the poor [dal] to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.*

He that oppresseth the poor [dal] to increase his riches. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. He squeezes the poor to grow richer.

and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want. Hebrew *machsor*, want. He fawns on the rich with gifts, hoping for favour. Both men are doing the same thing: taking from those who have little and giving to those who have much. Both, as a rule, end in want. The first collection of Solomon's proverbs, which began with a son and his parents (10:1), ends with the poor, whose Maker is Jehovah (v. 2).

Looking back

These sixteen verses have summed up the collection. A good name, the fear of Jehovah and humility are worth more than riches; rich and poor have one Maker; the prudent man sees trouble coming, the simple walks into it; a child must be started on the right road and have the folly driven out of his heart; the generous eye is blessed; the scorner must be cast out; the strange woman is a pit; and the man who grinds the poor will come to want.

Looking Back on Division 2

Three hundred and seventy-five sayings of Solomon have now been presented, one by one. Part A (10–15) set the righteous and the wicked side by side until each could be seen by the light of the other. Part B (16:1–22:16) set both under two thrones: the throne of Jehovah, who weighs the heart, orders the steps and turns the king's heart like a water channel; and the throne of the king, who winnows out the wicked and is upheld by mercy.

Through all of it the same lessons have come back again and again, as a wise teacher repeats what matters most:

- **The fear of Jehovah** is the beginning, and it leads to life (10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:33; 19:23; 22:4).
- **The tongue** gives life or death (10:11; 12:18; 15:1, 4; 18:21).
- **Work** feeds a man; sloth starves him, with its cold and its lions (10:4; 13:4; 20:4; 22:13).
- **Honesty** in weights and words is Jehovah's delight (11:1; 12:22; 16:11; 20:10, 23).
- **The poor** are His; to oppress them is to insult Him, and to give to them is to lend to Him (14:31; 17:5; 19:17; 22:2, 9).
- **Correction** is love, and the wise receive it (12:1; 13:24; 15:31, 32; 19:18; 22:15).
- **Pride** goes before destruction, and humility before honour (11:2; 15:33; 16:18; 18:12).
- **Jehovah's counsel** stands, whatever men plan (16:1, 9; 19:21; 21:30).

The next division brings other voices: "the words of the wise."

Division 3 — The Words of the Wise (22:17–24:34)

A. What this division is about

"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise" (22:17). With these words the book changes voice again. The single sayings of Solomon are over. A teacher speaks once more directly to the son, "thou," "thee," "my son" (23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21), as the father did in chapters 1 to 9. But the sayings are not his alone: they are "the words of the wise," wise men of Israel whose sayings were gathered into Solomon's book. A short second collection follows with its own heading: "These things also belong to the wise" (24:23).

This division stands at the centre of the book's structure (Part One, Chapter 4). It is the shortest of the five, eighty-two verses, and its sayings are longer than Solomon's: many run to two, three or more verses. Their subjects are those of a young man going out into the world, especially one who will serve at court: the poor man's rights, the angry man, the rash pledge, the landmark, the ruler's table, the race for riches, the drunkard, the strange woman, envy of the wicked, the duty to rescue those being led to death, and the fear of Jehovah and the king.

B. Its structure

This structure is the study's own, from the text's own headings and calls to hear.

- A | 22:17–21. The call to hear the words of the wise: "that thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]."
- B | 22:22–23:11. Sayings for one who will stand before rulers: the poor, the angry man, the surety, the landmark, the skilled man, the ruler's table, riches, the stingy host, the fool, the fatherless.
- *A* | 23:12–25. The call renewed: "Apply thine heart unto instruction"; "My son."
- *B* | 23:26–24:22. Sayings for one who must keep his heart: the strange woman, the drunkard, envy of the wicked, wisdom that builds, the duty to rescue, the righteous who rises, the fear of Jehovah and the king.
- C | 24:23–34. "These also belong to the wise": the judge, the honest answer, the order of work, revenge, and the sluggard's field.

C. The words of the wise and the *Instruction of Amenemope*

The book of Proverbs could not be studied honestly without facing a claim that is now found in almost every modern commentary and study Bible: that this division, or its first part (22:17–24:22), was borrowed from an Egyptian book of wisdom, the *Instruction of Amenemope*. As agreed for this study, the claim has been examined and the findings are set out here plainly. The full case, with its weight, is in Appendix F, Question 11.

The facts. The *Instruction of Amenemope* is an Egyptian book of advice from a father, a scribe named Amenemope, to his son. Its best copy is a papyrus in the British Museum (EA 10474), acquired in 1888 and published by E. A. Wallis Budge in the early 1920s; other fragments of it are known. Scholars date its composition to the later New Kingdom of Egypt, usually somewhere between the thirteenth and the eleventh centuries B.C., though the dating is disputed. In 1924 the German Egyptologist Adolf Erman pointed out that several sayings in Proverbs 22:17–24:22 closely resemble sayings in Amenemope, and since then most scholars have held that the Hebrew writer used the Egyptian book.

The parallels. They are real, and some are close. The book of Amenemope begins, "Give thine ears, hear what is said, give thine heart to understand them," as Proverbs 22:17 says, "Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart." Both warn against robbing the poor and crushing the afflicted (22:22); against friendship with the hot-tempered man (22:24); against moving the boundary stones of a field (22:28; 23:10); both say that the skilled man will stand before kings (22:29), give advice for eating at a ruler's table (23:1–3), and picture riches flying away like birds (23:5). Amenemope is arranged in thirty chapters, and some read Proverbs 22:20 as "thirty sayings" (see 22:20).

What the parallels do not show. They do not show that the Hebrew writer copied. Three explanations have been proposed: that Proverbs borrowed from Amenemope; that Amenemope borrowed from Hebrew wisdom (as some scholars argued before Erman's view became general); and that both drew on a common stock of sayings current across the ancient world. The most careful study of the question in English, by John Ruffle (1977), concluded that the likeness is real but not close enough to prove direct copying, and suggested that an Egyptian scribe at Solomon's court could account for it. The dates are not secure enough to settle which came first. And the parallels are scattered and loose: the order differs, the wording differs, and many sayings in Proverbs 22:17–24:22 have no parallel in Amenemope at all, while most of Amenemope has none in Proverbs.

What the text itself says. The book does not hide that these are other men's sayings. It calls them "the words of the wise" (22:17; 24:23). If some of those wise men lived outside Israel, or if some of these sayings were known in Egypt too, that does not trouble the inspiration of Scripture. God's Word does not need every true saying to be new. Paul quoted heathen poets when what they said was true (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). What God's Word does is choose, correct and set in its proper place what is true.

The difference. That is exactly what has happened here, and the difference is the most important finding. The Egyptian sayings speak of the gods of Egypt; the Hebrew sayings are set under Jehovah, and the purpose of the whole collection is stated in its first lines: "That thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]" (22:19). Where Amenemope warns against moving a widow's boundary because the moon-god will punish it, Proverbs says, "their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee" (23:11): the *go'el*, the kinsman-redeemer of Israel's Law (Lev. 25:25), and Jehovah Himself as the Redeemer of His people (Isa. 41:14). Where Amenemope says the poor man is protected by the gods, Proverbs says, "the LORD [Jehovah] will plead their cause" (22:23). And the landmark that both forbid moving was already in the Law of Moses: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set" (Deut. 19:14; 27:17). The Hebrew sayings stand on the Law Israel had received, and point the son to the God of Israel.

The answer. Some sayings in this division are like sayings in the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*. Whether the Hebrew wise men knew that book, or both drew on common sayings, cannot be proved either way. What is certain is that these sayings are given in Scripture as "the words of the wise," set under the fear of Jehovah, grounded in His Law, and written so that the reader's trust may be in Him. This study presents them as what the book says they are.

Proverbs 22:17–29 — Bow Down Thine Ear

Place: Division 3; members A (22:17–21) and the first part of B (22:22–29). **Writers:** the wise, gathered into Solomon's book.

Introduction

The words of the wise open with a call to listen (vv. 17–21), much like the father's calls in chapters 1 to 9, and with a stated purpose: that the son's trust may be in Jehovah, and that he may know the certainty of the words of truth (vv. 19–21). Then come the first sayings: the poor man's cause, which Jehovah pleads (vv. 22, 23); the angry man (vv. 24, 25); the rash pledge (vv. 26, 27); the ancient landmark (v. 28); and the skilled man who stands before kings (v. 29). Most of them run to two verses.

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 17–21. The call to hear, and its purpose.
- 22, 23. Rob not the poor.
- 24, 25. No friendship with an angry man.
- 26, 27. Be not a surety.
- 28. The ancient landmark.
- 29. The skilled man before kings.

The Text

> **22:17** *Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.*
>
> **22:18** *For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.*
>
> **22:19** *That thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah], I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.*
>
> **22:20** *Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge,*
>
> **22:21** *That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?*
>
> **22:22** *Rob not the poor [dal], because he is poor [dal]: neither oppress the afflicted [ani] in the gate:*
>
> **22:23** *For the LORD [Jehovah] will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*
>
> **22:24** *Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go:*
>
> **22:25** *Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.*
>
> **22:26** *Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.*

> **22:27** *If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?*
>
> **22:28** *Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.*
>
> **22:29** *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*

Verse by verse

> **22:17** *Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.*

Bow down thine ear. Hebrew *hat*, incline, bend (2:2; 4:20; 5:1). The voice of the father in chapters 1 to 9 is heard again.

and hear the words of the wise. Hebrew *divre chakhamim*. The heading of the division, set inside the first verse: what follows are sayings of wise men (1:6).

and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. Hebrew *tashith libbekha*, set your heart. "My knowledge": the teacher who gathered these words makes them his own and speaks them to the son.

> **22:18** *For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.*

For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee. Hebrew *na'im*, pleasant (2:10); *bevitnekha*, in your belly, inside you. Wise words kept inside are a pleasure, stored like food.

they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. Hebrew *yikkonu yachdaw*, they shall be ready together. What is stored inside will be ready on the lips when needed (15:23).

> **22:19** *That thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah], I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.*

That thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *mivtachekha*, your confidence (3:26; 14:26). Here is the purpose of the whole division, stated before a single saying is given. These words of the wise are not given to make the son clever or successful; they are given so that he will trust Jehovah.

I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. The repetition, "to thee, even to thee," presses it home. The teaching is personal.

> **22:20** *Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge,*

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge. The word translated "excellent things" has three readings. The written Hebrew text has *shilshom*, "formerly," "the day before yesterday": "Have I not written to thee before?" The Hebrew margin reads *shalishim*, "officers," and so "noble, excellent things," as the King James Version renders it. Many modern scholars, comparing the thirty chapters of Amenemope, read *sheloshim*, "thirty": "Have I not written thee thirty sayings?" The text as it stands does not mark thirty sayings, and counts of the sayings in 22:22–24:22 vary. The King James Version's reading, from the Hebrew margin, is followed here: these are excellent, princely things, worthy of a prince's son (8:6). (See the Division's introduction above, and Appendix F, Question 11.)

> **22:21** *That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?*

That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth. Hebrew *qosht*, truth, reliability; *imre emeth*, words of truth. The aim is certainty: that the son may know that what he has been taught is true, and rely on it. "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4).

that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? The son will serve as a messenger, a counsellor or an envoy. He must be able to bring back a true answer to those who send him (25:13; 13:17). This verse, with verse 20, stands beneath the title of this study: its purpose is the same, the certainty of the words of truth.

> **22:22** *Rob not the poor [dal], because he is poor [dal]: neither oppress the afflicted [ani] in the gate:*

Rob not the poor [dal], because he is poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing (Part One, Chapter 5). Do not rob him because he is weak and cannot defend himself. His weakness is the very reason the robber chooses him, and the very reason he must be protected.

neither oppress the afflicted [ani] in the gate. The poor man bowed down by affliction. "Oppress" is *dakka'*, to crush. "The gate" was the court (1:21). The poor man is most easily crushed where justice should protect him: in a court bought by the rich (17:23).

> **22:23** *For the LORD [Jehovah] will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*

For the LORD [Jehovah] will plead their cause. Hebrew *yariv rivam*, He will contend their contention, argue their case. The poor man has an advocate: Jehovah Himself. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Ps. 72:12).

and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them. Hebrew *qava'*, to rob. He will rob the robbers of their lives. The word is used only here and in Malachi 3:8, 9: "Will a man rob God?"

> **22:24** *Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go:*

Make no friendship with an angry man. Hebrew *ba'al aph*, "a master of anger," a man ruled by his temper. Do not make him your companion.

and with a furious man thou shalt not go. Hebrew *ish chemoth*, a man of heats. Do not walk the road with him.

> **22:25** *Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.*

Lest thou learn his ways. Hebrew *te'alaph*, you become familiar with, you learn by association. Temper is catching. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise" (13:20); the man who walks with the angry becomes angry.

and get a snare to thy soul. Hebrew *moqesh*, a trap (12:13; 18:7). His temper becomes your trap.

> **22:26** *Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.*

Be not thou one of them that strike hands. Hebrew *toq'e kaph*, strikers of the palm, those who pledge (6:1; 11:15; 17:18).

or of them that are sureties for debts. Hebrew *mashsha'oth*, loans. The fourth warning in the book against rash suretyship.

> **22:27** *If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?*

If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? If the debtor defaults and you cannot pay, the creditor will take even your bed. The Law limited what a creditor could take (Ex. 22:26, 27; Deut. 24:6, 10–13), but a man who has put himself in debt for another has put his own home at risk.

> **22:28** *Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.*

Remove not the ancient landmark. Hebrew *gevul 'olam*, the boundary of old: the stone that marked the edge of a family's inherited land.

which thy fathers have set. The land of Israel was divided by lot among the tribes and families (Num. 26:55), and each family's portion was its inheritance from Jehovah. To move the boundary stone at night was to steal a neighbour's land, and to steal what God had given. The Law forbade it: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance" (Deut. 19:14), and cursed the man who did it (Deut. 27:17). The saying is repeated at 23:10, where the fatherless are named.

> **22:29** *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? Hebrew *mahir*, quick, skilled, practised; *bimla'khto*, in his work. The word is used of Ezra, "a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), and of the "ready writer" of Psalm 45:1.

he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men. Hebrew *chashukkim*, obscure men, men of no account. Skill in one's work leads to service at the highest level. Joseph "stood before Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:46); Hiram, the skilled worker in brass, was brought to do Solomon's work (1 Kings 7:13, 14); Daniel and his friends "stood before the king" (Dan. 1:19, 20).

Looking back

The words of the wise have begun with a purpose (trust in Jehovah, certainty of the truth) and then with a set of sayings for a young man who will one day stand before rulers. He must protect the poor, because Jehovah is their advocate; keep away from the hot-tempered; keep his own house free of rash debts; respect the boundaries God's Law set; and be skilled in his work. The sayings are practical, but each stands on the Law of Moses and under the God of Israel.

Proverbs 23 — Buy the Truth, and Sell It Not

Place: Division 3; the rest of member B (23:1–11), member *A* (23:12–25), and the beginning of member *B* (23:26–35). **Writers:** the wise.

Introduction

Chapter 23 begins at a ruler's table (vv. 1–3) and ends in a drunkard's stupor (vv. 29–35). In between it warns against wearing oneself out to get rich (vv. 4, 5), against the stingy host (vv. 6–8), and against moving the boundary of the fatherless, whose Redeemer is mighty (vv. 10, 11). Then the teacher calls again, "My son" (vv. 15, 19, 26), and the chapter fills with the joy of a father whose son is wise (vv. 15, 16, 24, 25), the charge to "buy the truth, and sell it not" (v. 23), and the plea, "My son, give me thine heart" (v. 26). The longest and most vivid portrait of drunkenness in Scripture closes it.

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–3. The ruler's table.
- 4, 5. Riches with wings.
- 6–8. The stingy host.
- 9. The fool who despises wisdom.
- 10, 11. The landmark of the fatherless, and their Redeemer.
- 12–14. Instruction and the rod.
- 15–18. A wise heart; envy not sinners; the sure hope.
- 19–21. The winebibber and the glutton.
- 22–25. Father and mother; buy the truth.
- 26–28. Give me thine heart; the deep ditch.
- 29–35. Who hath woe? The drunkard.

The Text

> **23:1** *When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:*
> **23:2** *And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.*
> **23:3** *Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.*
> **23:4** *Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.*
> **23:5** *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*
> **23:6** *Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:*

23:7 *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.*

23:8 *The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.*

23:9 *Speak not in the ears of a fool [kesil]: for he will despise the wisdom [sekel] of thy words.*

23:10 *Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless:*

23:11 *For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.*

23:12 *Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.*

23:13 *Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.*

23:14 *Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*

23:15 *My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.*

23:16 *Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.*

23:17 *Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] all the day long.*

23:18 *For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.*

23:19 *Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.*

23:20 *Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:*

23:21 *For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.*

23:22 *Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*

23:23 *Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.*

23:24 *The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.*

23:25 *Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.*

23:26 *My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.*

23:27 *For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit.*

23:28 *She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.*

23:29 *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?*

23:30 *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.*

23:31 *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*

23:32 *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*

23:33 *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*

23:34 *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.*

23:35 *They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

Verse by verse

> **23:1** *When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:*

When thou sittest to eat with a ruler. Hebrew *moshel*, a ruler, a man in power. The young man at court will be invited to great men's tables.

consider diligently what is before thee. Hebrew *bin tavin*, "discern carefully." The words can mean "what" or "who" is before you: notice the food, and notice the man. A great man's table is not only a meal; it is a test, and sometimes a trap.

> **23:2** *And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.*

And put a knife to thy throat. A strong figure (*Hyperbole*): restrain your appetite as if a knife were at your throat.

if thou be a man given to appetite. Hebrew *ba'al nephesh*, "a master of appetite," a man ruled by his hunger. At a ruler's table, a greedy man shows his weakness and puts himself in the ruler's power.

> **23:3** *Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.*

Be not desirous of his dainties. Hebrew *mat'ammoth*, delicacies, the tasty dishes (the word of Isaac's "savoury meat," Gen. 27:4).

for they are deceitful meat. Hebrew *lechem kezavim*, bread of lies. The ruler may have reasons for his hospitality that are not kind: to flatter, to test, to put the guest under obligation. Daniel "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat" (Dan. 1:8).

> **23:4** *Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.*

Labour not to be rich. Hebrew *yaga'*, to toil, to wear oneself out. Do not exhaust yourself to get rich.

cease from thine own wisdom. Hebrew *mibbinathekha*, from your own understanding. Stop relying on your own cleverness to make money (3:5). The verse does not forbid work (10:4); it forbids making riches the goal of life. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare" (1 Tim. 6:9).

> **23:5** *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? Literally "Wilt thou make thine eyes fly upon it, and it is not?" Riches are there one moment and gone the next; the eye flies to them, and they have flown.

for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. The figure *Simile*. Wealth is like a bird that sprouts wings and is gone into the sky. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). (The Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* has a like picture of riches flying away; see the introduction to this division.)

> **23:6** *Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:*

Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye. Hebrew *ra' 'ayin*, "evil of eye": the stingy, grudging man, the opposite of the "bountiful eye" of 22:9.

neither desire thou his dainty meats. *Mat'ammoth*, delicacies (v. 3).

> **23:7** *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.*

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. Hebrew *kemo sha'ar benaphsho ken hu*, "for as he reckons in his soul, so is he." The verb *sha'ar* means to calculate, to count the cost. The stingy host is counting every bite you take. This verse is often quoted to teach that a man becomes whatever he thinks. That is not its meaning. It describes a stingy host: what he is, is what he is reckoning inside, not what he says aloud.

Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. His words are generous; his heart is counting the cost.

> **23:8** *The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.*

The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up. When you see what he really thinks, the food will turn your stomach.

and lose thy sweet words. All your polite thanks and pleasant conversation will have been wasted on him.

> **23:9** *Speak not in the ears of a fool [kesil]: for he will despise the wisdom [sekel] of thy words.*

Speak not in the ears of a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Do not waste good counsel on him.

for he will despise the wisdom [sekel] of thy words. Insight, good sense (3:4). He will scorn it (9:7, 8; 26:4). "Neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6).

> **23:10** *Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless:*

Remove not the old landmark. The saying of 22:28; see there. What differs is the second line.

and enter not into the fields of the fatherless. Hebrew *yethomim*, orphans. The fatherless had no father to guard their field, and were the easiest to rob by moving the boundary stone.

> **23:11** *For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.*

For their redeemer is mighty. Hebrew *go'alam*, their *go'el*, their kinsman-redeemer. Under the Law, the nearest kinsman was bound to buy back a poor relative's land and avenge his blood (Lev. 25:25; Num. 35:19); Boaz was such a redeemer to Ruth (Ruth 4:1–10). The fatherless have no kinsman strong enough to defend them, so Jehovah Himself is their *go'el*: "I will help thee, saith the LORD [Jehovah], and thy redeemer (*go'el*), the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 41:14). "A father of the fatherless . . . is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5).

he shall plead their cause with thee. Hebrew *yariv eth-rivam*, He will contend their case (22:23). The man who steals an orphan's field must face the orphan's Redeemer.

> **23:12** *Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.*

Apply thine heart unto instruction. Hebrew *haviah*, bring in. Bring your heart to *musar*.

and thine ears to the words of knowledge. The call of 22:17 renewed: member *A* of the division begins.

> **23:13** *Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.*

Withhold not correction from the child. Hebrew *musar*, correction; *na'ar*, a boy.

for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. The rod of correction will not kill him (the father need not fear it); and it will keep him from the death his folly would bring (19:18; 13:24).

> **23:14** *Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*

Thou shalt beat him with the rod. The same truth said again for emphasis.

and shalt deliver his soul from hell. Hebrew *sheol*, the grave. Correction in youth saves a son from an early grave, the end of the wicked man's road (7:27; 15:24). The father who corrects is rescuing his son's life.

> **23:15** *My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.*

My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. The words "My son" return for the first time since 19:27. The teacher's joy is bound up with his son's wisdom (10:1).

> **23:16** *Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.*

Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Hebrew *kilyothay*, my kidneys, the inmost seat of feeling in Hebrew thought (Ps. 16:7; 73:21); *mesharim*, straight things (1:3). The father is glad to the core when the son's words are upright.

