

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 27/08/2011



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

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

Ex 30	Isaiah 55-58	Prov 1	John 20-21
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Ex 30

<http://bible.ucg.org/bible-commentary/Exodus/default.aspx>

In Exodus 30, we pick up the rest of the instruction for the furnishings that were to be placed in the tabernacle. In this chapter Moses was given the instructions on making an altar to burn incense upon. This altar was to be located just before the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (verse 6). Sweet and compelling, the incense represented the prayers of God's people coming before His throne (compare Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8). He therefore wanted His typical throne room filled with this incense. But He certainly did not want "strange incense" (Exodus 30:9), for as the book of Proverbs explains concerning "**one who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination**" (28:9). The bronze laver was placed outside of the Holy Place for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet in water before entering to officiate—symbolic for spiritual cleansing. Also, instructions were given for making the holy anointing oil, which—like the incense—was not to be copied by others in the congregation for personal use. Oil in such contexts is clearly representative of God's Holy Spirit.

One other thing in Exodus 30 that is very interesting is the offering for atonement collected at the census, also known as the ransom money. Moses was instructed that when he took a census of those 20 years of age and older, an offering of one half-shekel was to be taken up from each person for the service of the tabernacle. The point here was that each person was paying a price for his life—acknowledging that his life was from God and that God was owed because of it. It is noteworthy that the same amount was required of everyone, be they rich or poor.

Isaiah 55-58

Chapter 55 begins with the analogy cited by Jesus in the New Testament of the water of life— the Holy Spirit (see John 4:10-14; 7:37-38; Revelation 21:6; 22:1, 17). This ties back to earlier references in Isaiah, such as 12:3 and 44:3. We are told to buy even though we have no money. It is a totally free gift—albeit a gift with conditions. God requires only true repentance accompanied by faith and then baptism (see Acts 2:38; Hebrews 11:6). Of course, what many do not understand is that repentance is more than just being sorry for past sins. It also involves a lifelong commitment to obeying God.

“Wine and milk [in Isaiah 55:1] are symbols of complete satisfaction (v. 2). Not only does God’s salvation supply what is necessary for life, but it also provides what brings joy” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 1). As Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10)—meaning now and on into eternity beyond. “Abundance” is directly mentioned in verse 2 of Isaiah 55. Notice also that the invitation to “eat” and “delight” in abundance can be likened to a banquet. Jesus gave parables that picture salvation as partaking of a banquet (see Matthew 8:11; Luke 14:15-24). Isaiah 55:2 mentions the bread analogy used by Jesus as well (see John 6:48-58).

Verse 3 of Isaiah 55 mentions the “sure mercies of David.” Paul explained in his speech at Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:34 that this referred to Jesus being raised from the dead, and he goes on to cite Psalm 16 of David, which is full of many promises of future inheritance, blessings and pleasures. These “sure mercies” are also described here as an “everlasting covenant” that God is willing to make with all who “thirst” and come to God. And David was a witness of these promises (Isaiah 55:4). Indeed, there may also be a reference here to the Davidic covenant itself—wherein God promised David an eternal offspring, throne and kingdom. This, of course, is ultimately fulfilled in Christ—who was destined to inherit the throne of David. Yet this promise is for us as well—since Jesus said that His followers would share His throne with Him (see Revelation 3:21; compare Romans 8:17).

Isaiah 55 goes on to say that even the wicked may seek and find God if they forsake their wrong way and “return” to Him—the Old Testament term for repent. God says He will have mercy, immediately followed by a statement that His thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and ways. In its note on verses 6-7, The Bible Reader’s Companion states: “It is in the free pardon that God offers the wicked that the sharpest difference between God’s thoughts and our thoughts are seen. We feel anger and outrage and call for revenge. God feels compassion and love and extends mercy. Thus God’s word is gentle and life-giving; in Isaiah’s analogy, like the gentle rain that waters the earth and causes life to spring up. What a warm and wonderful view of God (v. 10).”

The chapter ends with God’s people leaving their exile. Again, this should be understood as having multiple applications: the Jews leaving Babylonian captivity; Israel and Judah leaving their end-time captivity; spiritual Israel receiving its deliverance through Christ today; the ultimate deliverance of spiritual Israel in its glorification at Christ’s return; the spiritual deliverance of physical Israel and all mankind when they are joined to spiritual Israel through Christ; and finally their ultimate deliverance when they are glorified as well. Commentators explain this chapter as being the last one addressed to the people in captivity. The remaining chapters of Isaiah are claimed by many to be addressed to a post-exilic audience.

From chapter 56 on, the book of Isaiah is believed by many commentators to be addressing the Jews who had returned to the Promised Land following the Babylonian captivity—around 150 years or more from when Isaiah preached. Of course, some of Isaiah’s prophecies in this section were probably meant, at least in some sense, for those of His day. And some were likely also addressed to people who lived much later—even people of the end time.

Chapter 56 begins with an exhortation to “keep justice, and do righteousness” (verse 1)—a major theme in the book of Isaiah. Verse 2 says the man who does this is blessed. And then a real problem is presented for those who believe that God’s Sabbath was just for Israel and only for Old Testament times.

Isaiah quotes God in describing the importance of not defiling the Sabbath, which God gave as a sign identifying Him and His people (Exodus 31:13-17). This theme is further elaborated on in the following verses, regarding eunuchs and foreigners. “The eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant” (Isaiah 56:4) are to receive a great reward, being brought within God’s walls. This is significant because, under the Old Covenant, eunuchs were not allowed to “enter the assembly of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:1). Thus,

the prophecy in Isaiah mainly looked forward to New Covenant times—and, of all things, the Sabbath is singled out as important to keep. Ironically, many today mistakenly contend that the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments no longer in force under the New Covenant.

So, too, the foreigner “who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant” (Isaiah 56:6), was promised to be brought into God’s house—His temple. Deuteronomy 23 listed certain foreigners who were not allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord. Yet in Isaiah God says His temple is to be “a house of prayer for all nations” (verse 7), and He lets Israel know that there will be others gathered together besides Israelites. Again, this clearly looked forward to New Covenant times, when salvation would be offered to the gentiles. And again, the Sabbath is made an important focus. It is clear from the verses above, and from Isaiah 58:13-14, that keeping the Sabbath is an important part of what is expected of all those with whom God is working. Christ Himself explained that the Sabbath was made for man—i.e., all mankind—and not just for the Jews (Mark 2:27-28).

(For more on this important weekly Holy Day, send for or download our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*. <http://www.ucg.org/booklet/sunset-sunset-gods-sabbathrest/>)

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus entered the temple and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. In doing so, He stated that the temple was to be a house of prayer, not merchandise, and cited Isaiah 56:7 (see Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46)

Sorceress, Adulterer and Harlot (Isaiah 56-57)

According to its note on Isaiah 56:9-12, *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* states: “Dumb dogs, sleeping dogs, greedy dogs... characterize the spiritual leaders (watchmen; cf. Ezk. 3:17), while shepherds is an OT term for rulers [although it could signify spiritual leaders as well]. The sequence is instructive: spiritually, to have no vision (v. 10a; cf. 1 Sa. 3:1) is to have no message (v. 10b) and to drift into escapism (v. 10c) and self-pleasing (v. 11a); meanwhile the civil leadership (vv. 11b, 12) will improve on this example with stronger excess and blither optimism.”

