

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 28/01/2012

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Lev 13	Jer 49-50	Prov 25	Acts 22
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Laws Regulating Disease and Bodily Discharges (Leviticus 13-15)

Modern leprosy, also called Hansen's disease, is, according to Mosby's Medical, Nursing, & Allied Health Dictionary, a "chronic, communicable disease... that may take either of two forms, depending on the immunity of the host. Tuberculoid leprosy, seen in those with high resistance, presents as thickening of [skin] nerves and [insensitive], saucer-shaped lesions. Lepromatous leprosy, seen in those with little resistance, involves many systems of the body, with widespread [deposits forming hardening] and [small lumps] in the skin, [eye inflammation], [corneal inflammation], destruction of nasal cartilage and bone, testicular atrophy, [swelling of extremities], and involvement of the [immune] system. Blindness may result. Death is rare unless... tuberculosis [or a related illness] occurs concurrently. Contrary to traditional belief, leprosy is not very contagious, and prolonged, intimate contact is required for it to be spread between individuals" (4th ed., "Leprosy").

Still, it is contagious nonetheless. As the Encyclopaedia Britannica states in its article on the disease:

"The prevention of leprosy rests upon the recognition of bacteriologically positive cases so that they may be isolated and treated" (1985, Vol. 7, p. 287). And this is quite biblical. While treatment is not emphasized in Leviticus, the priests, as medical control officers, were to diagnose individuals and then take action to protect the community from further infection—by isolating those displaying the disease's symptoms.

It may even be that the "leprosy" identified in Leviticus 13-14 was far more communicable than the modern disease of that name. "There is some debate among medical scholars about whether the Hebrew word translated 'leprosy' in the Bible is exactly the same disease as the modern variant. It may have been another deadly infectious disease that differs from modern forms of leprosy" (Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God: Astonishing Biblical Discoveries*, 1996,

p. 147). Indeed, The Nelson Study Bible notes on the word “leprosy” in Leviticus 13:2, “Hebrew saraath, disfiguring skin diseases, including leprosy.” So there may have been an immediate concern about a very infectious disease at the time God inspired Moses to write Leviticus.

Of course, it is also possible that the leprosy of the time was the same as today. In that case, God may have simply been instituting a general way of dealing with communicable illness—that is, quarantine. In any case, He was also illustrating the need for removing spiritual uncleanness by the lesson of such physical separation—and made this even clearer by certain ritual or ceremonial ordinances. “Leprosy” on house walls and garments, it should be pointed out, was almost certainly “decomposition by mildew, mold, dry rot, etc.” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 14:34)—spreading fungus. “All of these were harmful growths, whether on human skin, clothing, or the wall of a house.”

It is especially interesting to read the requirements of shaving and washing in water. Incredibly, the idea of microscopic germs passing on illness, which Leviticus seems to take for granted, was not even generally believed in until very modern times. Indeed, Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian doctor, was ridiculed by the entire medical establishment in the mid-1800s for instituting handwashing before examining patients—as if there were some invisible infectious agents to be worried about. Thankfully, his notion eventually caught on—but not until many died unnecessarily and until he died as well, following decades of rejection that, sadly, drove him into a mental institution (Jeffrey, pp. 145-146, from S.I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases*).

Yet consider the time during which Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Ancient Egyptian medical knowledge was primitive compared to that of the 1800s. It is obvious from the Papyrus Ebers manuscript and other ancient sources that there was no sense of sanitation in Egypt whatsoever. For instance, dung, from many different animals, was a primary ointment ingredient for all manner of ailments. The ancient laws of the Israelites, on the other hand, show nothing but concern for sanitation. They would have protected against microscopic pathogens. Yet how could Moses have known of the existence of such germs? The Egyptians certainly did not—nor did any other ancient culture. In fact, “until this century, all previous societies, except for the Israelites who followed God’s medical laws regarding quarantine, kept infected patients in their homes—even after death, exposing family members and others to deadly disease. During the devastating Black Death [or bubonic plague] of the fourteenth century, patients who were sick or dead were kept in the same rooms as the rest of the family. People often wondered why the disease [which killed half of Europe and seemed unstoppable] was affecting so many people at one time. They attributed these epidemics to ‘bad air’ or ‘evil spirits.’ However, careful attention to the medical commands of God as revealed in Leviticus would have saved untold millions of lives. Arturo Castiglione wrote about the overwhelming importance of this biblical medical law, ‘The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation’ (Arturo Castiglione, *A History of Medicine...* 1941, p. 71).

