

### Proverbs

<sup>3</sup> To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; <sup>4</sup> To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, <sup>5</sup> A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, <sup>6</sup> To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles. <sup>7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

### Introduction

Most believers adhere to what is referenced as an absolute morality, which is a simple list of things such as adultery, cheating, murder, etc. However, it is not a list of “deeds” as the basis of the absolute morality but “God’s desires” as revealed in the Scriptures. “Good” and “evil” is only determined from the character of God. Loyalty to God’s desires is the only standard. The difference in killing every man, woman and child in Jericho as the judgment of God and killing one’s neighbor is that one is God’s desire and the other is man’s desire. Thus the same physical act is entirely different since Jericho was enacted because Israel loved God with all their heart. David’s killing of Uriah (2 Samuel 11) was against God’s desires and in accordance with David’s. This feeling that there is an absolute “good” and “evil” that runs apart from God is a serious error. It leads to the error of universalism, that somehow an unbeliever, who does not know Jesus as the Son of God, nor God His Father, can do some good deed.

Thus a believer being moral because it is the right thing is not the correct issue. He is moral because he is fulfilling God’s desires according to revelation, because His loyalty belongs to Jesus and the Father and He desires to do their will.

A believer today must walk according to God’s promise, which is “eternal life”. This is the ability to walk fully in a relationship with God in the present through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and the promise of a life in the kingdom. Thus the believer is to negate all things in this life, which are not part of his journey to fulfill God’s desires in the kingdom and represent Him now in a fallen and about to be judged, world.

The believer does not follow a moral or ethical code, but a Character, the Character of God revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ, imputed into the believer. Thus, we follow Jesus, a Man in whom is all our trust. Anything apart from that belief as the only source of everything, is sin. Both Romans and James reference this.

**Romans 14:23** <sup>23</sup> But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

**James 4:17** <sup>17</sup> Therefore, to one who knows *the* right (lit: “good”; καλόν) thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

## Wisdom Literature<sup>1</sup> & The Proverbs

### Introduction

The Book of Proverbs is best approached by reviewing the introductory chapters 1—9. Those comprise a complete literary unit that defines the characters, their motivations and their outcomes. It is the story of a wise (“godly”) father who instructs his naïve (“empty”) son to follow wisdom (“revelation”). The son is alternatively being drawn to the call of sinners, mockers and strange women to follow them and their human reasoning (“sensuous self-centered reasoning”). If he follows wisdom he will walk with God (“life”), but if he follows the lure of his senses (coveting), he will end up in league with Satan and death.

### **The Bookends, “The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom” (1:7, 9:10)**

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

(Proverbs 1:1-7)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

(Proverbs 9:10)

This foundational phrase marks out the beginning and ending thought in this prime section of 1—9. While “fear” is a good translation it can mean “respect” or “awe” but the basic meaning is that one stands back and realizes that the Lord is totally apart in absolute superiority from the observer in every category. He is more powerful, more awesome, and generally just beyond one’s comprehension. This brings “fear.”

Now in the case of the reader, it is a realization that God is truth and there is no other source of truth other than what is found in God’s character. This truth is “life,” the character of God. Without it he will find only death and judgment. Thus it is a fearful thing to realize that this God is all encompassing. He alone has the knowledge that will give this man “life.” He alone will bring ultimate judgment to anyone who does not embrace Him to give them the only access to “life.”

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<sup>1</sup> While most of the notes herein are from my own study, some of the thoughts and concepts come from Dr. Elliott Johnson in his course in Wisdom Literature at Dallas Theological Seminary.

## Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding

If one was to try to define this “life,” this character of God, it would be the words, “wisdom,” “knowledge,” “understanding.” But it is not man’s intelligent observations such as common sense as wisdom, but is the knowledge of YHWH’s character, His desires, His reasoning. In other words, the only thing that is anything is God’s character and man wants to know how God thinks and reasons. In other words, it is God’s value system, His righteousness which is His wisdom.

<sup>33</sup> "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Mat 6:33)

## “The Beginning of Wisdom”

In order to start, to approach, this process of obtaining wisdom, knowledge . . . life, one must recognize that God is the only source. Thus the observer will “value” God’s character above everything else. He will have no value on anything else. Thus, in today’s vernacular, the Scriptures are the only source of truth since they are the means by which God chose to reveal Himself.

Thus, by reverencing God as the only source and value man will begin the journey to obtaining that wisdom from God. This is the parallel to the point of salvation where man begins to reverence God in Jesus Christ. Here he must ask God for Jesus (wisdom incarnate) and he will be given Jesus.

Thus, having become saved, the man now should pursue the knowledge given through Jesus as if his life depended on it, because it does. Should he at any time feel that knowledge of God or any thing of value comes from anywhere other than God (human wisdom and any other sensuous and self-perceived sources), then he will lose what he had obtained from God. In other words, God is like pure gold. Once this gold becomes mixed with impurities, then you don’t have truth any longer. One has something, but it is not truth. Truth is 100% correct and if it has any fallible information with it, it is not truth. Thus, man must always get everything from the Scriptures as that is the only source of 100% truth.

