

Proverbs Made Practical

by

Joe Neil Clayton

*A Topical arrangement of the Proverbs
to provide a practical study guide for use
in adult Bible classes, and for private study.*



1987

(Revised 2010)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

This material may be copied and used to the Glory of God

PROVERBS MADE PRACTICAL

INTRODUCTION--

The study of The Proverbs can be both interesting and frustrating. The appeal of this portion of the Bible is credited to the fact that a single verse can stimulate much meditation and discussion. However, if Proverbs is read in the same manner that one might use in reading historical or biographical segments of Scripture, the reader might complain that this book (like a dictionary) changes the subject too often. Because of the frustration many have experienced in trying to unravel the topics discussed in Proverbs, this re-arrangement of the book is offered to assist the Bible student in reaping the benefits of the precepts without the problem of organizing the material. It is the genuine hope of the arranger that he has succeeded in ordering the subjects in such a way that will find acceptance, and will prove to be a practical guide to the study of Proverbs.

A WORD ABOUT THE ANTHOLOGIST--SOLOMON

Since the major portion of Proverbs is attributed either to the invention, or, at the very least, the discreet selection of Solomon, it is proper to examine his credentials as the compiler of such material. This should help us in the appreciation of the moral value of the Proverbs.

Solomon was one of the sons of King David by Bathsheba. Another royal son, Adonijah, taking advantage of the aged David's physical weakness, and his correspondent mental lethargy, began to aspire to be king after his father. Adonijah had good title to claim the throne, by the standards of men, and this won the support of prominent soldiers and priests to his cause. Had it not been for David's former promise to Bathsheba to name Solomon as his chief heir (a choice which had the advantage of being compatible with the will of God), Adonijah's plan might have succeeded. Prompt action on the part of Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet aroused David to confirm his (and God's) choice of Solomon, and to announce the coronation of the future king. The news of the elevation of Solomon caused the conspirators around Adonijah to disperse in fear, but they still posed a threat to the security of the young king (1 Kings 1:5-53).

Thus, Solomon came to the throne of Israel during a crisis of political instability. Suddenly, decisions were thrust on him that required very careful handling. For this, and other situations of the same order, Solomon discerned (with a considerable measure of native wisdom) that the greatest thing he needed for a successful reign was a generous measure of divine wisdom. When God offered Solomon a choice of divine gifts, he prayed, *"I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in...Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil..."*(1 Kings 3:6-9). God, in his pleasure at hearing such a discreet petition, not only granted Solomon a wisdom that would make him a legend in his own time, but gave him also what he had not asked for, riches and honor, with the promise of a legendary

reputation in these realms, also. These promises were conditioned on the faithful obedience of Solomon to divine "statutes and commandments." While Solomon walked with God, the promises were fulfilled (1 Kings 3:10-14, 4:29, 10:23-25). This experience may have been what prompted Solomon to endorse the sentiment of Proverbs 3:35, "*The wise shall inherit glory.*" In his case, this was surely true.

"A WISDOM, NOT OF THIS WORLD..."

We are impressed that Solomon demonstrated the spark of divine wisdom in his first case of equity. When two harlots disputed the maternity of a child, he tested their maternal feelings by proposing to cut the child in two, giving each disputant a half. The result of this harsh suggestion was that the true mother was discovered by her willingness to abandon her claim, if only the child might live (1 Kings 3:16-18).

Also, we read the testimony of the "Queen of Sheba" that the reputation which she had first heard about Solomon, and rejected as an incredible exaggeration, had actually failed to reveal even the half of his genius and prosperity (1 Kings 10:1-10). It is very evident, then, that Solomon was well qualified to judge of the wisdom and heavenly approval of sayings that had won such a degree of acceptance among men as to become proverbs, maxims capable of guiding human behavior in every culture and age.

DIVINE WISDOM IS AVAILABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN

Wisdom, which the Christian may ask of God, is provided by Him "*who gives to all liberally, and upbraids not.*" Yet, the petitioner must "*ask in faith, nothing doubting.*" The doubter must not "*think that he shall receive anything of the Lord,*" since he has shown himself to be "*double-minded*" and "*unstable*" (James 1:5-7)." But God has also revealed His wisdom in the precepts of His Law. One Psalmist was aware of this source, when he sang:

*Oh, how love I thy law!
It is my meditation all the day.
Thy commandments make me wiser
than my enemies;
For they are ever with me.
I have more understanding than
all my teachers;
For thy testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged;
Because I have kept thy precepts...
Through thy precepts I get understanding:
Therefore I hate every false way!*

(Psalms 119:97-100, 104)

In the New Testament, Paul, by the Spirit, was moved to write to the Colossians about their capacity for love, "*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9-10).*" By the Scripture, then, the most simple man can borrow the wisdom of God, and be wiser than his enemies, teachers, and the aged. He can be truly wise, even though, when called by God, he might not be "*wise after the flesh (1 Corinthians 1:26).*"

It must be granted that sometimes men who are far removed from God show a spark of wisdom kin to that of Solomon. It is said that the Roman Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.) once tried a case in which a woman denied that a certain man was her son, even though some evidence indicated he was. Claudius solved the dilemma by issuing an imperial order for the woman to marry the man. Not wishing to commit incest, she refused, and subsequently admitted the truth (Seutonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, p. 168).

It is the expectation and desire of the Father in heaven, however, that His children long for and seek His wisdom through His Son Jesus, who was "*made unto us wisdom from God... (1 Corinthians 1:30).*" Jesus, in turn, rebuked the men of His generation by saying, "*The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth (the tip of the Arabian peninsula, a thousand difficult miles from Jerusalem) to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).*" Divine wisdom, therefore, is greater than that of man, even greater than that given to men by divine generosity, but the measure obtainable by prayer, and by the knowledge of God and Jesus through the Word, is sufficient for any man on earth. We need to seek that wisdom with the same earnestness that the world of Solomon's day beat an inquisitive path to his door (1 Kings 10:24).

ARE THE PROVERBS WISDOM FROM GOD?

There is some controversy in the religious world over the authenticity of the Proverbs. Are they from God (to be received as divine precepts), or are they simply a sampling of human wit (having only relative value and force)? Considering that no more than 500 of the 3000 proverbs spoken by Solomon are preserved in Sacred literature, and only a few of his 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), we must conclude that the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs is only a condensation of the literature once available to men. In fact, the Bible itself is a condensation of the knowledge of God, and the action of Deity (Deuteronomy 29:29, John 20:30-31, 21:25). It follows that only the best examples of proverbial wisdom found their way into the "sacred writings." If it could be apparent to Solomon's contemporaries that the wisdom of God was in him (1 Kings 3:28), then the wisdom of God should be also discovered in his condensed and careful

selection of the Proverbs. By contrast, "*the foolishness of God is wiser than men* (1 Corinthians 1:25)." Human wisdom is described as "*coming to nothing* (1 Corinthians 2:6)." It can even be "*Earthly, sensual, devilish* (James 3:15)." The wisdom from above, however, "*is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy* (James 3:17)." By this standard, The Proverbs surely commend themselves to be compatible with divine wisdom.

So, to those who trust the Scripture to be inspired of God (and Paul says all of it is, 2 Timothy 3:16), the Book of Proverbs is an important segment of the full revelation of heavenly wisdom, even when it speaks of earthly and practical things such as domestic happiness, economics, or politics. Skeptics scoff at the notion that homely proverbs, such as are found in abundance in this book, are a reflection of divine wisdom. They point to collections of purely human maxims, and call attention to similar sentiments found in them. The believer, however, need not contend that the truths of the proverbs of the Bible are impossible to discover by men of discretion apart from divine guidance. Truth is always truth, and many of the truths found in inspired revelation can be learned by experience through such human processes as trial and error. Nevertheless, truths learned through the Bible save us from the disappointments and troubles of learning them by any uncertain method. The inclusion of Proverbs in Scripture, therefore, shows that God intended them to be accepted as divine maxims, whether they have the appearance of divine invention, or only divine endorsement.

To the believer, the strongest evidence of the inspiration of Proverbs is found in the affirmation of their truths and the inclusion of some of them in New Testament literature. For instance, the writer of Hebrews cites Proverbs 3:11-12 as a true description of the just and loving discipline of God (Hebrews 12:5-6). James and Peter both confirm the truth of Proverbs 3:34, "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5)." Peter also commends God's system of reward stated in Proverbs 11:31 (1 Peter 4:18), and approves the truth of Proverbs 26:11 in his description of the folly of the infidel (2 Peter 2:22). Paul counsels us to let God avenge us, a sentiment taught in Proverbs 20:22 (see Romans 12:19). He also affirms the truth of Proverbs 25:21-22, regarding the treatment of enemies (Romans 12:20). Finally, the temptation to return evil for evil is reprovved in both Proverbs 24:29 and Romans 12:17.

Our Lord Jesus, some are quick to point out, never quotes from Proverbs in His teaching. The implication of this, they say, is that the book therefore has no sanction as divine wisdom. Yet, Apostolic use of them carries the same force of divine approval, as if they were the words of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:6-13, 14:37; 2 Peter 1:19-21). So, Jesus' failure to quote the book of Proverbs in His teaching does not invalidate it, any more than any other book he did not quote. Even though Jesus sometimes cited Scripture to make a point, it was recognized that He taught as one having authority, not as the scribes, who had to back their teaching with proof texts (Matthew 7:28-29, 23:1-3). Yet Jesus (before His death brought about a change of force between the Old and New Testaments, Hebrews 10:9-10) proclaimed the integrity of the Old Testament scriptures, and the dangers inherent to man in ignoring or violating them (Matthew 5:17-19). At the

time Jesus spoke, the Proverbs were considered a part of "sacred writings" by the Jews. Therefore, this grand book of wisdom, along with other Scripture, can make men "*wise unto salvation,*" and can be "*profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, (and) for instruction which is in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:15-16)."

One of the Proverbs says, "*The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom* (9:9-10)." An objective and comparative study of this book, treating it as divine wisdom, can lead to a profitable result. We should heed the instruction of Solomon to his son:

*"Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart,
And lean not upon thine own understanding:
In all thy ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct thy paths."*
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

FOREWORD

The text used in this study is the American Standard Version of 1901. The segments of study have been divided into three major parts, the first part covering the long discourse of Solomon to his son on Wisdom, re-arranged to group the various subjects together.

The second part is comprised of shorter dissertations, most only a few verses long.

The third section is devoted to the short individual proverbs, and grouped together under subjects. The one exception to this is the lengthy tribute of King Lemuel to the Worthy Woman.

In each lesson, comments are made, using other Scriptures that may apply to the subject, and questions are attached to each section.

A Word on Hebrew Poetry

The poetic Hebrew used by the inspired writers of the Bible is unlike the poetry of Western Culture. There is more of a rhyming of ideas (usually in couplets, but occasionally in triplets), rather than a phonetic rhyming. In English translations, also, whatever rhythm and meter which might have existed in the Hebrew is not apparent. Sometimes, the rhyming of ideas is by contrast, and at other times by comparison. The student of poetic language in the Bible needs to be satisfied with its effective presentation of spiritual thoughts, and should not seek some abstract pleasure purely in its form.

**SOLOMON'S PREFACE
TO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS**

Proverbs 1:1-6

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

To know wisdom and instruction;

To discern the words of understanding;

To receive instruction in wise dealing, in
righteousness and justice and equity;

To give prudence to the simple--to the young
man knowledge and discretion;

That the wise man may hear, and increase
in learning;

And that the man of understanding may
attain unto sound counsel;

To understand a proverb, and a figure, the
words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

LESSONS--

I. SOLOMON'S GUIDEBOOK. 1:7-9:18

(NOTE: This first and longest dissertation of Solomon to his sons contains many of the principles discussed in other sections of the book, but are presented here together to maintain the structure of Proverbs. However, the material is also arranged categorically to assist our study.)

A. GOD'S WISDOM IS DISPENSED BY PARENTS.

1. Divine Law and parental authority is connected.

(1:7-9)

The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge;
But the foolish despise wisdom and instruction.
My son, hear the instruction of thy father,
And forsake not the law of thy mother:
For they shall be a chaplet (wreath) of grace unto thy head,
And chains about thy neck.

(9:10-12)

The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom;
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
For by me thy days shall be multiplied,
And the years of thy life shall be increased.
If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself;
And if thou scoffs, thou alone shalt bear it.

COMMENTS:

Obedience to parents "in the Lord" is "right." The father that nurtures his children in the "chastening and admonition of the Lord" serves them best (Ephesians 6:1-4). The fear of God is the springboard of wisdom and knowledge (Job 28:28). The Psalmist adds, "A good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalms 111:10). For the Christian, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ, the "mystery of God" (Colossians 2:1-3). Solomon prefaces much of his teaching to his son with reminders of this principle (see 2:1-2, 3:1-2, 4:1-2, 5:1-2, 6:20-23, 7:1-3, 8:32-33). Whether the son hears or rejects wisdom, he will bear his own responsibility (9:12, and see Ecclesiastes 11:9).

QUESTIONS

1. Though wisdom and knowledge are both said to begin in the fear of God, which naturally comes first?
2. Obeying parents, according to Paul in Ephesians 6:1, is qualified by what phrase?
3. According to Job 28:28, and Psalm 111:10, what actions are tied to "understanding?"
4. In whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden?
5. When Solomon commands his son, "forget not my law," and "keep my commandments," is it true that he is only referring to parental authority?
6. Even though we have parents to guide in youth, do they answer for us in the Judgment?

2. God is the surest source of wisdom for life.

(2:1-10)

My son, if thou wilt receive my words,
And lay up my commandments with thee;
So as to incline thine ear unto wisdom,
And apply thy heart to understanding;
Yea, if thou cry after discernment,
And lift up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hid treasures:
Then shalt thou understand the fear of Jehovah,
And find the knowledge of God.
For Jehovah giveth wisdom;
Out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding:
He lays up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to them that walk in integrity;
That he may guard the paths of justice,
And equity, *yea*, every good path.
For wisdom shall enter into thy heart,
And knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul.

COMMENTS:

Solomon urges his son to have the disposition to "receive" his words, to "lay up" his commands, to "incline" the ear to wisdom, and to "apply" the heart to understanding. Similar challenges are found in Jesus' teaching (Matthew 11:14-15). A good disposition has advantages (John 7:17). Treating wisdom as a "hid treasure" to be sought is Jesus' lesson of Matthew 13:45-46, and Jesus confirmed that knowledge and understanding comes "out of the mouth" of God," Matthew 4:4. A petition to God for wisdom finds Him generous (James 1:5-7). Christ is now the source of divine wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). The extended goal of the pursuit of wisdom is to "walk worthily unto all pleasing" (Colossians 1:9-12).

QUESTIONS

1. Complete the phrases, "receive _____," "lay up _____
_____" "incline _____"
_____" "apply _____."
2. What was the fault of those in John 8:43, which kept them from understanding Christ's speech? (compare also John 8:47)
3. What fact will be established in the mind of one who "wills to do God's will?"
4. What might prevent us from receiving wisdom, when we ask of God?
5. With what did Paul want the Colossians to be filled?

3. Precepts that lead to benefits.

(3:1-12)
My son, forget not my law;
But let thy heart keep my commandments:
For length of days, and years of life,
And peace will they add to thee.
Let not kindness and truth forsake thee:
Bind them about thy neck;
Write them upon the tablet of thy heart:
So shalt thou find favor and good understanding
In the sight of God and man.
Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart,
And lean not upon thine own understanding:

In all thy ways acknowledge him,
And he will direct thy paths.
Be not wise in thine own eyes;
Fear Jehovah, and depart from evil:
It will be health to thy navel,
And marrow to thy bones.
Honor Jehovah with thy substance,
And with the first-fruits of all thine increase:
So shall thy barns be filled with plenty,
And thy vats shall overflow with new wine.
My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah;
Neither be weary of his reproof:
For whom Jehovah loves he reproves
Even as a father the son in whom he delights

COMMENTS:

The precepts and benefits shown here have confirmation in other parts of the Scripture:

PRECEPT: Keep the law of the parent (and God).

BENEFIT: Length of days--years of life and peace.

CONFIRMATION: (OT) Exodus 20:12, (NT) Ephesians 6:1-3

PRECEPT: Follow kindness and truth--write them on the heart.

BENEFIT: Find favor--with God and Man.

CONFIRMATION: Jesus the example, Luke 2:52.

PRECEPT: Trust in God's wisdom, not in self-conceit (Compare Jeremiah 8:8-9).

BENEFIT: Health to the navel--marrow to the bones (See Job 21:23-24).

CONFIRMATION: Avoid self-deceit (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

PRECEPT: Honor God with our substance. (Compare Malachi 3:10)

BENEFIT: Barns filled--vats overflowing.

CONFIRMATION: See 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

QUESTIONS

1. "Honor thy father and mother" is called "the first commandment with promise."
What is the promise?
2. When a man follows kindness and truth, who is he imitating?
3. How is the man who "thinks he is wise in this world" to become truly wise?
4. When we are generous in benevolent giving, what will God "supply and multiply?"

5. Do all of God's precepts lead to benefits?

4. The father affirms the security found in wisdom.

(3:19-26)

Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth;
By understanding he established the heavens.
By his knowledge the depths were broken up,
And the skies drop down the dew.
My son, let them not depart from thine eyes;
Keep sound wisdom and discretion:
So shall they be life unto thy soul,
And grace to thy neck.
Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely,
And thy foot shall not stumble.
When thou lies down, thou shall not be afraid:
Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.
Be not afraid of sudden fear,
Neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh:
For Jehovah will be thy confidence,
And will keep thy foot from being taken.