> **23:17** *Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] all the day long.*

Let not thine heart envy sinners. Hebrew *qanna'*, to be jealous of. Do not look at sinners' success and wish you were them (3:31; 24:1, 19; Ps. 73:3).

but be thou in the fear of the LORD [Jehovah] all the day long. Not envy all day, but reverence all day. This is the fourteenth and last time the book uses the phrase "the fear of the LORD [Jehovah]" (1:7).

> **23:18** *For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.*

For surely there is an end. Hebrew *acharith*, a latter end, a future, an afterward. The sinner's prosperity is now; the righteous man's reward is ahead (Ps. 37:37, "the end of that man is peace").

and thine expectation shall not be cut off. Hebrew *tiqwah*, hope (10:28). Your hope will not be cut down. What the righteous man waits for, in this life and finally in the resurrection, will come (14:32). The same words return at 24:14.

> **23:19** *Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.*

Hear thou, my son, and be wise. The second "My son" of the chapter.

and guide thine heart in the way. Hebrew *ashar*, to go straight, to lead straight on (4:14; 9:6). Steer your heart straight down the road.

> **23:20** *Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:*

Be not among winebibbers. Hebrew *sov'e yayin*, swillers of wine, heavy drinkers.

among riotous eaters of flesh. Hebrew *zolele vasar*, gluttons of meat. The two words are joined in the Law's description of the rebellious son: "he is a glutton (*zolel*) and a drunkard" (Deut. 21:20).

> **23:21** *For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.*

For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty. Hebrew *yiwwaresh*, they shall be made poor (the root of [rash]).

and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Hebrew *numah*, drowsiness, the heavy sleep that follows the feast. It ends in rags.

> **23:22** *Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*

Hearken unto thy father that begat thee. Listen to the man who gave you life.

and despise not thy mother when she is old. Do not look down on her when she is grey and weak (30:17). The command to honour father and mother has no age limit (Ex. 20:12).

> **23:23** *Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.*

Buy the truth, and sell it not. Hebrew *emeth qeneh*, "truth, buy!": *qanah*, the verb of 4:5, 7, "Get wisdom." Pay whatever it costs to have the truth, and never sell it for anything, at any price. "Then Judas . . . sold" (Matt. 26:15); Esau sold his birthright for a meal (Gen. 25:33).

also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. *Chokmah*, *musar*, *binah*: the words of 1:2. All of them are to be bought and kept.

> **23:24** *The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.*

The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice. Hebrew *gil yagil*, rejoicing he shall rejoice, leaping for joy.

and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Hebrew *chakham*, wise. The reverse of 17:21.

> **23:25** *Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.*

Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. The mother is named twice, as in 17:25, where the foolish son was "bitterness to her that bare him." Here the wise son brings her joy.

> **23:26** *My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.*

My son, give me thine heart. The third "My son" of the chapter, and the heart of the teacher's appeal. Not only your ears (v. 12) or your obedience, but your heart, your inmost self (4:23).

and let thine eyes observe my ways. The written text reads *tirtsenah*, "delight in"; the margin, *titstsorenah*, "keep." Watch, love and keep the way I walk. The teacher asks for the heart before he names the strange woman, because only a heart already given is safe from her.

> **23:27** *For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit.*

For a whore is a deep ditch. Hebrew *zonah*, a harlot; *shuchah 'amuqqah*, a deep pit (22:14).

and a strange woman is a narrow pit. Hebrew *nokriyyah*, a foreign woman (2:16); *be'er tsarah*, a narrow well. A narrow well is easy to fall into and almost impossible to climb out of.

> **23:28** *She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.*

She also lieth in wait as for a prey. Hebrew *chetheph*, a robber, or the robber's prey. She lies in ambush like a robber (7:12).

and increaseth the transgressors among men. Hebrew *bogedim*, the treacherous, the faithless (2:22). She multiplies the number of men who betray their wives and their God.

> **23:29** *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?*

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? Hebrew *oy*, *avoy*, cries of pain: "Who has 'Oh!'? Who has 'Alas!'?" Six questions in one verse (the figure *Erotesis*), each naming a misery:

who hath contentions? Hebrew *midyanim*, quarrels (6:14).

who hath babbling? Hebrew *siach*, complaining, endless talk.

who hath wounds without cause? Hebrew *chinnam*, for nothing (1:11): bruises from fights he does not remember starting.

who hath redness of eyes? Hebrew *chakhliluth*, dullness, bloodshot eyes.

> **23:30** *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.*

They that tarry long at the wine. Who stay late over their cups.

they that go to seek mixed wine. Hebrew *mimsakh*, wine mixed with spices to make it stronger (9:2). They go looking for it. The answer to all six questions is one: the drinker.

> **23:31** *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*

Look not thou upon the wine when it is red. Do not gaze at it, admiring it.

when it giveth his colour in the cup. Literally "when it giveth its eye," its sparkle, its gleam.

when it moveth itself aright. Hebrew *yithhallekh bemesharim*, it goes down smoothly (Song 7:9). The temptation is in the look and the taste: red, sparkling, smooth.

> **23:32** *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*

At the last it biteth like a serpent. Hebrew *acharith*, the end (5:4); *nachash*, a serpent. The smoothness at the beginning, the bite at the end.

and stingeth like an adder. Hebrew *tsiph'oni*, a viper. Its poison spreads after the bite.

> **23:33** *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*

Thine eyes shall behold strange women. Hebrew *zaroth*, which may mean "strange women" or "strange things." Drink loosens a man's eyes as well as his tongue: he sees what he should not, or sees things that are not there.

and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Hebrew *tahpukoth*, perversities (2:12). His heart pours out twisted things through his mouth.

> **23:34** *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.*

Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea. Literally "in the heart of the sea." The drunkard's bed heaves like the deck of a ship.

or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. Swaying high above the deck, where one slip means death. The figure is exact: the dizziness, the danger, and the man's blindness to it.

> **23:35** *They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick. He has been beaten in a brawl and does not even feel it.

they have beaten me, and I felt it not. He is numb.

when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again. His first thought on waking is to drink again. This is the end of the portrait, and its most terrible line: not the bruises or the bloodshot eyes, but the craving that sends him back to the cup. Drink, like the strange woman, is a narrow pit: easy to fall into, hard to leave. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess" (Eph. 5:18; compare 20:1).

Looking back

Chapter 23 has followed the young man from the ruler's table to the tavern. At every table there is a danger: the ruler's dainties that put him under obligation, the stingy host whose heart is counting the cost, the wine that sparkles and then bites. Between them stand the riches that fly away, the fatherless whose Redeemer is mighty, and the father's plea: buy the truth, keep it, give me your heart, and let me rejoice in a wise son.

Proverbs 24 — The Just Man Falleth Seven Times

Place: Division 3; the rest of member *B* (24:1–22), and member C, "These also belong to the wise" (24:23–34). **Writers:** the wise.

Introduction

The words of the wise close with a run of sayings about the righteous and the wicked seen over time: do not envy the wicked, for they have no future (vv. 1, 2, 19, 20); wisdom builds a house that lasts (vv. 3, 4); the righteous man falls seven times and rises again (v. 16). In the middle stands one of the most searching commands of the book: rescue those who are being dragged to death, and do not say "we knew it not," for God weighs the heart (vv. 11, 12). The first collection of the wise ends with "My son, fear thou the LORD [Jehovah] and the king" (v. 21). A short second collection follows (vv. 23–34), ending with a walk past the sluggard's field.

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1, 2. Envy not evil men.
- 3–7. Wisdom builds, wisdom strengthens; too high for a fool.
- 8–10. The schemer, the scorner, and the man who faints.
- 11, 12. Rescue those drawn to death.
- 13, 14. Honey, and the sweetness of wisdom.
- 15–18. The just man rises; rejoice not at an enemy's fall.
- 19–22. Fret not; fear Jehovah and the king.
- 23–25. These also belong to the wise: no partiality in judgment.
- 26–29. The right answer; first the field, then the house; no false witness, no revenge.
- 30–34. The sluggard's field.

The Text

> **24:1** *Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.*
> **24:2** *For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.*
> **24:3** *Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:*
> **24:4** *And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.*
> **24:5** *A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.*
> **24:6** *For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.*
> **24:7** *Wisdom is too high for a fool [ewil]: he openeth not his mouth in the gate.*

24:8 *He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.*

24:9 *The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner [lets] is an abomination to men.*

24:10 *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.*

24:11 *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain;*

24:12 *If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?*

24:13 *My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste:*

24:14 *So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

24:15 *Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place:*

24:16 *For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.*

24:17 *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:*

24:18 *Lest the LORD [Jehovah] see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.*

24:19 *Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked;*

24:20 *For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.*

24:21 *My son, fear thou the LORD [Jehovah] and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:*

24:22 *For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?*

24:23 *These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.*

24:24 *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him:*

24:25 *But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.*

24:26 *Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.*

24:27 *Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.*

24:28 *Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips.*

24:29 *Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.*

24:30 *I went by the field of the slothful [atsel], and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;*

24:31 *And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.*

24:32 *Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.*

24:33 *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:*

> **24:34** *So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.*

Verse by verse

> **24:1** *Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.*

Be not thou envious against evil men. Hebrew *'anshe ra'ah*, men of evil. The third warning against envy in these chapters (23:17; 24:19).

neither desire to be with them. Hebrew *tith'aw*, crave. Do not want their company (1:10–15).

> **24:2** *For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.*

For their heart studieth destruction. Hebrew *yehgeh*, meditates, ponders (15:28); *shod*, violence (21:7). The righteous man ponders how to answer well; the evil man ponders how to destroy.

and their lips talk of mischief. Hebrew *'amal*, trouble. That is what is in their heart, and what comes out. Why envy that?

> **24:3** *Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:*

Through wisdom is an house builded. As Wisdom built her house (9:1) and the wise woman hers (14:1). A home, a family, a life is built by wisdom.

and by understanding it is established. Hebrew *tevunah*; *yithkonan*, it is made firm (3:19, where Jehovah established the heavens by understanding).

> **24:4** *And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.*

And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. Hebrew *chadarim*, inner rooms; *hon yaqar wena'im*, precious and pleasant wealth. Wisdom builds the house, understanding makes it stand, knowledge fills it. Set against the "destruction" that evil men plot (v. 2).

> **24:5** *A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.*

A wise man is strong. Hebrew *ba'oz*, in strength. Wisdom is a kind of strength (21:22).

yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. Hebrew *me'ammets koach*, makes strength firm. Knowledge adds to a man's power.

> **24:6** *For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war. Hebrew *tachbuloth*, steering (1:5; 20:18).

and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. The second line of 11:14; see there. What differs is the first line: in 11:14 it was a nation falling for lack of counsel; here it is a war won by it. Wisdom's strength (v. 5) is shown in council more than in arms.

> **24:7** *Wisdom is too high for a fool [ewil]: he openeth not his mouth in the gate.*

Wisdom is too high for a fool [ewil]. The fool whose folly shows in what he does (1:7). Hebrew *ramoth*, high things, out of reach. He cannot reach it.

he openeth not his mouth in the gate. In the council at the city gate (1:21), where elders give judgment and advice, he has nothing to say. The fool who chatters everywhere else (10:8) is silent where wisdom is needed.

> **24:8** *He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.*

He that deviseth to do evil. Hebrew *mechashev*, he who plans.

shall be called a mischievous person. Hebrew *ba'al mezimmoth*, "a master of schemes," using [mezimmah] in its bad sense: the plot (12:2; 14:17). Men will give him the name he has earned.

> **24:9** *The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner [lets] is an abomination to men.*

The thought of foolishness is sin. Hebrew *zimmath 'iwweleth*, the scheming of folly. Even to plan folly is sin, before the act.

and the scorner [lets] is an abomination to men. The mocker, who laughs at correction and will not be taught. Men cannot stand him (21:24; 22:10).

> **24:10** *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.*

If thou faint in the day of adversity. Hebrew *hithrappitha*, you slacken, you let your hands go limp (18:9); *tsarah*, distress (1:27).

thy strength is small. Hebrew *tsar*, narrow, small. The Hebrew plays on two words that sound alike, *tsarah* ("distress") and *tsar* ("small"), the figure *Paronomasia*: "if you go slack in the narrow day, your strength is narrow." Trouble shows what strength a man really has.

> **24:11** *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain;*

If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death. Hebrew *hatsel*, rescue (2:12); *luqachim lammaveth*, those being taken away to death. The verse is a command: "Deliver them that are drawn unto death." Men are being led away to be killed, unjustly condemned, or carried off by violence. Do not stand by.

and those that are ready to be slain. Hebrew *matim laharegh*, those staggering to the slaughter. "And if thou forbear" (or "hold thou not back").

> **24:12** *If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?*

If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not. The excuse every bystander uses.

doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? Hebrew *tokhen libboth*, He who weighs hearts (16:2; 21:2). God knows whether you knew.

and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? Hebrew *notser naphshekha*, He who guards your life. The God who keeps your life knows when you refused to save another's.

and shall not he render to every man according to his works? "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6; Ps. 62:12). The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side (Luke 10:31, 32). Mordecai said to Esther, "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esth. 4:14).

> **24:13** *My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste:*

My son, eat thou honey, because it is good. *Devash*, honey.

and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste. Hebrew *nopheth*, the dripping honey of the comb (5:3; 16:24). Eat it; it is good for you.

> **24:14** *So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul. As honey is sweet and good to the body, so wisdom is to the soul (16:24; Ps. 19:10, "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb").

when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off. Hebrew *acharith*, a future (23:18). The words of 23:18; see there. What differs is the reason given: in 23:18 the hope was set against envy of sinners; here it is the reward of having found wisdom.

> **24:15** *Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place:*

Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous. The teacher turns and speaks to the wicked man directly (the figure *Apostrophe*). "Lay not wait" is *'arav*, to ambush (1:11).

spoil not his resting place. Hebrew *shadad*, to lay waste (11:3); *rivtso*, his resting place, his fold. Do not raid his home.

> **24:16** *For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.*

For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again. Seven is the number of completeness (6:16): "seven times" means as often as it happens, again and again. He falls into trouble, into calamity, under the wicked man's attacks; and each time he gets up. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise" (Mic. 7:8). "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD [Jehovah] upholdeth him with his hand" (Ps. 37:24). The verse speaks of falling into trouble, not into sin; but its truth holds in both.

but the wicked shall fall into mischief. Hebrew *yikkashelu bera'ah*, they stumble into calamity. They fall once, and do not rise.

> **24:17** *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:*

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth. Even when the man who laid wait for you (v. 15) falls, do not gloat.

and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth. "If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him . . ." (Job 31:29). "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44).

> **24:18** *Lest the LORD [Jehovah] see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.*

Lest the LORD [Jehovah] see it, and it displease him. Literally "and it be evil in His eyes." Gloating is itself a sin (17:5).

and he turn away his wrath from him. Jehovah may turn His anger from your enemy to you. The point is not that the son should hold back his joy so that his enemy will be punished more, but that gloating offends God; the man who gloats puts himself where his enemy stood.

> **24:19** *Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked;*

Fret not thyself because of evil men. Hebrew *tithchar*, to burn, to be heated. These are the words of Psalm 37:1: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers."

neither be thou envious at the wicked. The third warning against envy (v. 1; 23:17).

> **24:20** *For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.*

For there shall be no reward to the evil man. Hebrew *acharith*, a future (v. 14). The righteous man has a future; the evil man has none.

the candle of the wicked shall be put out. The lamp of 13:9 and 20:20. His light, his life and his line go out.

> **24:21** *My son, fear thou the LORD [Jehovah] and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:*

My son, fear thou the LORD [Jehovah] and the king. The last "My son" of the words of the wise. Reverence Jehovah, and respect the king He has set over you. Peter wrote, "Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Pet. 2:17). The king of Israel ruled as Jehovah's anointed (1 Sam. 24:6).

and meddle not with them that are given to change. Hebrew *shonim*, those who are different, who change: men always plotting a change of rulers, rebels. Do not mix (*tith'arav*, 14:10; 20:19) with them.

> **24:22** *For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?*

For their calamity shall rise suddenly. Their ruin will come without warning.

and who knoweth the ruin of them both? "Them both" may be Jehovah and the king: who knows what ruin either of them can bring on rebels? Or it may be the two kinds of men, the rebel and the one who joins him. Either way, the son is warned to stay out of rebellion. Absalom's rebellion ended with his death and the death of twenty thousand who followed him (2 Sam. 18:7, 14, 15). The first collection of the words of the wise ends here.

> **24:23** *These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.*

These things also belong to the wise. The heading of a second, short collection (vv. 23–34): more sayings of wise men.

It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment. Hebrew *hakker panim*, to recognise faces, to show partiality (18:5). A judge must not decide a case by who the parties are. "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment" (Deut. 1:17).

> **24:24** *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him:*

He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous. The judge who acquits the guilty (17:15).

him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him. Hebrew *yiqqevuhu*, they shall curse him (11:26); *yiz'amuhu*, they shall be indignant at him. The people know injustice when they see it.

> **24:25** *But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.*

But to them that rebuke him shall be delight. Those who rebuke the wicked man, who convict him and do not acquit him, will find it pleasant (*yin'am*).

and a good blessing shall come upon them. Hebrew *birkath tov*. Honest judges are blessed by the people.

> **24:26** *Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.*

Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer. Hebrew *nekhochim*, straightforward words (8:9). An honest answer is like a kiss: it is a mark of true friendship. In the East a kiss was a greeting of honour and affection (1 Sam. 20:41). Telling the truth is a kindness.

> **24:27** *Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.*

Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field. Get your field ready first: your work, your living.

and afterwards build thine house. Then build a house, and with it, a family. The word "house" in Hebrew means both. A man should be able to support a household before he sets one up. There is an order in wise living: first the means, then the home (Luke 14:28).

> **24:28** *Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips.*

Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause. Hebrew *chinnam*, for nothing (1:11). Do not testify against him when there is no need.

and deceive not with thy lips. Hebrew *wahaphittitha*, "and wouldst thou deceive?", a form of *pathah*, the root of [pethi]: do not make your lips "open" him to harm by deceit.

> **24:29** *Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.*

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me. The reason a man bears false witness "without cause" is often revenge: he did it to me. Do not say it (20:22).

I will render to the man according to his work. That is God's place, not man's (v. 12). "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17). "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39).

> **24:30** *I went by the field of the slothful [atsel], and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;*

I went by the field of the slothful [atsel]. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. The teacher tells what he saw on a walk.

and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. Hebrew *chasar lev*, without sense (7:7). The sluggard and the senseless man are the same man.

> **24:31** *And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.*

And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns. Hebrew *qimmeshonim*, thistles.

and nettles had covered the face thereof. Hebrew *charullim*, nettles, weeds.

and the stone wall thereof was broken down. The wall that kept out wild animals and thieves had fallen. Nobody had done anything wrong; nobody had done anything at all. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth" (Eccl. 10:18).

> **24:32** *Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.*

Then I saw, and considered it well. Hebrew *ashith libbi*, I set my heart on it.

I looked upon it, and received instruction. Hebrew *laqachti musar*, I took instruction. The wise man learns even from another man's ruin. The sluggard's field taught him what the ant taught (6:6).

> **24:33** *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:*

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. The words of 6:10; see there.

> **24:34** *So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.*

So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man. The words of 6:11; see there, with one small change: here "as one that travelleth" is *mithhallekh*, "comes walking along," a slightly different form of the same verb. What differs in the two passages is how the lesson is learned. In chapter 6 the son was sent to watch the ant, a picture of diligence; here the teacher walked past a ruined field, a picture of sloth. One lesson comes from a good example, the other from a bad one, and they end in the same words. The words of the wise end on this note: what a little more sleep costs.

Looking back

The words of the wise have ended as they began, with the son's trust in Jehovah and his duty to others. He must not envy the wicked, whose lamp goes out, but build his house by wisdom; he must rescue those being led to death, knowing that God weighs the heart; he must rise each time he falls, and never gloat when his enemy falls; he must fear Jehovah and the king and keep away from rebels; he must

judge without partiality, answer honestly, provide before he builds, and leave revenge to God. And he must walk past the sluggard's field, and learn.

Looking Back on Division 3

The words of the wise have been for a young man going out to serve: at the gate, at the ruler's table, in the council of war, in the court. They have taught him to defend the poor and the fatherless, whose Redeemer is Jehovah; to keep away from the angry man, the drunkard, the strange woman and the rebel; not to wear himself out for riches that fly away; to buy the truth and never sell it; and to give his heart to his teacher. Whatever likeness some of these sayings have to the wisdom of other nations, they are set here, as the division's first lines say, "that thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]" (22:19).

Division 4 — The Proverbs of Solomon Copied by the Men of Hezekiah (25:1–29:27)

A. What this division is about

"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out" (25:1). The book returns to Solomon's own sayings: a second collection, brought into the book some two and a half centuries after Solomon by the scribes of King Hezekiah, who restored the worship of the House of Jehovah and gathered what had been written in David's and Solomon's day (2 Chr. 29:25–30; Part One, Chapter 2). The sayings speak mostly of "he" and "they," as in Division 2, for all men; but more of them are longer, and many more of them are comparisons. Chapters 25 and 26 are full of "as . . . so" sayings, drawn from snow and rain, birds and dogs, silver and dross.

B. Its structure

This outline is the study's own.

- 25:1. The heading.
- 25:2–27. The king and his court; the neighbour; the right word and the faithful messenger; the enemy fed.
- 25:28–26:28. Self-rule and its opposites: the fool (26:1–12), the sluggard (26:13–16), the meddler, the deceiver, the talebearer and the hater (26:17–28).
- 27:1–27. Friends, neighbours and household; the shepherd's care of his flock.
- 28:1–29:27. The righteous and the wicked, and the ruler over them.

The division begins with kings (25:2–7) and ends with rulers (29:2, 4, 12, 14, 26). Its sayings were gathered in a king's court for a king's people.

Proverbs 25 — Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver

Place: Division 4; its heading and first chapter. **Writer:** Solomon; copied by the men of Hezekiah.