<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

(James 1:5-8)

### The Use of Proverbs by the Unbeliever

The Book of Proverbs will not be useful for the unbeliever. Since he has not regarded YHWH as the only source, he can only perform the deeds found therein for his own glory. So while he may benefit in some secular sense, he cannot glorify YHWH (since He does not honor Him alone) and thus must glorify himself, the definition of self-glorification is sin.

An illustration of this would be the proverb of not being too often in your neighbor's house. In other words, it will behoove him to stay out of his neighbor's house too frequently.

Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Or he will become weary of you and hate you. (Proverbs 25:17)

Anyone with common sense would know that and certainly would gain from it. However, the secular reader has a different motivation. He listens to that proverb and since he wants his neighbor to like him (self-benefit), he does not want to seem as though he is being presumptuous with his neighbor's property. The believer however, since he seeks to glorify YHWH, does not bother his brother because he is looking out for his brother's benefit and thus shows up to his neighbor's house only when the neighbor needs him. This then glorifies YHWH as a sacrificial love on behalf of the believer for his neighbor that he does on behalf of YHWH.

### The Essence of Motivation

Throughout the text the author will continually say that wisdom (or the woman "wisdom") is the character of God. God does not only give it, He is the only source. Thus all glory must be given to Him. Now the difficulty is that if a man is self-centered (e.g., he wants to glorify himself), then these do not work. He will not understand why he should follow "wisdom" when it does not provide self-benefit. He will not understand how "wisdom" is its own reward (no visible success) when he can have outcome, e.g., the sensuous pleasures of the strange woman. Only if he recognizes that this woman "wisdom" has complete enjoyment in knowing that she is "life" will he recognize that the sensuous self-pleasures are not worth pursuing.

Let's say that another way. The way of wisdom is acting for God with neither visible nor immediate benefits. By contrast, the way of human wisdom is to insure success and self-benefit.

**In other words, with human reasoning, the actions are not important but the results. With wisdom the actions are important regardless of the results.**

Assume for a moment an example of a 15-year-old "naïve" young man. He has a choice between a vivacious, sexually willing young girl and the alternative of waiting, perhaps for years, perhaps forever, for the right Christian

girl. The father explains to him that walking with Jesus is much more valuable than the fun that the immediately available girl will give him.

Frequently the arguments that are used to convince the young man not to pursue the available girl are those of unwanted pregnancy, disease or psychological problems. Yet on closer examination these are secular arguments that are used for unbelievers. The motivation is self-centered with the implication that if one could only avoid these pitfalls then it would be permissible. And this is exactly what we have in America today. Since the pitfalls have been eliminated the “go” sign has been put out. Parents today now supply their children with the safeguards and send them off telling them to “be careful.” In other words, the way that parents try to counteract the seeming physical positives (easy pleasure) is to argue for the physical negatives (problems), or to try to provide physical security to keep them from the negatives while pursuing the seeming positive benefits.

While that is a logical secular argument it fails in that sense because what is wrong can be justified if one can eliminate the negatives (eliminate disease, pregnancy) and simply enjoy the positives (easy pleasure). And, since the judgment is totally based on self-benefit, one can justify almost anything as long as there is not a measureable negative downside. Thus, one can justify abortion, homosexuality, multiple wives, same-sex marriages, based on the argument that they are benefitting in a positive way (easy pleasure) above the negatives (disease, etc.).

However, Proverbs does not argue that the physical negatives outweigh the positives. He argues that walking with God is its own reward. It is life. It is beneficial by itself regardless of the physical outcome whether beneficial or lacking.

In other words, one can choose to walk with the God of the universe and please Him. Or one can reject Him for a moment’s pleasure and ego-building activity. But when he walks away from God, his pleasure will be short-lived (at least ending with this life) and he will stand alone.

### **The Essence of “Trusting” and the Resultant “Rewards”**

Trusting is the identification with the Lord and His benefits. Thus one identifies through belief in the character of God and approaches Him on His self-revealed basis. The question always is, what is the relationship between this identification (belief) and physical rewards.

### **The Purpose of Physical Benefits**

In the beginning God had created a physical universe, not to the end that one would glorify the universe itself, but that one would admire the Creator. Thus, the creation is established in order to manifest the glory of the Creator.

Nothing ever changes in that respect. Jesus said in Matthew 6, that man should seek first the “Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” This is that, as in the Lord’s Prayer, man prays that God’s holiness (“Our Father . . . holy is Thy Name”) would come to be represented on the earth (“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”)

The second part of the verse regarding the seeking of righteousness is that “all these things will be added unto you.” The “things” are exactly that . . . “things.” But again these things are given to glorify God through them. They are not given so that man may glorify himself apart from God, but they are to glorify the Giver.

