

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 03/03/2012

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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Lev 18	Ezek 7-9	Prov 31	Acts 27
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Leviticus 18

Laws Concerning Sexual Immorality (Leviticus 18)

Chapter 18 continues the theme of holiness and separation. The instructions here are directed to all Israel, and no mention is made of the priesthood. Hence, the instructions are not for ritual sanctification, per se. Since the instructions regard prohibited sexual relationships, they appear to be for social holiness, that is, for producing right relationships between the basic units of society—men and women.

Sexual immorality has been a persistent problem in all human cultures. The societies of Israel's time committed a variety of sexual perversions, as do ours today. To create a holy nation, a nation whose individual and societal conduct was pure and stable, God had to make clear which sexual relationships were forbidden.

The list of prohibited relationships includes marriage between (1) parent and child, (2) stepparent and stepchild, (3) full siblings, (4) half-siblings, (5) grandparent and grandchild, (6) uncle and niece, or aunt and nephew, (7) father-in-law and daughter-in-law, and (8) brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Also, a man was forbidden to marry a woman as well as her daughter or granddaughter. God also now prohibited a man from taking his wife's sister as a second wife while his wife was alive; such a marriage would likely ruin the relationship between the sisters and produce endless rivalry and strife within the family.

These prohibitions, which are still in force, prevent destructive sexual relationships with the near of kin, prohibiting sexual relations with persons within two generations of an individual. As can be seen, these prohibitions, had they been enacted earlier, would have prohibited the marriages of any of Adam and Eve's children (per prohibition 3 above), Abraham and Sarah (per prohibition 4 above), as well as Jacob and Leah and Rachel (per the prohibition against marrying a wife's sister). No particular reason is given for the prohibitions, but medical science has demonstrated that the children of unions between near of kin, as defined by God, have a greater risk of genetic abnormality—and it is possible that this was a factor in the enactment of these prohibitions.

God also prohibits sexual relations with a woman during menstruation. While no reason for the prohibition is given, it is possible that a sensitive God gave it to provide a measure of protection for women during this oftenuncomfortable period. Menstruation frequently produces mild or even severe physical discomfort, and a woman's emotional condition at this time can be fragile. Moreover, medical science has shown that sex during menstruation poses a greater risk of tissue injury or infection to the woman, as well as of transmitting blood-borne disease from one partner to another. God's giving of this law may also be tied to the special role of blood for the atoning of sin, as blood seems to be the major concern in Leviticus 20:18. Whatever the reason, God takes this

matter very seriously—in the verse just cited, where God imposed a severe penalty for violation, as well as in Ezekiel 18, where it is declared a matter of righteousness (verses 5-9).

God concludes his instruction regarding illicit sexual relations and practices by pointedly reminding the Israelites that such conduct defiles not only them but also the land. It is easy to assume that bad conduct only affects the perpetrator and those immediately around him. Not so. The moral quality of a people extends far beyond them to the very land upon which they dwell. God reminds Israel that because such abominable acts were committed by the people of Canaan, that land was going to “vomit them out.” Far from being a figure of speech or a poetic device, God’s warning reveals a very real moral law of the universe. Sin has a material impact on the natural world. Lucifer sinned and Scripture seems to indicate that the creation was devastated as a result. Adam sinned and the plant and animal natures were corrupted. Just so, when a nation becomes sinful, even its land is defiled. Sin affects everything—man, beast, vegetation and land.

Ezekiel 7-9

“The End Has Come” (Ezekiel 7)

Chapter 7 is a continuation of the prophetic message we’ve been reading, emphasizing the point that because the people have refused to come to know God through seeking and following His will, they will come to know Him in a different way—through His severe judgment (7:4, 9, 27). God’s warning here to the “land of Israel” (verse 2) was likely given during the 390 days of mock siege that represented the punishment on the northern 10 tribes (compare 1:1-2; 4:5; 8:1). Since the ancient fall of Israel happened long before Ezekiel wrote, his warning in this chapter is of Israel’s destruction in the end time—indeed, the time leading into “the day of the wrath of the Lord” (7:19). Of course, as with the other prophecies of this section, there was some application to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in Ezekiel’s own day. But, again, the message is mainly for Israel at the end of this age.

The term “four corners of the land” (verse 2) conveys the total destruction God will bring. This is not a partial or regional calamity. Ezekiel, as God’s watchman, is required to thunder this warning loud and clear, even though his immediate audience was in captivity in Babylon. Accounts of what he said may well have been passed on to those Jews living in Jerusalem. And through the transmission of the sacred text across the centuries, we have his warnings today.

God explains that the Israelites are guilty of “abominations” (verses 3-4, 8-9)—terrible, loathsome sins—even in their religion, which is idolatrous (verse 20). The abominable practices are so bad that God declares He will not spare or have pity in the time of punishment—the severity of punishment conveying the severity of wrongdoing. Verse 9 introduces a terrifying new name for God in this context of punishment: YHWH makkeh, “The Eternal who strikes the blow.”

The ominous sense of impending doom is palpable. “Numerous short sentences and the repetition of words and phrases express the intensity of the message. The recurrence of the word ‘end’ [five] times in the first six verses stresses the finality of the judgment (cf. Amos 8:2).

Judgment had come! Immanency was heightened by the reiteration of the verb ‘coming’ (seven times in [Ezekiel 7] vv. 5-12); the repetition of ‘now’ (vv. 3, 8 {NIV, ‘about to’}); and the use of terms like ‘time,’ ‘day,’ and ‘is near’ (v. 7)” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verses 1-4).

Notice the rendering of this passage in the New Living Translation: “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to Israel: The end is here! Wherever you look—east, west, north, or south—your land is finished. No hope remains, for I will unleash my anger against you. I will call you to account for all your disgusting behavior. I will turn

my eyes away and show no pity, repaying you in full for all your evil... With one blow after another I will bring total disaster! The end has come! It has finally arrived! Your final doom is waiting! O people of Israel, the day of your destruction is dawning... Soon I will pour out my fury to complete your punishment for all your disgusting behavior. I will neither spare nor pity you. I will repay you for all your detestable practices... None of these proud and wicked people will survive. All their wealth will be swept away. Yes, the time has come; the day is here!" (verses 2-12).

Verse 10 appears to be saying, "The rod [of punishment] has blossomed [because] pride has budded [among God's people]." That is, the people are ripe for judgment since their arrogance has reached its zenith. Verse 11 may be saying that violence among God's people has produced the consequence of a "rod of wickedness"—that is, a rod necessitated by wickedness, a rod for dealing with wickedness. Alternatively, the verse may mean that "the violent one" (NIV)—that is, the enemy of God's people—has risen up as a punishing rod (meaning either Babylon or, in an ultimate sense, Satan).

Verses 12-13 seem to imply that people in difficult financial circumstances will be forced to sell property at low prices, but that in the end this will be irrelevant. The New Living Translation adds clarity: "There is no reason for buyers to rejoice over the bargains they find or for sellers to grieve over their losses, for all of them will fall under my terrible anger. And if any merchants should survive, they will never return to their business. For what God has said applies to everyone—it will not be changed! Not one person whose life is twisted by sin will recover."