COMMENTS:

The wisdom and understanding of God framed and sustains the creation (see Psalms 104:1, 4-13). Such a power holds the key to our security and confidence (compare Proverbs 1:29-33). The security we need is in the promises of His word (see 2 Peter 1:2-11).

QUESTIONS

1. When the "waters stood above the mountains," what means did God use to make them "flee" and "haste" to the place he had "founded" for them?
2. According to Solomon, what happens to the one who would have "none of (God's) counsel," and "despised all (His) reproof?"
3. By what common means do Solomon and Peter promise security against "stumbling?" (Peter mentions it four times)

5. The parent sets forth positive spiritual goals.

(4:20-27)

My son, attend to my words;
Incline thine ear unto my sayings.
Let them not depart from thine eyes;
Keep them in the midst of thy heart.
For they are life unto those that find them,
And health to all their flesh.
Keep thy heart with all diligence;
For out of it are the issues of life.
Put away from thee a wayward mouth,
And perverse lips put far from thee.
Let thine eyes look right on,
And let thine eyelids look straight before thee.
Make level the path of thy feet,
And let all thy ways be established.
Turn not to the right hand nor to the left:
Remove thy foot from evil.

COMMENTS:

Solomon commands his son to "keep his heart...for out of it are the issues of life." Jesus confirms the good and evil consequences of things springing from the heart, in Matthew 12:34-37 (compare Luke 6:45), and in Matthew 15:17-20 (compare Mark 7:21-23). The other thought in this section is the father's advice to his son to take the initiative to lay a proper course of righteousness for himself. Compare Hebrews 12:12-13 and 1 Peter 3:10-12.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the Bible definition of the "heart?" (See 1 Peter 3:4)
2. What things can proceed from the heart that defile a man?
3. Does our salvation depend, in part, on making our own determinations, or are we completely passive in the process?

6. Solomon expresses confidence in the divine force of his instruction.

(8:32-36)

Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me;
For blessed are they that keep my ways.
Hear instruction, and be wise,
And refuse it not.
Blessed is the man that hears me,
Watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at the posts of my doors.
For whoso finds me finds life,
And shall obtain favor of Jehovah.
But he that sins against me wrongs his own soul:
All they that hate me love death.

COMMENTS:

We can approach God through obedience to the instruction and examples of righteous inspired men. Solomon knew his wisdom was from God (1 Kings 3:11-12, 4:29-30), so he could expect his sons to "obtain favor of Jehovah" by hearing, finding and keeping his instruction. Both Jesus (as Son of God) and the inspired Apostles (as earthen vessels bearing the treasure of revelation from God, 2 Corinthians 4:5-7), could have the same confidence (see John 14:21-24, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 2 Timothy 3:14, Philippians 4:9, 1 Corinthians 11:1).

QUESTIONS

1. When any speaker is "speaking as it were oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), does he have the right to consider that his words carry divine authority? _____
(Would this be true if the speaker misinterprets the Scripture, either through ignorance or through deceit? _____)
2. As the Son of God, Jesus could certainly expect obedience to His commands, according to John, but what is the original source of these commands?

3. According to Paul's writings--

- a. What are we to do about the man who does not obey Paul's epistles?
- b. Of whom had Timothy heard "the things which he had learned and had been assured of?" (See 2 Timothy 1:5, 2:2.)
- c. What benefit comes to those who do the things "learned and received and heard and seen" in Paul?
- d. What example has Paul set, so as to expect us to imitate him?

B. SOLOMON PICTURES WISDOM IN THE GUISE OF A WOMAN.

1. Wisdom warns of the consequences of rejecting her.

(1:20-33)

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
She utters her voice in the broad places;
She cries in the chief place of concourse;
At the entrance of the gates,
In the city, she utters her words:
How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?
And scoffers delight them in scoffing,
And fools hate knowledge?
Turn you at my reproof:
Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you;
I will make known my words unto you.
Because I have called, and ye have refused;
I have stretched out my hand, and no man hath regarded;
But ye have set at nought all my counsel,
And would none of my reproof:
I also will laugh in *the day of your calamity*;
I will mock when your fear cometh;
When your fear cometh as a storm,
And your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind;
When distress and anguish come upon you.
Then will they call upon me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me.
For that they hated knowledge,
And did not choose the fear of Jehovah,
They would none of my counsel,

They despised all my reproof.
Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be filled with their own devices.
For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them,
And the careless ease of fools shall destroy them.
But whoso hearkens unto me shall dwell securely,
And shall be quiet without fear of evil.

COMMENTS:

Perverse men often fail to see the advantage of seeking truth (Jeremiah 6:16-19, Matthew 12:41-42), and suffer the consequences (Zechariah 7:8-14, Romans 1:28-32). What they fail to see is that the words of God are equated with the "pouring out" of His Spirit on them. Wisdom and the revelations of the Spirit are closely connected in the New Testament (see Colossians 1:9, Ephesians 1:17, and 1 Corinthians 12:8).

QUESTIONS

1. What did Jeremiah say was Israel's response to God's appeal to "walk" in the "good way?"
2. What evil would He bring on them because of their response?
3. Who was "greater than Jonah (and) Solomon?"
4. How would God punish those who would not hear Him, according to Zechariah?
5. What was God's reaction to those who "refused to have God in their knowledge?"
6. For what did Paul pray in Ephesians 1:17?

2. The benefits of "finding wisdom."

(3:13-18)

Happy is the man that finds wisdom,
And the man that gets understanding.
For the gaining of it is better than the gaining of silver,
And the profit thereof than fine gold.
She is more precious than rubies:
And none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her.

Length of days is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her:
And happy is every one that retains her.

COMMENTS:

The things men hold to be precious are not as beneficial as wisdom. The Kingdom and the blood of Christ are of the same superior value (Matthew 13:44-46, 1 Peter 1:17-21). The spiritual benefits of long life, pleasantness, and peace follow the "finding" of wisdom (Deuteronomy 5:33-6:3, Proverbs 24:3-4, Romans 8:5-6).

QUESTIONS

1. Wisdom has greater value than what earthly commodities?
2. What sacrifice should we make to possess the Kingdom of Heaven?
3. Paul said the "mind of the Spirit is _____"
4. How do we acquire the "mind of the Spirit?" (see Ephesians 4:17-24)

3. Wisdom is compared to a woman who rewards our love for her.

(4:1-13)

Hear, *my* sons, the instruction of a father.
And attend to know understanding:
For I give you good doctrine;
Forsake ye not my law.
For I was a son unto my father,
Tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.
And he taught me, and said unto me:
Let thy heart retain my words;
Keep my commandments, and live;
Get wisdom, get understanding;
Forget not, neither decline from the words of my mouth;
Forsake her not, and she will preserve thee;
Love her, and she will keep thee.
Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom;
Yea, with all thy getting get understanding.

Exalt her, and she will promote thee;
She will bring thee honor, when thou dost embrace her.
She will give to thy head a chaplet of grace;
A crown of beauty will she deliver to thee.
Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings;
And the years of thy life shall be many.
I have taught thee in the way of wisdom;
I have led thee in paths of uprightness.
When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened;
And if thou runs, thou shalt not stumble.
Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go:
Keep her; for she is thy life.

COMMENTS:

Though Solomon first appeals to his sons to adhere to the principles taught by parents, who have received them from their grandparents (1 Kings 2:2-4, and compare 2 Timothy 1:5), he then presents "wisdom" in the form of a fair lady with whom they may share a platonic love, and receive her rewards. The benefits of obtaining wisdom and understanding, and keeping them, is expressed also by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:11-12. The urgency that compels men to spend the effort to obtain and retain wisdom and knowledge is again expressed in this passage, in the second section, and reminds us of the reproof of Christ's generation in Luke 11:31.

QUESTIONS

1. What things qualified David (father of Solomon) to teach and expect obedience to his commands? (see Acts 13:21-23, 2 Samuel 23:1-2)
2. What things were Solomon's "sons" to do toward wisdom, as if she was the object of their affection?
3. What did the writer of Ecclesiastes say that "wisdom is as good as?" (See the American Standard Version.)
4. What else is a defense besides wisdom, according to Ecclesiastes 7:12?
5. In this same verse, what does wisdom preserve?
6. How far did the Queen of Sheba (Queen of the South) have to travel in order to hear the wisdom of Solomon?

4. Wisdom is compared to a virtuous woman crying to men in the city, and begging for acceptance. (Next Page)

(8:1-11)

Doth not wisdom cry,
And understanding put forth her voice?
On the top of high places by the way,
Where the paths meet, she stands;
Beside the gates, at the entry of the city,
At the coming in at the doors, she cries aloud:
Unto you, O men, I call;
And my voice is to the sons of men.
O ye simple, understand prudence;
And, ye fools, be of an understanding heart.
Hear, for I will speak excellent things;
And the opening of my lips shall be right things.
For my mouth shall utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverse in them.
They are all plain to him that understands,
And right to them that find knowledge.
Receive my instruction, and not silver;
And knowledge rather than choice gold.
For wisdom is better than rubies;
And all the things that may be desired are not to be
compared unto it.

COMMENTS:

Wisdom's call to simpletons and fools has the tone of frustration, as if men preferred to seek silver and gold and to count them better than wisdom. Jesus was also frustrated by the failure of men to see the value of His words (see John 12:35-38). David acknowledged the superiority of God's law to material wealth (Psalms 119:72), and Paul willingly gave up worldly advantage for it (Philippians 3:7-11).

QUESTIONS

1. In what places did wisdom stand to make her appeal?

2. What did all these places have in common?
3. What Old Testament prophet does John the Apostle quote, who foretold the cause for Jesus' frustration?
4. The "gains" which Paul counted as "loss" and as "refuse" he happily gave up for what?

5. Wisdom extols her virtues.

(8:12-21)

I wisdom have made prudence my dwelling,
And find out knowledge *and* discretion.
The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil:
Pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth do I hate.
Counsel is mine, and sound knowledge:
I am understanding: I have might.
By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.
By me princes rule, and nobles, *even* all the judges
of the earth.
I love them that love me;
And those that seek me diligently shall find me.
Riches and honor are with me;
Yea, durable wealth and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, *yea*, than fine gold;
And my revenue than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice;
That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance,
And that I may fill their treasuries.

COMMENTS:

Godly wisdom is moral in its effect (not like the vanity of human wisdom, Ecclesiastes 1:12-18). All of its goals are positive. "By me kings reign," says this passage. We are to pray that rulers will follow such moral and just wisdom (1 Timothy 2:1-4, Romans 13:3-4). The love of wisdom is reciprocal, with wisdom following the "natural" trend of returning love to those who love her (compare Jesus' teaching in John 14:21, and Luke 6:31-35).

QUESTIONS

1. What did the "Preacher" conclude, after applying his heart to know (human) wisdom?
2. What is the object of our prayers "for kings and all that are in high place?"
3. Of whom is a ruler to be a minister?
4. For what purpose?

6. Wisdom--the Master Workman of God

(8:22-31)

Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way,
Before his works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,
Before the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth,
When there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills was I brought forth;
While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields,
Nor the beginning of the dust of the world.
When he established the heavens, I was there:
When he set a circle upon the face of the deep,
When he made firm the skies above,
When the fountains of the deep became strong,
When he gave to the sea its bound,
That the waters should not transgress his commandment,
When he marked out the foundations of the earth;
Then I was by him, *as* a master workman;
And I was daily *his* delight,
Rejoicing always before him,
Rejoicing in his habitable earth;
And my delight was with the sons of men.

COMMENTS:

There is much that is "messianic" in this eloquent tribute to divine wisdom. The personality attributed to wisdom in this section brings to mind Jesus Christ, "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Colossians 2:2b-3). Certainly, Jesus, as "the Word," was with God as the "master workman" of creation (see John 1:1-3).

The accurate description of the features to be found in this creation ("circle on the face of the deep...fountains of the deep...etc."), were gems of knowledge that defied the investigative powers and tools of ancient man, and even escaped the wisdom of Solomon at times (Ecclesiastes 8:16-17). In the last part of this section, the "habitable earth" is finished, and God "saw everything that he had made, and...it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). This good earth was made for the "sons of men," in whom wisdom had "delight" (Genesis 1:26-30).

QUESTIONS

1. When did Jehovah "possess" wisdom?
2. When was wisdom "set up?"
3. In what figurative form do we find Jesus active in Creation?
4. What "treasures" do we find in Him?
5. When the earth was created, wisdom was "by him (God)," as what? What was he, "daily?"
6. In what thing did wisdom "rejoice?" In whom was his "delight?"
7. Was the creation UNTO Christ, as well THROUGH Him? (see Colossians 1:16)

7. **Wisdom offers an appeal to share in her "feast."**

(9:1-6)

Wisdom hath builded her house;
She hath hewn out her seven pillars:
She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine;
She hath also furnished her table:
She hath sent forth her maidens;
She cries upon the highest places of the city:
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither:
As for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him,
Come, eat ye of my bread,
And drink of the wine which I have mingled.
Leave off, ye simple ones, and live;
And walk in the way of understanding.

COMMENTS:

Wisdom's feast (prepared for the "simple," and those "void of understanding") reminds us of the King's decision, in Jesus' parable, to call "unworthies" to His feast (Luke 14:15-24). The appeal of "Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God..." is strongest to those who are NOT wise (or mighty, or noble), according to 1 Corinthians 1:26-30.

(NOTE: This section of Proverbs gives us an insight into ancient Jewish architecture. The "seven pillars" of Wisdom's house are arranged in a certain way. *"four of these were in the corners, three in the middle of three sides, while the entrance to the court was through the fourth side of the square"* [Pulpit Commentary]. Also, we find a culinary detail of Jewish feasts. Her wine was "mingled" with water, and possibly with herbs, to make it less inebriating, and more appetizing at the same time.)

QUESTIONS

1. What figurative things has Wisdom done to make her invitation to her feast more appealing?
2. What lame excuses did the "bidden" use to reject the King's "great supper?"
3. What did God choose, to "put to shame them that are wise?" _____

"to put to shame the strong?" _____

_____ "to bring to nought the things that *are*?" _____

C. WISDOM DELIVERS FROM THE WILES OF THE WICKED.

1. Solomon gives his son a warning against involvement with men of criminal mentality.

(1:10-19)

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.
If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood;
Let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause;
Let us swallow them up alive as Sheol,
And whole, as those that go down into the pit;
We shall find all precious substance;

We shall fill our houses with spoil;
Thou shalt cast thy lot among us;
We will all have one purse:
My son, walk not thou in the way with them;
Refrain thy foot from their path:
For their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed blood.
For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird:
And these lay in wait for their own blood;
They lurk privily for their own lives.
So are the ways of every one that is greedy for gain;
It taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

COMMENTS:

The recruitment of others is a goal of criminal sinners (2 Peter 2:17-19), so Solomon attempts to arm his son against such. The destroyer shall become a victim of his own evil design, according to vs. 18-19 of this section of Proverbs. The New Testament confirms this truth (2 Peter 2:12-13a, Matthew 26:51-52). As David prayed to this purpose, so should we (Psalms 26:9-12). Paul says, "evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

QUESTIONS

1. In the context of 2 Peter 2:17-19, what phrase best identifies to you those who "entice in the lusts of the flesh?"
2. What do sinners "suffer," as the "hire of wrongdoing?"
3. What precept did Christ give to Peter, when he cut off the ear of the servant to the High Priest?
4. According to David, what is in the hands of sinners?
5. What is their right hand full of?

2. Solomon identifies traits that will keep his son from associating with evil men.

(2:11-15)
Discretion shall watch over thee;
Understanding shall keep thee:
To deliver thee from the way of evil,

From the men that speak perverse things;
Who forsake the paths of uprightness,
To walk in the ways of darkness;
Who rejoice to do evil,
And delight in the perverseness of evil;
Who are crooked in their ways,
And wayward in their paths:

COMMENTS:

One of the traits commended here by Solomon saved David from "blood-guiltiness" (1 Samuel 25:2-35). The other trait helps us to "hate every false way" (Psalms 119:104).

QUESTIONS

1. What are the two traits that "watch over" and "keep" and "deliver" us from the "way of evil?"
2. Did David, in your judgment, have a certain measure of the "blessed" trait he found in Abigail? _____ Explain your answer:
3. Through what did the Psalmist say we would get understanding?

3. The intense desire of the wicked to do evil must be avoided.

(4:14-19)

Enter not into the path of the wicked,
And walk not in the way of evil men.
Avoid it, pass not by it;
Turn from it, and pass on.
For they sleep not, except they do evil;
And their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.
For they eat the bread of wickedness,
And drink the wine of violence.
But the path of the righteous is as a dawning light,
That shines more and more unto the perfect day.
The way of the wicked is as darkness:
They know not at what they stumble.

COMMENTS: (next page)

Involvement with the way of the wicked can be avoided by the simple maneuver of turning from it. The wisdom of avoiding the path of the wicked is seen in observing that they have no sense of moderation. They are unable to sleep, until they do some evil thing, or have caused someone to fall. Evil is their food and drink. While the righteous are children of light (Romans 13:12-13), the wicked stumble in the darkness, and in ignorance of the cause of their stumbling (John 11:9-10, 12:35b, 1 John 2:11).