## NOTES

### Background

#### Authorship

(See the Appendix for a full discussion of the authorship of Proverbs.)

#### Purpose

The purpose of Proverbs is stated in 1:1-6. "To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion . . ."

#### Date

The date of Solomon's proverbs would be during his reign, about 971-931 BC. The wise sayings of 22:17-24:34 are not clear as to date. The remainder of the proverbs were gathered together by Hezekiah from Solomon's writings. He reigned from 729-686 BC.

#### Structure

The structure of the book is to divide it by authorship.

Solomonic authorship:	1:1-22:16.
Instruction to the son:	1:8-9:18
Sayings of Solomon regarding righteous living: <sup>2</sup>	10:1-22:16
The sayings of wise men:	22:17-24:34.
Sayings of Solomon which Hezekiah transcribed:	25:1-29:27
Sayings of Agur:	30:1-33
Words of King Lemuel which his mother taught him:	31:1-31

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<sup>2</sup> These are a collection of sayings, which at least to this author, bear no structural markers, but are a miscellaneous collection. It should be noted that these appear to also be directed at the son (19:27)



## Commentary

### I. INTRODUCTION: The author identifies this collection. 1:1-7

The introduction contains the identification of the author and his purpose (refer to the purpose section). The beginning of all knowledge is the fear<sup>3</sup> of the LORD.

### II. Instruction to the son. 1:8-9:18.

The first one-half of the initial collection by Solomon is sayings to his son, meant to educate him about life.

Listen to the father<sup>4</sup> regarding:

A. The offer of sinners versus the offer of the woman ‘Wisdom’. 1:8-33.

1. The offer of sinners.

- a. Take advantage of others in violent ways (1:11-12)
- b. Obtain immediate gratification (1:13)
- c. Always a concept of brotherhood, camaraderie (1:14)<sup>5</sup>
- d. Their end, though delayed, is doom.<sup>6</sup>

2. The offer of the woman ‘Wisdom’

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<sup>3</sup> Here ‘fear’ should be regarded as more than respect. It is defined in the Law. The best illustration of fearing the Lord is the instruction to Israel that they were to fear the Lord (cf. Deut. 6:13-15) instead of the people of the land, which they were conquering (7:17-24). Israel feared the Canaanites and would not enter because they were afraid they would die at their hands (Num. 13:31--14:4). Thus they chose to fear the people instead of the Lord. They feared the wrong one. Israel died at the hands of the Lord whom they did not fear (Num. 28:28-35). Note that the Messiah, the Great Davidic Warrior of Isaiah 11 “fears” YHWH (11:3).

<sup>4</sup> And mother (1:8-33, 6:20--7:27)

<sup>5</sup> Yet it escapes their notice their reasoning is contradictory; they are betraying others for their common (non-betrayal) gain, yet advocating that there is unity between themselves (non-betrayal) based on their commonality (non-betrayal of others).

<sup>6</sup> The concept of “losing one’s life” in Proverbs, means essentially to lose the ability to represent God. Thus he is caught up in a lie, unable to find the truth (the word of YHWH). He is thus unable to find life, which is found only in relationship with YHWH. However, there is also a parallel and related physical aspect to this, since James warns of this very thing (James 1:21, 5:20).

- a. Wisdom not only imparts words, but illuminates the hearer to their truth.
  - b. The offer is not forever, for the day will come (delay) when the rejector cannot find her. The ability to perceive is granted by wisdom and may be withdrawn.
  - c. It provides success, though its appearance may be delayed.
3. The reasoning of sinners:
- a. Based only on perceived (human reasoning) gain for self.
  - b. Its rewards are quick and physical (riches).
4. The reasoning of the woman, 'Wisdom'
- a. She calls out to the naive asking that they respond based on *revealed wisdom*, and not on *observational gain*.
  - b. The positive results of partnership with the woman 'Wisdom' may be delayed yet are sure. They are unobtainable by physical reasoning.
- B. Results of those who seek wisdom. 2:1-22.

The image of wisdom is presented as a companion<sup>7</sup> who comes from God,<sup>8</sup> and therefore will help a man discern good from evil, particularly with the relationship of men with women.

When the female companion 'wisdom' guides the son, he will stay away from the adulteress woman, the one desired by the fool. Like the sinner her rewards are physically appealing and seem to have no downside. Yet she deceives not only with regard to the morality of the deed, but deceives the naive's mind. The adulteress woman will keep him from understanding the path of life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This exhortation is for a constant relationship. The point of salvation is just the beginning. One may be saved and reject the companionship of wisdom (cf. 26:11).

<sup>8</sup> Note here again that the source of wisdom is YHWH (2:6). It is unavailable to those who do not know Him.

<sup>9</sup> This is a very important fact to note. While most perceive that evil deeds may have a physical downside, very few understand that the practice of evil results in a depraved mind. Thus there are *two* penalties for an evil deed; the evil deed itself with its accompanying results, and the depraved mind that results from the justification of the evil deed.