The message continues with a reminder of the three-fold punishment coming from God: sword, famine and pestilence (verse 15). When the warning sounds, people will be too weak or too afraid to fight (verses 14, 17). The initial survivors will be like birds driven from their roosts, separated from their kind, making mournful noises like the dove. These people are described as clothed in sackcloth and shaved bald, symbols of humiliation and shame in Middle Eastern cultures to this day (verses 16-18). In the bleak despair of the Great Tribulation, as the Day of the Lord approaches, they will finally come to view their money, which they had practically worshiped before, as worthless, unable to truly provide them with what they need, and they will toss it away (verse 19).

God says: "They were proud of their gold jewelry and used it to make vile and detestable idols [as they do even still]. That is why I will make all their wealth disgusting to them. I will give it as plunder to foreigners from the most wicked of nations, and they will defile it. I will hide my eyes as these robbers invade my treasured land and corrupt it" (verses 20-22, NLT). Again, this happened to a degree when ancient Jerusalem was invaded and plundered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It happened again when the Romans, imperial successors to the Babylonians, invaded Jerusalem in apostolic times. It will happen on the greatest scale, as primarily foretold in these verses, when Israel and Judah are both invaded and destroyed by the end-time revival of Rome and Babylon.

Finally, God orders that a chain be prepared (verse 23). Chains were used for binding criminals or enemy prisoners. Indeed, the surviving Israelites will be bound in chains and led away into slavery—just as the Jews experienced when Nebuchadnezzar's forces invaded Judah and centuries later when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Recall also that the northern tribes were taken captive by the ancient Assyrians more than a century before Ezekiel's prophetic ministry. And lest this seem only the stuff of ancient history, we should remember Nazi Germany, in which multitudes of Jews were forced to toil in slave labor camps and vast numbers were led away to be exterminated. As horrifying as it is to contemplate, such days will come again, and are prophesied to be even worse.

People will turn to religious and civil leaders for help, but these will have no answers, not understanding the truth of God's Word (verse 26). They will have ignored the warnings prior to this. And now it will be too late. They will be judged according to what they deserve (verse 27). That would be a dire predicament for any of us. We all should deeply consider this and ask God to lead us to repent of our own sins now and receive God's merciful grace, before

such judgment falls—and pray that others will recognize their own sins and repent as well. God’s truth is available to us right now as we study His Word. Let’s make good use of it.

Sunrise Services at the Temple (Ezekiel 8)

Ezekiel 8-11 records the details of another powerful vision the prophet received from God. The date is a year and two months after the first vision (compare 1:1-2; 3:15-16; 8:1). This would seem to place it within the 40-day period during which Ezekiel lay on his right side to represent the punishment for Judah’s sins—following the 390 days on his left side for Israel (compare 4:4-8). (However, it should be noted that, as sometimes happens with the Hebrew calendar, it is possible that a 13th month had been added to the year, which would mean that the vision of chapters 8-11 occurred just after the 40-day period.)

As chapter 8 opens, we find Ezekiel sitting in his house with the “elders of Judah” (leaders among the Jewish exiles in Babylon) in audience to hear what he has to say. No doubt his lengthy mock siege had attracted a great deal of attention.

Once again, Ezekiel experiences “virtual reality” by seeing and experiencing in his mind what the others in the room do not. He sees the same glorious figure he beheld in the first vision— that of the Lord (verse 2; compare 1:26-28), the preincarnate Jesus Christ (compare Revelation 1:12-15). The Lord carries the prophet, who is also a priest, in vision to Jerusalem, to the northern gate of the temple. The north gate was also called the “altar gate,” apparently because sacrifices were killed in its vicinity, on the north side of the altar (compare Leviticus 1:11; compare Ezekiel 40:35-43).

Ezekiel sees the glory of God (8:4)—the cascading illuminations surrounding God’s presence —as he had witnessed in chapter 1. That glory was here at the temple, as were the four transporting cherubim, as we will see in the next few chapters. Yet, as we will also see, God’s glory will soon depart from the sanctuary. Abominations committed here are causing Him to withdraw His presence.

Ezekiel is taken on a tour of the temple area to witness the terrible abominations. He first is told to look around where he has landed in this vision, in the vicinity of the north gate near the place of sacrifice—where a vile image is now located (perhaps implying that sacrifices are made to it).

The image is referred to as the “image of jealousy...which provokes to jealousy” (verse 3). This probably hearkens back to God’s commands against idolatry: “You shall not make yourself a carved image...[to] bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God... You shall destroy their [the Canaanites’] altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)” (Exodus 20:4-5; 34:13-14). Israel is God’s wife by covenant, and He is rightly jealous over her loyalty and affections—demanding that she not enter into adulterous relations with other gods, adopting their worship customs. Of course, being provoked to jealousy essentially means being provoked to justified anger, which may be why the Jewish Tanakh translation renders verse 3 as saying, “that was the site of the infuriating image that provokes fury.” The Revised English Bible has “where stands the idolatrous image which arouses God’s indignation.”

There are different ideas as to what this image was. Some propose an image of Tammuz, the counterfeit savior of the Chaldean religion, since his worship is specifically mentioned in the chapter as occurring in the same place (Ezekiel 8:14). Surprisingly, the image could have been that of a large cross. As Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words explains, the modern cross “had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had

travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the 'cross' of Christ" ("Cross, Crucify," New Testament Section, 1985).

Most scholars, however, feel the image was an asherah, the Hebrew term for a sacred wooden image or tree. The reason for this conclusion is because Manasseh "even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made" in the temple of God, and "he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has made Judah sin with his idols" (2 Kings 21:7, 11, NKJV). Even though Josiah purged Judah of idolatry during his reign, the hearts of the people reverted back to Manasseh's evil after Josiah's death—which means the priests may have been inclined to reproduce Manasseh's image. Either way, since the corrupted Jewish worship was often syncretistic—blending true and false worship—it could well be that the idolatrous object, whatever its form may have been, was being used to worship the true God, which He had strictly forbidden.

Next, "Ezekiel was brought into the north entry gate. There he saw a hole in the wall and was told to dig through the wall, enter, and observe what the elders of Israel were doing secretly in the inner court [or, perhaps more accurately, in chambers or a particular chamber adjacent to the north gate] (vv. 7-9). These seventy elders were not the Sanhedrin of N[ew] T[estament] times. That institution had not yet begun. They were most likely the leaders of the nation who based their traditional position on Moses' appointment of the seventy elders to assist him in governing God's people (Exod 24:1, 9; Num 11:16-25)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Ezekiel 8:7-9).

Note that these are referred to as the "elders of the house of Israel" (verse 12). The expression "house of Israel" sometimes includes Judah—especially as Judah was supposed to be the faithful remnant of Israel. That Judah of Ezekiel's day is intended is clear from the mention of Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, as Shaphan had been Josiah's secretary of state and his other sons, such as Jeremiah's friend Ahikam, came to occupy important positions (see 2 Kings 22:8-14; 2 Chronicles 34:15-21; Jeremiah 26:24; 29:3; 36:10; 40:5, 9, 11; 41:2; 43:6). Moreover, the phrase "house of Judah" is explicitly used in Ezekiel 8:17. Yet it may be that in this vision the 70 elders are also meant to typify, in a broader spiritual sense, the religious leadership of all Israel in a future context (particularly as we will later see other indications that the vision of chapters 8-11 applies to both Israel and Judah in the end time— see 9:9; 11:15, 17-21).