Introduction

Chapter 25 begins in the palace: God conceals, kings search out (v. 2); the dross must be taken from the silver and the wicked from the king's presence (vv. 4, 5); a man should not push himself forward before the king (vv. 6, 7). Then it moves out to the neighbour: settle quarrels privately (vv. 8–10), do not wear out your welcome (v. 17), never bear false witness (v. 18), feed your enemy (vv. 21, 22). Its sayings about speech are among the most beautiful in the book: the word fitly spoken (v. 11), the wise reproof on an obedient ear (v. 12), the faithful messenger like snow in harvest (v. 13), the soft tongue that breaks the bone (v. 15), and good news from a far country (v. 25).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1. The heading.
- 2–7. God, the king, and the courtier.
- 8–10. Quarrels with a neighbour.
- 11–15. Words fitly spoken; the reprover; the messenger; the boaster; the soft tongue.
- 16–20. Enough honey; a welcome worn out; the false witness; the unfaithful; songs to a heavy heart.
- 21, 22. Feeding the enemy.
- 23–28. The backbiting tongue; the brawling woman; good news; the righteous who gives way; seeking one's own glory; the city without walls.

The Text

> **25:1** *These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.*
>
> **25:2** *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*
>
> **25:3** *The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.*
>
> **25:4** *Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.*
>
> **25:5** *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.*
>
> **25:6** *Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men:*
>
> **25:7** *For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.*

25:8 *Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.*

25:9 *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:*

25:10 *Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.*

25:11 *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

25:12 *As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.*

25:13 *As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.*

25:14 *Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.*

25:15 *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.*

25:16 *Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.*

25:17 *Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.*

25:18 *A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.*

25:19 *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.*

25:20 *As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.*

25:21 *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:*

25:22 *For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD [Jehovah] shall reward thee.*

25:23 *The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.*

25:24 *It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.*

25:25 *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*

25:26 *A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.*

25:27 *It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.*

25:28 *He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*

Verse by verse

25:1 *These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.*

These are also proverbs of Solomon. "Also": like those that went before, these are Solomon's (Part One, Chapter 2; Appendix F, Question 1).

which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. Hebrew *he'tiqu*, they moved, transferred, transcribed: they copied them from older records into this book. Hezekiah "did that which was right in

the sight of the LORD [Jehovah], according to all that David his father did" (2 Kings 18:3). His men served Jehovah by preserving His Word.

> **25:2** *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing. Hebrew *kevod Elohim*, the glory of God; *hasther davar*, to hide a matter. God does not tell men everything. Much of His working is hidden, and His glory is seen in the depth of what He knows and men do not. "The secret things belong unto the LORD [Jehovah] our God" (Deut. 29:29). "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

but the honour of kings is to search out a matter. Hebrew *kevod melakhim*, the glory of kings; *chaqor*, to search out, investigate. A king's glory is the opposite: he must search out every matter brought to him, to judge it rightly. Solomon searched out the truth between the two harlots (1 Kings 3:16–28). The word "glory" is used twice: God's glory is in what He hides; the king's is in what he finds.

> **25:3** *The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.*

The heaven for height, and the earth for depth. No one can measure the height of the sky or the depth of the earth.

and the heart of kings is unsearchable. Hebrew *ein cheqer*, there is no searching it. The king searches out matters (v. 2), but no one can search out the king's heart. His subjects cannot read his mind. Only Jehovah holds it (21:1).

> **25:4** *Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.*

Take away the dross from the silver. Hebrew *sigim*, dross, the impurities melted out of silver ore.

and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Hebrew *tsoreph*, the silversmith. When the dross is removed, the smith has pure metal to work.

> **25:5** *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.*

Take away the wicked from before the king. The meaning of the picture in verse 4. The wicked courtier is dross in the king's household.

and his throne shall be established in righteousness. Hebrew *yikkon*, it shall be made firm (16:12). Remove the wicked advisers, and the throne stands on justice (20:8, 26). Solomon began his reign by removing Joab, Shimei and Adonijah (1 Kings 2), and "the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon" (1 Kings 2:46).

> **25:6** *Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men:*

Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king. Hebrew *al-tithhaddar*, do not give yourself airs, do not put yourself forward.

and stand not in the place of great men. Do not take a place that belongs to those above you.

> **25:7** *For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.*

For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither. Better to be invited up than to push your way up.

than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen. Better than to be sent down in front of everyone. The Lord Jesus Christ taught the same at a wedding feast: "When thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher . . . For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:10, 11). (Some versions join the last words, "whom thine eyes have seen," to verse 8: "What thine eyes have seen, go not forth hastily to strive.")

> **25:8** *Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.*

Go not forth hastily to strive. Hebrew *lariv*, to go to law, to quarrel. Do not rush to court, or into a quarrel, over something you think you saw.

lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. When the facts come out and your neighbour proves you wrong, you will not know where to look (18:17). "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him" (Matt. 5:25).

> **25:9** *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:*

Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself. Settle it with him, face to face, privately. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15).

and discover not a secret to another. Hebrew *sod*, a confidence (11:13). Do not win your case by betraying someone else's secret.

> **25:10** *Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.*

Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame. The one who hears you betray a confidence will think less of you, and say so.

and thine infamy turn not away. Hebrew *dibbah*, an evil report (10:18). The name of a man who cannot keep a secret sticks to him.

> **25:11** *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

A word fitly spoken. Hebrew *davar davur 'al-ophnaw*, "a word spoken upon its wheels": a word that runs smoothly in its right setting, at the right time and in the right way (15:23).

is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. Hebrew *tappuche zahav*, golden apples, perhaps golden ornaments shaped like fruit; *maskiyyoth kesef*, settings, carvings, filigree of silver. A beautiful thing set in a beautiful frame. The right word at the right moment is a work of art.

> **25:12** *As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.*

As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold. Hebrew *nezem*, a ring (11:22); *chali*, a pendant; *ketem*, fine gold.

so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear. A wise rebuke, received by an ear that listens, is like gold jewellery on it. Reproof, so often resented, becomes an ornament when it is heard (1:9; 9:8).

> **25:13** *As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.*

As the cold of snow in the time of harvest. Not a snowfall at harvest, which would ruin the crop (26:1), but snow carried down from the mountains of Lebanon and Hermon to cool drinks in the harvest heat. A cold drink in the burning fields was a rare refreshment.

so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters. Hebrew *tsir ne'eman*, a faithful envoy (13:17); *yashiv*, he restores, brings back. The man who carries a message faithfully, quickly and truly is as welcome as snow-cooled water at harvest. Compare the sluggard, who is vinegar and smoke to those who send him (10:26), and the fool who cuts off his own feet (26:6).

> **25:14** *Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.*

Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift. Hebrew *mattath shaqer*, a gift of falsehood: a gift he promises and never gives.

is like clouds and wind without rain. In a dry land, clouds and wind promise rain. When none falls, the disappointment is bitter. Jude uses the same picture of false teachers: "clouds they are without water, carried about of winds" (Jude 12).

> **25:15** *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.*

By long forbearing is a prince persuaded. Hebrew *'orekh appayim*, patience (14:29); *yephutteh*, he is won over, persuaded (the verb *pathah*, the root of [pethi]). Patience can open even a ruler's mind.

and a soft tongue breaketh the bone. Hebrew *rakkah*, soft, tender (15:1). The figure is a paradox: what is soft breaks what is hard. Gentle words wear down the hardest resistance (15:1). Abigail turned David from his purpose with soft words (1 Sam. 25:23–33).

> **25:16** *Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.*

Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee. Hebrew *dayyekka*, your enough. Honey is good (24:13), but there is such a thing as too much.

lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Hebrew *tisba'ennu*, you are sated with it. Even good things, taken without measure, turn against a man.

> **25:17** *Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.*

Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house. Hebrew *hoqar*, make it rare, precious. Visit seldom.

lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee. Hebrew *yisba'ekha*, he be sated with you: the very word of verse 16. A friend, like honey, can be had too much of. The two verses belong together.

> **25:18** *A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.*

A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour. The ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16; 6:19; 19:5).

is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. Hebrew *mephits*, a war club, a hammer; *cherev*, a sword; *chets shanun*, a sharpened arrow. Three weapons, for crushing, for cutting, and for striking from a distance. A false witness can kill as surely as any of them.

> **25:19** *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.*

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble. Hebrew *mivtach*, trust; *boged*, the treacherous (2:22); *tsarah*, distress.

is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. Hebrew *shen ro'ah*, a broken tooth; *regel mu'adeth*, a foot that slips. You lean on them, and they give way, and the pain is worse than having nothing. "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted . . . hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9).

> **25:20** *As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.*

As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather. As cruel as stripping a man's cloak off him on a cold day.

and as vinegar upon nitre. Hebrew *nether*, soda. Vinegar poured on soda fizzes and both are spoiled.

so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart. Hebrew *lev ra'*, a sad heart. Cheerful songs to a grieving man are unkind, however well meant. "How shall we sing the LORD's [Jehovah's] song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:4). "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

> **25:21** *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:*

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat. Hebrew *sone'akha*, the one who hates you.

and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink. Meet his need. The Law already commanded kindness to an enemy's ox or ass (Ex. 23:4, 5). When the Syrian army was delivered into Israel's hands, Elisha said, "Set bread and water before them," and "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:22, 23).

> **25:22** *For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD [Jehovah] shall reward thee.*

For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Kindness to an enemy is like heaping burning coals on his head: it burns him with shame, and can melt his hatred.

and the LORD [Jehovah] shall reward thee. Hebrew *yeshallem*, He will repay (19:17). Paul quotes these two verses: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:20, 21).

> **25:23** *The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.*

The north wind driveth away rain. The Hebrew verb is *techolel*, it brings forth, gives birth to (the word of 8:24, "brought forth"). In the land of Israel the north and north-west winds bring rain from the sea. The verse reads: "The north wind bringeth forth rain."

so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue. Hebrew *lashon sether*, a secret tongue, a slanderer. Read with the Hebrew verb: as the north wind brings rain, so a backbiting tongue brings angry looks. Slander produces anger as surely as a north wind produces rain. (The King James Version's sense, that an angry look drives away a slanderer, is good advice in itself, but it reverses the picture.)

> **25:24** *It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.*

It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house. The words of 21:9; see there. The only difference is the word "and." That the same saying appears in Solomon's first collection and again in the one Hezekiah's men copied shows that the two collections came into the book separately.

> **25:25** *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*

As cold waters to a thirsty soul. Cold water to a parched man (v. 13).

so is good news from a far country. Hebrew *shemu'ah tovah*, a good report (15:30). In a world without fast messages, news from far away could take months. When Jacob heard that Joseph was alive in Egypt, "the spirit of Jacob their father revived" (Gen. 45:27).

> **25:26** *A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.*

A righteous man falling down before the wicked. Hebrew *mat*, tottering, giving way. Not falling into misfortune (24:16), but giving in, yielding, compromising before the wicked.

is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring. Hebrew *nirpas*, trampled, muddied; *moshchath*, polluted. The righteous man should be a spring of life (10:11). When he gives way to the wicked, the spring is fouled and those who come to drink find mud. When Peter withdrew from the Gentile believers for fear of those from Jerusalem, "the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away" (Gal. 2:11–13).

> **25:27** *It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.*

It is not good to eat much honey. The thought of verse 16.

so for men to search their own glory is not glory. The Hebrew is short and difficult: "and to search their glory, glory." The King James Version supplies "not," taking the sense to be: as too much honey is bad, so seeking honour for oneself is no honour. "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth" (27:2).

> **25:28** *He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*

He that hath no rule over his own spirit. Hebrew *ein ma'tsar lerucho*, there is no restraint on his spirit. He cannot hold his temper, his tongue, or his appetites.

is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. An ancient city's walls were its life. Without them, any enemy could walk in. The man who cannot rule himself is open to every temptation and every attack. "He that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city" (16:32): the man who rules himself is stronger than a conqueror; the man who cannot is weaker than a ruined town.

Looking back

Chapter 25 has moved from the throne to the neighbour's door, and has shown that the same virtues serve in both places: humility before the great, patience and soft words, faithfulness as a messenger, discretion with a secret, moderation in pleasure and in visits, honesty as a witness, kindness even to an enemy. And it has ended with the man who has no rule over himself, a city with no walls. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Proverbs 26 — As a Dog Returneth to His Vomit

Place: Division 4. **Writer:** Solomon; copied by the men of Hezekiah.

Introduction

Chapter 26 is the book's gallery of three kinds of men, each drawn in a run of sayings. First the fool (vv. 1–12): eleven sayings, every one with the word *kesil*, showing that honour does not suit him, a rod does, a message sent by him is lost, a proverb in his mouth is useless, and he returns to his folly like a dog to its vomit. Then the sluggard (vv. 13–16): his lion, his bed, his dish, and his conceit. Then the troublemakers (vv. 17–28): the meddler, the "joker," the talebearer, the quarrelsome man, and the hater who hides behind fair words. At the turn from the fool to the sluggard stands a sharp warning: there is more hope for a fool than for a man wise in his own conceit (v. 12).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–12. The fool [kesil].
- 13–16. The sluggard [atsel].
- 17–19. The meddler and the deceiver.
- 20–22. The talebearer and the quarrelsome man.
- 23–28. The hater with fair lips.

The Text

> **26:1** *As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool [kesil].*
>
> **26:2** *As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.*
>
> **26:3** *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's [kesil] back.*
>
> **26:4** *Answer not a fool [kesil] according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.*
>
> **26:5** *Answer a fool [kesil] according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*
>
> **26:6** *He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool [kesil] cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.*
>
> **26:7** *The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil].*
>
> **26:8** *As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool [kesil].*
>
> **26:9** *As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil].*
>
> **26:10** *The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool [kesil], and rewardeth transgressors.*
>
> **26:11** *As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool [kesil] returneth to his folly.*
>
> **26:12** *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him.*

26:13 *The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.*

26:14 *As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful [atsel] upon his bed.*

26:15 *The slothful [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.*

26:16 *The sluggard [atsel] is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*

26:17 *He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.*

26:18 *As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death,*

26:19 *So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?*

26:20 *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.*

26:21 *As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.*

26:22 *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

26:23 *Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.*

26:24 *He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;*

26:25 *When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart.*

26:26 *Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation.*

26:27 *Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.*

26:28 *A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.*

Verse by verse

26:1 *As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool [kesil].*

As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest. Snow in summer is out of place; rain in harvest is harmful, spoiling the cut grain. When Samuel called for thunder and rain at the wheat harvest, it was a sign of judgment (1 Sam. 12:17, 18).

so honour is not seemly for a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Seemly" is *naveh*, fitting (17:7; 19:10). Honour does not fit him, and it does harm: it makes him worse, and others follow him.

26:2 *As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.*

As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying. Hebrew *tsippor*, a sparrow, flitting about; *deror*, a swallow, darting. They fly past and do not land.

so the curse causeless shall not come. Hebrew *qilelath chinnam*, a curse without cause (1:11). An undeserved curse flits by and does not settle on its target. Balaam could not curse whom God had not cursed (Num. 23:8). When Shimei cursed David, David said, "It may be that the LORD [Jehovah] will look on mine affliction, and . . . requite me good for his cursing" (2 Sam. 16:12). (The written Hebrew reads "shall not come"; the margin, "shall come to him," that is, to the one who utters it.)

> **26:3** *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's [kesil] back.*

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's [kesil] back. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Each animal needs its own means of control; the fool, who will not be led by words, needs the rod (10:13; 19:29). "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle" (Ps. 32:9).

> **26:4** *Answer not a fool [kesil] according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.*

Answer not a fool [kesil] according to his folly. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Do not answer him on his own terms: with his anger, his insults, his foolish logic.

lest thou also be like unto him. If you stoop to his level, you become one of him.

> **26:5** *Answer a fool [kesil] according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*

Answer a fool [kesil] according to his folly. Answer him in a way that fits his folly and exposes it.

lest he be wise in his own conceit. If he is never answered, he will think he has won. The two verses stand side by side on purpose (Part One, Chapter 1). Both are true; which applies depends on the fool and the moment. Wisdom is needed to use a proverb. The Lord Jesus Christ did both. When the chief priests asked by what authority He acted, He answered their question with a question that exposed them (Matt. 21:23–27). When Herod questioned Him at length, "he answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9).

> **26:6** *He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool [kesil] cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.*

He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. He makes him his messenger.

cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. He might as well cut off his own feet; the message will never arrive, or will arrive wrong. "Drinketh damage" is *shoteh chamas*, he drinks violence: he swallows the harm the fool does. Compare the faithful messenger (25:13).

> **26:7** *The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil].*

The legs of the lame are not equal. Hebrew *dalyu*, they dangle, hang limp. A lame man's legs are there, but useless for walking.

so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools. "Parable" is *mashal*, a proverb (1:1). A fool may quote a proverb, but it limps in his mouth. He does not understand it or use it rightly. The book is making a point about itself: proverbs are useless to a fool.

> **26:8** *As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool [kesil].*

As he that bindeth a stone in a sling. To tie the stone into the sling is to make it useless; it cannot be thrown. (Others read, "as a bag of gems in a heap of stones": treasure thrown away.)

so is he that giveth honour to a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Honour given to a fool is wasted, or worse (v. 1).

> **26:9** *As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil].*

As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard. A drunkard grabs a thornbush and does not feel the thorns; or waves a thorny branch about and hurts others.

so is a parable in the mouth of fools [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fools. A proverb in a fool's mouth is not only useless (v. 7) but dangerous: he wounds himself and others with it, misapplying it.

> **26:10** *The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool [kesil], and rewardeth transgressors.*

The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool [kesil], and rewardeth transgressors. The dull, self-satisfied fool. This is one of the hardest verses in the book. The word "God" is supplied by the translators; the Hebrew reads *rav mecholel kol, wesokher kesil wesokher 'overim*. *Rav* can mean "great" or "master," or "an archer"; *mecholel* can mean "forming" or "wounding." The Revised Version renders: "As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by." That reading fits the run: a man who hires a fool, or any passer-by, without knowing him, is like an archer shooting at everything. The damage is random and widespread. This study takes that sense, which keeps the verse in the line of sayings about trusting a fool (vv. 6–10).

> **26:11** *As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool [kesil] returneth to his folly.*

As a dog returneth to his vomit. A disgusting picture, chosen to disgust. The dog throws up and comes back to it.

so a fool [kesil] returneth to his folly. The dull, self-satisfied fool. He suffers from his folly, and goes back to it (23:35). Peter quotes this verse of false teachers who had known the way of righteousness and turned back: "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again" (2 Pet. 2:22).

> **26:12** *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him.*

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? Literally "wise in his own eyes" (3:7).

there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him. The dull, self-satisfied fool. Even the fool, at least, might one day be shown his folly; the man who thinks he is wise cannot be taught anything. "Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12:16). The Lord said to the Pharisees, "now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41).

> **26:13** *The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.*

The slothful man [atsel] saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. The lazy man, who will not work and will not rise. The saying of 22:13; see there. What differs is the wording: two words for lion are used here, *shachal* and *ari*, and the lion is now "in the way" as well as in the streets. The excuse grows as it is retold.

> **26:14** *As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful [atsel] upon his bed.*

As the door turneth upon his hinges. Hebrew *tsir*, the pivot or hinge.

so doth the slothful [atsel] upon his bed. The lazy man. He turns over and over, like a door on its hinge, and never leaves the frame. He moves, but he goes nowhere.

> **26:15** *The slothful [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.*

The slothful [atsel] hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The lazy man. The saying of 19:24; see there for "bosom," which is the dish. What differs is the end: in 19:24 he "will not" bring his hand to his mouth; here "it grieveth him," *nil'ah*, it wearies him. The effort itself exhausts him.

> **26:16** *The sluggard [atsel] is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*

The sluggard [atsel] is wiser in his own conceit. The lazy man. He thinks himself very wise.

than seven men that can render a reason. Hebrew *meshive ta'am*, men who give a sensible answer (11:22). Seven, the number of completeness: he thinks himself wiser than a whole council of sensible men. He always has a reason for doing nothing, and is sure it is a good one. The sluggard and the man wise in his own conceit (v. 12) are the same man.

> **26:17** *He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.*

He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him. Hebrew *mith'abber*, getting angry over a quarrel that is not his.

is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. Dogs in the East were half-wild scavengers. Grab one by the ears and you cannot hold on and cannot safely let go; either way you will be bitten.

> **26:18** *As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death,*

As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death. Hebrew *mithlahleah*, one who acts like a madman; *ziqqim*, firebrands.

> **26:19** *So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?*

So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? Hebrew *mesacheq*, joking, playing (8:30; 10:23). He does harm, and when he is caught he says, "I was only joking." The harm is as real as if a madman had thrown fire and arrows. "Just joking" does not undo a wound.

> **26:20** *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.*

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out. Take away the fuel and the fire dies.

so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. Hebrew *nirgan*, a whisperer, a gossip (16:28; 18:8); *yishtoq*, it grows quiet. The gossip is the fuel of quarrels. Remove him, and the quarrel dies down (22:10).

> **26:21** *As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.*

As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire. Hebrew *pecham legechalim*, charcoal to live coals. Fuel added to a fire.

so is a contentious man to kindle strife. Hebrew *ish midyanim*, a man of quarrels. He feeds the fire. The talebearer (v. 20) and the quarrelsome man are two kinds of fuel.

> **26:22** *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. The words of 18:8; see there. What differs is the setting: here the saying stands in the middle of a run about fire and fuel (vv. 20, 21). Gossip is not only a tasty morsel that sinks in; it is fuel that keeps the fire of strife burning.

> **26:23** *Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.*

Burning lips and a wicked heart. Hebrew *sephathayim dolqim*, glowing, fervent lips: lips warm with professions of friendship, over a heart that is evil.

are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. Hebrew *cheres*, a clay pot, a broken piece of pottery; *kesef sigim*, dross of silver, used as a glaze. A cheap clay pot glazed to shine like silver: bright on the outside, common clay within. "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 23:27).

> **26:24** *He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;*

He that hateth dissembleth with his lips. Hebrew *yinnakher*, he disguises himself (the word used of Joseph, who "made himself strange" to his brothers, Gen. 42:7).

and layeth up deceit within him. Hebrew *mirmah*, deceit, stored inside.