1. Wisdom will give discernment for Godly choices (2:1-11)
  2. Example: It will keep you from evil men (2:12-15).
  3. Example: It will keep you from the adulteress woman (2:16-22).
- C. Wisdom. YHWH is the insurer of blessing when one embraces His wisdom. 3:1-35.

The son needs to submit to the Lord's teaching. He tells him not to stray, nor use human reasoning to understand or question the Lord's instruction, nor to reject it when the Lord disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Further one needs to reflect the Lord's wisdom in his relationship with men,<sup>11</sup> that is, be fair, for YHWH insures blessing and cursing, being the one who weighs men's actions.<sup>12</sup>

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This is the warning of 2 Peter 2:20-22. The way of righteousness is the path, which one is to choose continually. It begins with salvation ("the fear of the Lord") and continues by knowing the revelation of God, that is, "the way of righteousness". A prominent phrase in Proverbs (8:20, 12:28, 16:31), this 'way' is required for success, even in a Christian's life. Thus in 2 Peter 2:20, the one who rejects is not rejecting the offer of Christianity, but is a young Christian who does not recognize the value of continuing on with the revelation. Note that 2 Peter 2:22 is a quotation from Proverbs 26:11 in reference to the parallel between a dog returning to his vomit and a fool.

<sup>10</sup> Note here that 'discipline' is not necessarily designating that the son has done something wrong and is being punished. It is related to training, and thus is to relate to any difficulty, which enters the life of the son with regard to his education in life. It stands as a great contrast to the previous verse where one's barns are filled with plenty in relationship to his honoring the Lord with his wealth. This is very much related to Deuteronomy 8 where one is tested by having the person go through struggles while trusting God to deliver at some time in the future. God is testing to see what is in their heart. Thus, if the one must trust through discipline (suffering that is not related to disobedience), then he will be rewarded after the delay. So the barns will be filled ultimately, but only after the discipline (testing) of the faith.

Note the applicability of this verse to Hebrews 12:5-11. The Hebrew Christians were wondering why they were suffering if they were not disobedient. The author of Hebrews explains that the fact that not prospering physically is not a sign of disobedience, but may be educational discipline. He then quotes this verse in Proverbs 3.

<sup>11</sup> All the instances of 3:27-31 are instances of unfairness to a neighbor for selfish gain.

<sup>12</sup> The basis is that wisdom is the founding principle of creation (3:9), and attribute of YHWH.

D. The priority of wisdom. 4:1-27.

Wisdom must be high in one's priority, for she will guide one in life. She must be possessed at all costs.<sup>13</sup>

E. Sexual relationships. 5:1-23.

Wisdom (or lack of it) affects the sexual relationship. First there is the adulteress. She seems on the surface to be sweet, but it is only a cover for the fact that she is evil and will destroy her possessor. The son is to obey God's principles for sexual fulfillment. The way to the adulteress house enslaves a man to waste his life with regard to God. The wise man will enjoy God's program of sexual fulfillment with the wife that God has given him.

F. Foolish traits of men. 6:1-19.

Among worthless traits are laziness, worthlessness, haughtiness, lying, attacking the innocent, evil scheming, loving evil, lying, and spreading strife.

G. Adultery. 6:20--7:27.

Now the mother joins the father to give the son lessons on adultery. Ruin is sure to those who involve themselves with their neighbor's wife<sup>14</sup> or adultery in general.

H. The nature of the woman 'Wisdom'. 8:1-9:18.

Now the author moves back to the personification of wisdom as a woman. She, as contrasted to the adulteress, is clear, straightforward and valuable. She is the way to power, riches and honor. She is an attribute of YHWH present in creation. The man who claims her is wise and blessed. The scoffer will reject and secure his doom.

1. The woman 'Wisdom' calls out to the naive to live (9:1-6)

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<sup>13</sup> Another New Testament book that uses Proverbs greatly is James. In the introduction to the book James' point is that though one is physically poor, yet if he has God's wisdom he is rich. He states in 1:9-10, "But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position (*because he asked for wisdom and received it from God (1:5)*); and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation (*he must humble himself to ask for wisdom*) because like flowering grass he will pass away."

<sup>14</sup> 6:29 is likely referenced by Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Thess. 4:6

2. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM (9:10).
3. The woman 'Folly' calls to the naive and offers death (9:13-18).

The final chapter contrasts the woman 'Wisdom' with the woman 'Folly'. In between these two 'bookends' is the key verse that takes the reader back to introduction in 1:7 thus completing the section from 1:8.

### **III. The Proverbs of Solomon concerning the righteous living and wicked living, how righteous living is rewarded and wicked living leads to destruction. 10:1-22:16.**

This is the miscellaneous proverbs section which deals with basic principles of living in a sin cursed world, or how to live Godly principles in an ungodly world.