In verses 10-11 of chapter 8, Ezekiel describes the portrayal of idolatrous images on the walls where he has entered, with the elders—shockingly—standing before them as priests with censers. In verse 12, it appears that the honoring of idols is even done privately in the elders' chambers—showing this to be their personal conviction. This seems fairly straightforward and yet the meaning may be broader. While pagan images may have literally been used to adorn the temple complex or its chambers in Ezekiel's time, as they certainly did at earlier times, it is possible that the vision should be understood, at least on some level, in a figurative sense. Perhaps the indication is that the nation's leaders, while practicing what appears to be a form of true worship, are really devoted to false gods and customs of false worship.

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary states that the elders "are here the representatives of the people, rather than to be regarded literally. Mostly, the leaders of heathen superstitions laughed at them secretly, while publicly professing them in order to keep the people in subjection. Here what is meant is that the people generally addicted themselves to secret idolatry, led on by their elders; there is no doubt, also, allusion to the mysteries, as in the worship of Isis in Egypt, the Eleusinian [mysteries] in Greece, etc., to which the initiated were alone admitted" (note on verse 12).

Such a figurative meaning would apply in the nations of Israel and Judah even today—its leaders and people having rejected true worship for a false Christianity descended in many respects from the Babylonian mystery religion—called in Revelation 17 “Mystery, Babylon the Great.” Indeed, as God’s “temple” in New Testament times is His Church (see Ephesians 2:19-

22; 2 Corinthians 6:16; compare Ezekiel 11:16)—the true “Israel” of God (Galatians 6:16)—Ezekiel’s vision here may even picture, in type, the great apostasy from the truth foretold by the apostle Paul (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The elders are pictured as saying, “The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land” (Ezekiel 8:12). When Ezekiel received this vision, Judah had experienced drought and a series of invasions—King Jeconiah and many people having been dragged away to Babylon. So, the leaders reasoned, God had deserted the land and the people—what did they have to lose! In the next chapter, these words are attributed to both Israel and Judah (9:9), so the same false reasoning will be employed in the future as national calamities begin to worsen. How ironic that such reasoning itself eventually leads to even greater calamity (verse 10). Also ironic is that the name of Jaazaniah, the person singled out, means “The Eternal Hears” or “The Eternal Harkens”—implying that God does indeed hear and see whatever is going on, and reacts.

Ezekiel is next directed to see the terrible abomination of women at the temple “weeping for Tammuz” (Ezekiel 8:14). The Encyclopedia Mythica says Tammuz was “the Akkadian vegetation-god, counterpart of the Sumerian Dumuzi and the symbol of death and rebirth in nature. He is the...husband of Ishtar. Each year he dies in the hot summer (in the month Tammuz, June/July) and his soul is taken by the Gallu demons to the underworld. Woe and desolation fall upon the earth [in the form of withering vegetation in autumn and winter], and Ishtar leads the world in lamentation [i.e., the weeping for Tammuz]. She then descends to the nether world...and after many trials succeeds in bringing him back, as a result of which fertility and joy return to the earth [in the spring]. In Syria he was identified with Adonis” (<http://www.pantheon.org/booklets/>”<http://www.ucg.org/booklets/index.htm>” target=”_new”>Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?).

It has been suggested by some scholars that the practice of “weeping for Tammuz” was the actual origin of Lent, the Roman Catholic 40-day period of abstinence prior to Easter (starting after Mardi Gras, “Fat Tuesday,” on Ash Wednesday). Consider that the name Easter itself is derived from Ishtar, the ancient Babylonian fertility goddess and Tammuz’s mother. Alexander Hislop, in his book *The Two Babylons*, explains that “the forty days abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess. Such a Lent of forty days, ‘in the spring of the year,’ is still observed by the Yezidis or Pagan Devil-worshippers of Koordistan, who have inherited it from their early masters, the Babylonians. Such a Lent of forty days was held in spring by the Pagan Mexicans... ‘Three days after the vernal equinox... began a solemn fast of forty days in honour of the sun.’ Such a Lent of forty days was observed in Egypt...Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing, and which, in many countries, was considerably later than the Christian festival, being observed in Palestine and Assyria in June, therefore called the ‘month of Tammuz’; in Egypt, about the middle of May, and in Britain, sometime in April. To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity—now far sunk in idolatry—in this as in so many other things, to shake hands” (1959, pp. 104-105).

The month of Tammuz was the fourth month on the Hebrew calendar. Lent today overlaps the last month of the Hebrew year and ends in the first month. It is interesting to consider that the Celtic Britons, who centuries ago observed the mourning period more in line with the time Lent is observed today, were Israelites. Perhaps they had begun this practice while still in the Promised Land—as the apostate Jews may have also done. Either way, whether

fourth month or first, we should notice that Ezekiel's vision takes place in the sixth month (Ezekiel 8:1). Though that might appear problematic, this may just signify the time Ezekiel received the vision, not the time the events depicted in it actually occurred. Indeed, Ezekiel's vision appears in many respects to be symbolic. Even if literal, we should not necessarily conclude that he was seeing things at the temple the very moment they were transpiring. His vision may have been more sweeping in scope, just as many other prophets had visions in a short time of events that would span days, months or even years in their actual fulfillment.

Ezekiel is then taken from the vicinity of the north gate to the court area outside of the Holy Place. He is here presented with another stunning sight—men with their backs to God's temple "worshipping the sun toward the east" (verse 16). "The location for the sun worship was in the inner court...between the porch and the altar. These 25 men must have been Levites if temple regulations were being followed; otherwise, the area was forbidden (see Num. 3:7, 8; 18:1-7; 2 Chr. 4:9; Joel 2:17)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Ezekiel 8:15-16).

Indeed, this group appears distinct from the 70 image-worshipping elders mentioned previously. "It would seem strange that only a portion of the seventy would have been engaged in the sun worship. The specific numbers of seventy (v. 11) and twenty-five (v. 16) were probably given to aid in distinguishing the two groups. Therefore it is more likely that these twenty-five men were priests though one cannot be dogmatic about it. If they were priests perhaps the number is twenty-five because there was a representative of each of the twenty-four courses of the priests plus the high priest (cf. 1 Chron 23)" (Expositor's, note on Ezekiel 8:16). Perhaps the symbolism is to demonstrate that both the civil and religious leadership were engaged in pagan practices—and maybe to show that the same would be true in the end time. (It should also be noted that chapter 11 mentions 25 "princes" giving wicked counsel, with another person named Jaazaniah among them—albeit a different Jaazaniah.)

In Ezekiel 8:16, since the sun was in the east, this logically denotes sunrise, a popular "in between" moment for sun worship in the pagan world. Consider, as quoted above, "the solemn fast of forty days in honour of the sun." Tammuz was often equated with Baal, and Baal often with the sun. Coming right on the heels of the previous verses, it could well be that what Ezekiel was witnessing was the conclusion of the pagan Lenten season, when Ishtar (or Easter) was deemed to have brought Tammuz (here as the incarnate sun) back from the underworld in a resurrection in the spring, specifically on the feast of Ishtar, known today as Easter. This, then, would have essentially been Easter sunrise services—so extremely popular today in the world religion that masquerades as Christianity and yet an utterly vile abomination according to God. Indeed, the symbolism is profound. The worshipers, religious leaders even, turned their backs on God in order to participate—and yet they probably claimed to be honoring the true God (as they still do). What audacity!