QUESTIONS

1. Solomon commands, " _____not into the path of the wicked, _____
_____not in the way of evil men. _____it, _____
_____by it, _____from it, and pass on." (ASV)
2. What is their bread of the wicked? What is their wine?
3. To "walk becomingly, as in the day," what did Paul advise the Romans to avoid?
4. According to Jesus, "If a man walk in the night, he stumbles...," because of what?
5. According to John the Apostle, the man that "walks in the darkness...knows not whither he goeth," because of what?

4. The "worthless person" is described, and his deeds are hated.

(6:12-19)

A worthless person, a man of iniquity,
Is he that walks with a perverse mouth:
That winks with his eyes, that speak with his feet.
That makes signs with his fingers;
In whose heart is perverseness,
Who devises evil continually,
Who sows discord.
Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly;
On a sudden shall he be broken, and that without remedy.
There are six things which Jehovah hates;
Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him:
Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood:
A heart that devises wicked purposes,
Feet that are swift in running to mischief,

A false witness that utters lies,
And he that sows discord among brethren.

COMMENTS:

The "worthless person" described by Solomon possesses nearly all of the attributes "hated" by God. He has no sense of propriety or justice. So, "his calamity comes suddenly...without remedy" (compare 2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Examples of this sort of men are found at the trials of Jesus (Mark. 14:55-59), and of Stephen (Acts 6:8-14).

QUESTIONS

1. Of the seven things God hates, the "worthless person has six:" which is left out?
2. When God runs out of "remedies," what happens to the sinners?
3. Why was the testimony of the witnesses at the trial of Jesus useless to the chief priests?
4. The witnesses used in the trial of Stephen were *suborned*. What does this mean?

D. WISDOM DELIVERS FROM THE WILES OF THE "STRANGE" WOMAN.

1. Solomon contrasts the love of strange women to marital love.

(5:1-23)

My son, attend unto my wisdom;
Incline thine ear to my understanding:
That thou mayest preserve discretion,
And that thy lips may keep knowledge.
For the lips of a strange woman drop honey,
And her mouth is smoother than oil:
But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
Sharp as a two edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
Her steps take hold on Sheol;
So that she finds not the level path of life:
Her ways are unstable *and* she knows *it* not.
Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me,
And depart not from the words of my mouth.
Remove thy way far from her,
And come not nigh the door of her house;

Lest thou give thine honor unto others,
And thy years unto the cruel;
Lest strangers be filled with thy strength,
And thy labors *be* in the house of an alien,
And thou mourn at thy latter end,
When thy flesh and thy body are consumed,
And say, How have I hated instruction,
And my heart despised reproof;
Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers,
Nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!
I was well-nigh in all evil
In the midst of the assembly and congregation.
Drink waters out of thine own cistern,
And running waters out of thine own well.
Should thy springs be dispersed abroad,
And streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for thyself alone,
And not for strangers with thee.
Let thy fountain be blessed;
And rejoice in the wife of thy youth.
As a loving hind and a pleasant doe,
Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times;
And be thou ravished always with her love.
For why shouldest thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman,
And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?
For the ways of man are before the eyes of Jehovah;
And he makes level all his paths.
His own iniquities shall take the wicked,
And he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.
He shall die for lack of instruction;
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

COMMENTS:

Solomon was the king who was influenced to forsake God by his many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1-8). He disobeyed God in two ways. He "multiplied wives" (contrary to the law governing kings in Deuteronomy 17:17), and he married foreigners who led him into idolatry (contrary to Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Yet, he devotes much of his instruction to his sons to warn them against going "nigh the door" of such women. Here in this section, he is warning them against committing the sin of adultery. If he wrote this advice during the period when he was being led away from god, he apparently draws a distinction between his faults, and the ones he warns against here. He may

have written these warnings before he had been led away from God. If so, he should have followed some of his own wise advice.

The outward beauty, and the enticing words, of the "strange woman" (meaning, a woman not your own wife), must be unmasked to expose the bitter, destructive, unstable nature she possesses. Vague warnings are given here against fathering children out of wedlock, and thereby dispersing his strength among strangers. He shows that if his son falls into this sin, he will regret having hated instruction, and having disobeyed teachers. To save a man from remorse, he must know and appreciate the evil consequences of adultery before his temptation (Compare 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). As a protection against the wiles of the evil woman, he should be "ravished always" by the love of his wife, the "wife of his youth" (Compare Malachi 2:14-16).

QUESTIONS

1. Though the strange woman's lips "drop honey," what are her true ways?
2. If the son surrenders to the temptation, what things does Solomon say he will "mourn at the latter end?"
3. The son should "drink waters out of" what?
4. In whom should the son "rejoice?"
5. According to verse 21, can adultery be committed in secrecy? ____ Why?
6. What shall "take the wicked?"
7. What does it mean to be "holden with the cords of sin?"
8. What shall he "die for lack of?"
9. He "shall go astray" in what?

2. Temptations of the adulteress lead to "death." (next page)

(2:16-22)

To deliver thee from the strange woman,
Even from the foreigner that flatters with her words;
That forsakes the friend of her youth,
And forgets the covenant of her God:

For her house inclines unto death,
And her paths unto the dead;
None that go unto her return again,
Neither do they attain unto the paths of life:
That thou mayest walk in the way of good men,
And keep the paths of the righteous.
For the upright shall dwell in the land,
And the perfect shall remain in it.
But the wicked shall be cut off from the land,
And the treacherous shall be rooted out of it.

COMMENTS:

Solomon calls this woman a "stranger," and a "foreigner," but this need not be construed to mean a woman of a foreign nation, since he later says that she "forgets the covenant of her God." Though some commentators say that this covenant is merely the covenant of marriage (compare Malachi 2:14), others say that it is the covenant which forbids adultery (see Exodus 20:14). If it is the latter, we can see that Solomon is using the words "stranger" and "foreigner" in a figurative way. A woman married to another is to be treated as a "stranger," and her "flattery" is to be resisted. "Her house inclines unto death," partly because of the penalties stated in the law for adultery (see Leviticus 20:10), and partly because the one who yields to her departs from the "paths of life." Once involved with the temptress, and having committed adultery, "none that go unto her return again," that is, the deed cannot be undone (compare 6:32-33); it will always stand as a psychological barrier between the adulterer and the "wife of his youth," even though it may be ultimately for-given by God (compare 2 Samuel 12:9-14).

Vs. 20-22 are a general application of the situation described in vs. 16-19. God's hatred of all sin causes him (in the Old Testament) to call for "cutting off" and "rooting out" the wicked from the midst of the righteous (compare Deuteronomy 22:22). In the New Testament, sinners suffer spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1-6).

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense may we interpret the words "stranger" and "foreigner" as they apply to the woman of our text?
2. Whom does this woman "forsake" when she tempts a man to commit adultery?
3. What does she "forget?"
4. In what sense does adultery lead to death in the Old Testament?

5. In what sense does adultery lead to death in the New Testament?

3. Solomon shows the rational consequences of adultery.

(6:20-35)

My son, keep the commandment of thy father,
And forsake not the law of thy mother:
Bind them continually upon thy heart;
Tie them about thy neck.
When thou walks, it shall lead thee;
When thou sleeps, it shall watch over thee;
And when thou awake, it shall talk with thee.
For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light;
And reproofs of instruction are the way of life:
To keep thee from the evil woman,
From the flattery of the foreigner's tongue.
Lust not after her beauty in thy heart;
Neither let her take thee with her eyelids.
For on account of a harlot *a man is brought* to a
piece of bread;
And the adulteress hunts for the precious life.
Can a man take fire in his bosom,
And his clothes not be burned?
Or can one walk upon hot coals,
And his feet not be scorched?
So (is) he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife;
Whosoever touches her shall not be unpunished.
Men do not despise a thief, if he steal
To satisfy himself when he is hungry:
But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold;
He shall give all the substance of his house.
He that commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding:
He does it who would destroy his own soul.
Wounds and dishonor shall he get;
And his reproach shall not be wiped away.
For jealousy is the rage of a man;
And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.
He will not regard any ransom;
Neither will he rest content, though thou gives many gifts.

COMMENTS:

After repeating once again his appeal to keep parental commandments, Solomon commands his son not to "lust after" the evil woman "in his heart." Jesus teaches that one who "looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her *already* in his heart (Matthew 5:27)." Then, Solomon reasons with his son regarding the consequences of adultery. He cannot "take fire into his bosom" and escape the "burning" that will result. The adulterer will "not be unpunished" (see Hebrews 13:4). David learned the continuing consequences of his adultery with Bathsheba, even though God had "put away" the guilt of the sin (2 Samuel 12:10-11). When Solomon compares the guilt of the petty thief, he says there is sympathy for him, since he is attempting to satisfy his hunger. No such sympathy exists for the one who takes his neighbor's wife, because there is no comparative "need." Nevertheless, even the thief with whom we have sympathized is still punishable, being required to "restore sevenfold" (NOTE: The Law did not require this exact formula of restitution [see Exodus 22:1-4], but the use of the number "seven" indicates complete payment.)

A second consideration faced by the adulterer is the self-destructive nature of his particular sin. In the New Testament, Paul teaches by the Spirit that one who "commits fornication sins against his own body (1 Corinthians 6:18)."

The third consideration the adulterer needs to face is the jealousy and vengeance of the husband of the adulteress. Nothing can moderate the distinctive rage of one who has been made a cuckold. It becomes a question of pride, or self-esteem, to take vengeance on someone. He will accept no compensation, because he cannot see how that will restore his self-esteem.

QUESTIONS

1. According to verse 25, what does the evil woman use to tempt her victim?
2. What is a man "brought to" because of the temptations of a harlot?
3. What happens to the man who "takes fire in his bosom?" _____
_____ If he "walks on hot coals?" _____
(question continued next page)
_____ If he "goes in to his neighbor's wife?"

4. What sort of thieves do men not despise? _____
_____ Do such thieves deserve to escape punishment? _____
5. What consequences are listed for the adulterer in vs. 32-33?

6. What are the characteristics of the jealousy of the husband of an adulteress?

4. Solomon describes the temptations of the adulteress.

(7:1-27)

My son, keep my words,
And lay up my commandments with thee.
Keep my commandments and live;
And my law as the apple of thine eye.
Bind them upon thy fingers;
Write them upon the tablet of thy heart.
Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister;
And call understanding *thy* kinswoman:
That they may keep thee from the strange woman,
From the foreigner that flatters with her words.
For at the window of my house
I looked forth through my lattice;
And I beheld among the simple ones,
I discerned among the youths,
A young man void of understanding,
Passing through the street near her corner;
And he went the way to her house,
In the twilight, in the evening of the day,
In the middle of the night and in the darkness.
And, behold, there met him a woman
With the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart.
(She is clamorous and willful;
Her feet abide not in her house:
Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places,
And lies in wait at every corner.)
So she caught him, and kissed him,
And with an impudent face she said unto him:
Sacrifices of peace-offerings are with me;
This day have I paid my vows.
Therefore came I forth to meet thee,
Diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.
I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry,
With striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt.
I have perfumed my bed
With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning;
Let us solace ourselves with loves.

For the man is not at home;
He is gone a long journey:
He hath taken a bag of money with him;
He will come home at the full moon.
With her much fair speech she causes him to yield;
With the flattering of her lips she forces him along.
He goeth after her straightway,
As an ox goeth to the slaughter,
Or as *one in* fetters to the correction of the fool;
Till an arrow strike through his liver;
As a bird in hast to the snare,
And knows not that it is for his life.
Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me,
And attend to the words of my mouth.
Let not thy heart decline to her ways;
Go not astray in her paths.
For she hath cast down many wounded:
Yea, all her slain are a mighty host.
Her house is the way of Sheol,
Going down to the chambers of death.

(9:13-18)

The foolish woman is clamorous;
She is simple, and knows nothing.
And she sits at the door of her house,
On a seat in the high places of the city,
To call to them that pass by,
Who go right on their ways:
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither;
And as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him,
Stolen waters are sweet,
And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.
But he knows not that the dead are there;
That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

COMMENTS:

After the usual admonitions to heed his commands, and to "write them on the tablet of his heart" (compare this language to 3:3, Jeremiah 31:33, and 2 Corinthians 3:2-3), the whole of Chapter Seven is devoted by Solomon to describe the wiles of the woman he calls a "strange foreigner," terms which we have already seen are not literal. Solomon says the adulterous Jewess is to be avoided like a "foreigner." As wisdom, in

the guise of a woman, appealed to the "simple," and to those "void of understanding" (1:20-22, 8:5), so also does the adulteress. To be kept from her, the man must make wisdom his "sister, and call understanding (his) kinswoman." The traits of the adulteress are that she wears the attire of a harlot (compare Genesis 38:14-15), is "clamorous and willful" (compare Jeremiah 3:3), and is "not in her house," but "in the streets...lying in wait" (compare 23:27-28). Her vows have been paid, with "peace-offerings," indicating that she had sought a "right relationship with God," according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. This served as a ruse to make her victim think that she was pious and pure. Her preparations are elaborate, and her invitation is seductive. She assures her paramour that "the man is not at home," and will be gone till the "full moon," because he took plenty of money with him. So he goes in to her, "as an ox goeth (unwary) to the slaughter," and does not realize the "fatal" consequences of his action. Truly, "all her slain are a mighty host."

The shorter section from Chapter Nine is mostly a repetition of the warnings against the seductiveness of the "foolish" and "simple" woman, who entices the man "simple...and void of understanding." She says, "Stolen waters are sweet," though Solomon has advised, "drink waters out of thine own cistern" (5:15, and compare 20:17 with Romans 7:7-11). He yields, never suspecting the "fatal" circumstances of involvement with her.

QUESTIONS

1. What more, besides what verse 5 tells us, do you think is implied by Solomon, when he tells his son to make wisdom his sister and understanding a kinswoman?
2. In what part of the day does the "simple" youth go his way toward the adulteress' house?
3. What are her characteristics?
4. What is her purpose in telling her victim that her vows are paid?
5. With what information does she assure her victim that her man is on a long journey?
6. With what does she cause her victim to "yield," and "forces him along?"
7. To what does Solomon compare the victim, when he "goeth after her straightway?"
8. What are the results of her seductive ways, according to 7:26-27?

9. What things are said of the "foolish woman," in 9:13, that are said of her victim in 9:16?

10. What things does the adulteress tell her victim are "sweet," and "pleasant?"

E. WISDOM IN HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE ISSUES OF LIFE.

1. Practice good relations, Solomon counsels, in view of God's attitudes toward the wicked and the righteous.

(3:27-35)

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due,
When it is in the power of thy hand to do it.
Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again,
And to-morrow I will give;
When thou hast it by thee.
Devise not evil against thy neighbor,
Seeing he dwells securely by thee.
Strive not with a man without cause,
If he have done thee no harm.
Envy thou not the man of violence,
And choose none of his ways.
For the perverse is an abomination to Jehovah;
But his friendship is with the upright.
The curse of Jehovah is in the house of the wicked;
But he blesses the habitation of the righteous.
Surely he scoffs at the scoffers;
But he giveth grace unto the lowly.
The wise shall inherit glory;
But shame shall be the promotion of fools.

COMMENTS:

The obligation to do good without procrastination is taught in both the law of Moses (Leviticus 19:13), and in the New Testament (Romans 13:7, 1 John 3:17, James 2:15-16, 5:4). Doing good to one's neighbor is also taught in both testaments (Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:24; Romans 13:8-10). While Solomon says, "Strive not with a man without cause" (compare 24:28), Jesus says (in the KJV), "Whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:22). Jesus, himself, was a victim of this sort of hatred (John 15:24-25). Envying the "man of violence" shows a perversity in ourselves, which is kin to the perversity found in the wicked, and held in abomination by God. Peter reminds us that "the face of the Lord is

against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). Verse 34 is quoted by both Peter (1 Peter 5:5), and James (James 4:6), to confirm this proverb as divine revelation.

QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, what sort of traits are found in the man who "withholds good" when it is in his "power to do it?"
2. What specific evils against a neighbor are forbidden by our references in Deuteronomy?
3. What two things are we to avoid, regarding the "man of violence?"
4. What two New Testament writers quote a verse from this section?

2. Solomon advises his son against being a "surety."

(6:1-5)

My son, if thou art become surety for thy neighbor,
If thou hast stricken thy hands for a stranger;
Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth,
Thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.
Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself,
Seeing thou art come into the hand of thy neighbor:
Go, humble thyself, and importune thy neighbor;
Give not sleep to thine eyes,
Nor slumber to thine eyelids;
Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand *of the hunter*.
And as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

COMMENTS:

Suretyship is defined: "Guarantee, taking responsibility for the debts, or performance of others." This was done by Judah to guarantee the return of Benjamin to Jacob (Genesis 43:9). Similar warnings against this practice are found elsewhere in Proverbs (11:15, 17:18, 20:16, 22:26, 27:13). The advice to plea for release seems to promise doubtful results, but as we might have a moment of weakness, in agreeing to be a surety, we might also find a similar momentary weakness in the one who asked us to pledge it, and he might be moved to release us from it.

QUESTIONS

1. What term might we use today to suggest "suretyship" on the loan of another person?
2. With what is one who becomes a surety "snared" and "taken?"
3. What is meant by the phrase, "come into the hand of thy neighbor?"
4. The importance of delivering oneself from suretyship is shown by what phrases in verse 4?