### **IV. Various preventative sayings of wise men. 22:17-24:34.**

This section is broken up into two parts, initial sayings (22:17-24:22), and additional sayings (24:23-34).

Warnings regarding associations to gain personal benefit

Angry men: Association with those who use anger to manipulate will make one like them

22:24 Do not associate with a man *given* to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, 25 Lest you learn his ways, And find a snare for yourself.

Borrowers: Do not associate with those who take loans for things they cannot afford, giving their essentials for collateral, will risk losing their essentials

26 Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become sureties for debts. 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you? 28 Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set.

Skilled men: (Associate with) a skilled man since he will be justly honored.

29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.

Rulers: Association with a ruler to gain for oneself is wrong and dangerous as well as fleeting.

23:1 When you **sit** down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; 2 And put a knife to your throat, If you are a man of *great* appetite. 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food. 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*. 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens.

Selfish men: Association with a selfish man to gain for oneself is fruitless and harmful.

6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies; 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you. 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

Fools: Association with a fool, when seeking to influence him with one's argument, will turn against you.

9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

**V. The proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah transcribed. 25:129:27.**

These additional proverbs of Solomon are broken into four categories as follows.

- A. With respect to kings 25:1-7.
- B. With respect to arguing your case 25:8-10.
- C. Figurative comparison with respect to various types of people, fools and wise. 25:11-26:28.
- D. Various sayings of wisdom 27:1-29:27.

**VI. The sayings of Agur. 30:1-33.**

Agur, after identifying himself, focuses on God as the ultimate knowledge, the sanctity of God's word, and the importance of keeping deception and lies far from himself. He further asks for a situation which will keep him from profaning God, for he knows his weakness.

Agur continues in vv. 10-33 with observations on mankind.

## **VII. The Words of King Lemuel which his mother taught him. 31:1-31.**

King Lemuel's mother first told him to avoid at all costs giving strength to women, avoid drink, to stand up for the rights of the unfortunate and to judge righteously.

She finishes with verses 10-31 which describe a virtuous woman,<sup>15</sup> the woman whom Solomon desired for his son in the earlier chapters. This woman is a contrast to the adulteress woman in chapters 1--9.

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<sup>15</sup> There are many discussions on the meaning of these verses. Some feel that this is the “Woman, Wisdom” from earlier in the book, again personified. Other views are that she represents the Holy Spirit, the church, and a bride. There seems to be no hint here that the characteristics described here are intended to be figurative (Woman Wisdom). This is a literal woman indicated by her literal deeds. She is the ideal woman to be sought after. While some argue that this woman is too perfect to be a regular human, this is typical of the Scriptures, which do not represent what is to be sought after as a partially perfect person, but always the ideal, that is, one who is representing God fully. While it is true that these never occur in this chaotic earth, they are what God has designed them to be.

The connection to wisdom in chapters 1—9 is that this is the desirable woman who follows the Woman Wisdom (cf. 5:15-21) as opposed to the adulteress woman (5:1-14) who follows the Woman Folly. All the attributes here are very specific duties of a woman on behalf her husband.

## APPENDIX I

### **CAN SOLOMONIC AUTHORSHIP OF PROVERBS 1-9 BE MAINTAINED?**

#### **Introduction**

The Book of Proverbs attributes authorship of its portions in seven different places, Solomon (1:1), Solomon (10:1), wise men (22:17), also...wise men (24:23), Solomon...(25:21), Agur (30:1), and Lemuel (31:1). What is the nature of the statement of 1:1 ("The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel"). There are several possibilities, a few are listed here:

1. The statement of 1:1 applies actual authorship to Chapters 1-9.
2. The statement of 1:1 applies actual authorship to the whole book.
3. The statement of 1:1 indicates a Solomonic proverb tradition only and not actual authorship, neither to the Chapters 1-9 nor the whole book.

The following discussion will examine the problem by reviewing the evidence.

#### **The Date And Style**

Much of the argument against Solomonic authorship of these chapters centers around the supposed date of the writing. Those who oppose his authorship state that the form and style are clearly post-exilic, thus it could not have been written in the period of the monarchy, as would be necessary for authentication of authorship..

A representative of these is Eissfeldt, who claims that the long sentences, the personification of wisdom and folly, and the Hebraism's from Greek words ('etun, 7:16, from Greek "othone") indicate, at the earliest, a date of the third or fourth century B.C.<sup>16</sup>

However, it seems that there is considerable evidence that allows these types of writing to be traced to cultures contemporary with and preceding the period of the monarchy. For instance, Chapters 8 and 9 bear resemblance to literature of Phoenicia.<sup>17</sup> Also many pagan texts found in the Fertile crescent and dated to the time of Solomon and centuries before him clearly refute the skepticism, and allow for a date in or even preceding the monarchial period.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Edward J. Young, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 312.