Rejection of true worship has resulted in violence throughout the land (Ezekiel 8:17)— bloodshed, the next chapter explains (9:9). As for "putting the branch to their nose" (verse 17), the meaning is uncertain. Matthew Henry's Commentary states: "...a proverbial expression denoting perhaps their scoffing at God and having him in derision; they snuffed at his service, as men do when they put a branch to their nose. Or it was some custom used by idolaters in honour of the idols they served. We read of garlands used in their idolatrous worship (Acts 14:13), out of which every zealot took a branch which they smelled to as a nosegay. Dr. Lightfoot (Hor. Heb. in John 15:6) gives another sense of this place: They put the branch to their wrath, or to his wrath, as the Masorites read it; that is, they are still bringing more fuel (such as the withered branches of the vine) to the fire of divine wrath, which they have already kindled, as if that wrath did not burn hot enough already. Or putting the branch to the nose may signify the giving of a very great affront and provocation either to God or man; they are an abusive generation of men" (note on verses 13-18).

God states that in the time of punishment He will not spare these leaders, even though they cry aloud for help. We must all reject false worship. Yet that is not the only point here. The lesson of this chapter becomes clearer when we examine the next chapters in this section. They show the glory of God departing from the temple because of such abominable practices and attitudes. God's Spirit leaves when people turn away from Him. He remains only where He is welcome and is obeyed. This is true of nations, church organizations and individuals. And when He leaves, judgment follows.

A Mark on Those Who Sigh and Cry Over Abominations (Ezekiel 9)

The vision of the previous chapter continues. This chapter reveals some insight about God's sparing of a remnant during a time of destruction. Notice that punishment is to come on "Israel and Judah" (verse 9). As the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen more than a century before Ezekiel wrote, this prophecy must be meant for the future destruction of Israel and Judah in the end time. As in chapters 4-7, Jerusalem is here used to represent all Israel, the city being the ancient capital of all 12 tribes. Of course, the prophecy no doubt had a limited application to the people of Judah in Ezekiel's own day.

As the chapter opens, men who "have charge over the city" are summoned (verses 1-2).

These are apparently angelic beings who were to render God's judgment on the people of Jerusalem, again representative of all Israel. Six arrive, each armed with a battle-ax. They stand beside the bronze altar, the altar of sacrifice, perhaps symbolizing that they will make a sacrifice of the disobedient nation (compare Isaiah 34:6; Zephaniah 1:7)—that blood would run as a result of the sins of the people.

With them is a man clothed in white linen who has a writer's kit containing a horn of ink at his side. In the Bible, one "clothed in linen" typically represents a holy servant of God (compare Daniel 10:5; Revelation 15:6).

In Ezekiel 8:3 the prophet again mentions the presence of the "glory of the God of Israel." It had "gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold [or entryway] of the temple"—on its way out altogether, as we will see in chapters 10-11. Putting this verse together with 10:3-4, it appears that the "cherub" in 8:3 and 10:4 indicates the inanimate copies of the cherubim whose wings covered the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The transporting cherubim were waiting outside on the south side of the temple (10:3). The idea seems to be that God rises from His earthly throne in the Holy of Holies, ascends His transportable throne above the four living cherubim and then flies away. By withdrawing His presence God demonstrates His readiness to bring judgment on the people.

The writer with the horn is instructed to mark the foreheads of those who "sigh and cry" over the abominations and idolatry around them. The sighing here is not just a brief exhalation of disappointment. It is an utter groaning of spirit—deeply grieving and feeling anguish over what is happening. Jesus likewise said, "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4). This does not mean an absence of any joy and happiness in life. Rather, it means regular and heartfelt sober reflection on the state of the world.

Of course, those who are truly grieved at the sins are those who follow righteousness. That does not mean they are perfect, but they strive to do God's will. They mourn over their own sins as well as over those of the world around them. They groan over the pain and suffering human beings inflict on one another through their sins. They are indignant and outraged at injustice and blasphemy against God and His truth. They constantly cry out to God to intervene. These are the righteous—God's true servants—and God says He will spare them. He certainly protected such individuals in Ezekiel's day, but the primary focus here is on the future. This passage might well be read along with traditional references to a "place of safety" or God's protection at the end time (Zephaniah 2:3; Luke 21:36; Revelation 3:10; 12:14)—the object of such protection being those who are a part of God's true Church.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John also saw visions of people being marked in their foreheads for protection. Notice: “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (7:3). And: “They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:3-4). Also: “Behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (14:1).

The first occasion in Scripture of a host of people being spared through some outward sign was the time of the Passover in Egypt, when lamb’s blood was used to mark the dwellings of the Israelites who were spared from the slaughter of the death angel. The seal on those in the end-time is an inward one, the forehead representing the mind—wherein resides God’s Holy Spirit, which signifies whether one is truly a Christian or not (see Romans 8:9).

The “death angels” in Ezekiel’s vision are instructed to begin killing the people of Jerusalem— no doubt through the various punishments mentioned in Ezekiel 4-7. Of course, God doesn’t command this slaughter until the people have been given sufficient warning to repent. But eventually it is time for the punishment to fall.

God says to begin with His sanctuary—the elders before the temple then being the actual starting point (9:5-6). This clearly hearkens back to the abominations portrayed in the previous chapter.

The place to begin correction is always with those who should know better. In the early days of the tabernacle, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu disobeyed God and were destroyed by fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). The precedent continues throughout time. The apostle Peter explained that “judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). This he said of God’s New Testament Church. And in fact, the Church may well be the “sanctuary” of Ezekiel 9:6, at least in type.

The Church is the true “temple” of God today (Ephesians 2:19-22), as God dwells in His people through the Holy Spirit, making each individual Christian a temple or, in fact, part of the same temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). That being so, consider the interesting statement God makes in Ezekiel 11, part of the same prophecy. Regarding “all the house of Israel in its entirety” (verse 15), God says, “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone” (verse 16). This ties in well with Christ’s statement to the Samaritan woman at the well: “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain [the Samaritan holy place], nor in Jerusalem [where the temple was], worship the Father... The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24) —that is, through the Holy Spirit, thereby becoming the spiritual temple of God, which is not confined to one place.

If the sanctuary in Ezekiel 9:6 is meant to portray the Church of God on some level (which, besides the parallels we’ve just seen, seems likely also because those to be protected in verse 4 are probably true Christians of the end time), then the indication is that punishment would apparently fall first and foremost on apostates from God’s truth. This would have to mean that the temple abominations of the previous chapter apply in part to such apostates—again, as mentioned in the commentary on Ezekiel 8, possibly indicating the great falling away from God’s truth foretold by the apostle Paul (2 Thessalonians 2). Moreover, there are degrees of responsibility even within the Church. The apostle James stated, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). So the “elders before the temple,” the first to be judged in Ezekiel 9:6, may well be apostate elders of God’s Church. Paul sternly warned Church elders that savage wolves would rise up from among them (Acts 20:17, 29-31).