> **26:25** *When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart.*

When he speaketh fair, believe him not. Hebrew *yechannen qolo*, he makes his voice gracious. However kindly he speaks, do not trust him.

for there are seven abominations in his heart. Seven, the full number: his heart is full of everything Jehovah hates (6:16–19).

> **26:26** *Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation.*

Whose hatred is covered by deceit. Hebrew *mashsha'on*, deceit, guile.

his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Hebrew *qahal*, the assembly (5:14). What was hidden will be exposed in public. "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed" (Luke 12:2).

> **26:27** *Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.*

Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein. The pit he dug for another becomes his own grave. "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made" (Ps. 7:15; compare Ps. 57:6; Eccl. 10:8).

and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him. He rolls a stone up the hill to drop on someone below, and it rolls back on him. Haman built the gallows on which he himself was hanged (Esth. 7:10).

> **26:28** *A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.*

A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it. Hebrew *dakkaw*, its crushed ones, those it has wounded. A liar comes to hate the very people he has wronged; the wrong itself feeds his hatred. Amnon, after he had wronged Tamar, "hated her exceedingly" (2 Sam. 13:15).

and a flattering mouth worketh ruin. Hebrew *peh chalaq*, a smooth mouth (2:16; 5:3); *midcheh*, ruin, overthrow. Flattery is as destructive as open lies. The chapter ends where the book's warnings began: with the smooth mouth.

Looking back

Chapter 26 has hung three portraits side by side. The fool, who should never be honoured, sent on an errand, or trusted with a proverb, and who returns to his folly like a dog to its vomit. The sluggard, turning on his bed like a door, too tired to feed himself, and wiser in his own eyes than seven sensible men. And the troublemakers: the meddler, the joker whose sport is fire and arrows, the gossip who feeds the fire, and the hater whose fair words cover seven abominations. Each picture is drawn so the son will recognise the man, and never become him.

Proverbs 27 — Iron Sharpeneth Iron

Place: Division 4. **Writer:** Solomon; copied by the men of Hezekiah.

Introduction

Chapter 27 is the chapter of friends. It speaks of the friend whose wounds are faithful (v. 6), the friend whose counsel is sweet as perfume (v. 9), the old family friend not to be forsaken (v. 10), the friend who sharpens as iron sharpens iron (v. 17), and the false friend whose loud blessing at dawn is a curse (v. 14). Around these sayings are others on boasting, envy, the restless wanderer, the nagging wife, and the hunger of the eye that is never satisfied. It holds the only "My son" of this division (v. 11), and ends with a short poem on the shepherd's care of his flock (vv. 23–27), a lesson for every man, and for every ruler, that riches do not last but faithful care does.

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1, 2. Boasting of tomorrow and of oneself.
- 3, 4. The weight of a fool's wrath; the power of envy.
- 5–10. Friends: open rebuke, faithful wounds, sweet counsel, the old friend, the near neighbour.
- 11–16. The son who gladdens; the prudent and the simple; the surety; the loud blesser; the contentious wife.
- 17–22. Iron and iron; the fig tree; the face in the water; the eye never satisfied; praise as a furnace; the fool in the mortar.
- 23–27. The shepherd and his flock.

The Text

> **27:1** *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*
> **27:2** *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*
> **27:3** *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's [ewil] wrath is heavier than them both.*
> **27:4** *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*
> **27:5** *Open rebuke is better than secret love.*
> **27:6** *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*
> **27:7** *The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*
> **27:8** *As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.*
> **27:9** *Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.*

> **27:10** *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.*
>
> **27:11** *My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.*
>
> **27:12** *A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished.*
>
> **27:13** *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*
>
> **27:14** *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.*
>
> **27:15** *A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.*
>
> **27:16** *Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.*
>
> **27:17** *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*
>
> **27:18** *Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.*
>
> **27:19** *As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.*
>
> **27:20** *Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.*
>
> **27:21** *As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.*
>
> **27:22** *Though thou shouldest bray a fool [ewil] in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*
>
> **27:23** *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*
>
> **27:24** *For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?*
>
> **27:25** *The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.*
>
> **27:26** *The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field.*
>
> **27:27** *And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.*

Verse by verse

> **27:1** *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

Boast not thyself of to morrow. Do not make your plans as if tomorrow were yours.

for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Hebrew *yeled yom*, what a day will give birth to. "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city . . . Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour" (Jas. 4:13, 14). The rich fool planned for many years, and died that night (Luke 12:19, 20).

> **27:2** *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth. Self-praise is no praise (25:27).

a stranger, and not thine own lips. Hebrew *zar*, an outsider, one who has no reason to flatter you. "For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. 10:18).

> **27:3** *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's [ewil] wrath is heavier than them both.*

A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty. Hebrew *koved even*, the weight of a stone; *netel hachol*, the load of sand. Hard things to carry.

but a fool's [ewil] wrath is heavier than them both. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. "Wrath" is *ka'as*, vexation: the trouble a fool causes, the provocation he gives. It is a heavier load to bear than any stone.

> **27:4** *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*

Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous. Hebrew *akhzeriyyuth chemah*, the cruelty of fury; *shetheph aph*, a flood of anger. Rage is terrible, but it passes, like a flood.

but who is able to stand before envy? Hebrew *qin'ah*, jealousy (6:34). Envy does not pass; it waits and plots. Cain killed Abel from envy (Gen. 4:5–8); "the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt" (Acts 7:9); Pilate "knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matt. 27:18).

> **27:5** *Open rebuke is better than secret love.*

Open rebuke is better than secret love. Hebrew *tokhachath megullah*, rebuke that is uncovered, spoken openly; *ahavah mesuttareth*, love that is hidden, that never speaks. A friend who tells you the truth to your face is better than one who loves you silently and lets you go wrong.

> **27:6** *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Hebrew *ne'emanim*, faithful, trustworthy; *ohev*, one who loves. When a true friend hurts you with the truth, you can trust the wound.

but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Hebrew *na'tharoth*, profuse, lavish. An enemy may be lavish with kisses. Joab kissed Amasa and stabbed him (2 Sam. 20:9, 10); Judas came to the Lord and "kissed him" (Matt. 26:49).

> **27:7** *The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*

The full soul loatheth an honeycomb. Hebrew *tavus*, it tramples on it. When a man is full, even honey is nothing to him.

but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. When he is hungry, even bitter food tastes good. Need changes taste. The prodigal "would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:16). A man who has too much despises what is good; a man in need is thankful for anything.

> **27:8** *As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.*

As a bird that wandereth from her nest. Hebrew *nodedeth*, straying, fleeing. A bird that leaves her nest leaves her eggs or young unprotected, and is herself exposed.

so is a man that wandereth from his place. His home, his family, his land, his calling. The restless man who leaves his place loses what he had and finds no rest. Cain was condemned to be "a fugitive and a vagabond (*nad*) in the earth" (Gen. 4:12).

> **27:9** *Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.*

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart. Hebrew *shemen*, oil; *qetoreth*, incense, fragrance.

so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. Hebrew *metheq*, sweetness; *'etsath nephesh*, counsel from the soul. A friend's heartfelt advice is as pleasant as perfume.

> **27:10** *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.*

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. An old family friendship is precious. Hiram king of Tyre "was ever a lover of David," and he was a friend to Solomon too (1 Kings 5:1, 12). Rehoboam forsook his father's counsellors, and lost the kingdom (1 Kings 12:8).

neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity. Hebrew *'eyd*, disaster. Do not rely on a brother who is far away, or who has grown cold.

for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. A friend close at hand can help today; a brother far off cannot (17:17; 18:24).

> **27:11** *My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.*

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad. The only "My son" in the collection copied by the men of Hezekiah. The father's joy is in his son's wisdom (10:1; 23:15).

that I may answer him that reproacheth me. Hebrew *choreph*, one who taunts. A father is judged by his son. A wise son is the father's answer to every critic. "They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Ps. 127:5).

> **27:12** *A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished.*

A prudent man [arum] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple [pethi] pass on, and are punished. The shrewd man, and the open, untaught one. The words of 22:3; see there. That this saying stands in both of Solomon's collections shows how much it matters: see trouble coming, and take cover.

> **27:13** *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. The words of 20:16; see there. It is the sixth warning in the book against rash suretyship (6:1; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26).

> **27:14** *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.*

He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning. He shouts his greetings and compliments at the crack of dawn.

it shall be counted a curse to him. Loud, early, excessive praise is unwelcome; it sounds false, and it disturbs. Too much flattery is worse than none (26:28).

> **27:15** *A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.*

A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Hebrew *delef tored*, a steady drip (19:13); *sagrir*, a downpour, a rainstorm. The drip through a leaking roof on a day of heavy rain, and a nagging wife: both are unending.

> **27:16** *Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.*

Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind. Hebrew *tsophneha*, he who would restrain her, hold her back. Trying to restrain her is like trying to hold the wind.

and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself. Hebrew *yiqra'*, it calls out, announces itself. Perfumed oil on the hand gives itself away by its smell. A quarrelsome woman can neither be held back nor hidden; everyone knows.

> **27:17** *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*

Iron sharpeneth iron. Hebrew *yachad*, sharpens. One iron blade is used to sharpen another.

so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Hebrew *pene re'ehu*, his friend's face. Friends sharpen each other: their minds, their judgment, their character, by honest talk, even friction. The faithful wounds of verse 6 do this. Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Peter (Gal. 2:11), sharpened one another.

> **27:18** *Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.*

Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof. Hebrew *notser*, he who guards. The man who tends his fig tree patiently eats its figs. "Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?" (1 Cor. 9:7).

so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. Hebrew *shomer adonaw*, he who keeps his master. The faithful servant will be rewarded. "Who then is that faithful and wise steward . . . Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" (Luke 12:42–44).

> **27:19** *As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.*

As in water face answereth to face. Look into still water, and your face looks back.

so the heart of man to man. A man's heart reflects the man: what he is inside is what he truly is. Or: as one face matches another in the water, so one man's heart matches another's; men are alike within. Or: a man sees himself in others. All three readings are drawn from the same picture, and all three are true. The first fits the book best: the heart is the true mirror of a man (4:23).

> **27:20** *Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.*

Hell and destruction are never full. Hebrew *sheol* and *'abaddo*, the grave and destruction (15:11). The grave is never satisfied; there is always room for more of the dead (30:15, 16).

so the eyes of man are never satisfied. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing" (Eccl. 1:8). Man's desire is as endless as the grave. "The lust of the eyes" is not of the Father (1 John 2:16).

> **27:21** *As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.*

As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold. The words of 17:3; see there.

so is a man to his praise. What differs is the second line. There it was Jehovah who tries the hearts; here a man is tried by praise. How he takes it shows what he is: whether he swells with pride or stays humble. The verse may also mean that a man is tested by what he praises. Either way, praise is a furnace.

> **27:22** *Though thou shouldest bray a fool [ewil] in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*

Though thou shouldest bray a fool [ewil] in a mortar among wheat with a pestle. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. "Bray" is *kathash*, to pound; *makhtesh*, a mortar; *riphoth*, crushed grain; *'eli*, a pestle. Grain is pounded to separate the husk from the kernel.

yet will not his foolishness depart from him. Hebrew *'iwweleth*. Pound him as you would pound grain, and his folly will not come off. In a child, folly can be driven out by the rod (22:15); in a grown fool, it is part of him. The difference is time: correct early.

> **27:23** *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks. Hebrew *yadoa' teda' pene tsonekha*, "knowing, know the faces of your flock": know each animal by sight.

and look well to thy herds. Hebrew *shith libbekha*, set your heart. A good shepherd knows his flock (John 10:14).

> **27:24** *For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?*

For riches are not for ever. Hebrew *chosen*, treasure, stored wealth (15:6). Money runs out.

and doth the crown endure to every generation? Hebrew *nezer*, a crown. Even a royal crown does not last for ever. The men of Hezekiah, copying this in the last century of the kingdom of Judah, had seen the northern kingdom fall (2 Kings 17:6). What lasts is not hoarded wealth but a well-tended flock that renews itself year by year.

> **27:25** *The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.*

The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself. Hebrew *chatsir*, grass; *deshe*, new green grass. The pasture renews itself each season.

and herbs of the mountains are gathered. Fodder is gathered from the hills for the winter.

> **27:26** *The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field.*

The lambs are for thy clothing. Their wool.

and the goats are the price of the field. Sell goats, and buy land.

> **27:27** *And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.*

And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens. The flock that is cared for feeds and clothes the whole household. The poem is about farming, and also about ruling. David was taken "from the sheepfolds . . . to feed Jacob his people" (Ps. 78:70–72). Kings and leaders are called shepherds throughout Scripture (Ezek. 34:2), and the elders of the church are told, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (1 Pet. 5:2). The man who knows his flock and tends it will have enough; the man who trusts in riches will see them go.

Looking back

Chapter 27 has taught the worth of a true friend: one who wounds faithfully, counsels sweetly, stays near, and sharpens as iron sharpens iron. It has warned against the things that spoil friendship: boasting, envy, flattery too loud and too early, a quarrelsome spirit, a restless heart, and the eye that is never satisfied. And it has ended in the sheepfold, with a quiet lesson: know your flock, tend it faithfully, and it will keep you; riches and crowns do not last.

Proverbs 28 — The Righteous Are Bold as a Lion

Place: Division 4. **Writer:** Solomon; copied by the men of Hezekiah.

Introduction

Chapters 28 and 29 close Solomon's proverbs as a pair. Their great subject is the righteous and the wicked under rulers, and the ruler himself. Four sayings frame them: "When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden" (28:12); "When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase" (28:28); "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice" (29:2); and "When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth" (29:16). Chapter 28 speaks often of the Law (vv. 4, 7, 9): those who keep it, and those who turn their ears from it. It holds the book's clearest word on confession (v. 13).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1, 2. The bold and the fleeing; the land with many princes.
- 3–11. The Law kept and forsaken; the poor and the rich; usury; the prayer that is an abomination.
- 12–18. When the righteous rejoice; confession; the tender heart; the wicked ruler and the wise prince; the murderer; the upright walker.
- 19–24. Plenty and poverty; haste to be rich; partiality; the evil eye; the honest rebuke; the son who robs his parents.
- 25–28. Pride and trust; the heart that trusts itself; the giver; when the wicked rise.

The Text

> **28:1** *The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.*
>
> **28:2** *For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.*
>
> **28:3** *A poor man [rash] that oppresseth the poor [dal] is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.*
>
> **28:4** *They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.*
>
> **28:5** *Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD [Jehovah] understand all things.*
>
> **28:6** *Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.*
>
> **28:7** *Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.*

28:8 *He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor [dal].*

28:9 *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*

28:10 *Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession.*

28:11 *The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor [dal] that hath understanding searcheth him out.*

28:12 *When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.*

28:13 *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

28:14 *Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.*

28:15 *As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor [dal] people.*

28:16 *The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.*

28:17 *A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.*

28:18 *Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.*

28:19 *He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.*

28:20 *A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.*

28:21 *To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress.*

28:22 *He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.*

28:23 *He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.*

28:24 *Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.*

28:25 *He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be made fat.*

28:26 *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool [kesil]: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.*

28:27 *He that giveth unto the poor [rash] shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.*

28:28 *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.*

Verse by verse

28:1 *The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.*

The wicked flee when no man pursueth. A guilty conscience runs from shadows. The Law warned Israel that if they turned from Jehovah, "ye shall flee when none pursueth you" (Lev. 26:17, 36).

but the righteous are bold as a lion. Hebrew *yivtach*, confident, secure; *kephir*, a young lion. A clear conscience has nothing to fear. Daniel went to his window and prayed as before, knowing the decree was signed (Dan. 6:10).

> **28:2** *For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.*

For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof. When a nation sins, its rulers change again and again: coups, rebellions, short reigns. The northern kingdom of Israel had nineteen kings from several different families in about two hundred years; one, Zimri, reigned seven days (1 Kings 16:15).

but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged. Hebrew *ken ya'arikh*, so it shall last long. One wise ruler gives a land stability.

> **28:3** *A poor man [rash] that oppresseth the poor [dal] is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.*

A poor man [rash] that oppresseth the poor [dal]. The man in want, oppressing the weak, low man (Part One, Chapter 5). A poor man who gets a little power and uses it to crush other poor men is the worst oppressor of all; he knows what it is to be poor, and does it anyway. The servant forgiven ten thousand talents seized his fellow servant by the throat for a hundred pence (Matt. 18:28). (Some read *rosh*, "a ruler," for *rash*, "a poor man"; the Hebrew as it stands makes good sense.)

is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food. Hebrew *matar sochef*, a beating rain that washes the crop away. Rain should bring food; this rain destroys it.

> **28:4** *They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.*

They that forsake the law praise the wicked. Hebrew *torah*, here the Law of God. Those who have left it admire those who break it.

but such as keep the law contend with them. Hebrew *yithgaru*, they stir themselves up against them, they oppose them. Keeping the Law means standing against the lawless, not praising them.

> **28:5** *Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD [Jehovah] understand all things.*

Evil men understand not judgment. Hebrew *mishpat*, justice, what is right. Their wickedness blinds them.

but they that seek the LORD [Jehovah] understand all things. Those who seek Jehovah are given understanding in all that matters. "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Ps. 119:100). "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

> **28:6** *Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.*

Better is the poor [rash] that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. The man in want. The saying of 19:1; see there. What differs is the second line: there it was a fool "perverse in his lips"; here it is a rich man "perverse in his ways" (*'iqqesh derakhayim*, crooked in two ways, double-dealing). Here the contrast with the rich, which 19:1 left to be supplied, is stated.

> **28:7** *Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.*

Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son. Hebrew *notser torah*, he who guards the Law.

but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father. Hebrew *ro'eh zolelim*, he who feeds with gluttons (23:20, 21). The wise son keeps the Law; the foolish one keeps bad company and disgraces his father (10:1; 29:3).

> **28:8** *He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor [dal].*

He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance. Hebrew *neshekh*, interest, literally "a bite"; *tarbith*, increase, profit. Under the Law, an Israelite was forbidden to charge interest to his poor brother: "Take thou no usury of him, or increase . . . Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:36, 37; Deut. 23:19, 20; Ps. 15:5).

he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. The usurer piles up wealth, and in God's ordering it passes to a man who will use it to help the poor (13:22). He has been gathering it, without knowing, for someone else's kindness.

> **28:9** *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law. He refuses to listen to God's Word.

even his prayer shall be abomination. Hebrew *tephillah*, prayer; *to'evah*. If he will not hear God, God will not hear him. "They refused to hearken . . . therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD [Jehovah] of hosts" (Zech. 7:11–13; compare 15:8, 29; Isa. 1:15).

> **28:10** *Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession.*

Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way. Hebrew *mashgeh*, he who leads astray, the verb *shagah* of 5:19–23. He tempts a good man into sin.

he shall fall himself into his own pit. Hebrew *shechutho*, his own pit (26:27). The tempter is caught in his own trap. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck" (Matt. 18:6).

but the upright shall have good things in possession. Hebrew *yinchalu tov*, they shall inherit good.

> **28:11** *The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor [dal] that hath understanding searcheth him out.*

The rich man is wise in his own conceit. Wealth makes a man think he is wise: he has succeeded, so he must know best (26:12).

but the poor [dal] that hath understanding searcheth him out. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. "Searcheth him out" is *yachqerennu*, sees through him (18:17). A poor man with discernment sees through the rich man's pretensions.

> **28:12** *When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.*

When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory. Hebrew *ba'alots*, when they exult, triumph (11:10); *tiph'areth*, splendour. When the righteous come out on top, the whole land shines.

but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden. Hebrew *yechuppas*, he must be searched for. When the wicked come to power, good men go into hiding, and have to be searched out. In the days of Ahab and Jezebel, Obadiah hid a hundred prophets in caves (1 Kings 18:4). The saying is repeated in another form at verse 28.

> **28:13** *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper. Hebrew *mekhasseh pesha'aw*, he who covers his transgressions. To cover another man's sins is love (10:12; 17:9); to cover one's own is folly. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long" (Ps. 32:3).

but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Hebrew *modeh*, he who confesses, acknowledges; *'ozev*, he who forsakes; *yeruchamm*, he shall be shown compassion. Both are needed: to own the sin and to leave it. "I acknowledged my sin unto thee . . . and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5). Under the Law, confession went with sacrifice and restitution (Lev. 5:5; 6:4, 5). For the believer in the administration of grace, who is a son of God by the new birth, sin does not undo his sonship; confession restores his fellowship with the Father: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9).

> **28:14** *Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.*

Happy is the man that feareth alway. Hebrew *ashre*, "O the happinesses" (3:13); *mephached*, one who trembles, who is always careful before God. A tender conscience is a blessing.

but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief. Hebrew *maqsheh libbo*, he who makes his heart hard. Pharaoh hardened his heart again and again, until he was destroyed (Ex. 8:15, 32). "Exhort one another daily . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

> **28:15** *As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor [dal] people.*

As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear. Hebrew *ari nohem*, a growling lion; *dov shoqeq*, a charging, ravenous bear. Two beasts of prey.

so is a wicked ruler over the poor [dal] people. The weak, low people. A wicked ruler devours the helpless. Peter uses the same picture of the adversary: "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

> **28:16** *The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.*

The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor. Hebrew *chasar tevunoth*, lacking understandings; *rav ma'ashaqqoth*, great in oppressions. A foolish ruler is an oppressive one; folly and tyranny go together.

but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days. Hebrew *sone betsa'*, he who hates unjust gain (1:19). The law of the king promised that the king who kept the Law would "prolong his days in his kingdom" (Deut. 17:20).

> **28:17** *A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.*

A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person. Hebrew *'adam 'ashuq bedam nephesh*, a man burdened with the blood of a life: a murderer, weighed down by his guilt.

shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him. Hebrew *bor*, the pit, the grave (1:12); *yithmekhu*, hold him up, support him. He is running to his own grave; let no one try to help him escape justice. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). The Law allowed no ransom for a murderer (Num. 35:31).

> **28:18** *Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.*

Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved. Hebrew *tamim*, whole, blameless; *yivvashea'*, he shall be delivered.

but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. Hebrew *ne'qash derakhayim*, crooked in two ways, the double-dealer (v. 6); *be'echath*, in one, all at once. He tries to walk two roads and falls on one of them, suddenly.