3. Solomon combats laziness in his son.

(6:6-11)

Go to the ant, thou sluggard;
Consider her ways, and be wise:
Which having no chief,
Overseer, or ruler,
Provides her bread in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.
How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?
When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep:
So shall thy poverty come as a robber,
And thy want as an armed man.

COMMENTS:

The assertion that ants have no rulers is confirmed in modern observations of their colonies. Each ant seems to fulfill the obligations of its class without direction. Solomon says, "Consider HER ways," and modern science confirms the truth that the "worker ants" are females! In the section of Proverbs called the "Oracle of Agur," the ant is included in a discussion of "four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise" (30:24-25). So, the ant is extolled for wisdom, as well as for diligent energy. Some people are hard-working, but not wise in their choice of work. This is true of both physical and spiritual work. We need only to return to the maxim, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom (9:10)," to see the source of choices of work in the spiritual realm. Jesus warned the people of his day against "working iniquity" (Matthew 7:23). The Greek word for "iniquity" is ANOMIA ("without law"). All lawless work, no matter how diligent, is futile. The "sluggard" is rebuked for his tendency to sleep

(compare 19:15, 20:13, 24:33-34). The New Testament has similar teaching (Luke 22:46, 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

QUESTIONS

1. Has modern science disproved the statement that ants "have no chief, overseer, or ruler?"
2. What does the ant do, even without a ruler?
3. The "sluggard" is troubled with what tendency?
4. What will happen to him, if he gives in to this tendency?

4. Solomon counsels selectivity in the choice of those to rebuke and instruct.

(9:7-9)

He that corrects a scoffer gets to himself reviling;
And he that reproves a wicked man *gets* himself a blot.
Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee:
Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee.
Give *instruction* to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser:
Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

COMMENTS:

The insensitive nature of the "scoffer," as contrasted with the readiness to learn found in the wise, is also taught in 10:8, 14:6, 15:12, 21:11, and elsewhere. Apollos, an "eloquent man" and "mighty in the Scriptures," had the good sense to be corrected by Aquila, and his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the response of the scoffer when corrected? _____ When reproved?

2. How does the wise man respond to reproof?
3. What common result is seen in teaching the wise man, and the righteous man?
4. Did Priscilla violate the rule of 1 Tim. 2:12, when she assisted in teaching Apollos? _____ Explain your answer:

II. DISSERTATIONS

A. MAN'S PLANS AND GOD.

(16:1-9)

The plans of the heart belong to man;
But the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah.
All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes;
But Jehovah weights the spirits.
Commit thy works unto Jehovah,
And thy purposes shall be established.
Jehovah hath made everything for its own end;
Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.
Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to Jehovah:
Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.
By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for;
And by the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil.
When a man's ways please Jehovah,
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
Better is a little, with righteousness,
Than great revenues with injustice.
A man's heart devises his way;
But Jehovah directs his steps.

COMMENTS:

Many passages of Scripture teach the inability of man to direct his own steps (20:24, Jeremiah 10:23). Even the Apostles found "sufficiency" only in God (2 Corinthians 3:5). The "ways" of a man are "clean in his own eyes," yet Paul says we are "not thereby justified" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Therefore, our works should be subject to God (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Verse 4 cannot be interpreted to mean that God created the wicked to destroy them, in view of 1 Timothy 2:3-4, and 2 Peter 3:9. It is true that the Day of Judgment is "for the destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7), but they are not "predestined" to this end, without hope of appealing to God in repentance. We should not see in this verse "sinful man made for the day," but "the day made for sinful man."

The pride of man is offensive to God. It is a sin (21:4, Mark 7:21-22), and will therefore be punished (16:18), but the man who humbly merges his plans with God's shall have many blessings (James 4:13-15). First, "mercy and truth" will "atone" for iniquity (compare 14:22, Psalms 85:7-11). God will then provide peace, and the security of guiding our ways.

QUESTIONS

1. Though the "ways of a man are clean in his own eyes," is he fit to direct his own steps?
2. Though Paul knew nothing against himself, did this justify him?
3. What will be the result of committing our works to Jehovah?
4. Has God predestined the wicked for the "day of evil," without any hope of appeal? _____ How do we know this?
5. What is God's attitude toward the proud?
6. Is pride a sin?
7. By what is iniquity atoned?
8. What does God do for the man whose ways please Him?
9. What quality makes "a little" better than "great revenue?"
10. Is a man's destiny in the hands of God, no matter what he plans to do?

B. FOUR SHORT DISSERTATIONS ON KINGS.

1. Kings are to be just.

(16:10-15)

A divine sentence is in the lips of the king;
His mouth shall not transgress in judgment.
A just balance and scales are Jehovah's;
All the weights of the bag are his work.
It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness;
For the throne is established in righteousness.
Righteous lips are the delight of kings;
And they love him that speaks right.
The wrath of a king is *as* messengers of death;
But the wise man will pacify it.
In the light of the king's countenance is life;
And his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain.

COMMENTS:

A later section will list some isolated proverbs that deal with the justice of Kings. Kings must have people to rule (14:28), but his rule must be just. It is a "divine" justice that he wields, if he will realize it (Romans 13:1-4). Righteousness is good in kings, but also in nations (14:34), so, rulers are wise to be righteous, as good examples to those whom they rule. God requires that commerce should be regulated with just weights (compare Leviticus 19:36, Deuteronomy 25:13), and these are under the control of kings. Since kings are men, their wrath is to be avoided, for "the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God (James 1:20)." Verses 14 and 15 should be compared to 19:12. The mention here of a "latter rain" shows that the anticipation of farmers in Israel had changed little even in New Testament times (James 5:7).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the justice of kings to be considered "divine?"
2. Did the Law of Moses require just weights and balances?
3. On what quality will the throne be "established?"
4. What is the wrath of a king like?
5. To what should we compare his "favor?"

2. Knowledge of the ways of kings will guide men in their approach to them.

(25:1-7)

These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing;
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.
As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth,
So the heart of kings is unsearchable.
Take away the dross from the silver,
And there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner:
Take away the wicked *from* before the king,
And his throne shall be established in righteousness.
Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king,
And stand not in the place of great men:
For better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither,

Than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom thine eyes have seen.

COMMENTS:

(NOTE: The introduction of this section suggests that it was inserted by scribes under Hezekiah King of Judah, some 200 years after the reign of Solomon.)

It adds to the mysteriousness of God's ways that he knows, without investigation, many things that are "concealed." Kings, however, must have a knowledge of the internal workings of their kingdoms, in order to judge fairly, even though their own hearts may be unsearchable. Kings must also "refine" their reigns by purging out all those who deal corruptly (compare 1 Kings 2:5-6, 33, 46). The advice of the last verses of this section compare well with the advice of Christ in Luke 14:7-11. Humility is the lesson in both cases. It is far better to be "invited" to go higher, than to be embarrassed by a command to go lower. Kings that are perverse might not recognize or appreciate the humble servant in his kingdom, but righteous kings will.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the "glory of God?"
2. What is the glory of kings?
3. When a king removes those from his servants who are wicked, to what does Solomon compare it?
4. Why is it better not to "put yourself forward in the presence of a king?"

3. A rebuke for kings who become oppressors.

(28:15-16)

*As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear,
So is a wicked ruler over a poor people.*

*The prince that lacks understanding is also a great oppressor;
But he that hates covetousness shall prolong his days.*

COMMENTS:

A perverse lack of wisdom is seen in a king who oppresses a "poor" people. He should rather follow the advice of 29:14 on judging the poor. "Hating covetousness" is equated with having "understanding" in the last couplet. The warnings of the law against gathering gold and silver apply here (Deuteronomy 17:17).

QUESTIONS

1. A "wicked ruler over a poor people" is compared to what?
2. Should a king rule for his own enrichment, or that of his kingdom?

4. Advice from a mother of a king.

(31:1-9)

The words of king Lemuel; the oracle which his mother taught him.

What, my son? and what, O son of my womb?

And what, O son of my vows?

Give not thy strength unto women,

Nor thy ways to that which destroys kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine;

Nor for princes *to say*, Where is strong drink?

Lest they drink, and forget the law,

And pervert the justice *due* to any that is afflicted.

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish,

And wine unto the bitter in soul:

Let him drink, and forget his poverty,

And remember his misery no more.

Open thy mouth for the dumb,

In the cause of all such as are left desolate.

Open thy mouth, judge righteously,

And minister justice to the poor and needy.

COMMENTS:

Even though she is a woman, the first word of advice given to king Lemuel by his mother is to avoid the destructive influence of involvement with women. This theme is found in some of Shakespeare's plays (Hamlet and Macbeth are examples). History has shown many a king destroyed by subversions of women (Suleyman the Magnificent, ruler of the Ottoman Empire during the time of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation, was forced to execute some of his sons because of the plots of his wife Roxelana). Solomon himself was spiritually ruined by his foreign wives.

The second admonition is to avoid strong drink, so that he will not "forget the law" or "pervert justice" (compare Ecclesiastes 10:17, and Isaiah 28:7). The uses to be made of wine are compatible with some Bible teaching (1 Timothy 5:23), but inebriation is implied in giving drink so that one may "forget." The evils of drunkenness are rebuked by God in the Law of Moses, especially for rulers (compare Leviticus 10:8-11).

In the NT, drunkenness is classified as a sin which will condemn the sinner eternally, unless abandoned in repentance and forgiveness (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The third admonition is to speak for the "dumb," that is, those who are unable to plead their own cause, perhaps because of poverty. The system of having "public defenders" is used today, for the protection of such people.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three matters on which Lemuel's mother advised him?
2. Why should kings not drink strong drink?
3. Why should priests not drink?
4. What system has our government used which matches the third admonition?
5. Who was angry when the poor were oppressed? (See 2 Samuel 12:1-5)

C. A LIST OF PERVERSE MEN AND THEIR PURPOSES.

(16:27-30)

A worthless man devises mischief;
And in his lips there is as a scorching fire.
A perverse man scatters abroad strife;
And a whisperer separates chief friends.
A man of violence entices his neighbor,
And leads him in a way that is not good.
He that shuts his eyes, *it is* to devise perverse things:
He that compresses his lips brings evil to pass.

COMMENTS:

The "worthless" man in whose "lips there is as a scorching fire" is the prototype of principles found James 3:6. Solomon equates the "perverse" with "whisperers" who try to "separate chief friends." Because of whisperers, Paul was forced to defend his apostleship, in order to restore the trust of the Corinthians. The nature of the "whispers" is seen in Paul's answers (2 Corinthians 1:15-18, 2:17, 3:1, 6:11-13, 7:2-4, 10:10-18, etc.). The influence of a "violent man" is seen in Genesis 4:8, 23-24; 6:11-12 (compare Psalms 17:4-5). Perverse and evil men disguise their intent by "shutting" their eyes, and by "compressing" their lips. They refuse to see the consequences of their actions.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three kinds of men who are listed in this dissertation?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

2. What does each man do?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

3. What other words might describe the "whisperer?"

4. From the answers of Paul, what sort of things were being said about him by the "whisperers" of Corinth?

5. To what extent did the violence that was introduced into the world by Cain and his descendants grow by the time of Noah?

D. INQUIRERS AFTER WISDOM ARE COUNSELED TO BE SINCERE.

(22:17-21)

Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise,
And apply thy heart unto my knowledge.
For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee,
If they be established together upon thy lips.
That thy trust may be in Jehovah,
I have made *them* known to thee this day, even to thee.
Have not I written unto thee excellent things
Of counsels and knowledge,
To make thee know the certainty of the words of truth,
That thou mayest carry back words of truth to them that send thee?

COMMENTS:

Many people inquired after the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 4:34, 2 Chronicles 9:23), yet *he* inquired after wisdom from God (1 Kings 3:5-9). It is no wonder, then, that he should think that "inclining the ear to hear the words of the wise" would be the same as putting "trust in Jehovah," especially if the wise gleaned their wisdom from God

(Compare 2:1-5). Any who are exposed to heavenly wisdom should investigate it soberly, because there is a "certainty" in the "words of truth," and that creates an obligation to "carry back" such words to those that send. The "doubts" (if we may call them that) of John the Baptizer might have been based on the fact that Jesus did not seem to have the tenacity which John had predicted he would (see Matthew 3:10-12). However, Jesus showed John's disciples another facet of his work, His healing, His miracles, and His teaching, which were also based on prophecy, and let John's disciples "carry back" these "words of truth" to let John know the "certainty" of them (Luke 7:18-23).

QUESTIONS

1. How well known was the wisdom of Solomon?
2. From what source did Solomon acquire his wisdom?
3. Did Solomon think that hearing the "words of the wise" was like hearing God?
4. Why, do you suppose, did John question whether Jesus was the one they were to look for?
5. With what evidence did Jesus satisfy John's inquiry?
6. Do we have evidence that John was satisfied with the answer?

E. A CODE OF LIVING FOR THE RIGHTEOUS CHILD.

(23:15-24:22)

(1)

My son, if thy heart be wise,
My heart will be glad, even mine:
Yea, my heart will rejoice,
When thy lips speak right things.
Let not thy heart envy sinners;
But *be thou* in the fear of Jehovah all the day long:
For surely there is a reward;
And thy hope shall not be cut off.
Hear thou, my son, and be wise,
And guide thy heart in the way.
Be not among winebibbers,
Among gluttonous eaters of flesh:
For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty;

And drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags.
Hearken unto thy father that begat thee,
And despise not thy mother when she is old.
Buy the truth, and sell it not;
Yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.
The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;
And he that begets a wise child will have joy of him.
Let thy father and thy mother be glad,
And let her that bare thee rejoice.

(2)

My son, give me thy heart;
And let thine eyes delight in my ways.
For the harlot is a deep ditch;
And a foreign woman is a narrow pit.
Yea, she lies in wait as a robber,
And increases the treacherous among men.

(3)

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions?
Who hath complaining? who hath wounds without cause?
Who had redness of eyes?
They that tarry long at the wine;
They that go to seek out mixed wine.
Look not thou upon the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it goeth down smoothly:
At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like an adder.
Thine eyes shall behold strange things,
And thy heart shall utter perverse things.
Yea, thou shalt be as he that lies down in the midst of the sea,
Or as he that lies upon the top of a mast.
They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not hurt;
They have beaten me, and I felt it not:
When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

(4)

Be not thou envious against evil men;
Neither desire to be with them:
For their heart studies oppression,
And their lips talk of mischief.

(5)

Through wisdom is a house builded;
And by understanding it is established;
And by knowledge are the chambers filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.
A wise man is strong;
Yea, a man of knowledge increases might.
For by wise guidance thou shalt make thy war;
And in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.
Wisdom is too high for a fool:
He opens not his mouth in the gate.
He that devises to do evil,
Men shall call him a mischief-maker.
The thought of foolishness is sin;
And the scoffer is an abomination to men.
If thou faint in the day of adversity,
Thy strength is small.

(6)

Deliver them that are carried away unto death,
And those that are ready to be slain see that thou hold back.
If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this;
Doth not he that weighs the hearts consider it?
And he that keeps thy soul, doth not he know it?
And shall not he render to every man according to his work?

(7)

My son, eat thou honey, for it is good;
And the droppings of the honeycomb, which are sweet to thy taste:
So shalt thou know wisdom to be unto thy soul;
If thou hast found it, then shall there be a reward,
And thy hope shall not be cut off.

(8)

Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous;
Destroy not his resting place:
For the righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again;
But the wicked are overthrown by calamity.
Rejoice not when thine enemy falls,
And let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown;
Lest Jehovah see it, and it displease him,
And he turn away his wrath from him.

Fret not thyself because of evildoers;
Neither be thou envious at the wicked:
For there shall be no reward to the evil man;
The lamp of the wicked shall be put out.
My son, fear thou Jehovah and the king;
And company not with them that are given to change:
For their calamity shall rise suddenly;
And the destruction from them both, who knows it?

COMMENTS:

At first, this chapter-length dissertation seems to be a summary of the first nine chapters of Proverbs, but there are some distinctions in the subject matter. We will try only to call attention to those differences. The dissertation is segmented by number for our convenience.

(1) The wise son provides a service to parents by causing them to have joy in him. The reverse of this is true, also (compare 10:1, 15:20), and the son whose perverse nature robs his parents of joy is certainly to be condemned (compare 28:24). In this section is the famous saying, "Buy the truth, and sell it not," but other things which create joy for parents are abstinence from "wining and dining," and speaking the truth (compare 3 John 4).

(2) This subject is more thoroughly covered in the long dissertation of the first nine chapters. Here the harlot is described as a "deep ditch" and a "narrow pit." In 22:14, Solomon says, "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of Jehovah shall fall therein." One statement that is interesting here is the one which says that the harlot "increases the treacherous among men," once again identifying adultery with treachery (see again Malachi 2:14). In modern times, we may be more forgiving of the adulterer than we are the traitor, but Solomon shows us that they are identical.

(3) This section is the oft-quoted passage on the evils of drunkenness. It is thoroughly up-to-date in its analysis of the consequences of drinking alcohol. It is the source of sorrows, wounds, self-deceit, hallucinations, uninhibited speech, dizziness, impaired senses, and addiction.

(4) This section is covered well in Solomon's original dissertation to his sons.