Isaiah 57:1-2 shows that the death of God’s true followers is often misinterpreted. Probably some see it as evidence that they were misled. Yet it is not always the wicked who die prematurely. The righteous may also die early—because of God’s mercy, in order to spare them from hardship that they might otherwise have to experience. This is not to say that they could not endure the evil—it is just that they don’t need to for their personal character development, and so God chooses to shelter them in the grave, where they unconsciously await the resurrection.

Of verses 1-13 the same commentary just quoted states: “The watchmen have relaxed (56:9:12), and evil has duly flooded in. The times could well be those of Manasseh, Hezekiah’s apostate son, whose persecution of the innocent (2 Ki. 21:16) would accord with v. 1, and whose burning of his own son (2 Ki. 21:6) matches the revival of Molech-worship here (vv. 5b, 9).” Of course, these aspects of Manasseh’s reign transpired after the death of Hezekiah himself, which puts it beyond the date of Isaiah’s actual preaching (Isaiah 1:1)—thus still requiring divine foresight.

It is sad, in light of all that we’ve read concerning Israel’s wonderful future, to again read of the awful apostasy of God’s people—viewed by Him as an adulterous wife. Even today, the descendants of these same Israelites are rife with paganism and idolatry. While children are not literally sacrificed as they once were (verse 5), the unborn are murdered, aborted in a terrible holocaust at the altar of convenience and personal freedom. And living children are still offered over to the evil ways of our society from a young age—setting them on the path of death instead of God’s right path of life.

Then notice verse 8: “Behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance.”

The verse goes on to show this to be pagan. In Deuteronomy 6, God said of His instructions, “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (verse 9). Many took this literally. The Bible Reader’s Companion explains: “The religious Jew attached small tubes containing bits of Scripture to his doorpost. Isaiah complains that while these symbols of piety are present, behind your doors there are pagan symbols. It’s what’s inside our homes, and our hearts, that counts” (note on Isaiah 57:8). Even today, many claim to follow the Bible—yet they set up pagan symbols such as Christmas trees right in their living rooms. Indeed, this is the norm in modern Christendom. Others following Jewish traditions use a Chanukah bush instead of the Christmas tree.

Verses 7-9 portray an adulterous wife seductively seeking lovers. The “king” of verse 9 could refer to the pagan god Molech (meaning “king”). Equated with the Roman god Saturn, his birthday was observed at the winter solstice with child sacrifice and evergreen trees (such as in verse 5). Indeed, in many respects, while the great false Christianity of this world claims to worship Jesus Christ, they are actually worshiping the wrong king, the false savior of the Babylonian mysteries—the sun god Baal or Molech. (It should perhaps be mentioned that some commentaries suggest that “king” in this verse could also indicate a foreign ruler the Israelites appeal to for aid rather than God. This happened in ancient times, and it appears from prophecy that it will happen again in the end time—this last time with the ruler of the European “Beast” power foretold elsewhere in Scripture, who will himself be directly tied to the false worship system already mentioned.)

The remainder of the chapter contrasts the fear and punishment of the wicked with the peace and reward of the righteous. Yes, even despite Israel’s idolatrous rebellion, God in His unbounded mercy looks to the future redemption He has planned. Verse 15 is a comforting passage. God is “high and lofty,” yet He dwells with us as we pursue our mundane affairs here below. God will be as intimately involved in our lives as we allow Him to be. This contrasts with the way pagan gods were depicted in some ancient cultures—as distant from the people: “Epicurean philosophy [in Greece] depicted the gods on Mount Olympus...in detached unconcern for the world” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verse 15).

Paul cites verse 19 about preaching peace as applying to Jesus (Ephesians 2:17). And the chapter ends with the same words that ended chapter 48: There is no peace for the wicked.

Chapter 58 begins with a command from God that Isaiah—indeed, all of God’s messengers—cry out a warning of His people’s need to repent of their sins. The proclamation of this message of repentance is compared to the blowing of a trumpet, which is loud and clear—and often a signal of impending calamity (verse 1; compare Ezekiel 33).

Verse 2 of Isaiah 58 is more understandable in the New International Version: “For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God” (emphasis added). Yet it was all a pretense. All of their rituals and displays of religion were just that—rituals and displays. Their heart was not one of truly and sincerely serving God.

Starting in verse 3, God gives the example of fasting. While supposedly honoring God through self-denial of food and drink, the same people were dealing wrongfully with others and even using fasting itself for selfish advantage—as a show of their own righteousness and to criticize and deal heavy-handedly with those who didn’t fast as they did (verses 3-4). Worse still, they viewed their fasting as a way to force God to hear and help them (verse 4). God would not—and will not now or ever—accept such fasting (see Luke 18:9-14).

Fasting is supposed to help us draw close to God—to make us more mindful of the need of His constant provision for us. It is to be an exercise of genuine humility—not one of exalting ourselves over others with penance and self-righteous displays of our supposed piety. Indeed, fasting should involve not only our relationship to God, but also

our relationship with our fellow man. We are to seek an attitude of giving, service and esteeming others highly, with the goal of ceasing from malicious talk and finger pointing (Isaiah 58:9; compare James 3:8-10). God says this is especially true with our “own flesh” (Isaiah 58:7; compare 1 Timothy 5:8)—which may indicate our close relatives but could mean our community or nation or even the entire human race, since we are all one family. Overall, this passage emphasizes that fasting should indicate our willingness for self-sacrifice for others, not self-exaltation.

Because of religious hypocrisy among God’s people, both physical and spiritual Israel, a time of darkness and drought is coming, as can be discerned from Isaiah 58:10-11 (God here warns of such a time, telling His people the attitude they need to have to be preserved through it).

Indeed, from other prophecies about coming droughts and national calamities, it is clear that many of His people will be forced to “fast” in the future—that is, they will suffer hunger and thirst because there will be very little to eat and drink. They will be forced into humility—but this will be a genuine humility. Then they will cry out to God, and He will answer (as in verse 9). He will rescue His people—giving them drink and nourishment, signifying both physical and spiritual sustenance. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon them and its fruit will flow out from them—they themselves being like springs of water. (Here and in other passages, God is, in a sense, basically telling us to draw close to Him in fasting with genuine humility now—so that we are not forced to do so in the difficult times ahead.)

The prophecy of verse 12 about rebuilding the waste places is primarily for the last days. Yet, while literal, it also indicates a ministry of spiritual reconciliation and restoration.

Continuing on, it is interesting that in a last-days context we should find a command to properly observe God’s Sabbath (verses 13-14). This is yet another blow to those who argue that the Sabbath is abolished in Christ. Indeed, we can see here another instance of the religious hypocrisy that this section of the book of Isaiah is denouncing. And as with the other matters Isaiah brings out, this denunciation was not only for the people of his day. In fact, it is primarily for our time now. In the modern nations of Israel today, there is a great deal of religious observance supposedly done in God’s honor. But they don’t observe the only day of the week God actually commanded people to keep—the seventh-day Sabbath. Furthermore, even many who do keep the Sabbath—Jews and various seventh-day observing Christian organizations— often fail to properly observe it. They either overly ritualize it into a burden or look for loopholes to get around keeping it as God intended it to be kept. (We might note that even fewer give proper attention to God’s annual Sabbaths, listed in Leviticus 23 and commanded in various other passages).