> **28:19** *He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.*

He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread. The first line of 12:11; see there.

but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough. Hebrew *reqim*, empty things or men (12:11); *yisba' rish*, he shall be filled with poverty. What differs from 12:11 is the end: there he was "void of understanding"; here he is "filled with poverty." The farmer is filled with bread; the dreamer is filled with want. The play on "filled" is the point.

> **28:20** *A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.*

A faithful man shall abound with blessings. Hebrew *ish emunoth*, a man of faithfulness (20:6).

but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. Hebrew *'ats leha'ashir*, he who hurries to get rich; *lo yinnaqeh*, he shall not go unpunished (6:29). A man in a hurry for wealth will cut corners, and will not stay clean (13:11; 20:21). "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare" (1 Tim. 6:9).

> **28:21** *To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress.*

To have respect of persons is not good. Partiality in judgment (18:5; 24:23).

for for a piece of bread that man will transgress. Hebrew *path lechem*, a morsel of bread. The man who will favour persons can be bought for almost nothing. The false prophets of Ezekiel's day polluted God "for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread" (Ezek. 13:19).

> **28:22** *He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.*

He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye. Hebrew *nivhal lahon*, he who rushes after wealth; *ra' 'ayin*, evil of eye, the grudging, greedy man (23:6). Greed and stinginess go together.

and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. Hebrew *chesser*, want. He is so busy getting that he does not see the loss coming (v. 20; 21:5).

> **28:23** *He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.*

He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour. Hebrew *acharay*, afterwards, in the end. The man who corrects you may not be thanked at once, but in the end you will be grateful (27:5, 6).

than he that flattereth with the tongue. Hebrew *machaliq lashon*, he who makes his tongue smooth (2:16). The flatterer is welcome at first, and despised at last. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16).

> **28:24** *Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.*

Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression. He takes from his parents and tells himself it is not stealing: it will all be his one day anyway. The Lord Jesus Christ condemned those who said of what should have supported their parents, "It is a gift," and so "made the commandment of God of none effect" (Matt. 15:5, 6).

the same is the companion of a destroyer. Hebrew *chaver le'ish mashchith*, a partner of a man who ruins. He is in the same class as a vandal or a robber (18:9; 19:26).

> **28:25** *He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be made fat.*

He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife. Hebrew *rechav nephesh*, wide of appetite: the greedy, grasping man, whose desire is never satisfied (Hab. 2:5). His grasping causes quarrels (13:10).

but he that putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be made fat. Hebrew *boteach*, he who trusts (3:5); *yedushshan*, he shall prosper (11:25). The greedy man grabs and fights; the man who trusts Jehovah does not need to, and is satisfied.

> **28:26** *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool [kesil]: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.*

He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool [kesil]. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Trusteth" is *boteach*, the same word as verse 25: one man trusts Jehovah, the other trusts his own heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9). "Lean not unto thine own understanding" (3:5).

but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. Hebrew *holekh bechokhmah*, he who walks in wisdom; *yimmalet*, he shall escape (11:21).

> **28:27** *He that giveth unto the poor [rash] shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.*

He that giveth unto the poor [rash] shall not lack. The man in want. "Lack" is *machsor*, want. The giver does not end in want (11:24, 25; 19:17).

but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. Hebrew *ma'lim 'eynaw*, he who shuts his eyes, who looks away from the poor so as not to see them. "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother" (Deut. 15:7). The poor whom he ignored will curse him (11:26; 21:13).

> **28:28** *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.*

When the wicked rise, men hide themselves. The thought of verse 12, repeated to close the chapter.

but when they perish, the righteous increase. When the wicked fall, the righteous come out of hiding and multiply. The chapter is framed by these two sayings (vv. 12, 28), and the next continues the theme (29:2, 16).

Looking back

Chapter 28 has shown a land under two kinds of rule. Under the wicked, good men hide, the poor are devoured as by lions and bears, and the land changes rulers again and again. Under the righteous, there is glory, and the righteous increase. In either land, a man must keep the Law and hear it, confess and forsake his sins, keep a tender heart, walk uprightly, refuse to hurry after riches, rebuke honestly, honour his parents, trust Jehovah rather than his own heart, and open his eyes to the poor.

Proverbs 29 — Where There Is No Vision

Place: Division 4, its last chapter: the end of the proverbs of Solomon. **Writer:** Solomon; copied by the men of Hezekiah.

Introduction

The last chapter of Solomon's proverbs is about rule: the king who establishes the land by justice or overthrows it by taking gifts (v. 4), the ruler who listens to lies (v. 12), the king who judges the poor faithfully (v. 14), the people who need the word of God (v. 18), and the ruler whose favour many seek, though every judgment comes from Jehovah (v. 26). Around these are sayings on the son and the servant, the angry man and the proud, the flatterer and the scorner, and the fear of man that brings a snare (v. 25). It ends with the oldest enmity in the world: the just and the unjust, each an abomination to the other (v. 27).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–4. The hardened neck; righteous rulers; the son and the harlots; the king who takes gifts.
- 5–11. The flatterer's net; the snare and the song; the cause of the poor; scorners and the wise; contending with a fool; the bloodthirsty; the fool who vents.
- 12–18. The ruler who hears lies; rich and poor lightened; the king's throne; the rod; the multiplying wicked; the son who gives rest; no vision.
- 19–23. The servant, the hasty speaker, the pampered servant, the angry man, the proud man.
- 24–27. The thief's partner; the fear of man; the ruler's favour; the just and the unjust.

The Text

> **29:1** *He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*
>
> **29:2** *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.*
>
> **29:3** *Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.*
>
> **29:4** *The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.*
>
> **29:5** *A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.*
>
> **29:6** *In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.*
>
> **29:7** *The righteous considereth the cause of the poor [dal]: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.*
>
> **29:8** *Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath.*

> **29:9** *If a wise man contendeth with a foolish [ewil] man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.*
>
> **29:10** *The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.*
>
> **29:11** *A fool [kesil] uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.*
>
> **29:12** *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.*
>
> **29:13** *The poor [rash] and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD [Jehovah] lighteneth both their eyes.*
>
> **29:14** *The king that faithfully judgeth the poor [dal], his throne shall be established for ever.*
>
> **29:15** *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*
>
> **29:16** *When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.*
>
> **29:17** *Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.*
>
> **29:18** *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*
>
> **29:19** *A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer.*
>
> **29:20** *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him.*
>
> **29:21** *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.*
>
> **29:22** *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.*
>
> **29:23** *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.*
>
> **29:24** *Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.*
>
> **29:25** *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be safe.*
>
> **29:26** *Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD [Jehovah].*
>
> **29:27** *An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.*

Verse by verse

> **29:1** *He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck. Hebrew *ish tokhachoth*, a man of reproofs, one who has been corrected many times; *maqsheh 'oreph*, making his neck stiff (28:14). The stiff neck is the picture of an ox that will not bend to the yoke (Ex. 32:9).

shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Hebrew *yishshaver*, he shall be broken; *ein marpe'*, no healing. The words of 6:15. Of Jerusalem it is written that Jehovah "sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending . . . But they mocked the messengers of God . . . until the wrath of the LORD [Jehovah] arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chr. 36:15, 16).

> **29:2** *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.*

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. Hebrew *birvoth tsaddiqim*, when the righteous increase, are in power.

but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. Hebrew *bimshol rasha'*, when a wicked man rules; *ye'anach*, they groan. The sayings of 28:12, 28 are now stated of the people as a whole (11:10).

> **29:3** *Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.*

Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father. The wise son gladdens his father (10:1; 27:11).

but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance. Hebrew *ro'eh zonoth*, he who feeds with harlots; *ye'abbed hon*, he destroys his wealth. The prodigal "devoured thy living with harlots" (Luke 15:30; compare 5:9, 10; 6:26).

> **29:4** *The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.*

The king by judgment establisheth the land. Hebrew *mishpat*, justice; *ya'amid*, makes it stand.

but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it. Hebrew *ish terumoth*, a man of levies, of contributions: a ruler who takes bribes, or who exacts heavy taxes. Either way he tears the land down. When the people asked Rehoboam to lighten the heavy yoke his father had laid on them, and he refused, the kingdom broke apart (1 Kings 12:4, 13–16).

> **29:5** *A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.*

A man that flattereth his neighbour. Hebrew *machaliq*, he who makes smooth (28:23).

spreadeth a net for his feet. For his neighbour's feet, to trap him; or for his own, since the flatterer is caught in the end (26:28). Both are true.

> **29:6** *In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.*

In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare. Hebrew *moqesh*, a snare (12:13). His own sin traps him.

but the righteous doth sing and rejoice. Hebrew *yarun*, he sings for joy. The righteous man walks free, and sings.

> **29:7** *The righteous considereth the cause of the poor [dal]: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.*

The righteous considereth the cause of the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. "Considereth" is *yodea'*, knows: he takes the trouble to know the poor man's case (*din*). Job said, "I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out" (Job 29:16).

but the wicked regardeth not to know it. Hebrew *lo-yavin da'ath*, he does not discern knowledge. He does not want to know.

> **29:8** *Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath.*

Scornful men bring a city into a snare. Hebrew *anshe latson*, men of scorning: scorners, the mockers who laugh at correction (the root of [lets]). "Bring into a snare" is *yaphichu*, they blow upon it, fan it into flame. They set a city on fire with their mockery and stirring up.

but wise men turn away wrath. They calm what the scorners inflamed (15:1; 16:14).

> **29:9** *If a wise man contendeth with a foolish [ewil] man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.*

If a wise man contendeth with a foolish [ewil] man. The fool whose folly shows in what he does. "Contendeth" is *nishpat*, goes to law with him.

whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest. Hebrew *ragaz*, to be agitated, to rage; *sachaq*, to laugh. The fool either storms or mocks; either way the wise man gets no settlement (*nachath*, rest, quiet). A dispute with a fool cannot be resolved by reason (26:4).

> **29:10** *The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.*

The bloodthirsty hate the upright. Hebrew *anshe damim*, men of blood; *tam*, the blameless (2:7). The violent hate the man whose life condemns theirs (1 John 3:12).

but the just seek his soul. Hebrew *yevaqqeshu naphsho*, they seek his life. The phrase is usually used of seeking to kill; here, set against the bloodthirsty, it means the upright seek to preserve the blameless man's life: they care for him. "No man cared (*doresh*) for my soul" (Ps. 142:4).

> **29:11** *A fool [kesil] uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.*

A fool [kesil] uttereth all his mind. The dull, self-satisfied fool. "Mind" is *ruach*, spirit, temper. He lets it all out (12:16; 18:2).

but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards. Hebrew *ashabbechennah*, he calms it, stills it; *be'achor*, back, afterwards. He holds it back. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jas. 1:19).

> **29:12** *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.*

If a ruler hearken to lies. If he listens to flattery and slander.

all his servants are wicked. His courtiers learn what pleases him, and become liars. Saul listened to Doeg's report against the priests of Nob, and Doeg slew them (1 Sam. 22:9–18). A ruler's ears shape his whole court.

> **29:13** *The poor [rash] and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD [Jehovah] lighteneth both their eyes.*

The poor [rash] and the deceitful man meet together. The man in want, and the *ish tekhakhim*, the man of oppressions, the extortioner. The saying is like 22:2; see there. What differs: there the rich man met the poor; here it is the oppressor.

the LORD [Jehovah] lighteneth both their eyes. He gives the light of life to both (Ps. 13:3). In 22:2 Jehovah was "the maker of them all"; here He keeps both alive and gives both their daylight. "He

maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. 5:45). The oppressor owes his very sight to the God of the man he oppresses.

> **29:14** *The king that faithfully judgeth the poor [dal], his throne shall be established for ever.*

The king that faithfully judgeth the poor [dal]. The weak, low man of small means and little standing. "Faithfully" is *be'emeth*, in truth.

his throne shall be established for ever. The test of a king is how he treats those who can do nothing for him (16:12; 20:28; 25:5). Of the coming King it is written, "with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11:4; Ps. 72:2, 4, 12–14).

> **29:15** *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*

The rod and reproof give wisdom. Hebrew *shevet wethokhachath*, the rod and correction (13:24; 22:15).

but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Hebrew *na'ar meshullach*, a boy let loose, left to go his own way. Adonijah's father "had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" and Adonijah tried to seize the throne (1 Kings 1:5, 6).

> **29:16** *When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.*

When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth. Wickedness feeds on numbers; sin grows where sinners gather.

but the righteous shall see their fall. They will outlast them (Ps. 37:34; 91:8). The fourth of the sayings that frame these chapters (28:12, 28; 29:2).

> **29:17** *Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.*

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest. Hebrew *yasser*, discipline (19:18); *yeniechekha*, he will give you rest.

yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. Hebrew *ma'adannim*, delicacies, delights. The son corrected in youth becomes a joy. Set beside verse 15: the son left to himself shames his mother; the son corrected brings rest.

> **29:18** *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Hebrew *chazon*, a vision, a revelation: the word God gives through His prophets (Isa. 1:1; 1 Sam. 3:1, "the word of the LORD [Jehovah] was precious in those days; there was no open vision"). "Perish" is *yippara'*, they cast off restraint, they run wild: the word used of Israel at the golden calf, when "the people were naked (*parua'*); for Aaron had made them naked (*pera'o*)" (Ex. 32:25), let loose. Where there is no word from God, people throw off restraint. This verse is often quoted to mean that a people or a company needs goals and plans for the future. That is not its meaning. It speaks of revelation from God, and of the lawlessness that follows when men do not have it, or will not hear it. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD [Adonai Jehovah], that I will send a

famine in the land, not a famine of bread . . . but of hearing the words of the LORD [Jehovah]" (Amos 8:11).

but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. Hebrew *ashre*, "O the happinesses." The contrast is between no word from God and God's Word kept. The happy man has the Law and keeps it (Ps. 1:1, 2).

> **29:19** *A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer.*

A servant will not be corrected by words. A hired or slave servant who does not care will not change for words alone.

for though he understand he will not answer. Hebrew *ein ma'aneh*, there is no response. He understands perfectly well, and does nothing.

> **29:20** *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him.*

Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? Hebrew *'ats bidvaraw*, quick in his words (19:2).

there is more hope of a fool [kesil] than of him. The dull, self-satisfied fool. The form of 26:12; see there. What differs is the man: there it was the man wise in his own conceit; here the man who speaks before he thinks. Both are past hope, because both will not listen. "Be not rash with thy mouth" (Eccl. 5:2).

> **29:21** *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.*

He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child. Hebrew *mephanneq*, he who pampers, spoils.

shall have him become his son at the length. Hebrew *manon*, a word found only here. It may mean "a son," an heir, as the King James Version takes it: the pampered servant ends up presuming to be one of the family. Or it may mean "grief": he will bring his master grief in the end. Either way, spoiling a servant ruins him.

> **29:22** *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.*

An angry man stirreth up strife. Hebrew *ish aph*, a man of anger (15:18; 22:24).

and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. Hebrew *ba'al chemah*, a master of fury; *rav pesha'*, great in transgression. Anger multiplies sins: words said, blows struck, wrongs done in heat (14:17).

> **29:23** *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.*

A man's pride shall bring him low. Hebrew *ga'avath adam tashpilennu*, man's pride will lay him low.

but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Hebrew *shephal ruach*, low of spirit (16:19). The Hebrew plays on two words from one root: pride makes a man *shaphal*, low; and the man who is *shephal*, lowly, is lifted up with honour. The proud are brought down; the lowly are raised (15:33; 18:12). "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

> **29:24** *Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.*

Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul. Hebrew *choleq*, he who shares. The accomplice ruins himself.

he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. Hebrew *'alah*, an oath, a curse: the solemn charge by which a judge called on witnesses to come forward. The Law said, "if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing (*'alah*), and is a witness . . . if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5:1). The thief's partner hears the judge's charge, keeps silent, and brings the curse on himself.

> **29:25** *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be safe.*

The fear of man bringeth a snare. Hebrew *cherdath adam*, trembling before man; *moqesh*, a snare. Fear of what men will think or do traps a man into sin. Saul confessed, "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:24). Peter, afraid of a servant girl, denied his Lord (Matt. 26:69–75). "Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him . . . For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42, 43).

but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD [Jehovah] shall be safe. Hebrew *yesuggav*, he shall be set on high, out of reach (18:10). The man who fears God need fear no man. "The LORD [Jehovah] is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Ps. 118:6).

> **29:26** *Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD [Jehovah].*

Many seek the ruler's favour. Hebrew *pene moshel*, the ruler's face. They crowd his court for a hearing (19:6).

but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD [Jehovah]. Hebrew *mishpat*, the decision. The ruler's face may be sought, but the final word is Jehovah's (16:33; 21:1). "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:6, 7).

> **29:27** *An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.*

An unjust man is an abomination to the just. Hebrew *ish 'awel*, a man of injustice. The righteous man detests what he does.

and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked. Hebrew *yeshar derekh*, straight of way. The wicked man detests the upright man, because his life condemns theirs. The two cannot be at peace. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The proverbs of Solomon end with the two men set side by side, as they began: the wise son and the foolish (10:1), the just and the unjust.

Looking back

Chapter 29 has closed Solomon's proverbs with the ruler and the ruled. A land stands on justice and falls by bribes; a king's throne stands when he judges the poor in truth; a ruler who listens to lies fills his

court with liars. And a people stands or falls by whether it has the word of God and keeps it. Under every throne, the same choices face each man: to bend his neck to correction or stiffen it; to vent his temper or hold it; to fear man or trust Jehovah.

Looking Back on Division 4

The proverbs that Hezekiah's men copied out have shown Solomon's wisdom at court and at home: the king who searches out a matter and removes the dross; the word fitly spoken and the faithful messenger; the enemy fed; the fool, the sluggard and the troublemaker in their portraits; the friend who sharpens and the flock that is tended; and the righteous and the wicked under rulers good and bad. The division began with the glory of God, who conceals, and the glory of kings, who search out (25:2); it ended with every man's judgment coming from Jehovah (29:26). The men who copied these words served a king who sought to restore the worship of Jehovah, and they kept for every later generation the counsel Solomon gave his own.

Division 5 — The Words of Agur, and of Lemuel (30:1–31:31)

A. What this division is about

The book closes with the words of two men named nowhere else in Scripture: Agur the son of Jakeh (30:1), and King Lemuel, who passes on "the prophecy that his mother taught him" (31:1). With them the book returns to where it began: personal instruction, spoken to a son, with a mother's teaching at its heart (1:8; 31:1). And it ends with a portrait of the virtuous woman (31:10–31), an alphabet poem from *aleph* to *tav*, whose last word of praise is the book's first word of wisdom: she "feareth the LORD [Jehovah]" (31:30; 1:7).

B. Its structure

This outline is the study's own.

- A | 30:1–9. Agur's confession, his question, and his prayer.
- B | 30:10–33. Agur's sayings, most of them numbered: "three things . . . yea, four."
- *A* | 31:1–9. Lemuel's mother's counsel to a king.
- *B* | 31:10–31. The virtuous woman: an alphabet poem.

C. Who were Agur and Lemuel?

Nothing is known of Agur or of Jakeh, his father, beyond these verses. The word translated "the prophecy" in both headings (30:1; 31:1) is *hammassa'*, "the burden," the word used of a prophet's oracle (Isa. 13:1). It may also be read as a place name, "of Massa," the name of one of the sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:14), whose tribe lived in northern Arabia; then Agur and Lemuel would be wise men from outside Israel, as Job was. Jewish tradition took "Lemuel," which means "belonging to God," to be another name for Solomon, as "Jedidiah" was (2 Sam. 12:25), and his mother to be Bathsheba. This cannot be proved, and the study does not rest anything on it. But the counsel of Lemuel's mother, against giving his strength to women and to wine (31:3, 4), is exactly the counsel Solomon most needed, and did not keep (1 Kings 11:1–4). (See Appendix F, Question 12.)

Proverbs 30 — The Words of Agur

Place: Division 5; members A (30:1–9) and B (30:10–33). **Writer:** Agur the son of Jakeh.

Introduction

Agur begins where every wise man must begin: by confessing that he does not know (vv. 2, 3). He asks the great questions of creation: who has gone up to heaven and come down, who holds the wind and the waters, what is his name, and what is his son's name? (v. 4). He answers with the one thing he is sure of: "Every word of God is pure" (v. 5). He prays a short, wise prayer: neither poverty nor riches, but daily bread (vv. 7–9). Then he looks at the world and sorts it into numbered groups: four kinds of wicked men, four things never satisfied, four things too wonderful, four things the earth cannot bear, four little things that are wise, four things stately in their going (vv. 11–31). He ends with a warning to put a hand over the mouth (vv. 32, 33).

The runs

This outline is the study's own.

- 1–6. Agur's confession, his question, and the pure word of God.
- 7–9. Agur's prayer.
- 10–14. The slanderer, and four kinds of wicked men.
- 15–17. The leech's daughters; four things never satisfied; the eye that mocks a father.
- 18–20. Four ways that leave no trace; the adulterous woman.
- 21–23. Four things the earth cannot bear.
- 24–28. Four little things that are wise.
- 29–31. Four things stately in going.
- 32, 33. Lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

The Text

> **30:1** *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,*
>
> **30:2** *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.*
>
> **30:3** *I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.*
>
> **30:4** *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?*
>
> **30:5** *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.*
>
> **30:6** *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

30:7 *Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die:*

30:8 *Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:*

30:9 *Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD [Jehovah]? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

30:10 *Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.*

30:11 *There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.*

30:12 *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.*

30:13 *There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.*

30:14 *There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor [ani] from off the earth, and the needy [evyon] from among men.*

30:15 *The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough:*

30:16 *The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.*

30:17 *The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.*

30:18 *There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:*

30:19 *The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.*

30:20 *Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.*

30:21 *For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:*

30:22 *For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool [nabal] when he is filled with meat;*

30:23 *For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*

30:24 *There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:*

30:25 *The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;*

30:26 *The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;*

30:27 *The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;*

30:28 *The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.*

30:29 *There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going:*

30:30 *A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any;*

30:31 *A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.*

30:32 *If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.*

30:33 *Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.*

Verse by verse

> **30:1** *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,*

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh. A new writer. *Agur* may mean "gathered," "collector"; *Jakeh*, "obedient."

even the prophecy. Hebrew *hammassa'*, the burden, the oracle; or "of Massa" (see the introduction to this division).

the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal. Hebrew *ne'um haggever*, "the oracle of the man," the phrase used of Balaam (Num. 24:3) and of David's last words (2 Sam. 23:1). Ithiel and Ucal may be the names of Agur's pupils or sons. The same letters, divided differently, can be read, "I have wearied myself, O God; I have wearied myself, O God, and I am consumed": the cry of a man who has searched for God and come to the end of his own strength. The next verses fit that reading well; both readings are possible.