Yet the sanctuary is just the beginning of the slaughter. It continues throughout all of Israel and Judah (Ezekiel 9:9-10). Ezekiel sees great numbers killed until He alone is left, and He cries out to God, asking Him if He is going to wipe out everyone who is left (verse 8). Of course, he already had the answer from verse 4 that some would be spared. But they were no longer here to be seen. God explains to Ezekiel that the punishment fits the crime, bemoaning the exceedingly great iniquity of Israel and Judah. The people have degenerated into depravity and disrespect for human life because of their false religion. They have denied the power and reach of God—but they won't be able to deny it any longer. At that very moment the angel clothed in linen returns, reporting that he has done his job. This means he has marked all of those who wanted to obey God and they have been spared. God thus gives Ezekiel encouragement by the report of the angel.

Let us take heart as well and strive to be among those who sigh and cry over the abominations committed throughout the nations of Israel and the rest of the world, praying to God, "Your kingdom come." **Proverb**

31

The Words of King Lemuel From His Mother (Proverbs 31:1-9)

It was noted in previous comments that chapters 30 and 31 are two distinct but related sections, each apparently with two subsections; four parts in all. As stated before, some ties between the two chapters may indicate that they should be read together. We will note some of these again as we proceed.

1. Subheading (31:1).

As with Agur, some have thought that King Lemuel?this name meaning "Devoted to God" or "Belonging to God" (repeated in verse 4)?is a pseudonym for Solomon. Yet, as was pointed out in regard to Agur, it seems odd that Solomon would go by another name here considering the clear mentions of his name elsewhere in the book of Proverbs. It is true that he goes by the title of "Preacher" in Ecclesiastes, but his name Solomon is not used elsewhere in that book. Some argue that Proverbs 30 and 31 being separate compositions only later appended to the book of Proverbs could explain this. However, we might then wonder why the later compilers did not clarify Solomon as the author of these sections?in line with his name being used elsewhere in Proverbs (unless, of course, they did not know). Clearly, the matter is strictly a guess either way?but an author other than Solomon seems perhaps more likely. Lemuel, like Agur, could well be a pseudonym?but not necessarily for Solomon. Perhaps it was a nickname for this king used particularly by his mother.

Some maintain that Lemuel was a foreigner. As in Proverbs 30:1, the word in 31:1 translated "utterance" in the NKJV (or "oracle" in the NIV) is massa?the Hebrew word meaning "burden" (used frequently by Israel's prophets to denote a message from God, either because it was "carried" by them or was heavy or weighty). It was pointed out previously that the word occurs in 31:1 without the definite article (the), a fact some use to support this being the name of a country over which Lemuel was king?especially as there was a Massa son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13-16; 1 Chronicles 1:29-31), whose descendants were probably the Arabian tribe of that name recorded in Assyrian documents. This opinion is buttressed by the arrangement of the words here in the original Hebrew: dabari lemuel melek massa?"words Lemuel king massa" (it being unusual to say "Lemuel King," rather than "the-King Lemuel" or "Lemuel theking," unless the word to follow was the name of a land or people). However, recall the use of the definite article with massa (i.e., ha-massa) in Proverbs 30:1?which makes more sense as "the burden" (i.e., the borne or weighty message) than as the name of a country. And it is likely that massa is meant in the same sense in 31:1. Why, then, is there no definite article in the latter case? In the Hebrew, the adjective asher (meaning "that") comes immediately after the word massa here, which can serve to make the sense definite rather than indefinite. The subheading should probably be read this way: "Words of Lemuel, king, a weighty message that his mother taught him."

Of course, this gets us no closer to knowing who Lemuel was. We know only that he was a king?whether of Israel or a related people is not clear. Those who contend he was Solomon maintain that Solomon's mother Bathsheba was the source of the instruction here. Yet again, that is indeterminate and seems unlikely. Whatever the case it was the king's mother who taught him what is written here. Some label her the queen mother, but she could have been a lesser royal wife who died before her son ascended the throne. And Lemuel's mother may not have actually written what we read here. Lemuel himself, or another commissioned by him, may have summarized her lifelong instructions in literary form.

How much of the chapter should be attributed to Lemuel's mother or to one who summarized her teaching? Some regard only verses 2-9, meant specifically as instructions for a king, as constituting her counsel. They view the poem of the virtuous wife in verses 10-31 as the product of someone else entirely?an independent, concluding unit to the book of Proverbs. Yet given the absence of a new subheading at verse 10, it seems more natural to view the latter part of the chapter, even though it is unquestionably a distinct unit in itself, as the concluding part of Lemuel's mother's instructions?though, again, someone else could have turned her advice into the remarkable poem here. Of course, being part of Lemuel's mother's counsel does not preclude this poem from also being used as an epilogue or conclusion to the book of Proverbs, which it seems to be.

2. Three Requirements for Righteous Rule (31:2-9)

TYPE: ADMONITION. Chapter 30 closed with an admonition, and chapter 31 opens with one. The lessons here concern kingship. As pointed out earlier, forms of the word "king" are used four times at the end of chapter 30 (30:22, 27, 28, 31) and four times at the beginning of chapter 31 (31:1, 3, 4). "With remarkable conciseness the mother of Lemuel describes the moral requirements of good government. These lessons are, simply put: do not use your authority as a means to debauchery (v. 3), keep your head clear from the stupefying effects of alcohol (vv. 4-7), and use your power to help the powerless (vv. 8-9)" (New American Commentary, note on verses 2-9).

The previous admonition in chapter 30 concluded with a threefold repetition of two words, "churning?produces" (verse 33). This one opens with a threefold repetition of two words, "what?son" (31:1). The point in each statement seems to be, "What, then, am I to tell you, my son?" This is not because she is unsure. It is simply a device to call to attention?to let Lemuel know she is about to tell him something important. The phrase "son of my womb" is a term of endearment and closeness intensifying the previous phrase "my son"?and showing that she has raised him from birth. Next, "son of my vows" perhaps implies that she had made promises to God in praying for a son when she was yet without child?possibly even that she had particularly vowed Lemuel (which could explain his name, again meaning "Devoted to God").

Proverbs 30 mentioned problem women?the adulteress and odious woman (verses 20, 23)? while Lemuel's mother here warns her son against giving his strength to women, by which kings are destroyed (31:3). This likely pointed to kings amassing large harems as well as sleeping around outside of marriage, both of which could ruin rulers?through disease, through the squandering of national wealth and distraction from state duties, through subjecting themselves to scandal, blackmail, vengeful plotting or palace intrigue between wives trying to exalt themselves and their sons, and through moral degradation leading to other vices.

Verses 4-5 do not mean rulers should never drink alcoholic beverages. The warning is against excess, as shown by the reason given?to prevent interference with proper and just rulership. In strict moderation, alcohol does not impair judgment. Drunkenness, however, is another matter.

There is some debate over the point of verses 6-7. Some think Lemuel's mother was saying that a king should not hoard up drink for his own use (whereby he would become drunk) but should offer it as a comfort to the suffering and needy?as God intended alcoholic beverages to cheer people up (see Psalm 104:15). The contrast with the ruler

in this case would not imply that commoners are entitled to drink to excess, as other passages in the Bible show the great dangers involved in that vice (compare Proverbs 23:29-35). Also, the idea here would not be a government welfare program of free beer and wine. The statement would instead be rhetorical?to show that a king should put the needs of his subjects above his own desires for pleasure.

