

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 21/02/2015

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

Ex 30	Isaiah 55-58	Prov 1	John 20-21
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Incense, Water and Oil; Ransom Money (Exodus 30)

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.

"Come to the Waters" (Isaiah 54-55)

Chapter 55 begins with the analogy cited by Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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. Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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.

Keep from Defiling the Sabbath (Isaiah 56-57)

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).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Yeshua 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.

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 Yeshua, they are actually worshipping 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 Yeshua (Ephesians 2:17). And the chapter ends with the same words that ended chapter 48: There is no peace for the wicked.

Proper Fasting and Honoring God’s Sabbath (Isaiah 58-59)

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 Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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:

“To Know Wisdom and Instruction” (Proverbs 1:1-7)

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* – scorner (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 (1:17), 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 of 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... 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 thornbush 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 thornbush 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. 5657). 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 set apart 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 Yeshua 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, Yeshua 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 Yeshua, 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.

Avoid Evil Counsel and Listen to Wisdom (Proverbs 1:8-33)

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

Miryam from Magdala goes to the tomb of Yeshua on the first day of the week early, when it was still dark and finds the stone rolled away. She reports back to the disciples that Yeshua’s body had been stolen. Peter and John run to see for themselves. They saw for themselves only the linen wrappings, they believed and ran back to tell the others. Miryam stayed, weeping. Yeshua speaks to her but she did not recognize Him right away. He tells her to go and tell the others that He is ascending to our Father.

Later that day, as they were all together with the doors shut to their room, Yeshua appears to them and they rejoice. He breathes upon them the Set apart Spirit and gives them authority to bind and loose on earth. Toma was not there, but later (8 days) he was and saw Yeshua for himself and believed.

John 21

Some of the disciples had decided to go fishing (this is sometime later). Yeshua appears to them again on the beach after their fishing trip and asks them for food. When they arrived they found Yeshua cooking some fish already for them on some coals and He fed them. This is when Yeshua focuses on Kepha and asks him three times whether or not he loved Him. Kepha says yes and Yeshua instructs to 'feed His sheep,' and prophesies to him the manner of his death as He also instructs Him specifically to "Follow Me."