> **30:2** *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.*

Surely I am more brutish than any man. Hebrew *ba'ar*, stupid as a beast (12:1). Agur does not say it to be modest; he says it because he has seen how little he knows before God.

and have not the understanding of a man. Hebrew *binath adam*. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Ps. 73:22). It is the very opposite of the scorner, who thinks he knows everything (21:24), and of the man wise in his own conceit (26:12).

> **30:3** *I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.*

I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Hebrew *da'ath qedoshim*, the knowledge of the Holy One (9:10). Human wisdom cannot reach God. What can be known of Him must be given (2:6).

> **30:4** *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?*

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who has gone up to heaven to learn its secrets, and come down to tell them?

who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? Four questions (the figure *Erotesis*), like the questions Jehovah asked Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Or who shut up the sea with doors?" (Job 38:4, 8). "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span?" (Isa. 40:12). The answer is that no man has done these things; only God has.

what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? If one has done these things, who is he? Agur's answer is the next verse: God, whom we know only by His word. "His son's name" was a

question Agur could not fully answer. Israel was called God's son (Ex. 4:22, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn"; Hos. 11:1). The New Testament gives the full answer to the first question and the last. The one Man who has ascended into heaven is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom God raised from the dead and took up into heaven (Acts 1:9–11; Rom. 1:4): "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10), having first gone down "into the lower parts of the earth," into the grave (Eph. 4:9). He is the Son whose name Agur asked. He is not the God who gathered the wind; He is the Son of that God, "the man Christ Jesus," the one Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), raised and exalted to His right hand.

> **30:5** *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.*

Every word of God is pure. Hebrew *imrath Eloah*, every saying of God; *tseruphah*, refined, tested in the fire (17:3). There is no dross in it. "The words of the LORD [Jehovah] are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6). Agur does not know everything, but he knows that God's word is true.

he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Hebrew *magen*, a shield (2:7); *chosim*, those who take refuge. The words are nearly those of David: "the word of the LORD [Jehovah] is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him" (Ps. 18:30; 2 Sam. 22:31).

> **30:6** *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

Add thou not unto his words. God's word is complete as He gave it. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it" (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18).

lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. The man who adds to God's word puts his own words in God's mouth, and is a liar. This verse stands behind this whole study: its purpose is to give the sense of what is written, not to add to it (Neh. 8:8).

> **30:7** *Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die:*

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die. Agur turns to prayer, the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. He asks for two things, for the rest of his life.

> **30:8** *Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:*

Remove far from me vanity and lies. Hebrew *shav'*, emptiness, falsehood; *devar kazav*, a lying word. First: keep me true. Let me neither deceive nor be deceived.

give me neither poverty nor riches. Hebrew *resh*, poverty (6:11). Second: keep me in the middle.

feed me with food convenient for me. Hebrew *lechem chuqqi*, "the bread of my portion," my allotted bread, enough for each day. "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11).

> **30:9** *Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD [Jehovah]? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD [Jehovah]? The danger of riches is to forget God. Moses warned Israel: "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full . . . then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD [Jehovah] thy God" (Deut. 8:12–14). Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD [Jehovah], that I should obey his voice?" (Ex. 5:2).

or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. Hebrew *taphasti*, I lay hold of it, profane it. The danger of poverty is to steal, and so dishonour God's name. Both dangers are real (6:30, 31). Agur asks to be spared both. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound" (Phil. 4:12).

> **30:10** *Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.*

Accuse not a servant unto his master. Hebrew *al-talshen*, do not slander, do not use your tongue against. Do not inform on a servant to his master; he is the weaker party. The Law protected the runaway slave: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee" (Deut. 23:15).

lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty. The wronged servant's curse will not be causeless (26:2), and you will bear the guilt.

> **30:11** *There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.*

There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. Hebrew *dor*, a generation, a class, a kind of people. Four "generations" follow, four kinds of wicked men (vv. 11–14). The first despises its parents (20:20).

> **30:12** *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.*

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes. The second thinks itself clean (16:2; 20:9).

and yet is not washed from their filthiness. Hebrew *tso'ah*, filth, excrement: a deliberately crude word. They think they are clean, and they are covered in dung. The Lord said to the Pharisees, "ye make clean the outside of the cup . . . but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. 23:25).

> **30:13** *There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.*

There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. The third is proud. The proud look heads the seven things Jehovah hates (6:17).

> **30:14** *There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor [ani] from off the earth, and the needy [evyon] from among men.*

There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives. The fourth is cruel. Their mouths are weapons.

to devour the poor [ani] from off the earth, and the needy [evyon] from among men. The poor man bowed down by affliction, and the destitute man who must beg (Part One, Chapter 5). They eat them

up. Paul describes the last days in the same terms: men "disobedient to parents . . . proud . . . without natural affection" (2 Tim. 3:2, 3).

> **30:15** *The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough:*

The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. Hebrew *'aluqah*, a leech. A leech has two suckers, and both are always drawing blood: its "daughters," always crying "Give, give" (*hav hav*). The picture of endless greed.

There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough. A numbered saying (Part One, Chapter 6): three, and then a fourth to complete the list.

> **30:16** *The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.*

The grave. Hebrew *sheol*. Death is never full (27:20).

and the barren womb. Hebrew *'otser racham*, the closed womb. Rachel said, "Give me children, or else I die" (Gen. 30:1).

the earth that is not filled with water. Dry ground drinks every drop and still thirsts.

and the fire that saith not, It is enough. Fire consumes all it is given and wants more. Four pictures of desire that never ends: death, longing, thirst and fire.

> **30:17** *The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.*

The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother. Hebrew *til'ag*, it mocks; *liqqahath em*, the obedience due a mother (the word is used in Gen. 49:10, "unto him shall the gathering [obedience] of the people be").

the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. Hebrew *bene nesher*, young vultures. He will die a shameful death, his body left unburied for the birds (1 Kings 14:11; Jer. 22:19). The eye that looked down on his parents will be the first part the birds take. The verse returns to the first "generation" (v. 11), and stands between two numbered sayings to show that greed and contempt for parents are kin.

> **30:18** *There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:*

There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not. Agur, who confessed that he did not know (vv. 2, 3), names four things that amaze him.

> **30:19** *The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.*

The way of an eagle in the air. It flies, and leaves no trail.

the way of a serpent upon a rock. It glides over stone, and leaves no track.

the way of a ship in the midst of the sea. It sails, and the water closes behind it.

and the way of a man with a maid. Hebrew *'almah*, a young woman of marriageable age. The way love draws a man and a young woman together is as mysterious as the others, and leaves no visible path. The four are wonderful because each moves surely and leaves no trace.

> **30:20** *Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.*

Such is the way of an adulterous woman. The fifth way, set beside the four: it too leaves no trace, and that is what makes it terrible.

she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. Hebrew *awen*, iniquity. "Eateth" is a modest figure (the figure *Euphemism*) for her sin. She wipes her mouth like a woman after a meal and says she has done nothing. The wonder of the man and the maid (v. 19), turned into something shameless. The strange woman of chapters 2 to 9 appears one last time.

> **30:21** *For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:*

For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear. Hebrew *ragezah*, it trembles, quakes. Four things turn the world upside down.

> **30:22** *For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool [nabal] when he is filled with meat;*

For a servant when he reigneth. A slave who becomes king without fitness for it rules as a slave would: harshly, greedily, unsure of himself (19:10; Eccl. 10:7).

and a fool [nabal] when he is filled with meat. The churl: coarse, godless, without shame (Part One, Chapter 5). When he has plenty to eat, his churlishness has no check. Nabal held "a feast in his house, like the feast of a king," and was "very drunken," the night after he insulted David (1 Sam. 25:36).

> **30:23** *For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*

For an odious woman when she is married. Hebrew *senu'ah*, a hated, unloved woman. The word is used of Leah: "the LORD [Jehovah] saw that Leah was hated" (Gen. 29:31). A woman unloved, once married, may take out her bitterness on the whole household.

and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress. A servant girl who takes her mistress's place. When Hagar conceived, "her mistress was despised in her eyes" (Gen. 16:4, 5). These four overturn the right order of things: servant over master, fool in plenty, the unloved wife and the servant girl in the mistress's place.

> **30:24** *There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:*

There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise. Hebrew *chakhamim mechukkamim*, "wise, made wise": wise by instinct, taught by their Maker. Four small creatures teach what strength cannot.

> **30:25** *The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;*

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer. The lesson of 6:6–8: foresight.

> **30:26** *The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;*

The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks. Hebrew *shephannim*, the rock hyrax, a small furry animal of the rocky hillsides of Israel. "The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies" (Ps. 104:18). The lesson: the weak are safe when they take refuge in the rock. "The LORD [Jehovah] is my rock" (Ps. 18:2).

> **30:27** *The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;*

The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands. Hebrew *chotsets*, divided into ranks. Locusts move like an army in perfect order, with no commander. "They shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks" (Joel 2:7). The lesson: order and unity.

> **30:28** *The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.*

The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces. Hebrew *semamith*, which most now take to be the gecko or lizard, as the Revised Version renders it. It clings to the wall with its feet, and climbs into the palaces of kings. The lesson: persistence. Something small that holds on can go where great men go. Four lessons in four small creatures: foresight, refuge, order, and persistence.

> **30:29** *There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going:*

There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going. Four things with a stately walk.

> **30:30** *A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any;*

A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any. Hebrew *layish*, a lion; *gibbor*, the mighty one. It does not turn aside for anything.

> **30:31** *A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.*

A greyhound. Hebrew *zarzir mothnayim*, "girded in the loins." The animal is uncertain: a greyhound, a war-horse, or (as the Greek has it) a strutting cock.

an he goat also. Hebrew *tayish*, the he-goat that leads the flock.

and a king, against whom there is no rising up. Hebrew *'alqum*, which may mean "with his army about him," or "against whom none rises." The king in his strength walks with the same assurance as the lion, the strutting creature and the lead goat. The four are pictures of a confident and stately bearing; the next verses warn against the false kind.

> **30:32** *If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.*

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself. Hebrew *navalta*, you have acted the [nabal], the churl. Lifting oneself up, strutting like the lion and the king without the right to it, is folly.

or if thou hast thought evil. Hebrew *zammotha*, you have plotted (the root of [mezimmah]).

lay thine hand upon thy mouth. Stop. Say nothing more. Job, when God had spoken, said, "Behold, I am vile . . . I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (Job 40:4).

> **30:33** *Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.*

Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter. Hebrew *mits*, pressing, squeezing. Press milk, and you get butter.

and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood. *Mits* again. Squeeze a nose, and it bleeds.

so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife. *Mits* a third time; and "wrath" is *appayim*, which also means "nostrils." The verse is a triple play on words (*Paronomasia*): press milk, press the nose (*aph*), press anger (*aph*), and out comes butter, blood and strife. Agur's words end with the same lesson as so many of Solomon's: stop pressing, keep quiet, let the quarrel die (17:14; 26:20).

Looking back

Agur has given the book a humble ending to its sayings. He knows he does not know; he knows God's word is pure and must not be added to; he prays to be kept from falsehood and from both riches and poverty. He has looked at the world with wonder: at greed that is never filled, at the mysteries of flight and love, at the order that the smallest creatures keep. And he has ended with a hand over the mouth. The wisest of men begin by confessing that they are not wise.

Proverbs 31 — The Words of King Lemuel

Place: Division 5; members *A* (31:1–9) and *B* (31:10–31). **Writer:** King Lemuel, recording what his mother taught him.

Introduction

The last chapter of the book is a mother's teaching, as the first discourse was a father's and a mother's (1:8). Lemuel's mother gives her son, a king, three charges: do not give your strength to women (v. 3); do not drink wine, lest you forget the law and pervert justice (vv. 4–7); and open your mouth for those who cannot speak for themselves (vv. 8, 9). Then comes the poem of the virtuous woman (vv. 10–31), twenty-two verses, each beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Whether the poem is part of the mother's teaching or a separate piece, it stands where it does as her answer to her own warning: not the women who destroy kings, but the woman worth more than rubies.

Structure

The structure of the poem (vv. 10–31) is the alphabet itself, from *aleph* to *tav*. Each letter is named at the head of its verse in the commentary. Within it, this study observes three movements:

- 10–12. Her worth, and her husband's trust in her.
- 13–27. Her work: at home and in the market, early and late, for her household, for the poor, and with her mouth.
- 28–31. Her praise: from her children, from her husband, and in the gates.

The Text

> **31:1** *The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.*
>
> **31:2** *What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?*
>
> **31:3** *Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.*
>
> **31:4** *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:*
>
> **31:5** *Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*
>
> **31:6** *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.*
>
> **31:7** *Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*
>
> **31:8** *Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.*
>
> **31:9** *Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor [ani] and needy [evyon].*
>
> **31:10** *Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*
>
> **31:11** *The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.*
>
> **31:12** *She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.*
>
> **31:13** *She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*

31:14 *She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.*

31:15 *She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.*

31:16 *She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.*

31:17 *She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.*

31:18 *She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.*

31:19 *She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.*

31:20 *She stretcheth out her hand to the poor [ani]; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy [evyon].*

31:21 *She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.*

31:22 *She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.*

31:23 *Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.*

31:24 *She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.*

31:25 *Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.*

31:26 *She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*

31:27 *She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*

31:28 *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

31:29 *Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.*

31:30 *Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD [Jehovah], she shall be praised.*

31:31 *Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.*

Verse by verse

31:1 *The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.*

The words of king Lemuel. *Lemuel*, "belonging to God" (see the introduction to this division).

the prophecy that his mother taught him. Hebrew *massa'*, oracle, or "of Massa" (30:1); *yisserattu*, she instructed him, corrected him: the verb of *musar*. The book that began with "forsake not the law of thy mother" (1:8) ends with a mother's law.

31:2 *What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?*

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? Hebrew *beri*, "my son," using the Aramaic word *bar*. "What" is a cry of deep feeling: "What shall I say to you, my son?" The repetition (the figure *Epizeuxis* with variation) shows her love.

and what, the son of my vows? He was the son she had prayed for and vowed to God, as Hannah vowed Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11). A child given by God and given back to Him.

31:3 *Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.*

Give not thy strength unto women. Hebrew *cheylekha*, your strength, vigour, wealth.

nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. Hebrew *lamchoth melakhin*, to those who wipe out kings. The law of the king: "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut. 17:17). Solomon "had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:3).

> **31:4** *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:*

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine. The repetition presses the point. A king's mind must be clear.

nor for princes strong drink. Hebrew *rozenim*, rulers (8:15); *shekhar* (20:1). "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when . . . thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" (Eccl. 10:16, 17).

> **31:5** *Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

Lest they drink, and forget the law. Hebrew *mechuqqaq*, what is decreed, the statute. Drink makes a ruler forget what he is bound to uphold.

and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Hebrew *bene 'oni*, the sons of affliction. A drunken judge wrongs the very people who most need justice. "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine . . . Which justify the wicked for reward" (Isa. 5:22, 23). Belshazzar drank from the vessels of the temple on the night his kingdom fell (Dan. 5:1–4, 30).

> **31:6** *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.*

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish. Hebrew *oved*, the perishing, the dying. Wine has its place: not to dull a king's judgment, but to ease a dying man's pain.

and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Hebrew *mare nephesh*, the bitter of soul. It was the custom, drawn from this verse, for women of Jerusalem to give drugged wine to men condemned to death; the Lord Jesus Christ was offered "wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not" (Mark 15:23).

> **31:7** *Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*

Let him drink, and forget his poverty. Hebrew *risho*, his want (the root of [rash]).

and remember his misery no more. Hebrew *'amalo*, his trouble. The verse is not a recommendation of drink as a cure for poverty. It sets the dying and the desperate against the king: wine may numb a man who has nothing left to lose, but it must never numb the man who must judge.

> **31:8** *Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.*

Open thy mouth for the dumb. Hebrew *'illem*, the speechless: those who cannot speak for themselves in court, through weakness, fear or ignorance.

in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Hebrew *bene chaloph*, "the sons of passing away": the dying, the defenceless, those about to be swept away. Speak for them (24:11, 12).

> **31:9** *Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor [ani] and needy [evyon].*

Open thy mouth, judge righteously. The second "open thy mouth." A king's mouth is for justice, not for wine.

and plead the cause of the poor [ani] and needy [evyon]. The poor man bowed down by affliction, and the destitute who must beg (Part One, Chapter 5). "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me . . . I was a father to the poor" (Job 29:14, 16). "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy" (Ps. 82:3). The mother's counsel ends where so many of the book's sayings end: with the poor, and the king who defends them (29:14).

> **31:10** *Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*

***Aleph.* Who can find a virtuous woman?** Hebrew *eshet chayil*, a woman of strength, of worth, of ability (12:4). *Chayil* is the word used of "mighty men of valour" (*gibbore chayil*): she is a woman of valour. Boaz said it of Ruth (Ruth 3:11). The question, like "a faithful man who can find?" (20:6), means that she is rare.

for her price is far above rubies. Hebrew *peninim*, the precious stones of 3:15 and 8:11, where Wisdom was "more precious than rubies." The virtuous woman is worth what Wisdom is worth. She is wisdom lived out in a home.

> **31:11** *The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.*

***Beth.* The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.** Hebrew *batach*, trust, rely on (3:5). He does not need to watch her or worry about her.

so that he shall have no need of spoil. Hebrew *shalal*, plunder, gain. He lacks nothing; she brings enough into the house.

> **31:12** *She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

***Gimel.* She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.** Not for a season, but all her life. The strange woman brings a man to bitterness at the end (5:4); this woman brings him good to the end.

> **31:13** *She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*

***Daleth.* She seeketh wool, and flax.** Hebrew *darash*, she seeks out, looks for. Wool for clothing, flax for linen: she finds the raw materials.

and worketh willingly with her hands. Hebrew *bechephets*, with delight. She enjoys her work. The sluggard's hands refuse to labour (21:25); hers delight in it.

> **31:14** *She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.*

***He.* She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.** Hebrew *oniyyoth socher*, trading ships. Solomon's ships brought gold and goods from far countries (1 Kings 9:26–28; 10:22). She shops widely and well, and brings home the best.

> **31:15** *She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.*

***Vav.* She riseth also while it is yet night.** She is up before dawn (contrast the sluggard, 6:9; 26:14).

and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. Hebrew *tereph*, food; *choq*, an allotted portion, the word of Agur's "food convenient for me" (30:8). She feeds her family and gives each servant her due.

> **31:16** *She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.*

***Zayin.* She considereth a field, and buyeth it.** Hebrew *zamemah*, she plans, considers: the verb from which [mezimmah], discretion, comes (1:4). She thinks before she buys.

with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. From what she has earned, she plants a vineyard that will bear for years.

> **31:17** *She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.*

***Cheth.* She girdeth her loins with strength.** Hebrew *chagrah*, she binds up, tucks her robe into her belt for work, as Elijah "girded up his loins" to run (1 Kings 18:46).

and strengtheneth her arms. She makes her arms strong by work.

> **31:18** *She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.*

***Teth.* She perceiveth that her merchandise is good.** Hebrew *ta'amah*, she tastes, she sees by experience. Her goods sell well, and she knows it.

her candle goeth not out by night. Hebrew *ner*, a lamp. Her lamp burns late as she works. It is also a sign: the lamp of the wicked is put out (13:9; 24:20); the lamp of her house keeps burning.

> **31:19** *She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.*

***Yod.* She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.** Hebrew *kishor*, the spindle-whorl; *pelekh*, the spindle. She spins thread herself.

> **31:20** *She stretcheth out her hand to the poor [ani]; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy [evyon].*

***Kaph.* She stretcheth out her hand to the poor [ani].** The poor man bowed down by affliction. The *kaph*, the open palm, is the very letter of this verse.

yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy [evyon]. The destitute who must beg. The hands that spin (v. 19) also give. She has a "bountiful eye" (22:9), and lends to Jehovah (19:17). She does what the king was charged to do (v. 9).

> **31:21** *She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.*

***Lamed.* She is not afraid of the snow for her household.** Snow falls in the hill country of Israel in winter.

for all her household are clothed with scarlet. Hebrew *shanim*, scarlet, wool dyed with the costly crimson dye, thick and warm. (The Greek reads *shenayim*, "double": they have double garments.) Either way, she has prepared for winter in summer, like the ant (6:8).

> **31:22** *She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.*

***Mem.* She maketh herself coverings of tapestry.** Hebrew *marvaddim*, coverlets: the very word used of the strange woman, who "decked her bed with coverings of tapestry" (7:16). The strange woman spread her coverlets to trap a young man; the virtuous woman makes hers to furnish her home.

her clothing is silk and purple. Hebrew *shesh*, fine linen; *'argaman*, purple, the colour of kings. She dresses well, and has earned it.

> **31:23** *Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.*

***Nun.* Her husband is known in the gates.** He is respected in the city gate, where the council sits (1:21).

when he sitteth among the elders of the land. Her diligence frees him for public service, and her character adds to his honour: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" (12:4).

> **31:24** *She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.*

***Samekh.* She maketh fine linen, and selleth it.** Hebrew *sadin*, a linen garment.

and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Hebrew *chagor*, a sash; *kena'ani*, a Canaanite, the word used of a trader, since the Canaanites (Phoenicians) were the great merchants. She runs a business.