(5) This subject is amply covered in the first nine chapters, but emphasis is made here on the "strength" to be found in wisdom. We are told not to be "wise in our own conceits" (Romans 12:16), because "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." A "fool" will not sit among the elders "in the gate" (compare Ruth 4:1-2, Deuteronomy 22:15).

(6) The sanctity of life is emphasized in this section. The Christian has the example of Jesus to motivate his concern for the protection of others (John 15:13, 1 John 3:16). We cannot evade this responsibility by saying "we knew not," because God sees and knows, and expects us to be "involved." (At the end of World War II in 1945, the German people were held in contempt by the free world, when it was revealed that the extermination camps had destroyed millions of lives, and they claimed that they did not know what was going on.)

(7) In this section, Solomon compares wisdom to delicious and desirable honey (compare Psalms 19:9-10, 119:103). Divine wisdom helps us to secure our hope (compare 1 Peter 1:3-4).

(8) The subject of this last section is the endurance and resilience of the righteous. He keeps "rising" after he "falls" (compare Ps. 37:24). "The wicked are not so," says Psalm 1:4. The righteous are told not to be happy when the wicked falls. We are to have the compassion of Christ for the sinner (compare Matthew 23:37-38). Jehovah, we are taught elsewhere, will turn away his wrath from the wicked, when they call on him in repentance (compare Ezra 10:10-14). However, here we learn that God may turn away his wrath from the wicked to spite those who rejoice over their calamity. (God advised Edom against rejoicing over the fall of Judah, lest they also be punished. See Obadiah 10-15.) One last interesting statement in this section is the warning against being companions of "them that are given to change, for their calamity shall rise suddenly." God loves stability, not change. God, being unchangeable, marks changes as the work of men. We should separate ourselves from those who are not satisfied with the *status quo*.

QUESTIONS

1. Section one of this dissertation is summed up in Prov. 10:1. What is that idea?
2. What does the Harlot "increase?"
3. What are the consequences of drinking alcohol?
4. What is the quality of wisdom emphasized in section 5?
5. What is found in a "multitude of counsellors?"
6. What phrases show us the attitude we are to have toward the sanctity of life?
7. Why can we not escape our responsibility toward those who are threatened?
8. If we rejoice over the calamity of the wicked, what might God do?
9. We are not to "company" with them that are "given to" what? _____
Why?

F. FOOLS AND FOLLY.

(26:1-12)

As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest,

So honor is not seemly for a fool.

As the sparrow in her wandering, as the swallow in her flying,

So the curse that is causeless alights not.

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass,
And a rod for the back of fools.
Answer not a fool according to his folly,
Lest thou also be like unto him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own conceit.
He that sends a message by the hand of a fool
Cuts off *his own* feet, *and* drinks in damage.
The legs of the lame hang loose;
So is a parable in the mouth of fools.
As one that binds a stone in a sling,
So is he that giveth honor to a fool.
As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard,
So is a parable in the mouth of fools.
As an archer that wounds all,
So is he that hires a fool and he that hires them that pass by.
As a dog that returns to his vomit,
So is a fool that repeats his folly.
See thou a man wise in his own conceit?
There is more hope of a fool than of him.

COMMENTS:

The definition of "fool" means "stupid, silly" (Strong). The Theological Wordbook of the OT says he is one who is "dull" or "obstinate," not referring to "mental deficiency, but to a propensity to make wrong choices." It is inappropriate to give honor to fools. His "causeless" curses are not to be feared. It is best to apply the "rod" to his back, because he thinks like a brute beast (compare 22:15). Verses 4 and 5 seem to contradict, but the instruction to "answer not a fool according to his folly" implies that the answerer must avoid looking like a fool himself, but "answering a fool according to his folly," to keep him from being "wise in his own conceits," is valid and helpful. Using a fool as a messenger is dangerous, in view of the definitions above. Parables in their mouths lose their force. One might as well tie his stone in the pouch of his sling, for all the good it may do, because they cannot be thrown. An indiscriminate archer can wound friend and foe alike, and so can a fool. Peter's use of the phrase, "a dog that returns to his vomit," in 2 Peter 2:20-22, shows that one who has "escaped the defilements of the world," and again becomes "entangled therein and overcome," is a "fool that repeats his folly." The last verse shows that a certain kind of "wisdom" self-conceit, is even more hopeless than "foolishness."

(NOTE: The prohibition of Jesus in Matthew 5:22 does not prevent the "recognition" of fools by Christians. See 1 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 1:14, 22; Titus 3:3, etc.)

QUESTIONS

1. Honor to a fool is as unseemly as what?
2. What instruments are helpful to govern...
Horses?
Donkeys?
Fools?
3. What may happen to the one who "answers a fool according to his folly?"
4. What benefit can come to the fool who is answered "according to his folly?"
5. What dangers face the one who "sends a message by the hand of a fool?" (How do the figures of speech used by Solomon help us to understand this?)
6. To what two things may we compare "a parable in the mouth of fools?"
7. Hiring fools and passers-by is compared to what? _____
_____(What does this figure of speech imply?)
8. How does Peter's use of verse 11 help us to understand the lesson of 2 Peter 2:20-22?
9. "There is more hope of (helping) a fool," than whom?

G. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EVIL GENERATION.

(30:11-14)

There is a generation that curse their father,
And bless not their mother.

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes,
And *yet* are not washed from their filthiness.

There is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes!
And their eyelids are lifted up.

There is a generation whose teeth are *as* swords, and their jaw teeth *as* knives,
To devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

COMMENTS:

Jesus had much to say about the characteristics of his own evil generation (Matthew 12:39-45, 17:17, 23:34-36), and the Apostles designated it "crooked and perverse" (Acts 2:40, Philippians 2:15). Yet, any generation that has the traits given here by "Agur the son of Jakeh" may be designated "evil." Those who curse father and mother are violators of the Law of Moses worthy of death (Exodus 21:17), but Jesus shows how the Jews of his day tried to justify themselves when they committed a variation of this sin (Mark 7:6-13). The self-righteousness and pride of any generation ignores its true state of "filthiness," and makes it vulnerable to destruction (compare Genesis 11:1-9, and Revelation 3:17-19). A self-righteous generation will tend to "call evil good, and good evil" (see Isaiah 5:20-21). Oppression of the poor and needy is the last characteristic, and Jesus brought this accusation against certain ones of his own generation (Luke 20:46-47, and compare Ezekiel 22:29-31).

QUESTIONS

1. What term is applied to "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh" in Proverbs 30:1?
_____What is the meaning of this term?
2. Is it enough to be "pure in your own eyes?" _____What is to be done?
3. What does the evil generation use its sword-like teeth to do?
4. What traits of Jesus' generation made it evil?
5. What did the Law say should be done to those who cursed father and mother?
6. Whom did Jesus say "devoured widow's houses?"

H. NUMBERS GAMES. 30:15-16, 18-31

1. The number of insatiable appetites.

(vs. 15-16)

The horse leach (leech) hath two daughters, *crying*, Give, give.

There are three things that are never satisfied,

Yea, four that say not, Enough:

Sheol, and the barren womb;

The earth is not satisfied with water;

And the fire that saith not, Enough.

COMMENTS:

Agur uses the voracity of the leech to introduce his four things that are "never satisfied." Sheol, the grave, will always claim its due, even with God's people, if they forsake truth (see Isaiah 5:13-14). The barren womb craves children (Genesis 30:1, 1 Samuel 1:2-11). Though the planet earth is unique in the solar system in its abundant supply of water, still the land is 1/5 desert, 1/5 mountainous, and another large portion is intemperate in climate. Famines are regular occurrences in many parts of the world, and the Bible mentions them often. It requires patience in the farmer to wait for rain (James 5:7). Fire has an appetite for fuel, and will travel far and energetically to find it (see 26:20). The idiom used here ("three things, yea, four..") is apparently one that was familiar to Solomon and his contemporaries (see 6:16-19).

(NOTE: Though vs. 17 seems out of place, it may refer to a fifth thing, the insatiable appetite of vengeance against the haughty eye.)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature of a leech?
2. What are the four things never satisfied?
3. In the two examples of barren women given in the comments, what situation was common to both?
4. What quality must farmers possess, while waiting for rain?
5. When does an untended fire go out?

2. The number of mysteries "too wonderful."

(vs. 18-20)

There are three things which are too wonderful for me,

Yea, four which I know not:

The way of an eagle in the air;

The way of a serpent upon a rock;

The way of a ship in the midst of the sea;

And the way of a man with a maiden.

So is the way of an adulterous woman,

She eats, and wipes her mouth,

And saith, I have done no wickedness.

COMMENTS:

The four things mentioned here by Agur are still mysteries to all but the most inquisitive. Researchers have unraveled the mysteries of flight (as birds accomplish it), the secret of locomotion without limbs, the way a sailing ship can progress to its destination without internal power, and the chemistry of physical attraction. However, most people today still marvel at these things.

(NOTE: Vs. 20 seems (like vs. 17) to add a fifth wonder, sinners whose conscience is not pricked when they do wrong. See 1 Timothy 4:1-2. Those whose inner consciences are pricked, like the hearers on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37, will be able to humble themselves in repentance and obedience to the Gospel.)

QUESTIONS

1. Do people today still find the things mentioned here marvelous?
2. Do researchers today try to solve the mysteries of these wonderful things?
3. In our day, do adulterers often admit their guilt? _____

3. The number of things that make the earth "tremble."

(vs. 21-23)

For three things the earth doth tremble,
And for four, *which* it cannot bear;
For a servant when he is king;
And a fool when he is filled with food;
For an odious woman when she is married;
And a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

COMMENTS:

The unseemliness of a servant made king, and of a food-filled fool, is also expressed in 19:10. And "odious" (or, hated) woman has an evil effect in marriage (see 21:9, 19; 27:15-16). The exaltation of a handmaid to equality with her mistress might make her proud, and come to be hated, as was Hagar (see Genesis 16:3-6, 21:1-14). All of these situations have in common the elevation of those unsuited to their new positions. Since we do not live in a society where strong class distinctions exist, we have some difficulty in apprehending the force of such a lesson.

QUESTIONS

1. Are these examples gems of true wisdom, or just expressions of the prejudices and "class consciousness" of Agur, in your opinion? (Explain your answer:)

2. When Hagar was elevated to the status of a wife, and conceived a child by Abraham, what change was seen in her attitude toward Sarah, her mistress?

4. The number of things "little and wise."

(vs. 24-28)

There are four things which are little upon the earth,
But they are exceeding wise:
The ants are a people not strong,
Yet they provide their food in the summer;
The conies (rabbits) are but a feeble folk,
Yet make they their houses in the rocks;
The locusts have no king,
Yet go they forth all of them by bands;
The lizard taketh hold with her hands,
Yet is she in kings' palaces.

COMMENTS:

We have already commented on the wisdom and energy of ants in 6:6. One of the psalmists confirms the habits of "conies" by saying, "The rocks are a refuge for the conies" (Psalms 104:18). The collective instincts of locusts are accomplished without apparent leaders, and the lowly lizard is found in the most elegant home. Therefore, "little" does not imply "weak," nor does lowliness exclude "wisdom."

QUESTIONS

1. Can the observance of creatures in the realm of nature be instructive?
2. What, in your opinion, is the lesson of this section?
3. What other "little and wise" creatures are similar to Agur's examples?

5. The number of things "stately in their march."

(vs. 29-31)

There are three things which are stately in their march,
Yea, four which are stately in going:
The lion, which is the mightiest among beasts,
And turns not away for any;
The greyhound; the he-goat also;

And the king against whom there is no rising up.

COMMENTS:

Agur's appreciation of the lion must be confined to its prowess in the land of Israel, because, in Africa, lions give a wide berth to the "king of beasts" in that region, the elephant. Many today consider the greyhound as the most graceful of dogs. The stiff-legged walk of the he-goat impresses the observer with its stateliness. And, finally, the secure and successful king who is above opposition is a person of grandeur. These are the earthiest examples given in this dissertation, having little to commend them as spiritual lessons. Consider the destiny of pompous Babylon, however (Isaiah 14:3-11).

QUESTIONS

2. Is pride and pomp befitting in men?
3. Where would the pomp of Babylon be "brought down?"

III. PROVERBS BY SUBJECT

A. HUMAN CONDUCT AND GODLY PRINCIPLES.

1. God's care of the righteous, and opposition to the wicked.

Jehovah will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish;
But he trusts away the desire of the wicked. (10:3)

The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him;
and the desire of the righteous shall be granted. (10:24)

The way of Jehovah is a stronghold to the upright;
but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity. (10:29)

They that are perverse in heart are an abomination to Jehovah;
but such as are perfect in their way are his delight. (11:20)

The way of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah;
But he loves him that follows after righteousness. (15:9)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah;
but the prayer of the upright is his delight. (15:8)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;
how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind! (21:27)

He that turns away his ear from hearing the law,
even his prayer is an abomination. (28:9)

Jehovah is far from the wicked;
but he hears the prayer of the righteous. (15:29)

A good man shall obtain favor of Jehovah;
but a man of wicked devices will he condemn. (12:2)

The eyes of Jehovah preserve him that hath knowledge;
but he overthrows the words of the treacherous man. (22:12)

He that is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife;
but he that puts his trust in Jehovah shall be made fat. (28:25)

COMMENTS:

The first verse (10:3) makes the same observation as Psalms 37:25-26. The next (10:24) promises that what the wicked fears will come on him (but even the righteous suffer from the anticipation of fears, Job 3:25). Many proverbs and Psalms compare the help of God as a "stronghold" (10:29). Five verses in this section show what is "abominable" to God, in contrast to what he approves. The first two (11:20, 15:9) are general in character. The next three (15:8, 21:27, 28:9) show God's attitude toward the sacrifices and prayers of the wicked (compare Isaiah 1:10-17). In contrast, God hears the prayer of the righteous (15:29, compare 1 Peter 3:12). Noah is a good example of one who was a good man who found "favor" (12:2, and see Genesis 6:8-9). The section closes with two more general promises (22:12, 28:25).

QUESTIONS

1. What had the "old" person in Ps. 37 never seen?
2. Do the righteous have fears that come upon them, as well as the wicked? Who is the example for this?
3. List the things that are an "abomination" to God:
4. "Jehovah...hears the prayer of" whom?

2. Blessings enjoyed by the righteous are denied to the wicked.

A righteous man that walks in his integrity,
blessed are his children after him. (20:7)

The integrity of the upright shall guide them;
but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them. (11:3)

The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way;
but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. (11:5)

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways;
and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. (14:14)

The way of him that is laden with guilt is exceeding crooked;
but as for the pure, his work is right (straight). (21:8)
Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;
he that keeps his soul shall be far from them. (22:5)

Good understanding giveth favor;
but the way of the transgressor is hard. (13:15)

He that diligently seeks good seeks favor;
but he that searches after evil, it shall come to him. (11:27)

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul;
but it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil. (13:19)

The desire of the righteous is only good;
but the expectation of the wicked is wrath. (11:23)

A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth;
but the soul of the treacherous shall eat violence. (13:2)

The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul;
but the belly of the wicked shall want. (13:25)

A trespass offering mocketh fools;
but among the upright there is good will. (14:9)

In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare;
but the righteous doth sing and rejoice. (29:6)

In the house of the righteous is much treasure;
but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. (15:6)

He that covers his transgression shall not prosper;
but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy.(28:13)

There shall no mischief happen to the righteous;
but the wicked shall be filled with evil. (12:21)

Happy is the man that fears always;
but he that hardens his heart shall fall into mischief. (28:14)

COMMENTS:

These "blessings" are like the "earnest of our inheritance," a taste of heaven. A life pleasantly filled with the blessings of God is very desirable. As examples from the section, verse 11:3 tells us that it is good to be "guided" by integrity. Abimelech of old was saved from sin by God, because of the "integrity of his heart" (Genesis 20:1-6). The Apostle Paul found that "the way of the transgressor is hard" (13:15, and see Acts 26:14). Jesus supplemented the teaching of 13:25 by saying, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)." The truths of 28:13 are confirmed in Hebrews 4:13 and 1 John 1:9. Verses 12:21 and 28:14 bring to mind the precepts of Romans 8:1 and Ecclesiastes 7:17-18.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of "integrity?"
2. What sin was Abimelech prevented from committing?
3. What did Jesus tell Paul, which portrayed the difficulty of opposing the Lord?
4. In your opinion, is the "eating" mentioned in 13:2 and 13:25 figurative or literal? Why do you think so?
5. Why is it impossible to "cover (hide) transgression?"
6. What shall a person receive, if he confesses and forsakes sin, according to 28:13?
7. What shall he receive, according to 1 John 1:9?

3. The stability of the righteous.

He that walks uprightly walks surely;
but he that perverts his ways shall be known. (10:9)

When the whirlwind passeth, the wicked is no more;
but the righteous is an everlasting foundation. (10:25)

The righteous shall never be removed;
but the wicked shall not dwell in the land. (10:30)

A man shall not be established by wickedness;
but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. (12:3)

The wicked are overthrown, and are not;
but the house of the righteous shall stand. (12:7)

The house of the wicked shall be overthrown;
but the tent of the upright shall flourish. (14:11)

The righteous man considers the house of the wicked,
how the wicked are overthrown to their ruin. (21:12)

The name of Jehovah is a strong tower;
The righteous runneth into it, and is safe. (18:10)

As a troubled fountain, and a corrupted spring,
so is a righteous man that giveth way before the wicked. (25:26)

COMMENTS:

The sentiment of all of these proverbs is the same, except that the last one (25:26) reverses it and shows that the righteous man can lose his security. Some of the figures of security here are supported by other Bible passages, such as the house on a foundation (compare Luke 6:47-48), or a "strong tower" (compare Psalms 61:3), or a deep "root" (compare Matthew 15:13, Colossians 2:6-7).

QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus say that one should do to be like a house built on a rock?
2. Why were "strong towers" built in Old Testament times?
3. According to Paul, in whom are we to be "rooted and builded up?"
4. In what are we to be established?

4. The influence of the righteous.

The memory of the righteous is blessed;
but the name of the wicked shall rot. (10:7)

The light of the righteous rejoices;
but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. (13:9)

The words of the wicked are of lying in wait for blood;
but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them. (12:6)

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life;
but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. (10:11)

The wicked desires the net of evil men;
but the root of the righteous yields fruit. (12:12)

The righteous is a guide to his neighbor;
but the way of the wicked causes them to err. (12:26)

The evil bow down before the good;
and the wicked, at the gates of the righteous. (14:19)

They that forsake the law praise the wicked;
but such as keep the law contend with them. (28:4)

When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoices;
and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. (11:10)

When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice;
but when a wicked man bears rule, the people sigh. (29:2)

When the wicked are increased, transgression increases;
But the righteous shall look upon their fall. (29:16)

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory;
but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves. (28:12)

When the wicked rise, men hide themselves;
but when they perish, the righteous increase. (28:28)

COMMENTS:

Jesus called the righteous "salt" and "light" to illustrate their influence in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). In these proverbs, we see the means by which the righteous have influence. They have reputations that cause them to be remembered (10:7, and compare Hebrews 11:4). They are "lights...holding forth the word of life" (13:9, 12:6, 10:11, and compare Philippians 2:15-16a). They "guide" their "neighbors" (12:26). They have such respect that even the "evil bow down before" them (14:19, and compare Revelation 3:9). Because of these things, they will "triumph" and "increase" (29:2, 28:12, 28:28).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the lesson of the use of the figure, Salt, in Jesus' teaching? What is the lesson of the figure of light?
2. What did Abel continue to do after he was dead?
3. The church at Philadelphia would receive "worship" from those of what group?

5. The characteristics of the righteous and the wicked.

The thoughts of the righteous are just;
but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. (12:5)

A righteous man hates lying;
but the wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame. (13:5)

He that walks in his uprightness fears Jehovah;
but he that is perverse in his ways despises him. (14:2)

The heart of the righteous studies to answer;
but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. (15:28)

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil;
he that keeps his way preserves his soul. (16:17)

It is joy to the righteous to do justice;
but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity. (21:15)

Evil men understand not justice;
but they that seek Jehovah understand all things. (28:5)

An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous;
and he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked (29:27)

A wicked man hardens his face;
but as for the upright, he establishes his ways. (21:29)

The wicked flee when no man pursues;
but the righteous are bold as a lion. (28:1)

The righteous taketh knowledge of the cause of the poor;
the wicked hath not understanding to know it. (29:7)

COMMENTS:

Jesus said, "...by their fruit you shall know them," speaking of how we may distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. In this section of proverbs, eleven traits are mentioned, but we will comment only on a few. The righteous man "hates lying" (13:5), because he knows the genealogy and destiny of liars (John 8:42-44, Revelation 22:15). He "studies to answer," because he feels obligated to defend his stance (compare 1 Peter 3:15). He follows after "justice" in order to emulate his God (see Romans 3:23-26). He is "bold" like the Apostles, if he walks with Jesus as they did (see Acts. 4:13). He will embrace the "cause of the poor," because he knows that men who do not do this are overthrown by God (example: Jeremiah 22:11-12, 15-17).

QUESTIONS

1. Eleven characteristics of the righteous are found in these proverbs in short phrases. What are they?
2. Who is the "father" of liars?
3. What is the destiny of "all liars?"
4. We are to be "ready to give answer...concerning the hope" in us, but in what attitude?
5. Did Shallum follow the example of his father, Josiah?

6. More characteristics of the evil man.

An evil man seeks only rebellion;
therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. (17:11)

When the wicked cometh, there cometh also contempt,
and with ignominy cometh reproach. (18:3)

The soul of the wicked desires evil;
his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes. (21:10)

The bloodthirsty hate him that is perfect;
and as for the upright, they seek his life. (29:10)

COMMENTS:

These additional traits of evil men should be added to those mentioned in the proverbs of the last section. Paul says that "evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse" (2 Timothy 3:13). They are not content simply to "seek rebellion," or "desire evil." They also "hate him that is perfect." Jesus warned his disciples that they would "be hated of all men for his name's sake" (Luke 21:17), because they followed a "perfect" man who was also hated (John 15:18). Though we do not experience this hatred so much, today, we should prepare ourselves, mentally, for any attack on us by unbelievers.

QUESTIONS

1. List the traits of the evil man that you find in these verses:
2. What does it mean to be a "perfect" person?

7. Rewards of the righteous and the wicked in contrast.

(Life-Death)

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing;
But righteousness delivers from death. (10:2)

The labor of the righteous tends to life.
The increase of the wicked, to sin. (10:16)

He that is stedfast in righteousness shall attain unto life,

and he that pursues evil does it to his own death. (11:19)

In the way of righteousness is life;
And in the pathway thereof there is no death. (12:28)

The wicked is thrust down in his evil-doing;
but the righteous hath a refuge in his death. (14:32)

The fear of Jehovah tends to life; and he that hath it shall abide
satisfied;
He shall not be visited with evil. (19:23)

He that follows after righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness, and
honor. (21:21)

The fear of Jehovah prolongs days;
but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. (10:27)

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life;
and he that is wise winns souls. (11:30)

(Deliverance)

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them;
but the treacherous shall be taken in their own iniquity. (11:6)

The righteous is delivered out of trouble;
and the wicked cometh in his stead. (11:8, and compare 21:18)

Whoso walketh uprightly shall be delivered;
but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. (28:18)

(General)

Blessings are upon the head of the righteous;
but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. (10:6)

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness;
but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. (10:28)

When a wicked man dies, his expectation shall perish;
and the hope of iniquity perishes. (11:7)

The wicked earns deceitful wages;
but he that sows righteousness has a sure reward. (11:18)
Though hand join in hand, the evil man shall not be unpunished;
but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered. (11:21)

Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth:
how much more the wicked and the sinner! (11:31)

Righteousness guards him that is upright in the way;
But wickedness overthrows the sinner. (13:6)

Evil pursues sinners;
but the righteous shall be recompensed with good. (13:21)

Righteousness exalts a nation;
But sin is a reproach to any people. (14:34)

Whoso rewards evil for good,
evil shall not depart from his house. (17:13)

He that sows iniquity shall reap calamity;
and the rod of his wrath shall fail. (22:8)

Whoso causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into
his own pit:
but the perfect man shall inherit good. (28:10)

A man that is laden with the blood of any person
shall flee unto the pit: let no man stay him. (28:17)

COMMENTS:

The "rewards" listed here fall into the three categories shown above. First, righteousness and wickedness are "life and death issues." This is one of the primary themes of the Bible, so it is fitting to find the Proverbs dealing with it also (compare Ezekiel 18:26-27, Romans 6:23). When we "win souls," as 11:30 says, we are "saving a soul from death" (James 5:19-20, and compare 1 Timothy 4:16). "Deliverance," or salvation from the guilt and punishment of sin is also a main theme. This is the prime goal of God and Christ (1 Timothy 1:15, 2:3-4). We could use many passages to "flesh out" the "general" rewards in the last part of this section (see the questions be-low).

QUESTIONS

1. What "profit" is in the "treasures of wickedness?"
2. What happens to the one who "pursues evil," according to 11:19?
3. In what way does the righteous have a "refuge in his death" (14:32)?
4. Why is a person "wise" to "win souls?"
5. What verse in Rom. 6 could be connected with Proverb 11:18?
6. What verse in the last part of 1 Pet. 4 could connect with Proverbs 11:31?
7. Does Proverb 22:8 agree with the idea that "you shall reap what you sow?"
8. What teaching of Jesus are you reminded of by Proverb 28:10?

B. INSTRUCTION (CORRECTION) IS BETTER THAN REBELLION.

1. The value of reproof and correction.

He is in the way of life that heeds correction;
But he that forsakes reproof errs. (10:17)

Whoso loves correction loves knowledge;
But he that hates reproof is brutish. (12:1)

He that refuses correction despises his own soul;
But he that hearkens to reproof gets understanding. (15:32)

A wise son hears his father's instruction;
But a scoffer hears not rebuke. (13:1)

A fool despises his father's correction;
But he that regards reproof gets prudence. (15:5)

A scoffer loves not to be reproved;
He will not go unto the wise. (15:12)

The ear that hearkens to the reproof of life shall abide among the wise. (15:31)

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuses correction;
But he that regards reproof shall be honored. (13:18)

There is grievous correction for him that forsaks the way;
And he that hates reproof shall die. (15:10)

He that being often reproved hardens his neck
Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. (29:1)

Whoso is partner with a thief hates his own soul;
He hears the adjuration and utters nothing. (29:24)

COMMENTS:

In this group of proverbs, 10:17 repeats the connection of reproof with the "way of life" found in 6:23 (compare Jeremiah 21:8-10). Solomon's familiar themes of "knowledge" and "understanding" are revived in 21:1 and 15:32 (this proverb is in contrast to 19:8). The attitude of fools and scoffers toward reproof is seen in the next three (13:1, 15:5, 15:12). Two proverbs (15:10 and 29:1) show severe penalties to those who refuse correction, and one of these offers no "remedy" (compare 2 Chronicles 36:16). Finally, another way to "hate your own soul" is seen in 29:24.

QUESTIONS

1. What shows that we "love knowledge?"
2. What helps us in "getting understanding?"
3. Who will not "go unto the wise?"
4. Who will "abide among the wise?"
5. What is the alternative to "poverty and shame" given in 13:18?
6. When one "hardens his neck," after "being often reproved," what is his destiny?

2. The importance of counsel.

Where no wise guidance is, the people falls;
But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. (11:14)

Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed;

But in the multitude of counsellors they are established. (15:22)

Every purpose is established by counsel;
And by wise guidance make thou war. (20:18)

Hear counsel, and receive instruction,
That thou mayest be wise in the latter end. (19:20)

There are many devices in a man's heart;
But the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand. (19:21)

COMMENTS:

These proverbs show that we can borrow, employ, and ingest the wisdom of the wise. "Purposes" should be weighed and implemented by counsel. The greatest counsel to counter the "many devices in a man's heart" is that of Jehovah. It and it only "shall stand" in the end (compare Hebrews 6:17-18).

QUESTIONS

1. In two of our proverbs "a multitude of counsellors" is advised. What benefits are said to result from this?
2. How many "purposes" should be established by counsel, according to 20:18?
3. According to the writer of Hebrews, what two things prove the "immutability of (God's) counsel?"

3. Corporal punishment is useful in correction.

Smite the scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence;
And reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand
knowledge. (19:25)

When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise;
And when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge. (21:11)

Judgments are prepared for scoffers,
And stripes for the back of fools. (19:29)

Stripes that wound cleanse away evil;
And strokes reach the innermost parts. (20:30)

COMMENTS:

In our society today, corporal punishment has been abandoned by the government, and is discouraged in the family. The "Wise Man" who accumulated these proverbs, and who had received wisdom from God (2 Chronicles 1:7-12), thought that such "stripes" had benefit, just as reproof and instruction benefits those who are wise and understanding. Jesus and others were subjected to stripes of "examination" and punishment (John 19:1, Acts 16:19-23, etc.), showing that such punishment was used in that time. The prophet says that we have a benefit from the "stripes" laid on Christ: "By His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24).

QUESTIONS

1. What two things will happen to the "simple," when he is given corporal punishment?
2. What are the benefits of reproof or instructing the one who is wise and understanding?
3. "Stripes that wound" will do what?
4. Who is healed by Jesus' stripes?

4. The Word of God is the prime source of instruction.

Whoso despises the word brings destruction on himself;
But he that fears the commandment shall be rewarded. (13:13)

He that keeps the commandment keeps his soul;
But he that is careless of his ways shall die. (19:16)

He that gives heed unto the word shall find good;
And whoso trusts in Jehovah, happy is he. (16:20)

In the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence;
And his children shall have a place of refuge. (14:26)

The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom;
And before honor goes humility. (15:33)

The fear of Jehovah is a fountain of life,
That one may depart from the snares of death. (14:27)

The law of the wise is a fountain of life,
That one may depart from the snares of death. (13:14)

The fear of man brings a snare;
But whoso puts his trust in Jehovah shall be safe. (29:25)

COMMENTS:

These proverbs cover a familiar theme found in both the Old and New Testaments. Several chapters in Deuteronomy list blessings to those who keep the Law, and curses to those who forsake it. In one of these proverbs (15:33) it is said, "The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom." Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word" (John 14:23). Whether we are motivated by reverent fear or love, we show it by heeding and keeping the Word of God through Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. A famous Bible personality once "despised the word" (2 Samuel 12:9), as Proverbs 13:13 says.
 - (a) Who was he?
 - (b) Did he bring destruction on himself?
 - © In what way?
2. What three things are equated with the "fear of Jehovah" in these proverbs?
3. What is brought by the "fear of man"?
4. Proverbs 13:14 says, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life." What other fountains of life are mentioned in 10:11 and 14:27?

5. The rewards of hearing or rejecting the instruction of wisdom.

The wise in heart shall be called prudent;
And the sweetness of the lips increases learning.
Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it;
But the correction of fools is their folly.

The heart of the wise instructs his mouth;
And adds learning to his lips. (16:21-23)

He kisses the lips
Who gives a right answer. (24:26)

The heart of the prudent gets knowledge;
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (18:15)

Apply thy heart unto instruction,
And thine ears to the words of knowledge. (23:12)

Also, that the soul be without knowledge is not good;
And he that hastens with his feet sins (19:2)

The man that wanders out of the way of understanding
Shall rest in the assembly of the dead. (21:16)

Cease, my son, to hear instruction
Only to err from the words of knowledge. (19:27)

COMMENTS:

These individual proverbs stress the same benefits of learning, knowledge, and understanding which Solomon gave to his sons in the first 9 chapters. The connection of the words on our "lips" with what goes in the ear is seen in 16:21-23, and 24:26. Jesus taught that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks," whether good or evil (Matthew 12:34-35). The last three proverbs here show the tragedy of being without knowledge.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the "heart of the wise" do?
2. What does he do that "gives a right answer?"
3. What is the meaning of this, in your opinion?
4. In which two of these proverbs are the "heart" and the "ears" joined in the pursuit of knowledge?
5. Where shall the "man that wanders out of the way" rest?

6. Is 19:27 a command, or merely a statement of fact?

C. WISDOM CONTRASTED TO FOOLISHNESS.

1. "A heart to know wisdom."

The wise in heart will receive commandments;
But a prating fool shall fall. (10:8)

He that winks with the eye causes sorrow;
But a prating fool shall fall. (10:10)

Wise men lay up knowledge;
But the mouth of the foolish is a present destruction. (10:14)

The heart of him that hath understanding seeks knowledge;
But the mouth of fools feeds on folly. (15:14)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes;
But he that is wise hearkens unto counsel. (12:15)

Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise;
But the companion of fools shall smart for it. (13:20)

A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not;
But knowledge is easy unto him that hath understanding. (14:6)

A rebuke enters deeper into one that hath understanding
Than a hundred stripes into a fool. (17:10)

Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom,
Seeing he hath no understanding? (17:16)

COMMENTS:

The descriptions of fools in these proverbs are similar to those in the "dissertation" on "Fools and Folly" (Page 52). They show the ways of the wise, however, in contrast to fools. The "scoffer who seeks wisdom and does not find it" is like the evil men Paul described who were "ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:1-8). When Solomon shows that a simple "rebuke" has greater penetrating power on "one that has understanding, than a hundred stripes into a fool," we think of Peter, who, after denying the Lord, suffered deep remorse from a simple

glance from the accusing Jesus (Luke 22:54-62). The fool does not know that wisdom cannot be bought with money; his attempt only illustrates the depth of his foolishness.

QUESTIONS

1. In 10:14, what is the significance of the contrast between the "wise" and the "foolish" Solomon is trying to express?
2. Can we gain wisdom by "walking with wise men," according to 13:20?
3. What happens to the "companion of fools?"
4. What, in your opinion, keeps the "scoffer" from finding wisdom, according to 14:6?
5. What did Jesus' single glance at Peter cause him to do?