Fortunately, the church fathers of Vienna finally took the biblical injunctions to heart and commanded that those infected with the plague... be placed outside the city in special medical

quarantine compounds. Care givers fed them until they either died or survived the passage of the disease. Those who died in homes or streets were instantly removed and buried outside the city limits. These biblical sanitary measures quickly brought the dreaded epidemic under control for the first time. Other cities and countries rapidly followed the medical practices of Vienna until the Black Death was finally halted” (Jeffrey, pp. 149-150).

No, Moses simply could not have understood the need to institute such laws through the natural means available to him at the time. But the Creator God did understand. And in commanding that His instructions for handling such situations be preserved in the Bible, the Eternal has given us one more amazing proof that this wonderful book is truly His inspired Word.

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Jeremiah 49-50

Prophecy Against Ammon (Jeremiah 49:1-33)

Continuing on from the prophecy against Moab in our previous reading, we move to Jeremiah's prophecy against Moab's brother nation, Ammon, which immediately follows in verses 1-6 of chapter 49.

The Ammonites lived just north of the ancient Moabites on the east side of the Jordan River. Today their descendants live primarily in the same area, the nation of Jordan and surroundings. Their ancient capital, "Rabbah of the Ammonites" (verse 2), is now the site of Jordan's modern capital, Amman.

When Gad and the other Israelite tribes east of the Jordan were deported by the Assyrians, the Ammonites took over Gadite territory. God speaks in verse 1 of Milcom inheriting Gad. Milcom (Hebrew Malcam, "their king," KJV) was the god of the Ammonites—another form of the name Molech (meaning "King")—"essentially identical with the Moabitish Chemosh" ("Molech," Smith's Bible Dictionary, 1986). Thus, the comments regarding Chemosh in the highlights from our previous reading would also apply here. Indeed, Milcom is to suffer the exact same fate as Chemosh (compare Jeremiah 48:7; 49:3). To be sure, they are one and the same.

We see then that the Ammonites encroached on Israelite territory and set up their worship throughout it. Yet they were not Israel's rightful heirs, as God points out in verse 1. "Judah was by the right of kindred the heir, not Ammon; but Ammon joined with Nebuchadnezzar against Judah and Jerusalem (II Kings 24:2) and exulted over its fall (Ps. 83:4-7, 8; Zeph. 2:8, 9)" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on Jeremiah 49:1).

So Ammon, like Moab in the previous chapter, will suffer destruction as punishment. While ancient invasion under Nebuchadnezzar may have been intended in part by the prophecy, it is clear that the primary fulfillment, as with the prophecy of the previous chapter, will occur during the Day of the

Lord. Notice verse 2: "the days are coming...desolate...then Israel shall take possession of his inheritance" (not only the land originally given to Israel, but the land inhabited by the Ammonites). This certainly did not occur in the days of Nebuchadnezzar for Judah was then taken into captivity— and Israel, the northern 10 tribes, remained scattered. This prophecy will not be fulfilled

until all the tribes of Israel are led back to the Promised Land (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Heshbon in verse 3 “was at one time possessed by the Ammonites, but later lost to the Moabites” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 3). Today, as part of the Kingdom of Jordan, the area of Heshbon is under the dominion of Amman, the Jordanian capital. “Ai is not the Israelite city of the same name” (note on verse 3). “Since the word Ai means ‘ruin’ in Hebrew, the reference may be to Rabbah” (The HarperCollins Study Bible, 1993, note on verse 3).

Rather than the Ammonites boasting of “valleys,” verse 4 may be translated: “Why do you boast in your strength? Your strength is ebbing” (NRSV; see explanation in *The New Bible Commentary*, note on verse 4). And their vaunted “treasures” may simply be their “resources for resisting the foe” (JFB, note on verse 4). Certainly their trust is misplaced. God calls Ammon a “backsliding daughter” (verse 4), as the nation had departed from the faith of its forefather Lot, who worshiped the true God.

Despite the terrible destruction the Ammonites will suffer, God will not make a complete end of them. Rather, as with the Moabites, He will ultimately “bring back the captives of the people of Ammon” (verse 6; compare 48:47).

Other prophecies concerning Ammon may be found in Amos 1:13-15, Zephaniah 2:8-11, Ezekiel 21:28-32, and 25:1-7 and verse 10.