Other commentators, however, take a completely different view here, seeing verses 6-7 of Proverbs 31 as Lemuel's mother telling him to leave to the lowly and downtrodden the drinking away of problems (as they are already inclined to this)?the point having already been made that this is simply not fit for a king, given his responsibilities. It should be noted in this regard that the word at the beginning of verse 6 often translated "give" could be rendered "leave." Along these lines, The New American Commentary says, "The comparison to the suffering poor and to their use of alcohol is meant to awaken Lemuel to the duties that go with his class and status rather than to describe some kind of permissible drunkenness" (note on verses 47).

The admonition from Lemuel's mother concludes with the charge in the next two verses. Whereas Agur's admonition to the proud and troublemakers in 30:32 is to "put your hand on your mouth," the mother of Lemuel twice tells him, a king who is to judge righteously, "Open your mouth" (31:8-9)?meaning "Speak out." This terminology may have been chosen to contrast with drunkenness (verses 4-5), which also requires the opening of one's mouth. Rather than open his mouth to drink and get drunk and thereby hurt the needy, a king should open his mouth to speak out to help the needy. For a king is supposed to serve his people.

Given the writing down and passing on of his mother's instructions, it is obvious that King Lemuel took her words to heart. It is hoped that he came to exemplify the ideals she expressed. Yet even Solomon, the principal author of the book of Proverbs, while a wonderfully successful ruler for a time, eventually succumbed to self-indulgence and debauchery and failed in his duty to God and others. Certainly such a high degree of principled concern to rule for the good of the governed was rare among ancient Middle Eastern monarchs?and it has remained so among political leaders throughout history up to our own day. But one day a King is coming whose reign over the whole world will be characterized by perfect, altruistic care for the welfare of all subjects, including an overarching concern to provide for the defense of the helpless?and those who serve in positions of responsibility under Him will exercise authority with the same motivation.

Epilogue to Proverbs: The Wife of Noble Character (Proverbs 31:10-31)

"TYPE: WISDOM POEM, ACROSTIC CHIASMUS" (NAC). We come now to the end of the book of Proverbs with a carefully crafted poem describing aspects of an ideal wife. The Hebrew word that the King James and New King James Versions translate as "virtuous" in verse 10 is hayil. This word has the sense of "strength"?as it is translated in verse 3 of this same chapter. It is also rendered "well" in verse 29. It is elsewhere used in the sense of military valor or bravery (which we will consider further in later comments here). Yet Boaz called Ruth a woman of hayil in Ruth 3:11?the point being that she was a woman of good, strong character. The sense of the word seems to be powerful and elevated. Indeed, note the description of the Proverbs 31 wife as being clothed with "strength and honor" (verse 25)?with high dignity. The word rendered "woman" (KJV) or "wife" (NKJV) can mean either of these. The context here shows that she is a wife. Thus, "wife of noble character" (NIV) seems a good way to render the phrase referring to her in verse 10. We should recall earlier the same expression being used in Proverbs 12:4: "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown" (NIV). This concluding poem of Proverbs 31 extols that point in greater detail and literary richness.

As the latter part of chapter 30 was characterized by the repeated use of a literary device (the numerical sayings), so the latter part of chapter 31 is a brilliantly structured literary composition.

Who is the author of this section? Does it continue the instruction from Lemuel's mother, just as the latter section of Proverbs 30 appears to continue the words of Agur? In chapter 30, there are thematic ties between the sections. Proverbs 31 also contains such ties. The negative image of having one's strength (hayil) sapped through sensual indulgence with women in verse 3 is answered by the positive image of the poem's woman of strong character (hayil). As the righteous king opens his mouth in the cause of social justice (verses 8-9), so this honorable woman opens her mouth with wisdom and kindness (verse 26). And her focus is likewise on serving others.

In its introduction to the poem of chapter 31, The New American Commentary says: "While this poem apparently does not describe the wife of a king and is not addressed to Lemuel, we cannot say that it is not part of the Lemuel text. Ancient wisdom texts could combine material in a way that seems incongruous to the modern reader, and the poem could come from Lemuel or his mother. If it is not part of the Lemuel text, it is an anonymous poem perhaps added as an epilogue to the canonical text. If that is the case, it is probably fairly late since epilogues are a late phenomenon. [Of course, many have suggested that this concluding poem was written by Solomon?attribution being deemed unnecessary since he is named as the principle author of the book at the outset (1:1).] Either way, however, the interpretation of the text is not affected, and the significance that the canonical Book of Proverbs ends in this manner remains."

There are multiple layers of organization in the poem, demonstrating great skill on the part of the writer. First of all, the work is acrostic, meaning that each of the 22 verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Thematically, the poem can be seen to "fold along the middle," as it were?with a point just before the center (between verses 19-20) serving as a "seam." Note the following structure, adapted from The New International Commentary on the Old Testament:

The seam at verses 19-20 is itself arranged in chiastic (concentric) fashion, considering the different Hebrew words used for "hand" and "palm":

This unit, an important hinge point in the poem, serves two purposes. Verse 19 concludes the first part of the poem, showing her worth and efforts, while verse 20 opens the next section, showing the results of her character. Moreover the two verses specifically illustrate the point that her activities (work with the hands, v. 19) are in fact done to benefit others (to open her hands to those in need, v. 20).

On top of all this, however, is another chiastic structure spanning the whole of the poem?which places the focal point on another verse. The integration of these various structural elements is astounding. The New American Commentary gives the overlaying chiasmus and comments on it:

"The center point of this chiasmus is v. 23, the declaration that the husband is highly regarded at the gate. The verse has been read as almost an intrusion into the poem; all the other verses praise the wife, but this verse alone focuses on the esteem the husband commands. Far from being an intrusion, however, v. 23 actually establishes the central message of the poem: this woman is the kind of wife a man needs in order to be successful in life. [Indeed, the concentric arrangement of the noble wife's characteristics around this verse may be an allusion to her serving as the husband's encircling crown in 12:4.]

"In short, the original intended audience was not young women ('this is what kind of wife you should be') but young men ('this is what kind of wife you should get'). This does not mean that the poem cannot be used to instruct women, but the interpreter must recognize its primary objective. Although it may seem strange that a wisdom poem on the virtues of a good wife should be directed at young men, it is in keeping with the whole thrust of Proverbs. The book everywhere addresses the young man ('my son') and not the young woman. It expounds in great detail on evils of the prostitute and how she is a snare for a young man; it says nothing about lusty boys and the threats they pose for young women. It is a false reading, however, to suppose that biblical wisdom despises

women or views them as fundamentally corrupt (this poem alone contradicts that notion). There is no double standard; the gender slant in Proverbs is a matter of audience orientation rather than ideological bias [just as Ruth, Esther and Song of Solomon may be wisdom texts oriented to young women]. Proverbs directs the reader away from the prostitute toward the good wife because its implied reader is a young man. For the same reason, Wisdom is personified as a woman and not as a man" (note on Proverbs 31:10-31).