We examine the scriptures commonly used to argue against Christian observance of the Sabbath, as well as God’s plain

instructions throughout Scripture about keeping it, in our booklet *Sunset to Sunset—God’s Sabbath Rest*. For the same type of information on the annual Sabbaths, see our booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan—Hope for All Mankind*. You can read them online, download them or request a copy of each to be mailed to you.

According to verse 13 of Isaiah 58, we aren’t to be doing our own pleasure on God’s Holy Day —or, perhaps better stated, doing as we please. In giving the Sabbath command, God said we are to rest and cease from our work—be it your occupation or occupational concerns (with the exception of God’s ministry, compare Matthew 12:5), personal business, housework (besides minor meal preparation and light tidying such as making the bed) or any exhausting activity (except in emergencies). But there is more to it than resting from work. Indeed, while God gives us the Sabbath as a time that can be used to get extra physical rest, this doesn’t mean sleep the day away or while it away on “doing nothing” or on personal pursuits. Rather than emphasizing what one should not do on the Sabbath, often there needs to be more focus on what to do, such as “honor Him” (verse 13) and doing good, as Jesus Christ emphasized and exemplified during His earthly ministry.

The Sabbath is a day we must treat with reverence—as holy time. And that doesn't just mean the period during which we attend worship services in accordance with God's command (Leviticus 23:3). For the entire seventh day, we must—as Isaiah 58:13 explains—stop pursuing our “own ways” (the things we normally do), seeking our “own pleasure” (just doing what we want) and speaking our “own words” (everyday things we talk about that don't involve God). This involves actually regulating the way we think on this day, since “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). We must focus our minds on God throughout His Sabbath.

This doesn't preclude doing any enjoyable things on the Sabbath since we are to find “delight” in it. But whatever we do, God must be an intrinsic part of it. The Sabbath is not a personal holiday. It is a day to meet with, and spend time with, our Creator. It is a day for Christ-centered family togetherness and spiritual fellowship. Again, God's Sabbath is not to be a rigid burden.

Indeed, as surprising as it may seem, Adam and Eve's wedding night was on the Sabbath. The Sabbath should be regarded as a joyous blessing, a rest from ordinary daily pursuits providing spiritual and mental rejuvenation.

Yet we must be careful in our use of the waking hours we have on this weekly Holy Day. The problem comes when people start making allowances for this and that and this and that—until the Sabbath is gone and very little time has been devoted to God. The Sabbath should be a time of extra prayer, extra Bible study, extra meditation on God's teachings, and extra discussion with family and fellow believers about God and His truth. In its note on Isaiah 58:13-14, The Expositor's Bible Commentary quotes from another commentator: “These verses describe the strictness and the gladness of the sabbath-keeping God desires.... The sabbath should express first of all our love of God (though both the foregoing passage and the sabbath practice of Jesus insist that it must overflow to man). It will mean self-forgetfulness...and the self-discipline of rising above the trivial.”

Other scriptures explain a little more about Sabbath observance (e.g., Mark 3:4; Luke 13:15-16; 14:1-6). God does not dictate precise terms, yet the attitude of an individual is revealed in the care He takes in striving to serve and please God by obeying the instructions He has provided. Of course, all that God commands us is for our good. Indeed, the Sabbath is for our benefit. Only when we develop a lifestyle of observing it as God instructs will He grant us the wonderful blessings of Isaiah 58:

Prov 1

Just what is wisdom? The book of Proverbs was written so that others would know it (1:2). “Descriptions of wisdom take different shape in different Old Testament contexts. In some, wisdom is knowledge related to a technical skill, for example, Bezalel's skill in crafting artistic designs with silver and gold, stone, and wood (Ex. 31:3). In other contexts, wisdom refers more to general knowledge learned from experience, especially from observation of the creation; for example, the lowly ant models diligence and foresight (Prov. 6:6-8). In general, we can say that wisdom involves knowing what to do in a given situation; skill in crafts or skill in living well both require that a person has learned how to ‘do the right thing’” (Paul Koptak, The NIV Application Commentary: Proverbs, 2003, introduction to Proverbs, pp. 38-39).

Wisdom in the book of Proverbs generally signifies moral discernment between righteousness and evil as well as skill in the proper conduct of the business of life. Wisdom implies the correct application of knowledge and understanding. The New Open Bible states in its introduction to the book: “The words ‘wisdom’ and ‘instruction’ in 1:2 complement each other because wisdom (hokhmah) means ‘skill’ and instruction (musar [the noun form of yasar]) means ‘discipline’ [or ‘correction’]. No skill is perfected without discipline.... Proverbs deals with the most fundamental skill of all: practical righteousness before God in every area of life.”

There are other frequently occurring Hebrew terms we should note up front:

bin understanding (intellectual ability to discern truth and error) da at knowledge (possession of factual information) skal wise perception and dealing (being insightful or successful) mezimma discretion (discernment to differentiate the right way to proceed) orma prudence (ability to reason through situations) leqakh learning (the root means to grasp or acquire, here mentally) tachbulah counsel (the root means to steer a ship, thus guidance to direct one's life) peti simple (uninformed, immature, aimless, naïve, gullible) kesil fool (evil but also an individual who rejects obvious truth and despises wise words) lason scornor (individual who seeks to make trouble for others)

The book of Proverbs is all about navigating between right and wrong choices. "Proverbs, if nothing else, zeroes in on the choices we face, and in recommending one way over another, it describes the kind of persons we can become and ought to be.... The proverbs do not give directions for what to do in every situation; instead, they present the qualities of character that guide us in the many decisions we will face in life" (NIV Application Commentary, introduction to Proverbs, p. 46).

The book is particularly geared to young people so they may learn from the experiences of others recorded here; but valuable and useful for everyone. "According to the prologue (1:1-7), Proverbs was written to give 'prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young' (1:4), and to make the wise even wiser (1:5). The frequent references to 'my son(s)' (1:8, 10; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1) emphasize instructing the young and guiding them in a way of life that yields rewarding ends" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, introduction to Proverbs). "In the final analysis," notes commentator Longman, "the book of Proverbs is for everyone, but with one notable exception. The fool is excluded. Perhaps it would be better to say that fools exclude themselves.... The final verse of the prologue [i.e., of the opening purpose statement] (Prov 1:7) gives what has been called the motto of the book: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.' ... By definition, fools cannot participate in wisdom because they reject God" (p. 20).

The same commentator further explains that the metaphoric imagery presented in the lengthy introduction of the book necessitates that a young man be the one addressed: "In summary, Proverbs 1:9 teaches that there are two paths: one that is right and leads to life, and one that is wrong and leads to death. The son is walking the path of life, and the father and Wisdom are warning him of the dangers he will encounter as well as the encouragement he will find.... Traps, snares, stumbling, enemies on the dark side; God on the side of life. But the most important people encountered along the way; and this explains why we need to understand that the addressee is a man; are two women: Woman Wisdom and the dark figure of Woman Folly" (p. 27).

Likewise, the Zondervan NIV Study Bible points out: "In the initial cycle of instruction (1:8, 9:18) the writer urges the young man to choose the way of wisdom (that leads to life) and shun the ways of folly (that, however tempting they may be, lead to death).

The author chooses two prime exemplifications of folly to give concreteness to his exhortations: (1) to get ahead in the world by exploiting (even oppressing) others rather than by diligent and honest labor; and (2) to find sexual pleasure outside the bonds and responsibilities of marriage. Temptation to the one comes from the young man's male peers (1:10-19); temptation to the other comes from the adulterous woman (ch. 5; 6:20-35; ch. 7). Together, these two temptations illustrate the pervasiveness and power of the allurements to folly that the young man will face in life and must be prepared to resist....The second especially functions here as illustrative and emblematic of the appeal of Lady Folly" (introduction to Proverbs). Understanding the figurative parallels here, it is clear that women can profit from the instruction given in this introduction as well.