Prophecy Against Edom (Jeremiah 49:1-33)

Verses 7-22 of Jeremiah 49 are directed “against Edom,” the descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau who dwelt in the mountainous area south of Moab and Judah (see Genesis 25:30; 36:8). Sections of this passage are clearly adapted from the prophecy of Obadiah—which you may wish to reread at this point. Edom, the perennial enemy of Israel, will at last suffer judgment.

Commentaries generally explain that this prophecy of Edom in Jeremiah 49 (along with the prophecies against Moab, Ammon and Damascus) was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar’s armies invaded Judah and its neighbors around 586 B.C. Yet while Edom and other tribal nations were invaded and subjugated then, the main fulfillment of the prophecy will be “in that day” (verse 22)—language that consistently refers to the future Day of the Lord. Like Obadiah, this chapter concerns ultimate national punishment on Edom. God calls it “the calamity of Esau...the time that I will punish him” (Jeremiah 49:8). And that time is clearly revealed elsewhere, God declaring: “For My sword...shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment.... For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah [the capital of Edom], and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.... For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:5-8; compare 63:1, 4). Thus, the time frame is the year that ends with the return of Jesus Christ.

God is going to repay the people of Edom for the evil way they have historically treated Israel (see Obadiah 10). Today, as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program commentary on Obadiah,

Edomites continue to dwell in various parts of the Middle East, including Jordan and Turkey. It is likely that many of today's Palestinians are Edomites in whole or in part. Furthermore, there is apparently a growing Edomite presence in many nations of Europe due to Muslim immigration from the Middle East and North Africa while Turkey is actively seeking membership in the European Union, which ultimately may help to explain some similarities between prophecies against end-time Edom and end-time Babylon.

Teman (Jeremiah 49:7) was a principal descendant of Esau (see Genesis 36:9-11) and is believed to be "the name of a town in Edom, sometimes used as the name of the northern half of the nation of Edom; here it probably stands for the whole nation" (Word in Life Bible, 1998, note on Jeremiah 49:7). The "wisdom" (or cunning, as the Hebrew could also be translated) for which Teman (or Edom) is known will quickly evaporate (verse 7; compare Obadiah 8). The inhabitants of Dedan will be put to flight (Jeremiah 49:8)—Dedan being "the name of a town in northwest Arabia, also used of the northwest region of Arabia along the Red Sea" (note on verse 8).

Verse 9 is adapted from Obadiah 5. Those gathering grapes or even thieves would take their fill. But God would go way beyond this. Edom would be utterly laid bare, completely plundered of everything and everyone (Jeremiah 49:10; Obadiah 6).

There is some confusion as to whether anyone will even be left alive of Edom. Many Bible versions have God telling Esau in verse 11 that He will preserve the children and widows. Yet Obadiah 18 says, "The house of Edom shall be stubble...and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau." If Jeremiah 49:11 means that children and widows will survive, then Obadiah 18 would only be referring to the men being killed. But the verse doesn't appear to read that way. Furthermore, while God promises to return the captives of Moab and Ammon (Jeremiah 48:47; 49:6), no such provision is made for Edom. And other versions, it should be considered, translate Jeremiah 49:11 differently.

In the Revised English Bible, God is shown asking, "Am I to keep alive your fatherless children? Are your widows to depend on me?" The implicit answer in this rendering is no. And, for another possibility, notice the end of verse 10 and verse 11 in the Jerusalem Bible: "His race is destroyed: it is no more! Of his neighbors, not one will say, 'Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive, your widows can rely on me.'"

Verse 12 concerns the cup of divine wrath, imagery that is also used in 25:15-29. Going to this other passage, we can see more clearly what God means in 49:12. He is declaring that if His own people Israel and Judah, and His holy city Jerusalem in particular, had to drink from the cup of wrath—that is, suffer divine judgment—then Edom, who was even guiltier, would certainly have to (compare 25:28-29).

Verses 14-16 of Jeremiah 49 are adapted from Obadiah 1-4. Note Jeremiah 49:16: "O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill," with a "nest as high as the eagle." The "clefts of the rock" may refer to Petra, mentioned in the highlights for our previous reading, and perhaps other rock fortresses. High above Petra and on other mountains of Edom were high

places for worship, lookouts and refuge. “Some of the mountain peaks of Edom reach over six thousand feet; Jerusalem [by comparison] is about 2,300 feet above sea level” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Obadiah 3). Yet the Edomites would be brought down—not just physically, but figuratively from their exalted prideful arrogance (Obadiah 4; Jeremiah 49:16).