<sup>17</sup> George Buttrick, Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IV, p. 775.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature", Bibliotheca Sacra, 136:543 (July-September 1979): 221-222



### **Structure**

The differences in views with regard to the authorship of Chapters 1-9, are debated on the basis of the layout of the book.

While some evangelicals tend to take them at face value (the title of each section introduces the author),<sup>19</sup> others who study historical format argue, that it was the nature of later editors to combine all proverbs under his name, which followed in the Solomonic tradition,<sup>20</sup> or that the title in 1:1 forms a commencement to the book itself,<sup>21</sup> giving first his own proverbs, then appending those of others to his.

However, in a review of these arguments, there seems to be no solid basis for a conclusive ruling to be made on any side. Both sides argue that this was a typical format in the Ancient Near East. The arguments basically seem shallow, coming to conclusions on very little hard evidence.

In review, it seems that there is a general lack of solid extra-biblical evidence on either side. However, there is evidence that allows this to be written in the monarchial period, by Solomon, in this form. The extra-Biblical evidence does not appear to disprove his authorship of these chapters.

### **Biblical Evidence**

First of all the statement of 1:1 states simply that these are the "proverbs of Solomon." This is identically the statement of 10:1, which is identical to the statement of 25:1 (preceded by "These are also the ..."). Thus at face value there seems to be nothing different in the attribution of the authorship to Solomon in any of these places. If the proverbs of Chapters 10 - 22, are authored by Solomon and those of Chapter 25 are his, then the burden of proof that Chapters 1-9 are not his, must be on the opposition.

Further, if one claims that the statement of 1:1 is an introduction to the whole book, then 1:1 cannot indicate authorship, since there seem to be other authors included, as Lemuel and Agur. Yet, it seems that 10:1 and 25:1 indicate authorship. Thus the burden of proof again lies on the opposition, since he is taking the same phrase to have different applications. Not that this is impossible, only that the burden of proof is on him.

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<sup>19</sup> Irving Jensen, Proverbs, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> James Orr, "Proverbs", The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 2472.

<sup>21</sup> Franz Delitzsch, Bible Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, Vol. I, p.1-4.

Some propose, that since 10:1 indicates "The Proverbs of Solomon", while 25:1 indicates "These are also the Proverbs of Solomon" that the literature preceding 10:1 must not be by Solomon, or else 10:1 would also add "These are also...".<sup>22</sup>

However, this is another judgment call with regard to form. Obviously, the form changes from Chapters 1-9, to Chapter 10 -22, from the longer literary dialogue concerning wisdom, to the short statement type of proverb. Also, the statement of 25:1 follows groups of proverbs attributed to other authors. This difference in transition could easily explain the difference in introduction.

It seems to this assessor that the basic key to establishing the authorship of Chapters 1--9 lies in the flow of the text itself.

First, there is general agreement that 1:1-6 are a literary unit. Whether verse 7 is to be included in 1-6 or to be the introduction to the remainder of the book is argued. However, if 1:1-6 can be linked literarily to 1:8--9:18, then there is evidence to conclude that Solomon be identified with these chapters in the same form as 10:1 and 25:1, and thus indicate authorship.

There are several lines of evidence that connect the introductory seven verses to the first nine chapters of the book, and separate it from the rest of the book.

First of all, there is the prominent phrase in the second line of verse 3, "righteousness, justice and equity". This particular phrase (though inferred in other parts of the book) appears in this same form only once in the book, in 2:9. The importance of this statement in the introduction, and the importance of the statement in 2:9 seem to indicate a similar author, who desires a similar purpose.

In addition there are several other words that are used in the introduction, which are used only in Chapters 1--9. These are not casual usage, but the meanings of the verses are similar.

To give prudence to the naive.  
To the youth knowledge and discretion,  
1:4

O naive ones, discern prudence;  
And O fools, discern wisdom  
8:5

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<sup>22</sup> Derek Kidner, Proverbs, p. 22.

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,  
And I find knowledge and discretion  
8:12

These phrases are not found beyond chapter 9 in this format. Notice the clear similarities in reasoning. Further the word here for "prudence" is found in Proverbs only in these verses. The word for "discretion" is found in this meaning only in Chapters 1--9 (2:11, 3:21, 5:2, 8:12). It should be noted that in all of its occurrences, it is used in combination with another noun from 1:1-3.

Thus the nature of the phrases seems to link the proverbs of 1--9 with the introduction 1:1-7. So it is this author's conclusion that the author of Chapters 1--9 is Solomon, and that the statement of authorship of 1:1 belongs to these chapters only and not to the rest of the book. The authors of other portions are similarly in the preface to their respective sections.

Thus the statements in 1 Kings 4:30-34, are appropriate, and it is only fitting that these have been preserved at least in part for a future audience.

## APPENDIX II

### **HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE IN THE STUDY OF PROVERBS**

#### Introduction

There are many hermeneutical problems which occur in the study of the Book of Proverbs, of which this paper will consider four. They are the problems of:

1. The doctrine of works.
2. The cultural understanding of a proverb.
3. The covenant basis of understanding proverbs.
4. Proverbs: principle or promise.