The opening discourses are “strikingly organized. Beginning (1:8-33) and ending (chs. 8-9) with direct enticements and appeals, the main body of the discourses is made up of two nicely balanced sections, one devoted to the commendation of wisdom (chs. 2-4) and the other to warnings against folly (chs. 5-7)” (ibid.). Expositor’s notes that “this section runs in cycles: the purpose of Proverbs is to give wisdom (2:1-4:27), but folly may prevent one from seeking it (5:1-6:19); there are advantages to finding wisdom (6:20-9:12), but folly may prevent this too (9:13-18)” (introduction to Proverbs).

Following the introduction, chapter 10 commences the concentration of short sentence proverbs forming the main collections of the book, there being only few such aphorisms scattered throughout the introductory discourses (the first being 1:7, as we’ve seen). When we reach chapter 10 in our reading, we will note the various forms of these proverbs.

There is a clear relation, we should observe, between Proverbs and the law of God, as Proverbs affirms the wisdom of keeping God’s law and the folly of breaking or ignoring it. This sometimes comes in the form of direct commands in the proverbs, these being a form of instruction. For example, Deuteronomy says, “You shall not remove your neighbor’s landmark”

(19:14) and “cursed is the one who moves his neighbor’s landmark” (27:17). Likewise, Proverbs says, “Do not remove the ancient landmark” (22:28; 23:10). At other times the relationship is more illustrative. The Fifth Commandment says, “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). Proverbs states, “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother” (10:1). The Eighth Commandment says, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19). Proverbs states, “Ill-gotten treasures are of no value; but righteousness delivers from death” (10:2, NIV). Of course, the desired conduct is still clear. Such is the nature of wisdom literature.

The NIV Application Commentary says: “One might go a little farther and say that experience and observation together persuade the wise of the truth of torah [God’s law or teaching]. It is torah tested in the crucible of experience, and one can draw from that crucible examples of how wisdom works in real life. Examples of wisdom in Proverbs, but also in Job, Ecclesiastes, a number of the psalms, and perhaps even the Song of Songs, join together to say: See, this way of life works, sometimes in ways we did not expect (see Job and Ecclesiastes), and one need not be afraid to bring the teaching of torah to experience to be tested by it. In wisdom literature the rule of God described in the torah takes on personal suffering (Job), the contradictions of life (Ecclesiastes), and the presence of evil in this world (Proverbs) and affirms that God’s instructions can be trusted. Experience ultimately will not contradict them” (pp. 39-41).

The mechanics of these principles leading to positive or negative outcomes may involve God’s direct intervention or simply follow a natural course. The New American Commentary points out: “Regarding the relationship between wisdom and the Torah, one must compare first of all the teaching of Proverbs on retribution with that found in Deuteronomy. Both strongly emphasize the concepts of retribution and reward. In both, just or right activity produces life and peace, whereas evil deeds end in self-destruction. On the other hand, in Deuteronomy the rewards or retributions come directly from the hand of God as he deals with his people according to the terms of the covenant. Proverbs, however, views the respective benefits and sorrows of good and evil not so much as direct acts of God as the natural and almost automatic results of certain actions” (pp. 25-26).

On this note we should realize that Proverbs does not support the misguided theology held by Job’s friends in the book of Job; the idea that physical blessings in life are proof of righteousness and suffering is proof of sinfulness. It may seem that way from numerous short sayings, or even that the sayings are contradictory, since some show the righteous living well and some show the sinful living well for the time being. The same commentary properly notes:

“Proverbs does not support the often alleged maxim that the Israelites believed that the rich are righteous and favored by God but the poor are sinners and under his punishment.

This assessment is a poor caricature of biblical wisdom. The problem here is not with the Bible but with our failure to grasp the hermeneutics [interpretive methods] of wisdom literature. By its very nature and purpose, wisdom emphasizes the general truth over some specific cases and, being a work of instruction, frames its teachings in short, pithy statements without excessive qualification. It is not that the wisdom writers did not know that life was complex and full of exceptions, but dwelling on those cases would have distracted attention from their didactic [i.e., teaching] purposes. It is general truth that those who fear God and live with diligence and integrity will have lives that are prosperous and peaceful but that those who are lazy and untrustworthy ultimately destroy themselves. And general truths are the stock in trade of Proverbs” (p. 57).

Commentator Wiersbe further notes: “Hebrew proverbs are generalized statements of what is usually true in life, and they must not be treated like promises. ‘A friend loves at all times’ (Prov. 17:17, NKJV), but sometimes even the most devoted friends may have disagreements [or fail to have proper care for one another]. ‘A soft answer turns away wrath’ (15:1, NKJV) in most instances, but our Lord’s lamblike gentleness didn’t deliver Him from shame and suffering. The assurance of life for the obedient is given often (3:2, 22; 4:10, 22; 8:35; 9:11; 10:27; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 19:23; 21:21; 22:4) and generally speaking, this is true. Obedient believers will care for their bodies and minds and avoid substances and practices that destroy, but some godly saints have died very young while more than one godless rebel has had a long life....‘The righteous man is rescued from trouble, and it comes on the wicked instead’ (11:8, NIV) certainly happened to Mordecai (Es. 7) and Daniel (Dan. 6), but...Christian martyrs testify to the fact that the statement isn’t an absolute in this life. In fact, in Psalm 73, Asaph concludes that the wicked get the upper hand in this world, but the godly have their reward in eternity. The Book of Proverbs has little to say about the life to come; it focuses on this present life and gives guidelines for making wise decisions that help to produce a satisfying life” (p. 22). Of course, the promises of eternity for the righteous are to be understood in a scriptural context and are to be kept in mind as a given while reading the proverbs.

The NIV Application Commentary cautions: “We may need to unlearn the idea that Proverbs is a book of principles that allow us to predict or even control how life will turn out, a collection of promises that we can cash in like coupons....Solomon and the sages who followed him never claimed that their observations were promises that God was duty-bound to fulfill. They understood that the wicked sometimes prosper for a time and that the righteous often suffer, but they also knew that God does not stop being God when circumstances seem to point the other way. Instead, these writings show us how life in this God-created universe works so we can work with it and not against it” (p. 43).

On this point, An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books comments: “It is inappropriate to treat the proverbs of this book as promises. They are theological and pragmatic principles.... If, of course, other genres of Holy Scripture set forth that truth [expressed in a particular proverb] as a promise, then it is appropriate to view the proverb in that manner, while acknowledging that the promissory element does not originate with proverbs. That is not their purpose” (Hassel Bullock, 1988, p. 162).

Moreover, we should realize that particular proverbs are sometimes situation-sensitive and not always universally applicable. This explains how we can have proverbs that seem directly contradictory. Perhaps the best illustration of this is Proverbs 26:4-5, where we are told: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” So do we answer a fool or not? Wisdom is discerning that it depends on the situation. We will see more on these particular verses in a moment. But the same

can be said of more modern English proverbs. Consider “Many hands make light work” versus “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” Which maxim is true? They both are, but each fits a different situation.