As to this latter point, the Zondervan NIV Study Bible says that the poem, besides offering counsel on the kind of wife a young man ought to seek, may be intended "in a subtle way to advise the young man (again) to marry Lady Wisdom, thus returning to the theme of chs. 1-9 (as [begun in 1:20-33 and] climaxed in ch. 9; compare the description of Lady Wisdom in 9:1-2 with the virtues of the wife in 31:10-31). In any event, the concluding epitomizing of wisdom in the wife of noble character forms a literary frame with the opening discourses [of the book], where wisdom is personified as a woman" (introduction to Proverbs). Thus, the poem is not only a brilliant literary creation on its own, but its message and position also makes the whole of Proverbs a greater, more unified literary work.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary says more about the woman here epitomizing wisdom: "The theme of the poem, the wife of noble character, captures the ideals of wisdom that have filled the book....It may well be that this is more the point of the composition than merely a portrayal of the ideal wife" (note on 31:10-31). Expositor's probably veers too far from the practical, literal sense in its assessment of the passage?since the words of the poem do not reveal it to be an obvious personification of wisdom as in Proverbs 1, 8 and 9. But the commentary gives some good reasons for at least seeing important symbolism here and not treating the poem of Proverbs 31 as some kind of numbered checklist of female righteousness.

Continuing in Expositor's with some inserted comments: "The woman here presented is a wealthy aristocrat who runs a household estate with servants and conducts business affairs? real estate, vineyards, and merchandise?domestic affairs, and charity. It would be quite a task for any woman [of average means] to emulate this pattern [though the general pattern of behavior and motives can and should be followed by any godly woman].... Others have also recognized that more is going on here than a description of the ideal wife or instructions for the bride to be.... [One scholar] allows that 'this lady's standard is not implied to be in reach of all [in every respect]'... but rather reveals the flowering of wisdom in domestic life.... [Another commentator] likewise affirms that 'as a whole it cannot be read as a kind of blueprint of the ideal Israelite housewife, either for men to measure their wives against or for their wives to try [in all respects] to live up to'.... Moreover, the work says nothing about the woman's personal relationship with her husband, her intellectual or emotional strengths, or her religious activities [though it does show that her life is based on the proper fear of God?verse 30]. In general it appears that the woman of Proverbs 31 is a symbol of wisdom [though this should not detract from some practical principles on being, choosing or appreciating a godly wife]....Indeed, many commentators rightly invite a contrast to the earlier portrayals of Dame Folly lurking dangerously in the streets?she was to be avoided?and Lady Wisdom, who is to be embraced. The Lady Wisdom in this chapter stands in the strongest contrast to the adulterous woman in the earlier chapters" (note on 31:10-31).

The same commentary notes more about this with regard to structure and composition: "The passage has striking similarities with hymns....Usually a hymn is written to God, but here apparently it was written to the wife of noble character. A comparison with Psalm 111, a hymn to God, illustrates some of the similarities. The psalm begins with hallelu yah ('Hallelu Yah'...or 'Praise the LORD'); this is reflected in Proverbs 31:31, which says, 'Her works bring her praise

[wihaleluha].' Psalm 111:2 speaks of God's works; Proverbs 31:13 speaks of her works. Psalm 111:2 says that the works of the Lord are searched or 'pondered' (derushim); Proverbs 31:13 says that she 'selects' (dareshah) wool

and flax. Psalm 111:3 says that the Lord's work is honorable (hadar; NIV, 'majestic'); Proverbs 31:25 ascribes strength and 'dignity' (hadar) to the woman. Psalm 111:4 says that the Lord is gracious and full of compassion; Proverbs 31:26 ascribes the law of compassion to the woman. Psalm 111:5 says that the Lord gives 'food' (terep); Proverbs 31:15 says that the woman provides 'food' (terep) for her house. Psalm 111:10 says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?the motto of Proverbs; Proverbs 31:30 describes the woman as fearing the Lord. Psalm 111:10 says that the Lord's praise will endure; Proverbs 31:31 says that the woman will be praised for her works. It is clear [or at least reasonable to think] that Proverbs 31 is patterned after the hymn to extol the works of wisdom" (same note).

Expositor's and other commentaries also point out that the passage bears similarities with heroic literature?seeming like an ode to a military champion. "For example, 'woman of valor' ('esheth-hayil in v. 10...) is the same expression one would find in Judges for the 'mighty man of valor' (gibbor hehayil, Judg 6:12...)?the warrior aristocrat; 'strength' ('oz in vv. 17..., 25) is elsewhere used for powerful deeds and heroics (e.g., Exod 15:2, 13; 1 Sam 2:10); '[gain]' (v. 11) in '[no lack of gain]' is actually the word for 'plunder'...; 'food' (v. 15) is actually 'prey' (terep); 'she holds' (shillehah in v. 19) is an expression also used in military settings (cf. Judg 5:26...); 'surpass them all' (v. 29) is an expression that signifies victory" (same note). Commentator Tremper Longman says: "Perhaps life's struggles here are envisioned as a war and the woman as an active and successful participant in taming life's chaos" (How to Read Proverbs, p. 140).

Long man also points out: "Another of the dominant themes throughout the poem is the woman's boundless energy. It is hard to believe that any single person could ever accomplish as much as this ideal woman, and perhaps the description is meant as a composite sketch. In any case, this woman is described not only as a warrior but also as a merchant ship that brings produce to port, namely her home. She also is active in commercial endeavors, not to speak of philanthropy toward the needy. Not only are her actions praised, but also her qualities of mind and attitude. She is fearless about the future, wise and kind. This woman has nothing at all to do with laziness. The emphasis at the end of the poem, as one might expect, is not on beauty or charm, but on the woman's fear of the Lord. Indeed, this woman is the epitome of wisdom. She is the human embodiment of God's wisdom; a flesh-and-blood personification of Woman Wisdom" (p. 141).

With this in mind, Expositor's is right to point out: "The poem certainly presents a pattern for women who want to develop a life of wisdom; but since it is essentially about wisdom, its lessons are for both men and women to develop. The passage teaches that the fear of the Lord will inspire people to be faithful stewards of the time and talents that God has given; that wisdom is productive and beneficial for others, requiring great industry in life's endeavors; that wisdom is best taught and lived in the home?indeed, the success of the home demands wisdom?and that wisdom is balanced living, giving attention to domestic responsibilities as well as business enterprises and charitable service" (note on Proverbs 31:10-31).

A Woman Who Fears the Lord?the Wise Choice (Proverbs 31:10-31) Let's now note a few more issues in the text of the passage.

Verse 10 points out the rarity of such a find as the virtuous woman and her supreme value, which should be treasured (again, applying to both a good wife and wisdom more generally).

Verse 11, the second in the poem, is a good illustration of a poetic device corresponding to the acrostic of the passage. "The Hebrew of the bet line... (Prov. 31:11) has a concentration of the letter bet. Betah bah leb ba'lah wesalal lo' yehsar" (Longman, p. 45). This was perhaps done to get Hebrew readers to take note of the acrostic pattern up front.