> **31:25** *Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.*

***Ayin.* Strength and honour are her clothing.** Hebrew *'oz* and *hadar*. Her real clothing is not the purple (v. 22) but her strength of character and her dignity.

and she shall rejoice in time to come. Hebrew *tischaq leyom acharon*, she laughs at the coming day. She is not afraid of the future; she has prepared for it. Wisdom laughed at the calamity of those who refused her (1:26); this woman laughs at the future because she has walked with wisdom.

> **31:26** *She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*

***Pe.* She openeth her mouth with wisdom.** *Chokmah*. The letter *pe* means "mouth," and this is the verse of her mouth.

and in her tongue is the law of kindness. Hebrew *torath chesed*, a teaching of loyal love. The book began with "the law of thy mother" (*torath immekha*, 1:8); it ends with a woman on whose tongue is "the law of kindness." She is the mother whose law her children are told not to forsake.

> **31:27** *She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*

***Tsade.* She looketh well to the ways of her household.** Hebrew *tsophiyyah*, watching, keeping watch, as a watchman watches a city. Her eyes are on everything in her home.

and eateth not the bread of idleness. Hebrew *'atsluth*, idleness, from the same root as [atsel], the sluggard. She is the sluggard's opposite in every way.

> **31:28** *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

***Qoph.* Her children arise up, and call her blessed.** Hebrew *ashsheruha*, they call her happy, from *ashre*, "O the happinesses" (3:13). Her children, grown, stand up to praise her.

her husband also, and he praiseth her. And he says the words of the next verse.

> **31:29** *Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.*

***Resh.* Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.** Hebrew *'asu chayil*, they have done worthily; *'alith 'al-kullanah*, you have risen above them all. The husband's praise: many women are good, and you are the best of them.

> **31:30** *Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD [Jehovah], she shall be praised.*

***Shin.* Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain.** Hebrew *chen*, charm; *sheqer*, deceit; *yophi*, beauty; *hevel*, vapour. Charm can deceive, and beauty fades like breath (11:22).

but a woman that feareth the LORD [Jehovah], she shall be praised. Here is the secret of all that has been said of her. Her skill, her diligence, her kindness, her wisdom grow from one root: the fear of Jehovah. The book began, "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7); its last word of praise is for a woman who fears Jehovah. Wisdom, which began in the fear of the LORD, ends there.

> **31:31** *Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.*

***Tav.* Give her of the fruit of her hands.** Let her enjoy what she has earned.

and let her own works praise her in the gates. Hebrew *ma'aseha*, her works. In the city gate, where Wisdom cried (1:21; 8:3) and where her husband sits (v. 23), her own works speak for her. "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth" (27:2): she does not need to praise herself; her works do it. The last letter of the alphabet closes the last verse of the book.

Looking back

Lemuel's mother has given her son, a king, the counsel the whole book has given: keep your strength from the women who destroy kings, keep your mind from the wine that makes judges forget the law, and open your mouth for those who cannot speak. Then she has painted, from *aleph* to *tav*, the woman who is everything the strange woman was not: trustworthy, diligent, generous, wise, kind, and fearing

Jehovah. The son of chapters 1 to 9 was told to love Wisdom and embrace her as a bride (4:6–8). Here, at the end of the book, Wisdom is seen in the life of a real woman, in a real home.

Looking Back on Division 5

The book has ended as it began. Agur's confession, "I neither learned wisdom," and his trust in the pure word of God (30:3, 5) echo the book's first lesson, that wisdom is given by God (2:6). Lemuel's mother's charge echoes the father's and mother's charge of chapters 1 to 9: beware of women and wine, keep the law, defend the poor. And the virtuous woman stands at the end as Wisdom's portrait in a human life, the answer to the strange woman, praised because she fears Jehovah.

Part Three — Closing

The thirty-one chapters have been presented, one by one. Part Three closes the study with a Conclusion and a chapter called *What We Have Learned*, which gathers the findings by subject and points back to the verses where each is found. The appendices and the Subject Index follow.

Conclusion

The Book of Proverbs begins with a father and a son. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (1:8). It ends with a mother and a son, and with a woman who has "the law of kindness" on her tongue (31:1, 26). Between those two homes lie nine hundred and fifteen verses, and every one of them, in the end, is a father's word to a son who must choose how he will live.

The book has shown the son what wisdom is. It is not cleverness, nor learning for its own sake, nor success. It is skill for living in the world God made, and it begins in one place only: "The fear of the LORD [Jehovah] is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). That sentence stands at the head of the book, comes back at the end of the first division (9:10), and is the last word of praise for the virtuous woman (31:30). Every saying in between is that fear worked out in daily life: in the market with honest weights, at home with a quiet tongue and a firm hand, in the gate with justice for the poor, at the table with a guarded appetite, in friendship with faithful wounds, and before the king with humility.

The book has shown the son where wisdom comes from. He must seek it as silver and search for it as hidden treasure (2:4); but "the LORD [Jehovah] giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (2:6). It is the very wisdom by which Jehovah founded the earth (3:19), pictured as a woman who was with Him before the world was made and who delights in the sons of men (8:22–31). The man who finds her finds life (8:35). And Agur, at the end, confesses that he never learned it by his own power, and rests on this alone: "Every word of God is pure" (30:5).

The book has shown the son two ways and two ends. On one road walk the wise, the righteous, the diligent, the humble, the truthful, the generous; their path is "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (4:18), and it has no death in it (12:28). On the other walk the simple who will not learn, the fool settled in his folly, the scorner who mocks correction, the sluggard, the liar, the oppressor, the proud; their way "seemeth right," but "the end thereof are the ways of death" (14:12). The strange woman and Folly call from the second road with words that sound like Wisdom's (9:4, 16). The son must learn to tell them apart.

The book was written to Israel under the Law, and its promises of long life, riches and honour are the blessings of that covenant (Part One, Chapter 3). But it was written also for our learning. Its wisdom about God, about the heart and the tongue, work and wealth, anger and pride, friendship and marriage, the poor and the powerful, holds in every age, and the New Testament quotes it to believers again and again. And it points beyond itself. The book asked, "What is his son's name?" (30:4). The New Testament answers: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, raised from the dead and ascended to God's right hand, "who of God is made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30), "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

"Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth?" (22:20, 21). That is what the book was written to do, and it is what this

study has tried to serve: to read the book distinctly, to give the sense, and to cause the reader to understand.

What We Have Learned

This chapter gathers the findings of the study by subject. The references point back to the verses where each is presented; the commentary on those verses gives the full treatment.

A. About the book

- The book has five divisions, marked by its own headings: Solomon to his son (1–9); the proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16); the words of the wise (22:17–24:34); the proverbs of Solomon copied by Hezekiah's men (25–29); and the words of Agur and Lemuel (30–31). Part One, Chapter 4.
- "The proverbs of Solomon" means proverbs by Solomon; chapters 1 to 9 are Solomon's own words to his son, passing on David's teaching (4:3–5). Part One, Chapter 2; Appendix F, Question 1.
- A proverb states the rule, not a promise for every case; 22:6 is the best-known example, and 26:4, 5 shows that a proverb needs wisdom to use. Part One, Chapter 1.
- The words of the wise (22:17–24:34) are other men's sayings gathered into the book. Some resemble the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*; whether by borrowing or common source cannot be proved; in Scripture they are set under Jehovah and His Law, "that thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]" (22:19). Division 3, C; Appendix F, Question 11.
- In several places the King James Version departs from the Hebrew, and the study follows the Hebrew: 16:1; 18:1; 18:24; 19:18; 19:24; 21:4; 25:23; 26:10; 29:18. Appendix F, Questions 9, 10, 13.

B. About God

- Jehovah is the One whose fear is the beginning of knowledge (1:7; 9:10; 15:33; 31:30), the fourteen times the phrase is used being listed at 1:7.
- He gives wisdom (2:6), and made the world by it (3:19, 20; 8:22–31).
- He sees everywhere, even the grave (15:3, 11), weighs the spirits and the hearts (16:2; 21:2; 24:12), and searches a man's inmost parts by the lamp of his own spirit (20:27).
- He has the last word over men's plans and steps (16:1, 9; 19:21; 20:24), over the lot (16:33), over kings' hearts (21:1), and over every battle (21:31). No counsel can stand against Him (21:30).
- He hates the seven things of 6:16–19, the false balance (11:1; 20:10, 23), lying lips (12:22), the sacrifice of the wicked (15:8; 21:27), and the proud heart (16:5).
- He is the Maker of rich and poor alike (14:31; 17:5; 22:2), the advocate of the poor (22:23), and the Redeemer of the fatherless (23:11). To give to the poor is to lend to Him (19:17).
- His Name is a strong tower (18:10), and every word of His is pure (30:5).

C. About wisdom and folly

- Wisdom is skill for living; the words for it are set out in Part One, Chapter 5, and every occurrence of the tagged words is listed in Appendix B.
- Wisdom is pictured as a woman who calls in the streets (1:20–33; 8:1–36) and builds her house (9:1–6). The figure is Personification; Wisdom is not a second Person beside God. 8:22; Appendix F, Question 3.
- The fools form a ladder from the simple, who can still be taught, to the scorner, who will not be (1:22; Part One, Chapter 5). The simple believes every word (14:15); the fool vents his whole mind (29:11); the scorner hates correction (9:7, 8; 15:12); there is more hope for a fool than for a man wise in his own conceit (26:12).
- The wise man hears counsel (12:15; 13:10; 19:20), loves correction (12:1; 15:31, 32), and grows wiser (1:5; 9:9).

D. About the heart and the tongue

- Keep the heart above all else, for out of it are the issues of life (4:23).
- No man can say he has made his heart clean (20:9); every man shows his heart by his deeds (20:11).
- Death and life are in the power of the tongue (18:21): a soft answer turns away wrath (15:1); a wholesome tongue is a tree of life (15:4); a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold (25:11); in the multitude of words there wants not sin (10:19); he that keeps his mouth keeps his life (13:3; 21:23).
- Gossip parts friends and feeds strife (16:28; 18:8; 26:20–22); flattery works ruin (26:28; 29:5); open rebuke is better than secret love (27:5, 6).

E. About work and wealth

- The diligent hand makes rich; sloth brings poverty (10:4; 12:24; 13:4). The sluggard's portrait is drawn in 6:6–11; 19:24; 20:4; 22:13; 24:30–34; 26:13–16.
- Riches gotten quickly or dishonestly do not last (13:11; 20:21; 21:6; 28:20, 22); riches fly away like an eagle (23:5); they do not help in the day of wrath (11:4).
- Better a little with the fear of Jehovah, with righteousness, with love and with quiet (15:16, 17; 16:8; 17:1). A good name is better than riches (22:1).
- The liberal soul is made fat (11:24, 25); honour Jehovah with your substance (3:9, 10). Agur's prayer: neither poverty nor riches (30:8, 9).
- Do not become surety for another rashly (6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26, 27; 27:13). The borrower is servant to the lender (22:7).

F. About the poor

- The four words for the poor are set out in Part One, Chapter 5, and listed in Appendix B.
- To oppress the poor is to reproach their Maker; to have mercy on them honours Him (14:31; 17:5).
- He that has pity on the poor lends to Jehovah (19:17); he that stops his ears to their cry will not be heard (21:13).
- Kings and judges are to defend the poor (29:14; 31:8, 9), and the virtuous woman stretches out her hand to them (31:20).

G. About home and family

- A father and mother teach their children (1:8; 4:1–4; 6:20; 31:1). A wise son makes a glad father; a foolish son grieves his mother (10:1; 15:20; 17:21, 25; 23:15, 24, 25).
- Correction is love; the father who spares the rod hates his son (3:11, 12; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15, 17). Train up a child in the way he should go (22:6).
- A wife is a gift of Jehovah (18:22; 19:14); a virtuous woman is her husband's crown (12:4) and worth more than rubies (31:10–31). A contentious wife is a continual dropping (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15, 16).
- The strange woman, the woman outside a man's marriage, leads to death (2:16–19; 5; 6:24–35; 7; 22:14; 23:27, 28). Drink from thine own cistern (5:15–19). Appendix F, Question 2.
- Honour father and mother; cursing or robbing them brings judgment (19:26; 20:20; 28:24; 30:11, 17).

H. About friends and neighbours

- A friend loves at all times (17:17); there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother, where many companions bring ruin (18:24).
- Faithful are the wounds of a friend (27:6); iron sharpens iron (27:17); do not forsake your father's friend (27:10).
- Do not wear out your welcome (25:17). Settle a quarrel privately (25:8–10). Do not meddle in another man's strife (26:17).
- Feed your enemy (25:21, 22); do not rejoice when he falls (24:17, 18); leave vengeance to Jehovah (20:22; 24:29).

I. About anger, pride and humility

- He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city (16:32; 14:29; 19:11). A man without rule over his spirit is a city without walls (25:28).
- Pride goes before destruction (16:18; 11:2; 18:12; 29:23); before honour is humility (15:33; 18:12; 22:4).

- Envy is crueller than wrath (27:4); do not envy the wicked (3:31; 23:17; 24:1, 19).

J. About drink

- Wine is a mocker (20:1); the drunkard's portrait is drawn in 23:29–35; kings must not drink, lest they forget the law (31:4, 5).

K. About justice and rulers

- Honest weights and honest witnesses are Jehovah's delight; false ones His abomination (11:1; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9; 20:10, 23; 25:18).
- Do not show partiality in judgment (18:5; 24:23; 28:21), nor take a bribe (15:27; 17:23; 29:4).
- The king's throne is established by righteousness, mercy and justice to the poor (16:12; 20:28; 25:5; 29:14). When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, men hide (28:12, 28; 29:2).
- Rescue those who are drawn to death (24:11, 12); open your mouth for the dumb (31:8).
- Fear Jehovah and the king; do not join rebels (24:21, 22).

L. About death and hope

- Sheol is the grave; the dead (*rephaim*) are in it (2:18; 9:18; 15:11; 21:16; 27:20). The strange woman's house and Folly's lead there (5:5; 7:27; 9:18).
- The way of righteousness has no death in it (12:28), and the righteous has hope in his death (14:32): the hope of the resurrection, not of going to heaven at death. Appendix F, Question 7.
- The righteous man's hope will not be cut off (23:18; 24:14); the wicked man's lamp will be put out (13:9; 24:20).

Appendix A — The Proverbs by Subject

The single sayings of the book are not arranged by subject. This index gathers them. It lists the chief verses on each subject; it is not exhaustive.

Subject	Verses
The fear of Jehovah	1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2, 26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 28:14; 31:30
Trust in Jehovah	3:5, 6, 26; 16:3, 20; 18:10; 20:22; 22:19; 28:25; 29:25; 30:5
Jehovah's rule and knowledge	15:3, 11; 16:1, 2, 4, 9, 33; 19:21; 20:12, 24, 27; 21:1, 2, 30, 31; 22:12; 24:12; 29:26
Wisdom: its worth and source	2:1–11; 3:13–20; 4:5–9; 8:1–36; 9:1–12; 16:16; 19:8; 23:23; 24:3–7, 13, 14
Correction and teaching	1:8, 23; 3:11, 12; 5:12, 13; 6:23; 9:7–9; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1, 18, 24; 15:5, 10, 12, 31, 32; 17:10; 19:18, 20, 25, 27; 22:6, 15; 23:13, 14; 25:12; 27:5, 6; 28:23; 29:1, 15, 17
The fool	1:7, 22, 32; 10:8, 14, 23; 12:15, 16, 23; 13:16, 19, 20; 14:7–9, 16; 15:2, 14; 17:10, 12, 16, 24, 28; 18:2, 6, 7; 20:3; 23:9; 26:1–12; 27:3, 22; 28:26; 29:9, 11, 20
The simple and the prudent	1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 6, 16; 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 19:25; 21:11; 22:3; 27:12
The scorner	1:22; 3:34; 9:7, 8, 12; 13:1; 14:6; 15:12; 19:25, 29; 21:11, 24; 22:10; 24:9; 29:8
The sluggard and diligence	6:6–11; 10:4, 5, 26; 12:11, 24, 27; 13:4; 14:23; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 20:4, 13; 21:5, 25, 26; 22:13, 29; 24:30–34; 26:13–16; 27:18, 23–27; 28:19; 31:13–27
The tongue and speech	4:24; 10:11–21, 31, 32; 11:9, 11–13; 12:6, 13–23, 25; 13:2, 3; 14:3, 23; 15:1, 2, 4, 7, 23, 28; 16:13, 21, 23, 24, 27–30; 17:7, 9, 20, 27, 28; 18:4, 6–8, 13, 20, 21; 20:15, 19; 21:23; 24:26; 25:11, 15, 23; 26:20–28; 29:11, 20
Lying and false witness	6:17, 19; 10:18; 12:17, 19, 22; 14:5, 25; 17:4; 19:5, 9, 28; 21:6, 28; 24:28; 25:18; 26:18, 19, 24–28; 30:8
Honesty in trade	11:1, 26; 16:11; 20:10, 14, 17, 23
Riches and poverty	3:9, 10; 10:2, 4, 15, 22; 11:4, 24–28; 13:7, 8, 11, 22; 14:20, 24; 15:6, 16, 17; 16:8, 16; 18:11, 23; 19:4, 6, 7; 20:21; 21:6, 17, 20; 22:1, 2, 7, 16; 23:4, 5; 27:24; 28:6, 8, 11, 20, 22; 30:8, 9
The poor	14:21, 31; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9, 16, 22, 23; 28:3, 8, 27; 29:7, 13, 14; 30:14; 31:8, 9, 20
Suretyship and debt	6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:7, 26, 27; 27:13
Gifts and bribes	15:27; 17:8, 23; 18:16; 19:6; 21:14; 29:4

Subject	Verses
Anger and patience	12:16; 14:17, 29; 15:1, 18; 16:14, 32; 19:11, 19; 22:24, 25; 25:15, 28; 27:3, 4; 29:8, 11, 22; 30:33
Pride and humility	3:34; 6:17; 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 15:25, 33; 16:5, 18, 19; 18:12; 21:4, 24; 22:4; 25:6, 7, 27; 26:12; 27:2; 29:23; 30:13, 32
Envy	3:31; 14:30; 23:17; 24:1, 19; 27:4
Strife and quarrels	3:30; 6:14, 19; 10:12; 15:18; 16:28; 17:1, 9, 14, 19; 18:6, 17–19; 20:3; 22:10; 25:8–10; 26:17, 20, 21; 29:22; 30:33
Friends and neighbours	3:27–29; 11:12, 13; 14:20, 21; 17:9, 17; 18:24; 19:4, 6, 7; 25:17; 27:5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 17
Enemies and revenge	16:7; 20:22; 24:17, 18, 29; 25:21, 22
Parents and children	1:8, 9; 4:1–4; 6:20–22; 10:1; 13:1, 24; 15:5, 20; 17:6, 21, 25; 19:13, 18, 26; 20:7, 20; 22:6, 15; 23:13–16, 22–25; 28:7, 24; 29:3, 15, 17; 30:11, 17; 31:28
Husband and wife	5:15–19; 12:4; 18:22; 19:13, 14; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15, 16; 31:10–31
The strange woman and adultery	2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:24–35; 7:5–27; 9:13–18; 22:14; 23:27, 28; 29:3; 30:20; 31:3
Wine and gluttony	20:1; 21:17; 23:1–3, 20, 21, 29–35; 31:4–7
The king and rulers	8:15, 16; 14:28, 35; 16:10–15; 19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1; 22:11, 29; 23:1–3; 24:21, 22; 25:2–7, 15; 28:2, 15, 16; 29:2, 4, 12, 14, 26; 31:3–9
Justice and the courts	17:15, 23, 26; 18:5, 17; 24:11, 12, 23–25; 28:5, 21; 29:7; 31:8, 9
Counsel and planning	11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 16:3, 9; 19:20, 21; 20:5, 18; 21:5; 24:6, 27; 27:1
Death, the grave and hope	1:12; 2:18, 19; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 10:2, 28; 11:7; 12:28; 14:12, 32; 15:11, 24; 21:16; 23:14, 18; 24:14, 20; 27:20; 30:16
The tree of life and the fountain of life	3:18; 10:11; 11:30; 13:12, 14; 14:27; 15:4; 16:22; 18:4

Appendix B — The Words for Wisdom, the Fool, and the Poor

Every occurrence of the tagged words, from the Hebrew text (Westminster Leningrad Codex, as tagged by the Open Scriptures Hebrew Bible). A verse is listed once even if the word occurs twice in it.

Word	Meaning	Times	Verses
[pethi]	the simple	15	1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 6, 16; 14:15, 18; 19:25; 21:11; 22:3; 27:12
[kesil]	fool (dull, self-satisfied)	49	1:22, 32; 3:35; 8:5; 10:1, 18, 23; 12:23; 13:16, 19, 20; 14:7, 8, 16, 24, 33; 15:2, 7, 14, 20; 17:10, 12, 16, 21, 24, 25; 18:2, 6, 7; 19:1, 10, 13, 29; 21:20; 23:9; 26:1, 3–12; 28:26; 29:11, 20
[ewil]	fool (folly in conduct)	19	1:7; 7:22; 10:8, 10, 14, 21; 11:29; 12:15, 16; 14:3, 9; 15:5; 16:22; 17:28; 20:3; 24:7; 27:3, 22; 29:9
[nabal]	fool (churl)	3	17:7, 21; 30:22
[lets]	scorner	14	1:22; 3:34; 9:7, 8; 13:1; 14:6; 15:12; 19:25, 29; 20:1; 21:11, 24; 22:10; 24:9
[atsel]	sluggard	14	6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13, 14, 15, 16
[ormah]	shrewdness, prudence	3	1:4; 8:5, 12
[mezimmah]	discretion; a plot	8	1:4; 2:11; 3:21; 5:2; 8:12; 12:2; 14:17; 24:8 (untagged in the text, "mischievous person")
[tushiyyah]	sound wisdom	4	2:7; 3:21; 8:14; 18:1
[sekel]	good understanding	6	3:4; 12:8; 13:15; 16:22; 19:11; 23:9
[arum]	the prudent	8	12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12
[dal]	the poor (weak, low)	15	10:15; 14:31; 19:4, 17; 21:13; 22:9, 16, 22; 28:3, 8, 11, 15; 29:7, 14
[ani]	the poor (afflicted)	8	3:34; 14:21; 15:15; 16:19; 22:22; 30:14; 31:9, 20

Word	Meaning	Times	Verses
[evyon]	the needy	4	14:31; 30:14; 31:9, 20
[rash]	the poor (in want)	16	10:4; 13:7, 8, 23; 14:20; 17:5; 18:23; 19:1, 7, 22; 22:2, 7; 28:3, 6, 27; 29:13

The untagged words for wisdom occur as follows: *chokmah*, "wisdom," 39 times (and the plural *chokmoth* 4 times: 1:20; 9:1; 14:1; 24:7); *binah*, "understanding," 14 times; *tebunah*, "understanding," 19 times; *musar*, "instruction," 30 times; *da'ath*, "knowledge," 40 times.