Indeed, Edom will be devastated—“all its cities shall be perpetual wastes.... as in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities” (verses 13, 18). The same is prophesied elsewhere of Moab and Ammon (Zephaniah 2:9). Interestingly, the territory of Ammon, Moab and Edom—modern Jordan—is believed to be where these ancient cities were located.

The translation of Jeremiah 49:19 is uncertain, as there is widespread disagreement among commentaries and Bible versions as to exactly what is meant. The prophecy against Babylon in the next chapter contains almost the exact same statement (50:44), again perhaps demonstrating some kind of tie between end-time Edom and end-time Babylon. In both prophecies, it is not clear who is doing what and who is speaking. Look again at the New King James rendering in chapter 49. Contrast that with the Moffatt Translation, which has God saying, “Like shepherds when the lion leaves the jungle of Jordan for the pasture, I will chase them [the Edomites in this case] away suddenly, and seize their rarest rams. Who can match me? Who dare challenge me? What shepherd can face me?” On the other hand, the Ferrar Fenton Translation presents this as a boast of, in this instance, Edom: “See he [Edom] was like a lion coming up from the swelling of Jordan to the permanent meadows: ‘I will be sly with them,’ he says, ‘I will assail from behind them—what hero can defend them? For who is equal to me, and who expects me? And what shepherd can stand before me?’”

Whatever the case, God is going to bring ruin on Edom: “The young of the flock will be dragged off, and their pasture will be aghast at their fate” (verse 20, REB). A great earthquake will accompany Edom’s fall (verse 21), parallel with other prophecies of Christ’s return (compare Isaiah 24:17-21; Zechariah 14:4-5; Revelation 16:18-20). The “He” who comes up “like the eagle” to “spread His wings over Bozrah” (Jeremiah 49:22) is the returning Jesus Christ coming to strike—just as in 48:40, as explained in the comments on our previous reading.

Of course, as was noted in the Bible Reading Program highlights on Obadiah, even if Edom is totally wiped out at Christ’s second coming, as appears likely, the Edomites will be raised to physical life and opportunity for salvation in the second resurrection, 1,000 years later (see Revelation 20:5, 11-12; Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42). All of God’s actions, we must keep in mind, work toward the ultimate good of all mankind. Even His punishment of the Edomites will work toward their eventual repentance, whenever that may be.

Besides Obadiah, other prophecies concerning Edom may be found in Amos 1:11-12, Isaiah 21:11-12, 34:1-17, 63:1-6, Ezekiel 25:12-14 and 35:1-15.

Prophecies Against Damascus and Arabia (Jeremiah 49:1-33)

Jeremiah 49:23-33 is directed “against Damascus,” the metropolitan capital of Syria representing the nation as a whole. Syria, north of the land of Israel, was usually a hostile neighbor to ancient Israel and Judah, and today remains a hostile neighbor to the modern Jewish state of Israel. The Assyrians had destroyed the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus around the same time the northern kingdom of Israel fell—and the Syrians were taken captive to the north. But the resettled city survived—and it is the city, along with the territory under its control, that Jeremiah addresses.

Hamath and Arpad “were major towns located west and north of the capital of Damascus” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 23-25). They are still under the rule of Damascus, which remains the capital of Syria.

“Trouble on the sea,” which “cannot be quiet,” may refer to an invasion of Syria’s Mediterranean coast from the sea. This did not happen in Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion, which came from the east. It may even be a direct end-time reference: “And there will be...on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectations of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:25-26). Yet some read Jeremiah 49:23 as simply meaning that those on the seacoast—or “at the sea” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on verse 23)—are, like those in other listed parts of Syria, experiencing unrest over the prospect of imminent invasion. In any case, the once-mighty Syria will be paralyzed with fear and anguish (verse 24).

Damascus, formerly “the city of praise” (verse 25), will be destroyed “in that day” (verse 26)—referring, we may reasonably conclude, to the Day of the Lord. This is even more clearly seen in verse 27. It is adapted from Amos 1:4, which appears to be part of an end-time prophecy (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Amos 1 and 2). “Ben-Hadad,” it should be recalled, was a title used by a number of Syrian rulers.

Besides Amos 1:3-5, other prophecies of Syria are found in Isaiah 17:1-3 and Zechariah 9:1-4.