Verses 13 and 19, mentioning the woman's textile work, serve to frame an inclusio (within the chiasmic structure outline above). This should not be taken to imply that women today must take on such work or start a garment business. The point is that she makes good, productive use of her talents for the welfare of her household. The case given is only an example, wherein the wife uses her skills to produce items she can then trade or sell in order to acquire other goods and services for her home. And what of her buying a field in verse 16? This likewise does not mean that wives today should go about making real estate purchases without consulting their husbands. It may well be that, in the example given, the woman's household is well enough off that such investments (the purpose here being for gardening) are within her discretionary spending. Yet if this involved a major expenditure of family resources we can rest assured that the noble wife would speak to her husband, for one of the principles of wisdom expressed throughout Proverbs is to seek counsel in making important decisions. The point of the example is twofold: 1) the husband trusts his valued wife enough to allow her to spend the household income in various ways; and 2) she takes initiative in such matters and is thoughtfully prudent and active in doing so.

Verse 15 does not mean that the woman portrayed here, a wealthy lady of the house, gets up early to personally make breakfast for the servants. "Instead, she supervises preparation of the morning meal and sees to it that all have a fair share. This implies first that she cares even for the servant girls and second that she is diligent about overseeing them" (New American Commentary, note on verse 15).

Verse 17 shows the responsible woman keeping herself fit so as to continue doing her work and serving her family. Having succeeded so well in providing for her family, the virtuous wife is able to give to others besides—and does so (verse 20). Indeed, this is part of the point of her work, as noted earlier.

Verse 21 shows the woman not fearing for those of her household when it's cold as she has enabled them to be clothed with "scarlet." The Hebrew here is shanim. Some, following the ancient Greek Septuagint translation, change the vowels in the Hebrew to read shenayim, meaning "double"—the idea being that they are wearing layers. However, "scarlet," denoting costly garments, might imply comfort even in inclement weather. Note the wife's clothing of purple in verse 22. The word rendered "tapestry" in this verse means "coverings," which might refer to bedding or other clothing.

In verse 25, where the KJV and NKJV have "she shall rejoice in time to come," the meaning is more likely "she can laugh at the days to come" (NIV). That is, being armed with strength and honor (same verse), she can face whatever the future might bring with confidence (able even to dismiss the idea that she and her family might come to destruction). In the overall chiasmic structure, this parallels her being unafraid of the cold in verse 21.

"Verse 27 is a brief, summarizing counterpart to the lengthy description of the wife's diligence in vv. 13-19. Here the text explicitly states that she avoids laziness" (NAC, note on verse 27).

Verses 28-29 show that such a woman is praised by her grateful family. And the next two verses provide us with the summary conclusion. Verse 30 states that charm and beauty are fleeting, while real and enduring praise is for the woman who fears the Lord—returning to the book's opening counsel (1:7). This woman should be rewarded with love and gratitude (30:31).

The New American Commentary summarizes the matter well: "The good wife described here has every virtue wisdom can offer. She is diligent, has a keen sense for business matters, is compassionate, is prepared for the future, is a good teacher, is dedicated to her family, and above all else possesses the primary characteristic of biblical wisdom, the fear of the Lord (looking back to Prov 1:7, the theme of the book). She is no less than Woman Wisdom made real. The riches Woman Wisdom offers (8:18) are brought home by the hard work of the good wife (31:11). Proverbs has, in effect, come full circle. It began by saying that the young man must embrace the

imaginary ideal of Woman Wisdom in order to have a fulfilling life [1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6], and it ends by saying that one needs a good wife to achieve this goal.

“The young man has no choice but to follow one woman or the other. He will either pursue Woman Wisdom or Woman Folly, and with them he will take their counterparts, the good wife or the prostitute/quarrelsome wife. He cannot attain wisdom without the good wife because she creates the environment in which he can flourish. If he chooses an evil woman, he has little hope of transcending the context she will make for him. Wisdom is not simply a matter of learning rules and precepts but is a matter of socialization, and a man is socialized first by his parents and then by his wife....In Proverbs wisdom is not merely or even primarily intellectual; it is first of all relational. The young person finds wisdom through three specific relationships” (note on 31:30-31)?with God, parents and spouse.

Indeed, the arrangement of the book of Proverbs is ingenious in this respect. It commences with telling a young man that knowledge and wisdom begin with the fear of God, laying out the choice between wisdom and folly, both calling for him. It follows with a great deal of parental advice in the form of short sayings. Then it ends with a “graduation,” so to speak, to adult life? with marriage to a godly woman who also wisely lives by the fear of God. Yet for success in life, a young man must not only choose a wise woman. He must choose wisdom itself. This, then, is the culmination of the book. The paramount choice presented lies before us all?men and women, young and old alike. Choose wisely.

Acts 27

Sha’ul is now being sent to Italy to stand before the Caesar. He, Luke, Aristarchos (a Macedonian), and some prisoners were put on a boat for sail. A captain of the Augustan regiment named Julius was in charge of the prisoners. They sailed for a day and then stopped in Tsidon where Julius allowed Sha’ul to go out onto land to visit his friends there and receive encouragement. They then set sail again and were placed on another boat, an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy while they were at Mura of Lukia. They were having much difficulty getting anywhere by sea due to some very strong winds that were against them. Luke reports very very slow travel and strong winds such that it took several days to get along and names several ports they passed.

The travel, waters, and weather had become so very treacherous that Sha’ul advised that the voyage was going to end with damage and great loss; for the cargo and the ship and their very lives! But the captain did not listen to Sha’ul and the pilot persuaded him that they should press on. They were hoping to make it to a good port to stay for the winter season. The winds died down for a short time and they thought all was going to be well and they lifted up the anchor, but then a Northeaster rushed in. They were caught up in the Northeaster and had to just let the wind carry them at will. They ran under a small island called Klauda and could not control the boat. They continued to be tossed all over the sea by the winds and began to throw supplies overboard. On the third day of the Northeaster, they threw overboard the ship’s tackle. They had no guidance from the sun or stars and were simply at the will of the weather and truly thought their lives were over.

After some time, there was no food and they had not eaten for days. Sha’ul stood up and admonished them for not listening to him earlier. He then stated with confidence that there would be no loss of life – only the ship would be lost. He had had a visit from a messenger from Elohim. The messenger confirmed that Sha’ul must be taken to appear before the Caesar and that not only would he make it there, but also everyone on the ship. So, he said that they needed to run up onto land if possible. After they had been tossed about the Adriatic sea for fourteen days, they began to suspect they were drawing near land. Taking depth soundings each few hours starting at midnight, it was confirmed and they dropped four anchors and waited for daylight.

Some sailors had thought to escape, but Sha'ul thwarted their plan by advising the soldiers to cut the rope to the small get-away boat and so they did. Just before daybreak, Sha'ul advised everyone that they needed to eat some food or else their health would fail them. So Sha'ul took some bread, broke it, gave thanks to Elohim, and they all took in some bread. This encouraged everyone, two hundred and seventy-six beings in all. At daybreak they noticed a beach and with lightening the ship by throwing wheat overboard along with the anchors, they intended to run upon the beach if possible. They ended up getting the prow of the ship stuck and the boat began to be destroyed by the constant pounding of the waves. Because of this, the soldiers then began to plot to kill the prisoners! They would rather to kill them than have them escape while on their watch. The captain however, mindful of Sha'ul and his words, ordered the soldiers to stand down and he commanded the prisoner to jump out and swim to shore – all those who could swim. In the end, they all reached the land in safety.