#### The doctrine of works

There is no question that to the casual reader of the Book of Proverbs there is a feeling that works determine one's ultimate salvation or destruction. How it shocks the reader that to share a bed with an adulteress is the way to Sheol (7:27), that it will cost him his life (7:23) or that those who follow the woman of folly into her living room join those who are in "the depths of Sheol" (9:18). Correction seems to be the way to keep a son's soul from Sheol (23:14).

The purpose of God for mankind was that he would *represent* God as he ruled over God's creation. These readers were clearly under covenant relationship through the Old Covenant. This covenant relationship established them as children of God through an external agreement. Having established this relationship through sacrifice (grace of forgiveness and positional relationship with God), the Israelite was now to represent God in his life. These proverbs established the nature of that living.

Life under the Old Covenant was the *ability to represent God*. As long as Israel obeyed God she would be blessed and would have *life*. When a covenanted person chose to disobey God, he was not representing Him, and He was in a state of *death* even while he lived. Thus, adultery and other undisciplined activities would lead the *covenanted* reader to a life which did not represent God. He would lose his life, by separating himself from *real life*, the representation of God.

Thus, salvation as we know it, was in the forgiveness granted in the covenant by faith. This same faith would impart the word of instruction to the believer and he would live according to God's word. Thus the way to Sheol<sup>23</sup> is simply indicating an end to life,

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<sup>23</sup> "Sheol" simply means the grave. It is normally seen in a negative connotation since it was the cessation of the ability to represent God. It has thus been taken in the

representing God. In addition the covenant would insure that those who strayed from the way of YHWH would indeed have a short life. If the covenant did not insure it through the enforcement of the people, then God could insure it.

Further the word Sheol, is not a parallel to the New Testament word "Hell". For the Israelite, Sheol was the grave, it's pathway, and all that it brought. It was death as opposed to life. It was death in all its forms, sickness, calamity and most of all the wretched effects of sin, as it not only ruins, but deceives the object of its ruination into thinking everything is all right (16:2, 5:6b). It is the opposite of the path leading to the true enjoyment of life as it was meant to be. It is the quality of death, as opposed to the quality of life that wisdom brings.<sup>24</sup> This life was the ability to represent God.

Proverbs deals with life in this realm. Thus, the one who is rebellious will walk away from God, resulting in a life of death.

### **The cultural understanding of a proverb**

There are occasions in the book, when a proverb bears a resemblance to a proverb in another culture, as Babylon or Egypt. Since these cultures preceded the Biblical proverbs, when the reader is confronted by an unclear meaning, he might consult the Egyptian parallel, and thus clear up the meaning. Or at times, the reader may even correct a seeming error in the proverb, from a proper understanding of the Egyptian parallel.<sup>25</sup>

Another question is whether the reader needs to understand the meaning of the proverb in its historical context (Israel's culture) or if it can be applied straight into the culture of the present day.

In answer to the first question, the reader should never interpret the Biblical proverb by the Egyptian proverb. The meanings may be similar and it is possible that the meaning may be made clearer (some possible(?) background). However, its meaning must always be ascertained within the text of the Bible itself. This is obvious from the principle that while ideas may have been borrowed by the Israelites, their fundamental theology was much different (one YHWH versus many gods, gracious God versus a judgmental god who insisted on hard works). While some things may be similar, some

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past to mean "hell" or "hades", but that definition is much more than the word itself connotes.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to the section in Kidner's Proverbs on Life and Death, p. 53-56.

<sup>25</sup> Refer to Kidner's Proverbs, p. 23-24 for a discussion on this problem of rereading the Hebrew text in light of the Egyptian counterpart. An example is found in 22:20.

may be quite different. Thus, one should never reinterpret the text, or edit the text solely on the basis of another culture's parallel documents.

Regarding the second question, it *is* necessary to place the text in its original cultural setting. The Proverbs, however do possess the rare ability to be speak in some commonality to many cultures. That is, it speaks mostly of qualities which surpass cultural boundaries, such as righteousness, wisdom, foolishness, prudence and adultery. Thus, quite often a thorough knowledge of the Israelite background may not be necessary for an understanding. But when there is a cultural setting, the setting must be understood to get the true value out of the proverb (see 24:30-34).

The generality of application comes primarily because many of the proverbs are based on a setting of Genesis 1--11, creative order. This creative order is common to all men. However, the details of this creative order are found in the instructions to the Nation Israel, within the Law. Thus a knowledge of the background, the Law, can only aid in an understanding of the Proverbs. In fact one finds that definitions of righteousness, wisdom, foolishness, prudence and adultery are ONLY defined properly within the Israelite revelation, The Old Testament. They may, however, be utilized in many cultures.