The message of Jeremiah 49:28-33 is “against Kedar [son of Ishmael, father of the Arabs] and against the kingdoms of Hazor...[who are] men of the East” (verse 28). These are people who dwell in tents, shepherd flocks and ride camels. Hazor here is not the more famous city of this name in northern Israel. Meaning “Enclosure,” this name was given to a number of towns (e.g., see Joshua 15:21-25). The JFB Commentary explains that the Hazor of Jeremiah 49 was “not the city in Palestine, but a district in Arabia Petraea. ‘Kingdoms’ refer to the several combinations of clans, each under its own sheikh” (note on verse 28). The same commentary note says “the Kedarenes led a wandering predatory life in Arabia Petraea, as the Bedouin Arabs.” As was mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 21:13-17, the entry on “Kedar” in Smith’s Bible Dictionary states, “The tribe seems to have been one of the most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes, and hence the rabbis call the Arabians universally by this name.”

In verses 28 and 30 of Jeremiah 49, specific mention is made of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as the instrument of punishment. This is a major reason many Bible scholars and commentators think

that attacks by Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled all the prophecies from Jeremiah 47:1-49:33—prophecies against the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians and Arabians. However, as has been explained, most of the prophecies in this section have not yet been ultimately fulfilled. In that context, it may even be that while the prophecy against the Arabians definitely applied to Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion, as that is clearly stated, it may also be dual. That is,

Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion may be presented here as a forerunner of latter day events to be ultimately fulfilled, as with the other prophecies, in the direct intervention of Jesus Christ during the Day of the Lord. Interestingly, the concept of a modern day “Nebuchadnezzar” is still very much alive in the minds of Muslims. Saddam Hussein portrayed himself as such a leader. Before him, the Shah of Iran attempted to reestablish the ancient Persian Empire through modern military might. While neither man fulfilled his personal vision, this kind of thinking should remind us that while ancient biblical prophecies may seem anachronistic and in no way pertinent to our time, they contain much that is still quite relevant in the present-day Middle East.

The Arabian sheiks are described as wealthy and secure (49:31)—yet without gates or bars (probably referring to the fact that the waterless desert provides a barrier of protection). Yet God will bring “fear on every side” (see verse 29)—a common theme in Jeremiah’s prophecies (see 6:25; 20:3 margin, verse 10; 46:5; 49:5)—and then actual “calamity from all its sides” (49:32).

What do all the ethnic groups addressed in Jeremiah 47:1-49:33 have in common? Historically they have usually been aggressively anti-Israel, often fighting the Israelites to destroy them and steal the land God gave His people—and the same is true today. Furthermore, in their fervor for the Islamic faith, they oppose the religion of the Bible and its adherents—often violently. God will eventually take action against the enemies of Israel (i.e., of the physical descendants of Israel and of spiritual Israel, the Church), and against all those who oppose His Word.

Jeremiah 50

The beginning of chapter 50 opens with a prophecy against Babel, the false god Bel, and the false god Merodak. A nation shall come against Babel from the north and destroy all of it, both land and gods of that land. The people and beasts of Babel shall flee.

In that day, says Yehovah through His prophet “the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, weeping as they come, and seek YHWH their Elohim.” He tells His people to flee from the midst of Babel, come out of the land of the Chaldeans. We see these same words in Revelation 18:4. Yehovah Himself is stirring up an assembly of great nations to form against Babel, for it is His vengeance against her.

Yehovah says He shall bring back Israel to his pasture and shall pardon the crookedness of both Israel and Judah that He leaves as a remnant. But for Babel and the Chaldeans He has determined a battle and destruction, plunder and ruin so that she has no remnant. She held the children of Judah and the children of Israel captive, oppressed them, and would not let them go.

However the Redeemer will plead their case and give rest to the land. He will give unrest to the inhabitants of Babel.

Verses 35-38 are all “the sword, the sword, the sword”... against everything in Babel! At the sound of Babel’s capture the earth shall be shaken, and the outcry shall be heard among the nations.

Proverb 25

First Part of Hezekiah’s Collection Mostly Synonymous (Proverbs 25:1-27)

1. Subheading (25:1)

We now come to the second Solomonic collection of proverbial sayings in the book (Proverbs 25?29)?this one copied by scribes working under King Hezekiah of Judah around 700 B.C. We don’t know if Hezekiah had them add this second collection to Solomon’s earlier book of Proverbs or if he established this collection as a separate one and later compilers joined both as one book.

It is interesting to note that the earlier collection was arranged with mostly antithetical proverbs up front (Proverbs 10?15) followed by mostly synonymous proverbs (16:1?22:16), while this later collection is arranged with mostly synonymous proverbs up front (25?27) followed by mostly antithetical ones (28?29).