2. Practices and traits of the wise and foolish.

In the lips of him that hath discernment wisdom is found;
But a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding. (10:13)

The lips of the wise disperse knowledge;
But the heart of the foolish does not so. (15:7)

Go into the presence of a foolish man,
And thou shalt not perceive in him the lips of knowledge. (14:7)

It is as sport to a fool to do wickedness;
And so is wisdom to a man of understanding. (10:23)

Folly is joy to him that is void of wisdom;
But a man of understanding makes straight his going. (15:21)

A fool's vexation is presently known;
But a prudent man conceals shame. (12:16)

A prudent man conceals knowledge;
But the heart of fools proclaims foolishness. (12:23)

He that spares his words hath knowledge;
And he that is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding. (17:27)

A fool hath no delight in understanding;
But only that his heart may reveal itself. (18:2)

A fool utters all his anger;
But a wise man keeps it back and stills it. (29:11)

Scoffers set a city in a flame;
But wise men turn away wrath. (29:8)

Every prudent man works with knowledge;
But a fool flaunts his folly. (13:16)

A wise man fears, and departs from evil;
But the fool bears himself insolently, and is confident. (14:16)

A prudent man sees the evil, and hides himself;
But the simple pass on, and suffer for it. (22:3 & 27:12)

Wisdom rests in the heart of him that hath understanding;
But that which is in the inward part of fools is made known. (14:33)
He that gives answer before he hears,
It is folly and shame unto him. (18:13)

Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise;
When he shuts his lips, he is esteemed as prudent. (17:28)

The simple believes every word;
But the prudent man looks well to his going. (14:15)

The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters;
The wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook. (18:4)

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water;
But a man of understanding will draw it out. (20:5)

The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way;
But the folly of fools is deceit. (14:8)

He that trusts in his own heart is a fool;
But whoso walks wisely, he shall be delivered. (28:26)

Speak not in the hearing of a fool;
For he will despise the wisdom of thy words. (23:9)

Delicate living is not seemly for a fool;
Much less for a servant to have rule over princes. (19:10)

Every wise woman builds her house;
But the foolish plucks it down with her own hands. (14:1)

COMMENTS:

The first three proverbs in this section (10:13, 15:7 and 14:7) stress the advantage of listening to the wise. The next two (10:23, 15:21) show us that a fool treats wickedness as sport, or as pleasure, but the "man of understanding" finds such fulfillment in wisdom, and the pursuit of a "straight" path. The next several proverbs (12:16, 12:23, 17:27, 18:2, 29:11, 29:8, 13:16, 14:16, 22:3, [27:12], 14:33, 18:13, and 17:28) have the purpose of showing that the wise person is reticent, humble, self-controlled, conciliatory, sober, and prudent in his actions (James makes some of these points also, advising us, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" [James 1:19]). The fool is the opposite of all of these. The next five (14:15, 18:4, 20:5, 14:8, and 28:26) show the sober deliberation and "deep water" wisdom of those who are men of understanding. In contrast, "the simple believe every word" (compare 1 John 4:1), and follow deceit, and trust in their own hearts. The last three proverbs carry a miscellany of ideas, the first (23:9) gives advice similar to that of Jesus in Matthew 7:6. The second (19:10) supports the "numbers games" dissertation regarding "things that make the earth tremble" (see Pages 56-57.). The last (14:1) illustrates the contrast between the "wise woman" who "builds," and the "foolish" one who "plucks down." Paul was therefore "wise" in that he had a mandate to "build up, and not to cast down" (2 Corinthians 10:8).

QUESTIONS

1. What is found in the lips of the discerning?
2. What do the lips of the wise disperse?
3. What "is as sport to a fool?"
4. What does a "man of understanding" consider as "sport?"
5. In what sense, do you think, does the "prudent man conceal knowledge?" (see 12:23)

6. In what way, do you think, is "working with knowledge" the op-posite of "flaunting folly?" (see 13:16)
7. What do people think of a fool who "holds his peace" and "shuts his lips?"
8. One proverb says, "The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters." What does another proverb say is "like deep water?"
9. Why should we avoid speaking "in the hearing of a fool?"
10. What does a wise woman do?
11. What does the foolish one do?

The foolishness of man subverts his way;
And his heart fretted against Jehovah. (19:3)

3. The frustration of dealing with fools.

Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding;
But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. (17:24)

A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty;
But a fool's vexation is heavier than they both. (27:3)

Though thou shouldest bray (grind) a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with
bruised grain,
Yet will not his foolishness depart from him. (27:22)

If a wise man hath a controversy with a foolish man,
Whether he be angry or laugh, there shall be no rest. (29:9)

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man,
Rather than a fool in his folly. (17:12)

COMMENTS:

Those who have to deal with fools are aware of the fact that the situation can be very frustrating. The fool lives in a dream world, and causes endless problems to the wise. These proverbs, when joined together, seem to say that there is no wise way to deal with them. However, the New Testament counsels us to be patient in our contacts with men (2 Timothy 2:24-25, and compare Ecclesiastes 7:8-9).

QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the writer means, when he says, "...the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth?"
2. Which of these proverbs expresses the difficulty of causing foolishness to depart from a fool?
3. What is the result of having a "controversy" with a foolish man?
4. What quality is needed by the wise in dealing with fools?

4. The rewards of wisdom and foolishness.

A man shall be commended according to his wisdom;
But he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. (12:8)

The simple inherit folly;
But the prudent are crowned with knowledge. (14:18)

The crown of the wise is their riches;
But the folly of fools is only folly. (14:24)

He that troubles his own house shall inherit the wind;
And the foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart. (11:29)

The King's favor is toward a servant that deals wisely;
But his wrath will be against him that causes shame. (14:35)

A servant that deals wisely shall have rule over a son that causes shame,
And shall have part in the inheritance among the brethren. (17:2)

To the wise the way of life goes upward,
That he may depart from Sheol beneath. (15:24)

He that gets wisdom loves his own soul:
He that keeps understanding shall find good. (19:8)

There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise;
But a foolish man swallows it up. (21:20)

A wise man scales the city of the mighty,
And brings down the strength of the confidence thereof.(21:22)

COMMENTS:

Keeping in mind that the wisdom considered in the book of Proverbs is of a divine nature, we naturally conclude that it will have its reward. Paul tells the Christians at Colossae that the "spiritual wisdom" they attain will cause them to be presented to God "holy and without blemish and un-reprovable" (Colossians 1:9-23). The rewards of wisdom are good, whether they be mere "commendation" (12:8), or escape from "Sheol beneath" (15:24).

QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is meant by the following phrases?
 - (a) "The simple inherit folly."
 - (b) "The folly of fools in only folly."
2. "The king's favor is toward a servant that dealeth wisely;" so what advantages will that servant have?
3. What contrasting conditions does the writer show in 21:20?
4. What reward is indicated in the phrase "scales the city of the mighty?"

D. MERCY IS CONTRASTED TO CRUELTY. (Next Page)

1. "The quality of mercy."

The merciful man does good to his own soul;
But he that is cruel troubles his own flesh. (11:17)

A righteous man regards the life of his beast;
But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. (12:10)

Do they not err that devise evil?
But mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. (14:22)

That which makes a man to be desired is his kindness.
And a poor man is better than a liar. (19:22)

Most men will proclaim every one his own kindness;
But a faithful man who can find? (20:6)

Kindness and truth preserve the king;
And his throne is upholden by kindness. (20:28)

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me;
I will render to the man according to his work. (24:29)

COMMENTS:

The first proverb in this list (11:17) shows the benefit derived by the one who has shown mercy (Matthew 5:7, but see James 2:13). Solomon says that mercy in the heart will extend even to beasts, but the "tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." (The Roman Emperor Domitian, When sitting in judgment, "prefaced all his most cruel sentences with the same speech about mercy; indeed, this lenient preamble soon became a recognized sign that something dreadful was on the way." Seutonius, The Twelve Caesars, p. 265.) The "quality of mercy" will make a man desirable (19:22). When Solomon asks, "A faithful man who can find?" (20:6), we think of the question of 31:10. The last proverb (24:29) is similar to 20:22, and stands in support of Matthew 7:12, the "golden rule." (Compare Luke 6:36.)

QUESTIONS

1. When the writer of proverbs speaks of the "tender mercies of the wicked" (12:10), is he speaking with sarcasm?
2. What "makes a man to be desired?"
3. If a king is wise, what qualities will be found in his rule?
4. The second portion of 24:29 could be attributed to man, or to God. If God is the speaker, would Christ share in the action? (see Matthew 16:27)

2. The poor are objects of kindness.

He that despises his neighbor sins;
But he that hath pity on the poor, happy is he. (14:21)

He that oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker;
But he that hath mercy on the needy honors Him. (14:31)

Whoso mocketh the poor reproaches his Maker;
And he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished. (17:5)

He that hath pity upon the poor lends unto Jehovah,
And his good deed will He pay him again. (19:17)

Whoso stops his ears at the cry of the poor,
He also shall cry, but shall not be heard. (21:13)

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed;
For he giveth of his bread to the poor. (22:9)

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack;
But he that hides his eyes shall have many a curse. (28:27)

COMMENTS:

In these proverbs we look at the poor from the standpoint of those capable of giving to them. Both the Old and New Testaments support the principle of private benevolence in many passages. We see that "duty" is not what is commanded, but God seeks to relieve the poor through planting the spirit of kindness and mercy in the hearts of His children. Of the man that "oppresses" or "mocks" the poor, both 14:31 and 17:5 say that he "reproaches his maker," for "He is kind toward (even) the unthankful and evil." (Luke 6:35). When 19:17 says that the one who shows pity to the poor "lendeth to Jehovah," we can compare Matthew 25:40. When a child of God "stops his ears" at the cry of the poor (21:13), or "hides his eyes" (28:27), it can be asked, "How doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). The principle of God is that the "giver" shall "receive" (see Ecclesiastes 11:1, Luke 6:38, and 2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

QUESTIONS

1. In what two ways do these proverbs say a person can "reproach his maker?"
2. How can having pity on the poor "lend" to Jehovah?
3. What will happen to the man who stops his ears at the cry of the poor?
4. Will the person who gives to the poor be in need?

E. PRIDE CONTRASTED TO HUMILITY.

1. The fruits of pride and humility

When pride comes, then comes shame;

But with the lowly is wisdom. (11:2)

By pride comes only contention;
But with the well-advised is wisdom. (13:10)

Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall. (16:18)

Before destruction the heart of man is haughty;
And before honor goes humility. (18:12, and compare 15:33)

The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah
Is riches, and honor, and life. (22:4)

A man's pride shall bring him low;
But he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honor. (29:23)

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold;
And a man is tried by his praise. (27:21)

COMMENTS: (Next Page)

These proverbs show the "fruit" of pride to be shame, contention, destruction, and being brought low. For the humble, however shall be wisdom, riches, honor, and life. Jesus said, "Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). Truly, as the last proverb in this list says, the "refining pot" which tests what sort of "metal" we are is called "praise."

QUESTIONS

1. In 11:2 and 13:10, wisdom is with what two kinds of men?
2. What is the reward of "humility and the fear of Jehovah?"
3. In Jesus' teaching of Luke 14:11, who first does the "exalting" or the "humbling?"
4. Who does these things next?

2. The superiority of humility.

Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and hath a servant;
Than he that honors himself, and lacks bread. (12:9)

Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the poor,
Than to divide the spoil with the proud. (16:19)

Boast not thyself of to-morrow;
For thou know not what a day may bring forth.
Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth;
A stranger, and not thine own lips. (27:1-2)

COMMENTS:

Solomon, with all his wealth, must have been discontented (he writes regarding his discontent in Ecclesiastes). So, he commends the humble life, whether one "hath a servant," or is "poor."

QUESTIONS

1. According to 12:9, does pride satisfy hunger?
2. What does it mean to "divide the spoil?"

3. The proud and the humble in relationship to God.

Jehovah will root up the house of the proud;
But he will establish the border of the widow. (15:25)

A high look, and a proud heart,
Even the lamp of the wicked, is sin. (21:4)

The proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name.
He works in the arrogance of pride. (21:24)

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh; the oracle.
The man saith unto Ithiel, unto Ithiel and Ucal.
Surely I am more brutish than any man,
And have not the understanding of a man;
And I have not learned wisdom,
Neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One.
Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended?
Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?
Who hath bound the waters in his garment?
Who hath established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou knows? (30:1-4)

COMMENTS:

The first proverb in this list (15:25) fits the sentiment which is found in 3:34, and 1 Peter 5:5. The next shows that pride is sin, though 1 John 2:16 shows that it is actually one of the three things in the world that tempt men to sin. The third proverb calls the haughty man by his real name, "scoffer," because the proud count others (and even God) as nothing (compare Luke 18:9-14). In 30:1-4, Agur's "oracle" shows the humble spirit of one who is confronted with the overwhelming power and knowledge of God (compare Job 38:1-18, and 42:1-6). The last sentence of the "words of Agur" sounds "Messianic," suggesting that the Creator has a son.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is the word "widow" used in opposition to the word "proud" in 15:25?
2. Is pride itself a sin, or is it one of the temptations that lead to sin?
3. When Agur sees God's power shown in nature, what does he say of himself?

F. LOVE CONTRASTED TO HATRED.

1. The fruits of love and hatred.

A wrathful man stirs up contention;
But he that is slow to anger appeases strife. (15:18)

He that is slow to anger is of great understanding;
But he that is hasty of spirit exalts folly. (14:29)

He that is soon angry will deal foolishly;
And a man of wicked devices is hated. (14:17)

An angry man stirs up strife,
And a wrathful man abounds in transgression. (29:22)

Hatred stirs up strifes;
But love covers all transgressions. (10:12)

He that covers a transgression seeks love;
But he that harps on a matter separates his friends. (17:9)

COMMENTS:

These six proverbs confirm the truths of two important New Testament doctrines. James says, "Let every man be...slow to wrath, for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God" (James 1:19b-20). Peter's teaching on love says, "Be fervent in your love among yourselves, for love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). In contrast Jesus taught that peacemakers are sons of God imitating Christ (Matthew 5:9, Ephesians 2:13-15).

QUESTIONS

1. How do these proverbs describe the man who is "slow to anger?"
2. In what does a "wrathful man" abound?
3. Peter says "love covers a multitude of sins." How many does Proverbs 10:12 say can be covered?
4. What happens when a man "harps on a matter?"

2. The superiority of love over hate.

Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is,
Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. (15:17)

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;
And he that rules his spirit, than he that takes a city. (16:32)

Better is open rebuke
Than love that is hidden.
Faithful are the wounds of a friend:
But the kisses of an enemy are profuse. (27:5-6)

COMMENTS:

Whoever practices love in all things is imitating God, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Men find the principle of 16:32 hard to believe, but to imitate God we must "walk in love, even as Christ also loved" us (Ephesians 5:1-2). When 27:5-6 says that "open rebuke" is better than hidden love, and that the "wounds of a friend" are "faithful," we must remember that "whom the Lord loves he chastens" (Hebrews 12:6). We must also remember that Judas' kiss in greeting the Lord was an act of betrayal.

QUESTIONS

1. What material condition does the phrase "a stalled ox" represent in 15:7?
2. When we rebuke someone out of love for them, who are we imitating?
3. When we "walk in love," who are we following?
4. When a friend "wounds" us, to whom is he being faithful?

3. The characteristics of lovers and haters.

A friend loves at all times;
And a brother is born for adversity. (17:17)

He loves transgression that loves strife;
He that raises high his gate seeks destruction. (17:19)
A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty;
For if thou deliver him, thou must do it yet again. (19:19)

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife;
But every fool will be quarreling. (20:3)

COMMENTS:

Our first proverb in this series (17:17) is confirmed in 18:24b. The second (17:19) shows that a man can advertise his animosity by doing such things as "raising high his gate." The third (19:19) tells us that trying to deliver violent angry men from the "penalty" due them may have to be repeated (this is the problem with releasing violent men from prison before they are reformed--they often commit other acts of violence). Keeping "aloof from strife" is honorable, 20:3 tells us, and so Paul calls strife a "work of the flesh" to be avoided (Galatians 5:19-20, 24).

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the statement, "A brother is born for adversity."
2. What modern penal problem is suggested by Proverb 19:19?
3. What does Paul say that those who are "of Christ Jesus" have done?

4. How to deal with hate and anger.

The beginning of strife is as when one lets out water;
Therefore leave off contention, before there is quarreling. (17:14)

A gift in secret pacifies anger,
And a present in the bosom strong wrath. (21:14)

Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out;
Yea, strife and ignominy shall cease. (22:10)
Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger;
and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go:
Lest thou learn his ways,
And get a snare to thy soul. (22:24-25)

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself,
Or if thou hast thought evil,
Lay thy hand upon thy mouth.
For the churning of milk brings forth butter,
And the wringing of the nose brings forth blood;
So the forcing of wrath brings forth strife. (30:32-33)

COMMENTS:

The advice of Solomon gives us several ways to handle anger found in others. We can "nip it in the bud," as 17:14 suggests; or, we can use gifts to placate it (21:14); or, we can eject the trouble-maker (22:10); or, we can withhold friendship from those who are "wrathful" (22:24-25); or, after trouble starts, we can stop our mouths, so that no more strife will be generated (30:32-33, compare 15:1). Jesus' teaching on "turning the other cheek" should have the same effect (Matthew 5:38-42).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the "beginning of strife" like "letting out water?"
2. Have many people used the advice of 21:14?
3. Does 22:10 call for making a judgment regarding who is causing strife, before ejecting him?
4. Does 22:24-25 teach the same principle, negatively, that 13:20 teaches, positively?

5. When we discover that we have made a mistake that may gender strife, what should we do, according to Solomon?
6. To what other things does 30:33 compare the "forcing of wrath?"
7. What does Jesus teach us to do when someone goes to law with us to take away our coat?