Or “Look before you leap” versus “He who hesitates is lost.” We find the same principle at work here. Sometimes people need to be more cautious, but in other situations they could be too cautious. Wisdom, we should realize, is not only knowing such principles, but knowing when a particular principle is applicable.

Commentator Longman puts it well: “Proverbs are not magical words that if memorized and applied in a mechanical way automatically lead to success and happiness. Consider Proverbs 26:7 and 9: ‘A proverb in the mouth of a fool is as useless as a paralyzed leg....A proverb in the mouth of a fool is like a thorn bush brandished by a drunk.’ These two proverbs say it takes a wise person to activate the teaching of a proverb correctly. A wise person is one who is sensitive to the right time and place. The fool applies a proverb heedless of its fitness for the situation. The two quoted proverbs are pointed in their imagery. A paralyzed leg does not help the person walk, so a proverb does not help a fool act wisely. According to the second saying, a fool’s use of a proverb may be worse than ineffective, it may even be dangerous. Using a thorn bush as a weapon would hurt the wielder as well as the one being struck. So a proverb must be applied at the right time and in the right situation. The wise person is one who can do this effectively” (p. 50).

He further adds: “Wisdom, then, is not a matter of memorizing proverbs and applying them mechanically and absolutely. Wisdom is knowing the right time and the right circumstances to apply the right principle to the right person. Returning to the ‘contradictory’ proverbs about whether or not to answer a fool (Prov 26:4-5), we see now that the wise person must, to put it baldly, know what kind of fool he or she is dealing with. Is this a fool who will not learn and will simply sap time and energy from the wise person? If so, then don’t bother answering. However, if this is a fool who can learn, and our not answering will lead to worse problems, then by all means, answer. In a word, proverbs are principles that are generally true, not immutable laws.

Bearing this in mind makes a world of difference when reading the proverbs. Someone reading Proverbs 23:13-14 [about not failing to beat a child with a rod for correction]...and having a mechanical view of the application of the proverbs, may well end up with a dangerous view of parenting....But this is not a law. It is a general principle that encourages those who are reluctant to use a form of discipline by telling them that it is permissible and even helpful for delivering a child from behavior that may result in premature death” (pp. 56-57). As with the former situation, it is important to discern what action the circumstance calls for.

The book of Proverbs, as with all of Scripture, is vital to living the Christian life. It is quoted nine times in the New Testament: Romans 3:15; 12:16, 20 (Proverbs 1:16; 3:7; 25:21-22); Hebrews 12:5-6 (Proverbs 3:11-12); James 4:6, 13-14 (Proverbs 3:34; 27:1); 1 Peter 2:17; 4:8, 18 (Proverbs 24:21; 10:12; 11:31); 2 Peter 2:22 (Proverbs 26:11). Indeed, the book points to the ultimate wisdom that is found in Christ. Jesus was the preeminent wisdom teacher. He taught with parables; and the Greek word *parabole* was, as noted earlier, used to translate the Hebrew *mashal* (the word translated “proverb” in English). In Luke 11:31 He spoke of the wisdom of Solomon and declared Himself greater than Solomon. But more than that, Jesus is the very embodiment of wisdom, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). And this was for our benefit: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and justification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30; compare verses 22-24). It is through Christ that we are made truly wise. Of course, that wisdom is reflected in Proverbs, as it is in all Scripture.

Finally, this wonderful trove of wisdom provides God’s people with a crucial guide to navigating the various situations of life. As the Soncino Commentary’s introduction to Proverbs notes: “The comprehensiveness of outlook is indeed remarkable. No phase of human relationship seems to be overlooked. The king on his throne, the

tradesman in his store and the farmer in the field, husband and wife and child, all receive wholesome instruction and exhortation. Advice is tendered on the treatment of friends, the poor, the rearing of children, the snares which lurk in the path of youth, the perils of overconfidence and self-commitment by standing surety for others. These and other contingencies provide occasion for shrewd counsel, based upon the central doctrine that wisdom is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and happy is every one that holdeth her fast ([3].18).” Let us all strive with Christ’s help to do just that.

Agreeing with an early compilation by Solomon himself, respected scholar Kenneth Kitchen’s structural analysis of Proverbs “indicates that the Book of Solomon (Prov 1:1-24) was written as a unified text at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Even apart from that work, however, the older criteria for dating the sections of Proverbs are inappropriate. The lengthy wisdom discourses and the personification of wisdom in Prov 1:9, once regarded as proofs of the late origin of those chapters, are now acknowledged to be paralleled in Egyptian literature” (NAC, p. 51). Indeed, there are a number of parallels in the book of Proverbs with similar wisdom literature in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

There are good reasons to give some consideration to this fact and take a look at such literature. As The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains in its introduction to Proverbs: “This literary background is helpful to understanding the biblical book. First, it provides help in understanding the forms of wisdom literature, proverbs, maxims, fables, riddles, allegories, and instructions. Second, it indicates the antiquity of the forms used in the Bible, especially Proverbs 1:9, which was once considered to be the latest form. But it now can be demonstrated that the literary proverb of two lines may be as old as the Sumerian proverbs, and that collected instructions may be as ancient as the Old Kingdom of Egypt.” Of course, such wisdom literature was based on human observation in a pagan setting without divine sanction. Yet some elements of this literature were valid and may have, through God’s direction, been edited to fit in the collection of the book of Proverbs, as we will see. On the other hand, the biblical proverbs may also have influenced foreign literature. We will consider these issues after briefly taking note of some of the foreign wisdom instruction.

Old Kingdom Egypt gives us “the ‘Instruction of Kagemni’ and the ‘Instruction of Ptah-hotep’ (2450 B.C.), which advise the proper decorum for a court official. Like Proverbs, Ptah-hotep counsels on persuasive speech: ‘Good speech is more hidden than the emerald, but it may be found with maidservants at the grindstones’.... He further warns against going after a woman like a fool, for ‘one attains death through knowing her’” (same note). The same work says: “When you are guest at the table of one who is greater than you then take what he gives you, as they serve it before you. Do not look at what lies before him, but always look only at what lies before you” (compare Proverbs 23:1).

Also from the Egyptian Old Kingdom, “the ‘Instruction of Merikare’ (2160-2040 B.C) records a monarch’s advice for his son on the wise qualities needed by a king, including this saying: ‘The tongue is a sword...and speech is more valorous than any fighting’” (Expositor’s, introduction to Proverbs).

From the Egyptian New Kingdom we have the “Instructions of Anii.” “Like the book of Proverbs, Anii exhorts readers to avoid beer drinking and warns about the disgrace of public drunkenness (see Pr 20:1). Anii asserts that an individual should avoid the company of brawlers and violent men (see v. 3). Anii advises against taking vengeance, urging the reader instead to seek divine help (cf. v. 22). Anii warns the reader to stay away from the ‘strange woman,’ the prostitute or adulteress (vv. [16; 22:14;] 23[:27]-35)” (“The Instructions of Anii,” NIV Archaeological Study Bible, sidebar on Proverbs 20, p. 990).

From early Mesopotamia comes the “Instruction of Shuruppak” (ca. 2000 B.C.), which “records the advice of a king to his son Ziusudra, the hero of the flood in the Sumerian version. For example, it says, ‘My son, let me give you

instructions, may you pay attention to them,' and '{My} son, do not sit {alone} in a {chamber} with someone's wife.' The 'Counsels of Wisdom' (c. 1500-1000 B.C.) are a collection of moral exhortations about avoiding bad company and careless speech, being kind to the needy, and living in harmony with one's neighbor and in loyalty to the king. For example, it says, 'Do not return evil to your adversary; Requite with kindness the one who does evil to you, / Maintain justice for your enemy'" (Expositor's, introduction to Proverbs).