It is also interesting to note some repetitions in the second collection. Hassel Bullock’s Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books (1988, p. 158) lists proverbs repeated identically in both collections.

2. On Dealing With Kings (25:2-7)

“TYPE: THEMATIC, PARALLEL (24:2-7). Verses 2-27 form a major division of Hezekiah [i.e., the Hezekiah collection of Solomon’s proverbs], and v. 16 further divides this section into two parts (see the discussion on v. 27).

“The proverbs of vv. 2-7 are all bound by the subject of dealing with royalty. They may have been placed at the beginning of the Hezekiah collection as a gesture of respect for the two great patrons of Israelite wisdom, Solomon and Hezekiah. The tone here is highly deferential to the royalty. In addition these proverbs are set up as three parallel pairs (vv. 2-3, 4-5, 6-7)” (NAC).

No doubt Solomon had himself in mind when he spoke the words of verse 2. God is glorified in creating all the mysteries of the universe, while kings have the honor of seeking and finding answers. Of course, all people have this privilege to some degree, but not on the scale of rulers and governments. This was particularly true in ancient times, when academic and scientific inquiry was more closely linked to royalty, as they had the time and resources for such undertaking.

Solomon himself studied the natural world of God's creation (1 Kings 4:33). He also studied spiritual and philosophical matters, seeking out all the proverbs and other wisdom that he did.

Proverbs 25:3 says that the heart of kings is unsearchable. Given the vast information that rulers are privy to, it is rather difficult to discern the motives for all they do.

Verses 6-7 tell us it's better to have humility rather than be humiliated. It is good to know one's place, but if we don't then we should humbly presume a lower station rather than a higher one and act accordingly. Jesus advised that the same deference be shown in other social settings, using the example of a wedding feast (Luke 14:7-11).

3. Settling Disputes Without Litigation (25:8-10)

"TYPE: THEMATIC" (NAC). It's best to deal with disputes outside of court in private or, if necessary, with an arbiter. Jesus similarly encouraged settling disputes out of court (Luke 12:57-59).

4. Fine Jewelry and Fine Counsel (25:11-12)

"TYPE: THEMATIC, CATCHWORD" (NAC). In verse 11, "the 'apples of gold' are not golden colored fruit but are some kind of jewelry or artwork." Besides the metaphor of jewelry and the importance of having the right words to say in both proverbs, we may also note the catchword "gold" in both.

5. Reliable and Unreliable People (25:13-14)

"TYPE: THEMATIC, PARALLEL....Both of these proverbs begin with some aspect of weather and its effects on an agrarian society; from that analogy they move on to the importance of personal reliability" (NAC). Verse 13 does not speak of actual snow at harvest time. That is incongruous (see 26:1) and could even prove disastrous. "The intention is the thought of snow's coolness in the intense heat of the harvest season and it's refreshing effect if it were available" (Soncino, note on 25:13). Just so, the person who carries out his duties reliably is pleasing to the one who assigned him. Compare misplaced confidence in an undependable person in verse 19 and sending a fool as a messenger in 26:6 (see also 10:26). In 25:14, those who fail to back up their boasts of giving in whatever capacity are a great disappointment. Moreover, this is a serious spiritual matter, as it involves hypocritical deception. In the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira, who brazenly lied to the Church make themselves look good, were punished by God with instant death as a stern witness about the gravity of this matter (see Acts 5:1-11).

6. Be Patient With the Authorities (25:15)

"TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB....This proverb, describing the importance of patience in dealing with an authority, answers 25:2-7 (with its high regard for royal authority) in inclusio fashion and so serves to mark off 25:2-15 as the first major section of Hezekiah. The bones are the most rigid body parts inside of a person, and fracturing the bones here refers to breaking down the deepest, most hardened resistance to an idea a person may possess" (NAC). This is best accomplished through gentle persuasion over time.

7. Exercising Caution With People (25:16-27)

“These proverbs are bound by the inclusion of proverbs on eating honey in excess (25:16, 27). They generally concern dealing with friends, family, and others; several focus on actions that are either inappropriate or paradoxically appropriate” (NAC).