Appendix C — The Proverbs in the New Testament

Proverbs	New Testament	How it is used
1:16 "their feet run to evil"	Rom. 3:15	With Isa. 59:7, of the sinfulness of all men
3:7 "Be not wise in thine own eyes"	Rom. 12:16	To believers: "Be not wise in your own conceits"
3:11, 12 "My son, despise not the chastening"	Heb. 12:5, 6; compare Rev. 3:19	God's discipline as proof of sonship
3:34 "he giveth grace unto the lowly"	Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5	From the Greek: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"
4:26 "Ponder the path of thy feet"	Heb. 12:13	From the Greek: "make straight paths for your feet"
10:12 "love covereth all sins"	1 Pet. 4:8; compare Jas. 5:20	"charity shall cover the multitude of sins"
11:31 "the righteous shall be recompensed"	1 Pet. 4:18	From the Greek: "if the righteous scarcely be saved"
25:6, 7 "Come up hither"	Luke 14:8–11	The Lord's teaching on the lowest seat
25:21, 22 "If thine enemy be hungry"	Rom. 12:20	"overcome evil with good"
26:11 "As a dog returneth to his vomit"	2 Pet. 2:22	Of those who turn back from the way of righteousness
27:1 "Boast not thyself of to morrow"	Jas. 4:13–16	The same teaching, in other words

Appendix D — Repeated and Near-Repeated Proverbs

At its first occurrence a saying receives the full treatment; at its second, what differs is explained, and the reader is pointed back. These are the chief repeats.

First	Again	What is repeated
1:8	6:20	"forsake not the law of thy mother"
2:16	7:5	"from the stranger which flattereth with her words"
3:15	8:11	"more precious than rubies . . . not to be compared"
5:7	7:24	"Hear me now therefore, O ye children"
6:10, 11	24:33, 34	"Yet a little sleep . . . thy want as an armed man"
6:15	29:1	"suddenly . . . without remedy"
9:4	9:16	"Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither"
10:1	15:20	"A wise son maketh a glad father"
10:2	11:4	"righteousness delivereth from death"
10:6	10:11	"violence covereth the mouth of the wicked"
10:8	10:10	"a prating fool shall fall"
10:15	18:11	"The rich man's wealth is his strong city"
10:29	21:15	"destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity"
11:13	20:19	"a talebearer revealeth secrets"
11:14	24:6	"in the multitude of counsellors there is safety"
11:21	16:5	"though hand join in hand . . . not be unpunished"
12:11	28:19	"He that tilleth his land . . ."
13:9	24:20	"the lamp (candle) of the wicked shall be put out"
13:14	14:27	"a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death"
14:12	16:25	"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man"
15:8	21:27	"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination"

First	Again	What is repeated
15:33	18:12	"before honour is humility"
16:2	21:2	"the ways of a man . . . in his own eyes . . . the LORD weigheth"
17:3	27:21	"The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold"
18:8	26:22	"The words of a talebearer are as wounds"
19:1	28:6	"Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity"
19:5	19:9	"A false witness shall not be unpunished"
19:12	20:2	"as the roaring of a lion"
19:24	26:15	"The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom"
19:25	21:11	the scorner punished, the simple made wise
20:10	20:23	"Divers weights . . . abomination" (and 11:1)
20:16	27:13	"Take his garment that is surety for a stranger"
21:9	25:24	"better to dwell in a corner of the housetop" (and 21:19)
22:2	29:13	rich (or oppressor) and poor meet together
22:3	27:12	"A prudent man foreseeth the evil"
22:13	26:13	"There is a lion"
22:28	23:10	"Remove not the ancient (old) landmark"
23:18	24:14	"thine expectation shall not be cut off"
26:12	29:20	"there is more hope of a fool than of him"

Appendix E — The Proverbs and the Rest of Scripture

Some of the sayings of Proverbs are found, or echoed closely, elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Proverbs	Elsewhere	The shared saying
1:7; 9:10	Ps. 111:10; Job 28:28	The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom
3:11, 12	Job 5:17; Deut. 8:5	Despise not the chastening of the Almighty
3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4	Gen. 2:9; 3:22–24	The tree of life
3:19	Ps. 104:24; Jer. 10:12	Jehovah made the earth by wisdom
8:27–29	Job 38:8–11; Ps. 104:9	The sea given its bound
10:7	Ps. 112:6	The memory of the just
10:30; 2:21	Ps. 37:9, 11, 29	The righteous shall inherit the land
14:13	Eccl. 7:3–6	Sorrow in laughter
15:16; 16:8	Ps. 37:16	Better a little with righteousness
16:33	Num. 26:55; Josh. 18:10	The lot
21:31	Ps. 20:7; 33:17	The horse is a vain thing for safety
22:28; 23:10	Deut. 19:14; 27:17	Remove not the landmark
24:19	Ps. 37:1	Fret not because of evildoers
27:20	Eccl. 1:8	The eye is not satisfied
30:5	Ps. 18:30; 2 Sam. 22:31	Every word of God is pure; He is a shield
30:6	Deut. 4:2; 12:32	Add not to His words

Appendix F — Questions That Are Disputed

Where a verse or a passage has been read in more than one way, the commentary gives this study's answer plainly. Here each case is set out with the reasons on each side and the weight of the answer given.

1. "The proverbs of Solomon": by Solomon, or for Solomon? (1:1)

Answer: by Solomon. "The proverbs of Solomon" at 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1 names him as their writer, and chapters 1 to 9 are Solomon's own words to his son. The sections the book itself calls "the words of the wise" are 22:17–24:22 and 24:23–34 only. And the strange woman, whose warnings fill chapters 1 to 9, appears also in Solomon's own collection (22:14) and in the words of the wise (23:27, 28), so the warnings are not a mark of another hand.

Other reading: *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 74, by Dr. J. W. Thirtle) holds that chapters 1 to 9, 19:20–24:34 and 27:1–29:27 were written *for* Solomon by his teachers, to train him as a prince; that "the words of the wise" in 1:6 was wrongly made part of the title and was meant to head chapters 1 to 9; and that "father" and "son" in those chapters mean teacher and pupil.

What the other reading fairly says: (1) the change from "my son," "thou," to "he," "him" is real and marks different kinds of material; (2) "father" is used of a teacher (2 Kings 2:12) and "sons" of pupils (2 Kings 2:3); (3) the son speaks of "my teachers" (5:13); (4) the warnings of these chapters answer closely to the law of the king (Deut. 17:14–20), as if written to train a prince; (5) Solomon's own proverbs (10:1–22:16) say little of the strange woman, and his later life (1 Kings 11) shows that he did not keep these warnings.

The case for the answer: (1) The Hebrew words at 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1 are the same, *mishle Shelomoh*; *The Companion Bible* itself reads 10:1 and 25:1 as "by" Solomon, and the same words cannot change their meaning at 1:1. (2) No Hebrew manuscript and no ancient version moves "the words of the wise" out of 1:6, where it stands in its place among the things the book helps the reader to understand. (3) In 4:3–5 the speaker describes himself as "tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother," taught by his father, "Get wisdom." "Tender" (*rak*) is David's own word for Solomon (1 Chr. 22:5; 29:1); "beloved" fits the son whom Jehovah loved and named Jedidiah (2 Sam. 12:24, 25); and "Get wisdom" is what Solomon sought at Gibeon. The speaker is a father passing on his own father's teaching: Solomon. (4) "The law of thy mother" (1:8; 6:20) is a real mother's teaching; a teacher is not a mother. (5) "These are *also* proverbs of Solomon" (25:1) counts what went before as his. (6) The boundaries at 19:20 and 27:1 have no heading in the text; Dr. Thirtle himself wrote "or thereabouts." (7) The point about the strange woman does not need the "for" reading: the warnings are as solemn, and Solomon's failure as plain, if Solomon wrote them himself.

What is kept from the other reading: the real change of person; the training of a son who is to rule; the close match with Deuteronomy 17; and Solomon's own failure as a sober witness to the truth of his words.

Weight: strong.

2. The strange woman: an adulteress, or a foreign woman? (2:16–19; 5; 6:24–35; 7)

Answer: she is the woman outside the son's own marriage: chiefly the adulteress, another man's wife, and also the harlot (6:26), whether she was an Israelite or a foreigner. In 2:17, "the covenant of her God" is her marriage covenant made before God.

Other reading: *The Companion Bible* (Appendix 74) holds that she is always a foreign woman, a heathen; that "her God" in 2:17 means her own nation's god; and that the warnings are against marriage or alliance with the heathen, as in Deuteronomy 7:3, 4 and 1 Kings 11:1, 2.

What the other reading fairly says: the word *nokriyyah*, "stranger," often means a foreign woman, and it is the word used of Solomon's foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1); the Law warned that foreign wives would turn Israel's heart to other gods (Deut. 7:4); and the Hebrew *Eloheha* can be read "her gods."

The case for the answer: (1) She has a husband who has gone on a journey (7:19, 20) and is called "a man's wife" (6:26) and "thy neighbour's wife" (6:29). (2) "The guide of her youth" (2:17) is a husband (Jer. 3:4), and "the covenant" beside him is most naturally the marriage covenant, which Malachi calls "the wife of thy covenant," with Jehovah as its witness (Mal. 2:14). (3) She offers peace offerings and pays vows (7:14), the worship of Israel. (4) The word *zarah*, "strange," means one outside, not belonging, and is used of what is outside a man's own house (5:17, "strangers'"). (5) The cure offered is a man's own wife (5:15–20), which answers adultery, not intermarriage.

What is kept from the other reading: the warning certainly reached as far as the foreign women who turned Solomon's heart (1 Kings 11:1–4; Neh. 13:26), and the commentary notes this where it applies.

Weight: strong that she is the woman outside the son's marriage; the question of her nation is left open, because the text leaves it open.

3. Proverbs 8:22–31: Wisdom personified, or the Son before creation?

Answer: Wisdom is God's own wisdom, pictured as a woman by the figure *Prosopopoeia* (Personification). The passage says in a figure what 3:19 says plainly: "The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth." It does not describe a second Person existing with God before creation. Jesus Christ is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24) in that God's wisdom is shown and given in Him (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:3); He is the fulfilment of what Wisdom pictures.

Other reading: from early times many have read the passage as the Son of God speaking of His existence with the Father before the world. The Greek Old Testament rendered *qanah* (8:22) as "created," and in the fourth century Arius used it to argue that the Son was a creature, while his opponents argued that it referred to the Son's human nature; both sides took Wisdom to be the Son. *The Companion Bible*'s notes read the passage of Christ before creation, though its structure heads it "Wisdom personified."

What the other reading fairly says: New Testament passages speak of Christ in words like Wisdom's: "All things were made by him" (John 1:3); "by him were all things created" (Col. 1:16); "by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2). Wisdom here speaks as a person, of being "brought forth" and being "by him."

The case for the answer: (1) Wisdom is a woman throughout chapters 1 to 9: she cries in the street (1:20), is to be loved and embraced as a bride (4:6–8), called "my sister" (7:4), and builds a house with maidens (9:1–3). The Son is never pictured as a woman. (2) Folly, set against her, is also a woman (9:13); if Wisdom is a real Person, so is Folly. (3) Understanding (8:1; 7:4) and prudence (8:12) are personified alongside her in the same way. (4) The same chapters say plainly, without the figure, that wisdom is God's own: "The LORD [Jehovah] by wisdom hath founded the earth" (3:19). (5) The verb *qanah*, "possessed," is the verb of 4:5, 7, "Get wisdom": God *had* wisdom from the beginning; He was never without it. (6) The language of birth (*chul*, 8:24, 25) is used of the mountains and the earth too (Ps. 90:2); it is a picture of origin, not a statement of a birth. (7) The passage's own purpose is given in 8:32–36: because Wisdom is the wisdom by which God made the world, "whoso findeth me findeth life." It is written to make the son want wisdom, not to teach a doctrine of the Godhead. (8) The New Testament never calls Christ "Wisdom" as a name for a pre-existent Person; it says that He is made wisdom *unto us*, and that in Him wisdom's treasures are hid. On His own lips wisdom is still a woman: "wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. 11:19). The New Testament passages about creation are treated in this library's study *One God, One Mediator*.

Weight: strong.

4. Proverbs 5:14 — "I was almost in all evil"

Answer: "I came near to utter ruin, before the whole congregation": the man looks back on how close he came to public judgment, adultery being a crime judged before the congregation (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22).

Other reading: "I was almost given to every kind of sin": the one sin nearly led him into all the rest.

The case for the answer: the word *ra'* is used for calamity as well as for sin; and "in the midst of the congregation and assembly" points to a public outcome rather than a private progress in sin.

Weight: moderate. Both readings are possible, and both are true to life.

5. Proverbs 5:16 — "Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad"

Answer: a question: "Should thy fountains be scattered abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets?" The answer expected is "No."

Other reading: a blessing: let your springs (your children by your own wife) be many and spread abroad.

The case for the answer: the next verse says, "Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee" (5:17), which only follows if verse 16 warns against scattering. Hebrew often asks a question without a word to mark it.

Weight: moderate.

6. Who is "my son"?

Answer: Solomon's son, and through him every son who will hear. The son is not named.

Other reading: Rehoboam in particular, the only son of Solomon named in Scripture.

The case: Rehoboam was born a year before Solomon began to reign (1 Kings 14:21; 11:42), so he was a boy in his father's early years; his mother was an Ammonitess (1 Kings 14:21); and he later "forsook the counsel of the old men" (1 Kings 12:8). All of this fits. But the father also speaks to many sons ("ye children," 4:1; 5:7; 7:24), and the book never names the son.

Weight: light for Rehoboam in particular. The study does not rest anything on it.

7. Proverbs 12:28 and 14:32 — "No death," and "hope in his death"

Answer: the way of righteousness does not end in death (12:28), and the righteous man, though he dies, has a refuge in death (14:32): God, and the hope of the resurrection. Neither verse says that the righteous do not die, or that they go to heaven at death.

Other readings: (1) that 12:28 teaches that the righteous never truly die, or have immortality now; (2) in 14:32, the Greek Old Testament reads "in his integrity" instead of "in his death," and some prefer it; (3) in 12:28 the Greek reads "unto death," making the second line a contrast with the first.

The case for the answer: the book knows that the righteous die (14:32 itself), and Scripture places the hope of the dead in the resurrection (Job 19:25, 26; Dan. 12:2; Heb. 11:13, 35). The Hebrew text as it stands makes good sense in both verses, and "hope in his death" fits the many places where the righteous are said to trust God in the face of death (Ps. 16:10; 49:15). The Greek readings rest on small changes of letters (*motho/tummo*; *'al/'el*) and are not needed.

Weight: strong on the meaning; moderate on the exact wording of 14:32, where the Greek reading cannot be ruled out. The teaching does not depend on it.

8. Proverbs 16:4 — "Even the wicked for the day of evil"

Answer: Jehovah has made everything with its fitting end (*lamma'anehu*, "for its answer"), and the wicked man's fitting end is the day of calamity. The verse does not say that God made the wicked man wicked.

Other reading: that God created some men in order to be wicked and to be destroyed.

The case for the answer: "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29). The book everywhere holds men responsible for their own ways (1:29–31; 5:22; 19:3). The word *ma'aneh*, "answer," in the same chapter (16:1), supports the sense "its fitting end." The verse is about God's ordering of outcomes, not His causing of sin.

Weight: strong.

9. Proverbs 18:1 and 18:24 — where the King James Version departs from the Hebrew

Answer: 18:1 reads, "He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire, and breaketh out against all sound wisdom." 18:24 reads, "A man of many companions comes to ruin; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Other reading: the King James Version: in 18:1, a man who withdraws to seek wisdom; in 18:24, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly."

The case for the answer: in 18:1 the verb *yithgalla'* means "to break out" in a quarrel, as in 17:14 and 20:3. In 18:24 the words *ish re'im lehithro'ea'* mean "a man of companions is to be broken," a play on *re'im*, "companions," and *ra'a'*, "to break"; and the second line, "there is a friend," contrasts one true friend with many companions. The Revised Version and most later versions agree.

Weight: good. The King James Version's sayings are true in themselves, but the Hebrew says something different, and this study follows the Hebrew.

10. Proverbs 19:18 — "Let not thy soul spare for his crying"

Answer: the Hebrew reads, "and to his death set not thy soul": correct your son while there is hope, but do not set your heart on his destruction. The words limit correction (it is for his good, never in fury to harm him) and warn against neglect (an uncorrected son goes to ruin, 23:13, 14).

Other reading: the King James Version: do not hold back correction because the child cries.

The case for the answer: the Hebrew *hamitho* means "to cause him to die," not "his crying." The thought of discipline given for life, not for harm, agrees with 3:12, 13:24 and 23:13, 14, and with "provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4).

Weight: good on the wording; the two applications (limit and neglect) are both true, and the study gives both.

11. Proverbs 22:17–24:22 and the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*

Answer: some sayings in 22:17–24:22 resemble sayings in the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*. Whether the wise men of Israel knew that book, or both drew on sayings common in the ancient world, cannot be proved either way. In Scripture these are "the words of the wise," set under Jehovah and His

Law, "that thy trust may be in the LORD [Jehovah]" (22:19). The findings are set out in full in the introduction to Division 3.

Other reading: since Adolf Erman (1924), most scholars have held that the Hebrew writer borrowed from Amenemope, adapting about thirty of its chapters; some read 22:20 as "thirty sayings" to match Amenemope's thirty chapters.

What the other reading fairly says: (1) the parallels are real: the opening call to hear (22:17); not robbing the poor (22:22); not befriending the angry man (22:24); the landmark (22:28; 23:10); the skilled man before kings (22:29); the ruler's table (23:1–3); riches that fly away like a bird (23:5); (2) Amenemope is in thirty chapters, and the word in 22:20 may be read *sheloshim*, "thirty"; (3) the Egyptian book is generally dated earlier than Solomon.

The case for the answer: (1) The dating of Amenemope is disputed (from the thirteenth to the eleventh century B.C. and later), and is not secure enough to settle which came first; before Erman, some argued that Amenemope borrowed from Hebrew wisdom. (2) John Ruffle's careful study (1977) found the likeness real but loose: the order differs, the wording differs, many sayings in Proverbs have no parallel, and most of Amenemope has none in Proverbs; direct copying is not proved. (3) The landmark law was already Israel's (Deut. 19:14; 27:17), and the care of the poor and fatherless runs through the Law. (4) The book itself says these are other men's sayings (22:17; 24:23); God's Word may take up a true saying from anywhere, as Paul did (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), and what it does is set it under the true God. (5) The differences are decisive for meaning: Amenemope appeals to the gods of Egypt; Proverbs to Jehovah, the Redeemer (*go'el*) of the fatherless (23:11) and the advocate of the poor (22:23).

What is kept from the other reading: the parallels are real and are stated plainly, and the reading "thirty" in 22:20 is given its place (see 22:20).

Weight: good. That some sayings resemble Amenemope is certain; that Proverbs copied it is not proved; that Scripture sets them under Jehovah is plain.

12. Agur, Lemuel, and "the prophecy" (30:1; 31:1)

Answer: who Agur and Lemuel were is not known, and the study rests nothing on it. *Hammassa'* is read "the burden," the oracle, as the King James Version has it; the reading "of Massa" is also possible.

Other readings: (1) "of Massa": Agur and Lemuel were wise men of the Ishmaelite tribe of Massa (Gen. 25:14) in northern Arabia; (2) Jewish tradition: Lemuel ("belonging to God") and Agur ("gatherer") are names for Solomon, and Lemuel's mother is Bathsheba.

What the other readings fairly say: *massa'* is a place name in Genesis 25:14 and 1 Chronicles 1:30, and Job shows that God had worshippers outside Israel; Lemuel's mother's warnings against women and wine (31:3, 4) fit Solomon's own failing (1 Kings 11:1–4), as "Jedidiah" (2 Sam. 12:25) shows Solomon had another name.

The case for the answer: *hammassa'* in both headings has the article, "the burden," which is the normal way the word is used of a prophet's oracle (Isa. 13:1; Nah. 1:1; Zech. 9:1); a place name would not usually take it. The headings name Agur "the son of Jakeh" and Lemuel "king," and nothing in Scripture identifies either with Solomon. Where Scripture is silent, the study is silent.

Weight: fair on "the burden"; the identities are open.

13. Other places where the study follows the Hebrew

Answer: in each of these verses the commentary follows the Hebrew where the King James Version differs. The point is set out at the verse.

- 16:1: "To man belong the plans of the heart; but from Jehovah is the answer of the tongue" (as *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 75).
- 19:24: "The slothful hideth his hand in the dish" (Hebrew *tsallachath*, a dish, not "his bosom").
- 21:4: "the lamp (*nir*) of the wicked," read by the vowels as "the ploughing" in the King James Version.
- 25:23: "The north wind bringeth forth rain" (Hebrew *techolel*, brings forth), not "driveth away."
- 26:10: "As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by" (Revised Version); the word "God" is supplied by the translators.
- 29:18: "vision" is *chazon*, revelation from God, not a plan or goal; "perish" is *yippara'*, cast off restraint.
- 22:20: *shilshom*, "formerly" (Hebrew written text), read *shalishim*, "excellent things" (the King James Version), or *sheloshim*, "thirty sayings."

Weight: good in each case on the meaning of the Hebrew words; 26:10 is the hardest verse in the book, and there the weight is fair.

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