Solomon may well have studied such literature, given the cosmopolitan nature of his kingdom and his renowned pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Considering his royal education and position as king, he likely was able to speak and read the languages of surrounding kingdoms. Scripture, as we've seen, even mentions the wisdom of the East and of Egypt, which was surpassed by Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:30; compare Daniel 1:4, 17, 20). Solomon was closely allied to Egypt, being married to the pharaoh's daughter. Many Egyptian cultural influences have been discovered in archaeological finds in Jerusalem dating to Solomon's time.

Some later works in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt could reflect earlier wisdom in nations that Solomon borrowed from. On the other hand, these works could just as easily reflect wisdom that came to some extent from Solomon, as his wisdom was famous throughout the Middle East during his reign. "The 'Words of Ahiqar' (700-670 B.C.) is a collection of proverbs, riddles, short fables, and religious observations by a court official for the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, giving advice on disciplining children, guarding the tongue, respecting secrets, and being circumspect in dealing with the king. For example, it says, 'Withhold not thy son from the rod' (...cf. Prov 13:24); and 'I have lifted sand, and I have carried salt; but there is naught which is heavier than {grief}' (...cf. Prov 27:3)" (same note).

And from later in Egypt there is the "Instruction of Ankhsheshonq" (ca. 400-300 B.C.), "a large collection of about five hundred sayings and precepts like those in the Book of Proverbs that reflect the practical and religious concerns of the community. But they do not have the poetic parallelism characteristic of Hebrew proverbs. For example, their instructions include: 'Do not go to your brother if you are in trouble, go to your friend' (cf. Prov 27:10); and 'Better {to have} a statue for a son than a fool' (cf. Prov 17:21)" (same note).

The strongest parallels with the book of Proverbs are to be found in the Egyptian New Kingdom "Instruction of Amenemope" (sometimes written as Amen-em-opet). A number of its statements correspond closely to the "Sayings of the Wise" in Proverbs 22:17-23:11. "For example, the instructions include these: 'Do not associate to thyself the heated man, / Nor visit him for conversation' (...cf. Prov 22:24); 'Do not strain to seek an excess, / When thy needs are safe for thee. / If riches are brought to thee by robbery.... / (Or) they have made themselves wings like geese / And are flown away to the heavens' (...cf. Prov 23:4-5)" (same note). The latter parallel is uncanny. Proverbs 23:4-5 says: "Do not overwork to be rich.... Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven." We will examine further parallels with Amenemope later. There is some debate over who influenced whom here. Most scholars take Amenemope to predate Solomon, in which case Solomon could have borrowed from the Egyptian work, though the Egyptian work could just as well have drawn on earlier Hebrew wisdom that Solomon also borrowed from. However, some argue that Amenemope was composed later than Solomon.

We should realize that borrowing or editing some sayings in use at the time does not signal approval of surrounding cultures, nor does it take away from the inspiration of Solomon's work. As commentator Tremper Longman points out: "Study of the similarities between the advice given in the biblical book and ancient Near Eastern wisdom...makes concrete what we read in 1 Kings 4, that the sages of Israel lived and studied in an international context. It is always dicey to be dogmatic about specific borrowings, but there is little doubt that Israel's wise teachers read, understood, adapted, and appropriated the wisdom of their (pagan!) neighbors. Does this tell us

something about how we should view our own, non-Christian culture, as well as other cultures worldwide? Many Christians react strongly against today's culture and the literature it produces, reading only Christian literature, going only to Christian schools, avoiding movies, and so forth. Certainly the prophets of Israel issued important warnings about the seductive power of pagan culture. The sages, though, are the counterbalance. They are a model of thoughtful observers, reflecting on the world around them [just as the apostle Paul later quoted from pagan literature to make certain points]. Perhaps we should be better observers ourselves. Though the sages observed and appropriated, they never simply or uncritically borrowed ideas from the broader cultural setting. Rather they adapted them to their own religious values.... If sages observed a truth in Egyptian wisdom, they understood it to be a truth of Yahweh" (How to Read Proverbs, 2002, p. 77).

And Expositor's notes: " Whatever the Spirit of God inspired the ancient writers to include became a part of the Word of the Lord. Such inclusions then took on a new and greater meaning when they formed part of Scripture; in a word, they became authoritative and binding, part of the communication of the divine will" (introduction to Proverbs).

Indeed, such wisdom was not left to stand on its own but was placed in subordination to the fact that true knowledge and wisdom begin with the fear of the Lord (see 1:7; 9:10). "The words 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge' (1:7) set the record straight, so to speak. This is the foundation on which all other wise sayings stand. It is the Book of Proverbs' central idea: Fear of the Lord motivates us to obey God's commandments, and obedience to them constitutes true wisdom" (The Nelson Study Bible, introduction to Proverbs). Indeed, 1:7, which concludes the purpose statement of the book and commences the introductory instruction, is the very first sentence proverb or compact saying in the book, contrasting the way to right knowledge through godly fear with the choice of fools to reject wisdom and instruction. (Compared to later sections of the book, the first nine chapters constituting the introduction contain relatively few such maxims.)

Second, following Psalms, in the Hebrew arrangement of the Writings section of the Old Testament is the premier example of wisdom literature in Scripture, the book of Proverbs. The Hebrew title of the book, based on the first verse, is Mishle Shelomoh, "Proverbs of Solomon." The Greek title used in the Septuagint is a translation of this: Paroimiai Salomontos. As we will consider further, the Greek word here is also the word for "parables." The Latin title, Liber Proverbiorum, brings us closer to the English title we use today. The early rabbinical writings called Proverbs Sepher Hokhmah, "Book of Wisdom," after its principal subject.

Just what is a proverb? In modern parlance the word denotes a memorable short saying summarizing a time-tested truth, also known as an aphorism, adage, maxim, epigram or byword. One commentator explains: "Proverbs are pithy statements that summarize in a few choice words practical truths relating to some aspect of everyday life. The Spanish novelist Cervantes defined a proverb as 'a short sentence based on long experience.' From a literary point of view, that isn't a bad definition. Some people think that our English word proverb comes from the Latin proverbium, which means 'a set of words put forth,' or, 'a saying supporting a point.' Or, it may come from the Latin pro ('instead of,' 'on behalf of') and verba ('words'); that is, a short statement that takes the place of many words. The proverb 'Short reckonings make long friendships' comes across with more power than a lecture on forgiving your friends" (Warren Wiersbe, Be Skillful: An Old Testament Study Proverbs: Tapping God's Guidebook to Fulfillment, 2004, p. 14).