“(1) Enough Is Enough (25:16-17)...TYPE: PARALLEL” (NAC). The example of eating too much honey in verse 16 shows that overindulging in even a likable thing can cause revulsion. There is a parallel here with verse 17, where visiting a neighbor too much can cause him to despise you or, put another way, you can wear out your welcome. The link between these proverbs is even clearer in the Hebrew. “The parallel of...’lest you have your fill of it [honey] and spew it out’ [in verse 16]...to...’lest he have his fill of you and hate you’ [in verse 17]...is obvious, as the NIV translation indicates” (footnote on verses 16-17).

“(2) Beware of These People (25:18-20)...TYPE: THEMATIC...All three of these proverbs are similes (although the word for ‘like’ is not in the Hebrew text), and all concern people one should avoid (the perjurer, the undependable, and the tactless). The point of each is evident” (NAC). In the last one (verse 20), “soda” refers to “sodium carbonate, natural in Egypt (see also Jer 2:22), which is neutralized with vinegar [?the effervescent reaction ruining the soda, which was otherwise useful for washing]. This would be counterproductive. It would be inappropriate and counterproductive to

‘sing songs’...to a ‘heavy heart’ [as this could, in a jolting way, churn things up negatively and prove hurtful]....One needs to develop sensitivity to others; songs may only irritate the grief.

However, see the example of David serenading Saul

(1 Sam 19:9); that was an exceptional case, but even there Saul’s response was unpredictable” (Expositor’s, note on Proverbs 25:20). Also, David’s music in Saul’s presence was probably of a soothing and inspirational nature.

(3) Overcome Evil With Good (25:21-22).TYPE: INDIVIDUAL, FOUR-LINE PROVERB. Many believe that no directive to treat enemies with kindness was given in the Bible until the New Testament. Yet here we see the principle made explicitly in the Old Testament book of Proverbs (see also Exodus 23:4). Jesus may have been alluding to this proverb when he said, “Do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:44, see verses 43-48). The apostle Paul directly quoted from this proverb (Romans 12:20) and summed it up with the words “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (verse 21).

However, the exact meaning of the heaping of burning coals is disputed. Some take it to mean heaping future divine judgment on the person who won’t be reconciled even after being treated well (compare Psalm 140:9-10). But the act of kindness in this case would not truly be kind. It would be a way of seeking vengeance, and some understand it that way. Others take an opposite view, seeing burning coals on the head as a metaphor for meeting a neighbor’s need? the idea being that a neighbor would need coals for his fireplace to keep warm or for his oven to prepare food and that he would carry them home in a tray atop his head. Coals were indeed given in ancient times as a gift to the poor. Yet this seems an odd illustration of helping out a neighbor

when feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty in the first part of the proverb makes that point quite well enough.

Many take heaping coals of fire to represent causing the recipient of kindness great pain; not in future judgment but presently in making him feel burning shame and remorse for his former mistreatment of the one now showing him kindness. This would hopefully lead to repentance. Interestingly, there was “an Egyptian ritual in which a man gave public evidence of his penitence by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head” (F.F. Bruce, quoted at www.zianet.com/maxey/Roman25.htm). On the other hand, besides “coals placed in a tray... carried as a gift to the poor or a sign of repentance...burning coals were also placed directly on the head to punish, to heal wounds, or to relieve suffering for a person dying of rabies!” (NIV Application Commentary, note on Proverbs 25:21-22). If such therapeutic treatment is in view in the proverb, the idea would be either something good being painful (the kindness causing shame and remorse) or something painful being good (the shame and remorse leading to repentance and reconciliation).

Yet another view is that the metaphor concerns the melting of metals with burning coals. As a hard metal is melted and made to flow by the application of burning coals, so kindness melts the hardness of an enemy. This would be somewhat similar to verse 15: “a gentle tongue breaks a bone.” Whatever the exact meaning, the response to an enemy’s dilemma is the reversal of what would perhaps be expected; we are to lend a hand, as paradoxical as that might seem. The clear point of the proverb is that we are to treat enemies with kindness, doing what we can to bring peace and reconciliation, expecting a positive outcome (later if not now) and trusting God to reward us for obeying Him with the proper attitude and behavior in such circumstances.

“(4) Cold Rain and Cold Looks (25:23)...TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC)?though there may be a thematic pairing with the next proverb. “Two sayings about anger and quarreling imply that paying attention to how one speaks can make a difference” (NIV Application Commentary, note on verses 23-24). Verse 23 contains interpretive difficulties: “The first is that the north wind does not bring rain in Israel [that coming more typically from the west]; the second is that the phrase ‘brings rain’ is literally ‘has the birth pangs of rain’ (which is subject to various interpretations), and the third is that the Hebrew does not make clear whether the ‘sly tongue brings angry looks’ or whether it is the other way around. Yet one could interpret it, with paraphrase, as follows: ‘As a cold wind gives birth to rains, so cold looks give birth to a storm of slander’” (NAC). Others see significance in the unexpected nature of cold rain from the north, paralleled with malicious talk getting an unexpected icy reception. Still others read the verse as referring to the north wind delivering up rain in the sense of stopping or repelling it? and that backbiting speech is stopped by angry looks.