### **The covenant basis of understanding proverbs**

This question is really an extension of the former one, yet more specific. Since these proverbs are set in Israel for the Hebrew reader, must they be read in a covenant context? That is, when the reader is promised prosperity for obedience, is that to be linked to the Palestinian Covenant (Deut. 28--30), disallowing these results for any other people than Israel?

There are several levels of examining the covenant question. First, when the proverbs mention things which are peculiarly Israel's, then the present reader must not make them directly his. An example may be found in 2:21-22 and 10:30 where the reward for uprightness is to live in the land, while the punishment for wickedness is expulsion. This reference to the land is primarily to Israel, and related to Deuteronomy 28--30.

In a broader sense, may the more general principles be used in any culture, that is, directly for any reader? The book was addressed to those who had a covenant relationship with God. Within the covenant certain things are promised for obedience as God's special people; riches, prosperity, long life. Are these things available to America? One must first analyze the result of the proverb on the proposed reader (covenant Israel). Then he must only take for himself what he shares with that reader (The same God, but not the same covenant, nor the same time frame within which the covenant was demonstrated).

### **Proverbs: principles or promises**

However, if some of the more general blessings offered in the Proverbs can be more broadly applied the question arises as to why the results seem to be so often unobserved.

Notice that the book actually does not seem to offer promises in all situations, else it appears to contradict itself. For it acknowledges that those who are upright may be poor (19:1), yet wisdom promises wealth (8:21). Yet, the book also notes that things are not over at death, where situations will be rectified (23:17-18). The book also intimates that temporary observations are not valid, as God will even all things up in the end, beyond this life (16:4, 23:17,18).

What the book offers is wisdom for each situation. It seeks to make one aware of the consequences of personal responsibility. That is, if one does right, and yet suffers, he is content in that he knows that it is beyond his control, and that God will eventually right the situation. What was in his control, he has done. Qoheleth, on the other hand, points out that there is much beyond man's control, so that even if he does right, it may not work out in the span of this life.

Yet these are promises. They are not observational wisdom (accurate on some percentage basis). If they are not able to be demonstrated as true, then how would they be any different from the world's wisdom (i.e., "the sayings of Mao")? This is revealed wisdom which flies in the face of the world's wisdom. The world would say, "No responsibility." Yet God is so bold as to say, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."<sup>26</sup> It is so easy to say that it is not the parent lack of training if the child strays. But, what parent follows the exhortations of Deut. 6. Why did Israel go bad? The text is very clear that one generation did not teach the other the word of God. Thus, if one wants to make this a principle which is generally true, but not always, then the instruction of Deuteronomy for parents, and the observations of Joshua and Judges are without merit.

This is how to live wisely and reap benefits and avoid evil's effects. God will even all things out some day. Other things may affect the outcome, but this is in God's hands and His timing. Yet the principle and the promise is true, when matched with God's design of this world.

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<sup>26</sup> Proverbs 22:6

### APPENDIX III

**Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

**Proverbs 22:6**

חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֱר עַל־פִּי דְרָכּוֹ גַם כִּי־יִזְקֵן  
לְאִי־סוּר מִמֶּנָּה:

Dedicate (to) a young boy (of manageable age, single) according to (the) mouth<sup>31</sup> (probably relating to testimony or confession) of his way<sup>32</sup>, yet truly (when) he becomes old will not fall away from it.

While the language is difficult it appears that it is saying that if one begins the training of a child from the beginning of his life, then they are guaranteed that he will not go from it. However, the mode of the training is not specified and thus can go either way. In other words, based on the training of this young child will be his adult life. It would seem that there is some hint that this is negative; i.e., “his way,” or one’s own way is always a negative in Proverbs unless guided by YHWH’s path. Proverbs use of this seems to be almost neutral; i.e., the way belonging to a person and may be influenced by righteousness and be a good way, or may follow evil and be a bad way. Outside of Proverbs, as in Isaiah, it seems to be usually one’s self-centered choices as his way as opposed to turning to YHWH’s way.

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<sup>27</sup> The phrase only occurs here in the OT. If it is the “mouth of his way”, it could mean the beginning or opening of the way that he will walk; i.e., his early training.

<sup>28</sup> Appears to mean “upon the mouth” or “opening” of

<sup>29</sup> Usually a young lad, paralleled in Prov. 1:4 with the naïve. The only place this form is used is translated “to a young man”.

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 53:5 is the only use of this form in Psalms or Proverbs and is used as enemies “encamped” against YHWH.

<sup>31</sup> This is used several ways as the mouth of a cave, the testimony of the Law or of a witness, or the literal mouth as toward the mouth of someone. Here it is likely the testimony or confession.

<sup>32</sup> “his way” in Proverbs is always the way of man. It is good if he analyzes his way and conforms it to YHWH’s way, but it is bad if it is not conformed. By itself as source, it would be negative. However, it is never used as a source in Proverbs, but simply man’s way, either directed for good or for evil.