Yet we should take care here to note that the Hebrew word translated "proverb," mashal (for which mishle is the plural), is considerably broader than this. It corresponds to our idea of a proverb, a popular short saying, in some passages (see 1 Samuel 10:12; 24:13). Yet it can also refer to a prophetic discourse (see Numbers 23:7, 18), a taunt (see Isaiah 14:4; Micah 2:4; Habakkuk 2:6), a parable or allegory (see Ezekiel 17:2; 20:49; 24:3-5), or the longer

discourse sections in Job (see Job 27:1; 29:1). The basic meaning of the Hebrew word *mashal* is “comparison,” “similarity” or “parallel.” Many of the short sayings in the book of Proverbs are comparisons or contrasts (see 11:22; 25:25; 26:6-9). Sometimes these are presented with the word “better” (see 15:16-17; 16:19, 32; 17:1; 19:1). But we should recognize that, unlike the latter part of the book, chapters 1-9 consist not mainly of short sayings but of lengthier discourses. Nevertheless, rather powerful metaphoric imagery is employed in these opening chapters, with wisdom and folly personified as two very different women. Such metaphoric discourses could perhaps fall within the meaning of the Hebrew term *mashal*. It may be that the general idea is illustrative sayings, which would include all of the above. Yet in the book of Proverbs, the meaning may more specifically refer to the compact sayings, as the section heading in 10:1 (following the introductory chapters 1-9) seems to commence the proverbs of Solomon without an “also” as in 25:1 (though some argue that this is because chapters 1-9 were a later addition, which seems unlikely).

As wisdom literature, the proverbs here have a didactic or instructive purpose (see 1:1-7), these being “the words of the wise” (1:6). Indeed, there were three classes of teachers in ancient Israel. Note Jeremiah 18:18: “Then they said, ‘Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.’” Also Ezekiel 7:26: “Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.” Besides the priests who taught the people God’s law and the prophets who communicated special messages from God, the people also learned from the “wise” or “elders” who gave them counsel on applying God’s principles and navigating their way through life. The seal of divine approval on such wisdom was its harmony with God’s laws and prophetic scriptures. Of course, in the case of the book of Proverbs, there is no question as to its divine warrant since it is now clearly part of the Bible, God’s Word. Yet even when compiled, the wisdom of its human author was known to have come from God.

In 1 Kings 3, we read how King Solomon received his great wisdom. When chosen to succeed his father David as king, Solomon humbly asked God to grant him wisdom so that he might be a good king in governing God’s people Israel: “Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (verse 9). God was very pleased with Solomon’s humble and serving attitude. Notice His response: “Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you” (verse 12). Later in 1 Kings 4 we read: “And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five....And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (verses 29-34).

The fact that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs does not mean that all originated with him. No doubt many were his creations. But others he collected, perhaps even from surrounding cultures, and some he edited and compiled into this written set. As we are told in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Because the Preacher [most likely Solomon] was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright, words of truth” (12:9-10). Some think Solomon’s plunge into uncontrolled polygamy and later idolatry disqualifies him from having written the book of Proverbs. But clearly God inspired his great wisdom and what he wrote, despite Solomon’s eventual choices to ignore what he knew to be right. Indeed, considering the other biblical testimony here, who better than Solomon to have put together the premier wisdom text?

Solomon's name appears at the beginning of three sections of the book of Proverbs: in 1:1 at the beginning of chapters 1-9; in 10:1 at the beginning of 10:1-22:16; and in 25:1 at the beginning of chapters 25-29. Let's note the parts of the book in order of arrangement:

1. 1:1-7 Title and Purpose Statement
2. 1:8-9:18 Prologue (father's exhortative discourses, wisdom personified)
3. 10:1-22:16 Proverbs of Solomon (Major Collection)
4. 22:17-24:22 Words of the Wise
5. 24:23-34 Further Words of the Wise
6. 25:1-29:27 Further Proverbs of Solomon (Hezekiah's Collection)
7. 30:1-33 Words of Agur
8. 31:1-9 Words of King Lemuel From His Mother
9. 31:10-31 Epilogue (Virtuous Wife)

(Sometimes section 1 above is referred to as a prologue and section 2 is called an introduction. Others reverse these designations. And still others apply both terms to both sections together. It is true that both are really part of the same section, so that sections 1 and 2 could be assigned the same number. Also, sections 8 and 9 are often grouped together, given that 9, the book's epilogue, has no separate attribution. This would yield a total of seven sections, corresponding to the distinct attribution at the beginning of each. Still, the authorship of the epilogue is uncertain.)

Many argue that the attribution to Solomon in 1:1 concerns the whole work rather than specifically chapters 1-9. This seems likely, since, as mentioned earlier, 10:1 does not have the word "also" like 25:1 does. However, that could be because 10:1 begins the section of compact proverbial sayings in contrast to the preceding longer discourses. As further noted earlier, some claim that chapters 1-9 constitute a later addition to the book of Proverbs written by someone other than Solomon. Yet the attribution to Solomon in 1:1 would then seem rather odd, not applying to any material for nine chapters. Thus, even though the title in 1:1 probably refers to the book as a whole, the absence of any other attribution at the beginning of chapters 1-9 most reasonably implies that Solomon is the one behind this lengthy prologue or introduction.

Out of the large number of proverbs Solomon spoke, he selected for the book of Proverbs' core collection bearing his name (10:1-22:16) the comparatively small number of 375 (one proverb per verse/line). Interestingly, this number corresponds to the numerical value of Solomon's name. His name in Hebrew, Shelomoh, is written with four Hebrew consonants, each of which corresponds to a number: shin (300) + lamed (30) + mem (40) + he (5) = 375.

A later collection of Solomon's proverbs (Proverbs 25-29) was added by "the men of Hezekiah king of Judah" (25:1). Hezekiah, a righteous king, directed this work, perhaps with the guidance of the prophets who were contemporary with him, Isaiah and Micah. We are not told where these were copied from, but it may have been from a book mentioned in 1 Kings 11:41: "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?" Some contend that the number of proverbs in this section (which is not always one per verse) likewise corresponds to the numerical value of Hezekiah's name. His name is variously spelled, but in Proverbs 25:1 the form is Hsqyh: heth (8) + zayin (7) + qoph (100) + yod (10) + he (5) = 130. The exact number of proverbs in this section is not clear, as some may be conjoined, but this number is perhaps possible. It is certainly close. Some contend that Hezekiah's name, as in other passages, should be counted with a

preceding yod (valued at 10), yielding a total of 140 and they argue that there are 140 verse lines in this collection that should be counted instead of literary units or sayings.

We do not know when the other collections in the book were included, these being the two from the “wise” (22:17-24:22; 24:23-34) and that of Agur (30:1-33) and of Lemuel (31:1-9), of which, as noted above, the epilogue about the virtuous wife (31:10-31) may or may not be part. Since none of these sections include a note about scribal copying like the Hezekiah collection, it may be that these others were all part of Solomon’s original compilation. As for Agur and Lemuel, we do not know who they are. Some consider these names to be pseudonyms for Solomon, but this is not provable and seems unlikely given the other clear attributions. We will further consider this matter later.

Other numerical factors may have guided the final editorial work on the book. As commentator Patrick Skehan notes: “The title in Prov 1:1 alleges ‘Proverbs of Solomon (375), son of David (d = 4 + w = 6 + d = 4, or 14 in all), king of Israel.’ Now since Ysr’l has the numerical value (y = 10 + s = 300 + r = 200 + ? = 1 + l = 30) 541, the names in Prov 1:1 have a value of 375 + 14 + 541, or 930, the number of lines in the book” (Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Monograph Series I, 1971, p. 44). The same commentator argues that the book is constructed as the “house of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:1), arranged in a numeric pattern corresponding to the temple of Solomon. “Skehan’s theory is intriguing, but most scholars remain unconvinced of its validity. Its very complexity and the peculiar way some passages are combined give the theory a contrived look” (New American Commentary, introduction to Proverbs, p. 48). Time and space limitations prevent further examination of this idea here.