“(5) A Nagging Wife (25:24)...TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC)?though, again, this could possibly be thematically paired with the preceding proverb. Verse 24 is the first proverb in Hezekiah’s Solomonic collection identical to one in the major Solomonic collection (see 21:9).

“(6) Good Water and Bad Water (25:25-26)...TYPE: THEMATIC....These two proverbs are linked by the implied idea of drinking water” (NAC). Good news coming “from a far country” in verse 25 may correspond to our modern English expression “from out of the blue”, meaning that it’s totally unexpected. Or it could denote good news about faraway relatives and friends after not hearing about them for an extended period.

(7) No Glory in Self-Indulgence (25:27). “TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB....Verse 27 closes off the first major division [of the Hezekiah collection]” (NAC). Overindulgence in honey is not good. As we saw in verse 16, too much honey can make one sick. A parallel is drawn here with those who enjoy the sweetness of being honored and respected so much that they inordinately pursue the honor of themselves. There is no real glory in this, only dishonor and, as we saw in verses 6-7, the likelihood of humiliation. The double mention of glory in verse 27 (about what is not glory) parallels the double mention of glory in verse 2 (about true glory). “The chiasmic structure of the whole is as follows: glory (v. 2)/honey (v. 16)/honey (v. 27a)/glory (v. 27b)” (NAC).

Acts 22

We left Sha’ul last time being arrested and taken to the barracks on account of the Jewish Pharisees accusing him of leading men away from the Torah and defiling the Temple with Greeks, who were seen as unclean. He has stopped on the steps of the facility and is going to speak to the people of Jerusalem. For this portion of our study, the words of Sha’ul are reproduced.

“Men, brothers, and fathers, hear my defense before you now. I am indeed a Jew (Yehudite), having been born in Tarsus of Kiliia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamili’el, having been instructed according to the exactness of the Torah of our fathers, being ardent for Elohim, as you all are today, who persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering up into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the eldership, from who I also received letters to the brothers, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”

[Gamili’el was considered one of the greatest Torah teachers of all history and not just any young Jewish man could learn directly from him. Only the best and the brightest] Apostle Sha’ul, it is taught, had memorized ALL of the first five books of Moses by the time he was an adult. We also remember from the beginning of Acts that Sha’ul was persecuting the new believers in Messiah. “And it came to be, as I was journeying and coming near Damascus, about noon, suddenly a great light shone around me out of the heaven, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Sha’ul, Sha’ul, why do you persecute Me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Master?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Yeshua of Natsareth, whom you persecute.’ And those who were with me did see the light and were afraid, but they did not hear Messiah’s Voice speaking to me.

And I said, 'What shall I do, Master?' And the Master said to me, 'Rise up, go into Damascus, and there you shall be told all that you have been appointed to do.'

So Sha'ul was blinded by the esteem of the Great Light and was led by his men into the city of Damascus. Sha'ul spoke of Hananyah who was led to him, and how well spoken of by the Jews he was and a dedicated man to the Torah. That the Spirit had led this man to Sha'ul on the street and said to him, "Look up." Sha'ul looked up at Hananyah and testified to Sha'ul of what had happened to him. He said, "The Elohim of our fathers has appointed you to know His desire, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear the voice from His mouth. Because you shall be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now arise, and be immersed and wash away your sins, calling on the Name of Yehovah."

Sha'ul shared with them the instruction he received in the vision he had of the Master in which Messiah instructed him to leave Jerusalem and share the Good News far off and to the gentiles. At this, the crowd came unglued and began shouting, "Away with such a one from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live!" So the soldiers took Sha'ul on into the barracks to tie him up, flog him, and question him. This is when Sha'ul made it known to them that he was a Roman and uncondemned, and even "born" a Roman. Upon hearing this, the commander and other soldiers backed away quickly and were in fear for even having bound him at all. On the next day Sha'ul was released and the Roman commander summoned the chief priest and all their council to come before him, along with Sha'ul to find out what Sha'ul was being accused of.