Instruction begins with the words “My son” (verse 8), and we see this several other times throughout the opening discourses of the book. Some see this address as formulaic of a wisdom teacher speaking to a disciple. Yet here and in 6:20, the mention of both father and mother make it clear that an actual son is being addressed. Perhaps Solomon wrote this for his own son, though it is later sad to see that his son Rehoboam did not walk in the ways of wisdom, following the foolish advice of his peers rather than the wisdom of elders (a fact made more understandable by the terrible failings of Solomon himself later in life). In any case, every child is to be the student of his parents. This applies to girls as well as to boys.

The book’s first exhortation (1:8-19) is an appeal to reject enticements to run with the wrong crowd, in this case people bent on harming others for gain. Regarding verses 17-19, The New American Commentary states: “Verse 17 is confusing as translated in the [NKJV,] NIV and most versions. Even if one is willing to admit that a bird is intelligent enough to recognize the purpose of a trap when it sees it (which is doubtful), the proverb has no point in context. In addition, the Hebrew cannot sustain the translation of ‘spread a net.’ The line is best rendered, ‘In the eyes of a bird, the net is strewn {with grain} for no reason.’ In other words, the bird does not see any connection between the net and what is scattered on it; he just sees food that is free for the taking. In the process he is trapped and killed. In the same way, the gang cannot see the connection between their acts of robbery and the fate that entraps them. In vv. 18-19 the teacher brings his point home: the gang members are really ambushing themselves. The very reverse of their proposal in v. 11 has come about. Also, v. 19 concludes, it will ever be that way” (note on verses 8-19).

We then have, in verses 20-33, the first appeal of wisdom in the book, a discourse with a symmetrical or chiasmic structure (NAC, note on verses 20-33):

Wisdom is personified as a woman crying out for others to hear and heed her instruction. Further chance to reform is given to those who have thus far failed to heed. For those who do accept correction, Wisdom says, “Surely I will pour out my spirit on you” (verse 23). In its immediate context, this simply means wisdom will be given to those

who are willing to learn. Yet since the fullness of wisdom is to be found in God, this could ultimately represent God saying that He will give His Spirit, which brings ultimate understanding and wisdom, to those who accept Him. Again, however, this is not what is directly stated here.

“Wisdom is a personification and not a person or a goddess. The statement that fools call on her when they get into trouble is not a reference to literal prayer but a dramatic picture of fools trying to find a way out of the trouble they are in. They ‘call on’ her in the sense that they are at last ready to listen to advice, but it is too late. Their indifference to Wisdom has already destroyed them (v. 32)” (same note). Of course, their rejection of wisdom is a rejection of choosing to fear God (verse 29), which is the beginning of wisdom (see 1:7; 9:10).

This sad warning ends in 1:33 with an assurance of security for those who will heed. As noted in the introduction, we must understand this as a general truth over the course of life. It is not a promise that bad things will never happen to righteous and wise people. Ultimately, of course, absolute and eternal security will be granted to the righteous in the future Kingdom of God.

John 20-21

In John 20 the very first thing we read is that this is now the 1st day of the week and the sun has not yet risen because it is still dark. There are some groups out there that are now saying the Sabbath is only the day part and not the night before.

Well here we have clear evidence that this was the first day and it was still dark.

Torah clearly shows us that each day begins at Sunset and finishes when the sun sets the following day. In Genesis it says for each day of creation;

Gen 1:5 And Elohim called the light ‘day’ and the darkness He called ‘night.’ And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the first day

Gen 1:8 And Elohim called the expanse ‘heavens.’ And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the second day.

Gen 1:13 And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the third day.

Gen 1:19 And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the fourth day.

Gen 1:23 And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the fifth day.

Gen 1:31 And Elohim saw all that He had made, and see, it was very good. And there came to be evening and there came to be morning, the sixth day.

We are then told in Lev 23 that for the day of Atonement we are to keep it from Sunset to sunset. Not when we see three stars in the night sky, but when the sun sets. This is when the day begins. This is when the Sabbath begins. This is when every Sabbath begins; at Sunset.

Lev 23:26 And Yehovah spoke to Mosheh, saying, 27 “On the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a set-apart gathering for you. And you shall afflict your beings, and shall bring an offering made by fire to Yehovah. 28 “And you do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yehovah your Elohim. 29 “For any being who is not afflicted on that same day, he shall be cut off from his people. 30 “And any being who does any work on that same day, that being I shall destroy from the midst of his people. 31 “You do no work – a law forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 32 ‘It

is a Sabbath of rest to you, and you shall afflict your beings. On the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you observe your Sabbath.”

In John 20:7 we read and the cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but folded up in a place by itself.

In the article Under the Shadow of His wings; The Tallit which you can read at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/?page_id=129 it says the following;

Some might think that the commands in Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12 have been abolished and not to be observed, especially by Gentile believers. But, the following study shows that the four cornered garment, especially the kind used in formal worship, was involved with miraculous healings years after the crucifixion of our Savior. In John 11:44 we learn of a Hebrew custom to wrap the face of the deceased with his prayer shawl, his tallit, with its fringes in its wings, corners:

“43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. 44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a NAPKIN [Strong’s G4676]. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” John 11:44.

This practice was also observed in the burial wrapping of our Savior:

“3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. 4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. 5 And he stooping down, [and looking in], saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the NAPKIN [Strong’s G4676], that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” John 20:3-7.

Notice the sanctity that the Savior gives to the “napkin” that had been wrapped around His face and head. The fact that He separated the “napkin” from the regular linen burial clothes shows that it was “holy” for the priests were to teach the people the difference and the setting apart of those things that were “holy” from those things that were common.** I cannot emphasize enough that this is AFTER the cross, that the Savior is setting apart this “napkin.” The reason why the Israelites wrapped their heads in their prayer shawls was because of their belief in the resurrection and respect for the Shekinah glory of YHWH. In veiling their faces even in death, the Hebrew believer showed respect for the resurrecting glory of YHWH. Moses had veiled his face because of the glory of YHWH radiating upon it.* Further, to be wrapped in one’s prayer shawl, tallit, was to show that even in death, the believer was “hiding under the shadow of the Almighty’s wings.” The Strong’s Concordance number for “napkin” in the above texts is Strong’s G4676, soudarion. This word shows up, translated as “handkerchief,” in Acts 19:11, 12: “11 And G-d wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick HANDKERCHIEFS [Strong’s G4676] or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.” Acts 19:11, 12.

Also in John 20:17 we have another huge indication of an event that most people just do not get. You can read about this huge understanding and teaching at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/?page_id=21 about Pentecost Hidden Meaning.

Yehshua was the wave offering spoken of in Lev 23. This offering was done on the first day of the week, Sunday during Unleavened Bread. For those of you who have not yet read the above article I encourage you to do so.

In Chapter 21 we read how Yehshua asked Peter three time if He love Him, and each time Peter said yes then Yehshua told him to feed His Lambs and to tend His Sheep and to feed His Sheep.

Many of you claim to love Yeshua. But do You?

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Those of you who do keep the commandments, who keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days of Lev 23 and the Sabbatical years, those who do this and keep the commandments are told that if you love Him to feed the sheep. That is to tell others what you have learned and what you know. Your silence is not golden if you take all you have learned to the grave with you.

Do not try and teach it to the brethren, but rather go into the rest of the world and teach all the different Christian denominations that do not know, teach them the truth of Torah. Help to find the rest of those who are called.

Do this if you love Yeshua.