G. RICHES CONTRASTED TO POVERTY.

1. The Vanity of Riches.

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing;
But righteousness delivers from death. (10:2)
Riches profit not in the day of wrath;
But righteousness delivers from death. (11:4)

Weary not thyself to be rich;
Cease from thine own wisdom. (23:4)

The rich man is wise in his own conceit;
But the poor that hath understanding searches him out. (28:11)

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?
For riches certainly make themselves wings
Like an eagle that flies toward heaven. (23:5)

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children;
And the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous. (13:22)

He that augments his substance by interest and increase,
Gathers it for him that hath pity on the poor. (28:8)

COMMENTS:

In 10:2 and 11:4, the compiler of Proverbs says first that the riches coming from wickedness have no profit, but then says that riches do not help in the "day of wrath," without qualifying how the riches were obtained. Jesus teaches us that "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," except through the help of God (Matthew 19:23-26). If the riches come from sin, the sinner needs forgiveness. If the riches are obtained legitimately, the rich man needs to follow Paul's advice (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Some of the vanity and self-conceit of riches lies in our inability to see into the future

(Luke 12:13-21). We are told that we cannot take our wealth with us when we die (1 Timothy 6:7). We are also taught that treasures on earth can "make themselves wings" by the devastation of "moths, rust, and thieves" (Matthew 6:19-21). The similar sentiments of 13:22 and 28:8 tell us that wealth gained by sinners must be left behind to those who may make much better use of it. No re-ward is given to the greedy sinner, but his righteous heirs may find a reward in re-distributing the sinner's wealth. Solomon also deals with the frustration of leaving wealth to those who have not labored for it (Ecclesiastes 2:18-22).

QUESTIONS

1. Does it make any difference, in gaining deliverance from death, whether our wealth is obtained in the right way or the wrong way?
2. According to Jesus, what action is easier than a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven?
3. Proverb 23:5 says, "riches certainly make themselves wings." What other ways can cause this, besides those mentioned by the Lord in Matt. 6?
4. Which two proverbs in this section indicate that the money gained by sinners may be left to the righteous?
5. Is it more frustrating, do you think, for a rich sinner to leave his wealth to righteous heirs, than for a wise man to leave it to a fool?

2. The Curse of Wealth.

The ransom of a man's life is his riches;
But the poor hears no threatening. (13:8)

Better is little, with the fear of Jehovah,
Than great treasure and trouble therewith. (15:16)

Better is a little, with righteousness,
Than great revenues with injustice. (16:8)

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith,
Than a house full of feasting with strife. (17:1)

COMMENTS:

Being rich tempts the extortioner who demands a "ransom," but the poor man is free from that threat. In a spiritual application of this principle, see Jesus' questions in Matthew 16:26. The last three proverbs speak of things that are better than the troubles brought by riches. Paul also lists some specific troubles in 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer the question of Jesus, "What shall a man give in exchange for his life?"
2. What three things make having only a "little" of this world's good "better," according to these proverbs?
3. What three evil things are said to accompany riches in these proverbs?

3. Ill-gotten Riches.

A gracious woman obtains honor;
And violent men obtain riches. (11:16)
Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished;
But he that gathers by labor shall have increase. (13:11)

Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man;
But afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. (20:17)

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue
Is a vapor driven to and fro by them that seek death. (21:6)

He that oppresses the poor to increase his gain,
And he that gives to the rich, shall come only to want. (22:16)

A needy man that oppresses the poor
Is like a sweeping rain which leaves no food. (28:3)

He that hath an evil eye hastens after riches,
And knows not that want shall come upon him. (28:22)

COMMENTS:

There are many ways to gain wealth legally, just as there are many ways to gain it criminally. James shows some ways that men profit by fraud and oppression in James 5:1-6. The Law of Moses condemned the defrauding of laborers (Leviticus 19:13). John the Baptist told publicans and soldiers who extorted by fraud and violence to repent (Luke 3:12-14).

QUESTIONS

1. In which of these proverbs is it said that "want" will come to those who seek riches in the wrong way?
2. How many wrong ways of "getting gain" can you find in these proverbs?

4. The Unjust Worldly Advantage of Wealth.

The rich man's wealth is his strong city;
The destruction of the poor is their poverty. (10:15)

The rich man's wealth is his strong city,
And as a high wall in his own imagination. (18:11)

The poor is hated even of his own neighbor;
But the rich hath many friends. (14:20)

Wealth adds many friends;
But the poor is separated from his friend. (19:4)

All the brethren of the poor do hate him;
How much more do his friends go far from him. (19:7)

A man's gift makes room for him,
And brings him before great men. (18:16)

Many will entreat the favor of the liberal man;
And every man is a friend to him that gives gifts. (19:6)

The poor uses entreaties;
But the rich answer roughly. (18:23)

The rich rules over the poor;
And the borrower is servant to the lender. (22:7)

The full soul loaths a honeycomb;
But to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet. (27:7)

COMMENTS:

It is a fact of life that the rich have certain advantages over the poor. In Christianity, however, God considers all to be equal. For this reason, we are warned against showing respect of persons to the rich (James 2:1-9). Men react strongly to stories of oppression by the rich, as David did (2 Samuel 12:1-6). Yet, no matter what the material advantage of riches, we see from the teaching of Jesus that wealth has no spiritual advantage (Luke 16:19-31). Proverbs 19:4 and 19:6 remind us of the "Pro-digal Son," who had both the experience of riches and poverty (Luke 15:11-16).

QUESTIONS

1. What, do you think, is the meaning of the phrase, "The destruction of the poor is their poverty."
2. In your opinion, are a rich man's friends likely to remain, if his wealth fails?
3. What sort of "gift" brings the giver "before great men?"
4. Are Proverbs 18:23, and 22:7, descriptive of conditions in the world today?

5. The True Riches.

There is that makes himself rich, yet hath nothing;
There is that makes himself poor, yet hath great wealth. (13:7)

There is that covets greedily all the day long;
But the righteous gives and withholds not. (21:26)

He that trusts in his riches shall fall;
But the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf. (11:28)

The blessing of Jehovah, it makes rich;
And he adds no sorrow therewith. (10:22)

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold.
Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver. (16:16)

There is gold, and abundance of rubies;
But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. (20:15)

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
And loving favor rather than silver and gold. (22:1)

Better is the poor that walks in his integrity,
Than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. (28:6, compare 19:1)

A faithful man shall abound with blessings;
But he that makes haste to be rich shall not be unpunished. (28:20)

The rich and the poor meet together;
Jehovah is the maker of them all. (22:2)

The poor man and the oppressor meet together;
Jehovah lightens the eyes of them both. (29:13)

Two things have I asked of thee;
Deny me them not before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lies;
Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is needful for me:
Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Jehovah?
Or lest I be poor, and steal, and use profanely the name of my God. (30:7-9)

COMMENTS:

The theme of these proverbs is supported throughout the Bible. Moses warned Israel against forsaking God when they became rich, and forgetting the true source of their riches (Deuteronomy 8:10-18, and compare 1 Samuel 2:7). The Prophet Jeremiah also showed the rich man that he should not glory in riches (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Jesus' teaching on this subject is well known (Matthew 6:19-21, 19:24-29; Luke 12:15). And, finally, the Apostles and Prophets of the New Testament teach it (Romans 9:22-23, 11:33; Ephesians 1:7, 18, 3:8, 14-16; Colossians 1:26-27; 1 Timothy 6:6-8, James 1:9-11). We have an example of the "choosing" of "true riches" in Hebrews 11:26. If Moses had chosen to become a prince of Egypt, his name would have been buried in Egypt's sand, like others who have made such wrong choices.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the added blessing of being made rich by God, according to 10:22?

2. What things are better than gold and silver, according to 16:16, 20:15, and 22:1?
3. Who is better than a rich man who is "perverse in his ways?"
4. What is meant, in your opinion, by the phrase, "The rich and the poor meet together?"
5. What are the dangers of riches and poverty, according to 30:7-9?

H. THE TONGUE, ITS SINS, AND ITS PROPER USES.

1. Sins of the Tongue.

(Lying-false witness)

He that hides hatred is of lying lips;
And he that utters a slander is a fool. (10:18)

A lying tongue hates those whom it hath wounded;
And a flattering mouth workss ruin. (26:28)

He that hates dissembles with his lips;
But he lays up deceit within him;
When he speaks fair, believe him not;
For there are seven abominations in his heart:
Though his hatred cover itself with guile,
His wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly.
Whoso digs a pit shall fall therein;
And he that rolls a stone, it shall return upon him. (26:24-27)

Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah;
But they that deal truly are his delight. (12:22)
A faithful witness will not lie;
But a false witness utters lies. (14:5)

A true witness delivers souls;
But he that utters lies causes deceit. (14:25)

Excellent speech becomes not a fool;
Much less do lying lips a prince. (17:7)

A false witness shall not be unpunished;
And he that utters lies shall not escape. (19:5, and see 19:9)

Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause;
And deceive not with thy lips. (24:28)

A man that bears false witness against his neighbor
Is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. (25:18)
As clouds and wind without rain,
So is he that boasts himself of his gifts falsely. (25:14)

As a madman who casts firebrands, arrows, and death,
So is the man that deceives his neighbor, and saith, Am not I in sport? (26:18-19)

(Whispering-talebearing)

The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels,
And they go down into the innermost parts. (18:8 and 26:22)

He that goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets;
Therefore company not with him that opens wide his lips. (20:19)

He that goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets;
But he that is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. (11:13)

For lack of wood the fire goes out;
And where there is no whisperer, contention ceases. (26:20)

(Other evils of the tongue)

With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor;
But through knowledge shall the righteous be delivered. (11:9)

Evil devices are an abomination to Jehovah;
But pleasant words are pure. (15:26)

An evil-doer gives heed to wicked lips;
And a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue. (17:4)

He that hath a wayward heart finds no good;
And he that hath a perverse tongue falls into mischief. (17:20)

A fool's lips enter into contention,
And his mouth calls for stripes. (18:6)

As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire,
So is a contentious man to inflame strife. (26:21)

Fervent lips and a wicked heart
Are like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross. (26:23)

COMMENTS:

James calls the tongue a "world of iniquity," because of the many ways in which the tongue can enunciate sin (James 1:26, 3:1-12, 4:11) Jesus condemned the sins of the tongue which issued from an evil heart (Matthew 12:34-37). A number of sins of the tongue are listed by Paul (Romans 1:29-30), and he counsels the control of these evils (Ephesians 4:25, 29, 31, 5:4; Colossians 3:9; Titus 2:1-2). Peter also gives this ad-vise (1 Peter 2:1-2, 3:8-10).

QUESTIONS

1. According to Proverbs 10:18, 26:28, and 26:24-27, what is the source of lying?
2. What do you think is the significance of the expression "seven abominations" found in 26:25?
3. Will false witnesses go unpunished, or liars escape?
4. With what weapons does 25:18 compare a man that bears false witness against his neighbor?
5. "The words of a whisperer are as" what?
6. Is it wise to "company" with a talebearer?
7. What "ceases" where there is no "whisperer?"
8. Who listens to "wicked lips?" A "mischievous tongue?"
9. To what should "fervent lips and a wicked heart" be compared?

2. Control of the Tongue.

In the multitude of words there wants not transgression; But he that refrains his lips does wisely. (10:19)

He that despises his neighbor is void of wisdom;
But a man of understanding holds his peace. (11:12)

He that guards his mouth keeps his life;
But he that opens wide his lips shall have destruction. (13:3)

Whoso keeps his mouth and his tongue
Keeps his soul from troubles. (21:23)

COMMENTS:

In the comments on the previous section, we cited the advice of Peter, who draws it from an Old Testament source (1 Peter 3:10). Refer to the previous section also for other Bible references dealing with the control of the tongue.

QUESTION

1. What words are used in these four proverbs which carry the idea of control?

3. The Right Use of the Tongue.

(Beneficial Words)

The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver;
The heart of the wicked is little worth.
The lips of the righteous feed many;
But the foolish die for lack of understanding. (10:20-21)

The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable;
But the mouth of the wicked *speaks* perverseness. (10:32)

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom;
But the perverse tongue shall be cut off. (10:31)

By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted;
But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. (11:11)
The tongue of the wise utters knowledge aright;
But the mouth of fools pours out folly. (15:2)

As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold,
So is a wise reprovcr upon an obedient ear.
As the cold of snow in the time of harvest,
So is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refreshes the soul of his
masters. (25:12-13)

He that loves pureness of heart,
For the grace of his lips the king will be his friend. (22:11)

By long forbearing is a ruler persuaded,
And a soft tongue breaks the bone. (25:15)

(Timely Words)

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold
in network of silver. (25:11)

Heaviness in the heart of a man makes it stoop;
But a good word makes it glad. (12:25)

A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth;
And a word in due season, how good is it! (15:23)

Pleasant words are as a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. (16:24)

As cold waters to a thirsty soul,
So is good news from a far country. (25:25)

(Untimely Words)

As one that takes off a garment in cold weather, *and* as vinegar upon soda,
So is he that sings songs to a heavy heart. (25:20)

COMMENTS:

With all the warnings we have noted against the evil use of the tongue, we must also realize that God wants the words of man to be good and beneficial, just as His own are (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). Even God's words of rebuke should be greeted as good (see 2 Kings 20:12-19). Paul was the beneficiary of timely good news (1 Thessa-lonians 3:5-8), and John said there was no greater joy than to hear that his "children were

walking in the truth" (3 John 4). We should always let our speech be "seasoned" and "gracious" (Colossians 4:6).

QUESTIONS

1. With what do "the lips of the righteous feed many?"
2. In reproofing a person, what quality must the "reprover" have?
3. What sort of "ear" will hear him?
4. Why is a "faithful messenger" like the "cold of snow in the time of harvest?"
5. What two qualities of speech endear the speaker to rulers, according to 22:11, and 25:15?
6. What four benefits come from timely words, according to the proverbs above?
7. Are God's words good? What about man's?
8. What was the good thing that Hezekiah saw in the rebuke he received from God?
9. What good report did Timothy bring from Thessalonica?
10. With what should our speech be seasoned, according to Paul? What does this mean?

4. The Fruits of the Tongue--Good and Evil.

In the transgression of the lips is a snare to the evil man;
But the righteous shall come out of trouble. (12:13)

A fool's mouth is his destruction,
And his lips are the snare of his soul. (18:7)

In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his pride;
But the lips of the wise preserve them. (14:3)

He that utters truth shows forth righteousness;
But a false witness, deceit. (12:17)

A false witness shall perish;
But the man that hears shall speak so as to endure. (21:28)

Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil;
But to the counsellors of peace is joy. (12:20)
The lip of truth shall be established for ever;
But a lying tongue is but for a moment. (12:19)

A man that flatters his neighbor
Spreads a net for his steps. (29:5)

He that rebukes a man shall afterward find more favor
Than he that flatters with the tongue. (28:23)

There is that speaks rashly like the piercings of a sword;
But the tongue of the wise is health. (12:18)

It is a snare to a man rashly to say, It is holy,
And after vows to make inquiry. (20:25)

Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words?
There is more hope of a fool than of him. (29:20)

The north wind brings forth rain;
So doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance. (25:23)

A soft answer turns away wrath;
But a grievous word stirs up anger. (15:1)

A gentle tongue is a tree of life;
But perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit. (15:4)

A wicked messenger falls into evil;
But a faithful ambassador is health. (13:17)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue;
And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. (18:21)

COMMENTS:

We have seen already that the New Testament has much to say about the proper use of the mouth. In this group of proverbs, we can find a warning against the evil fruits of the tongue, but, in contrast, there are some good things. In those proverbs that deal with false witness and lying (12:17, 21:28, 12:19-20), we see truth as the necessary

antidote (Ephesians 4:25), but Jesus teaches us also that the heart must be free of these evils (Matthew 15:18-20). Rash or hasty speaking is a danger which Solomon warns against in Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 (Jephthah suffered loss by making an ill-considered vow, Judges 11:30-40). Proverb 25:23 shows what backbiting can do (compare 2 Corinthians 12:20-21). When a mouth is used wrongly in the church, we must do what we can to stop it (Titus 1:10-11).

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways, do you think, can the "transgression of the lips" be a "snare to the evil man?"
2. What is the source of "false witness," and other tongue sins, according to Jesus?
3. What is the ultimate end of "all liars?"
4. In what form did Jephthah, the judge of Israel, make his vow?
5. In what place should we be careful about being "rash with our mouths," according to Ecclesiastes 5?
6. What does a "soft answer" do?
7. What is "a gentle tongue" like?
8. What two things are in the "power of the tongue?"

I. JUSTICE.

1. God's Attitude Towards Man's Treatment of Justice.

A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah;
But a just weight is his delight. (11:1)

A just balance and scales are Jehovah's;
All the weights of the bag are his work. (16:11)

Diverse weights, and diverse measures,
Both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah. (20:10)

Diverse weights are an abomination to Jehovah;
And a false balance is not good. (20:23)

To have respect of persons in judgment is not good.
He that says unto the wicked, Thou are righteous,
Peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him;
But to them that rebuke him shall be delight,
And a good blessing shall come upon them. (24:23-25)

To respect the person of the wicked is not good,
nor to turn aside the righteous in judgment. (18:5)

To have respect of persons is not good;
Neither that a man should transgress for a piece of bread. (28:21)

He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the righteous,
Both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah. (17:15)

Also to punish the righteous is not good,
Nor to smite the noble for their uprightness. (17:26)

A worthless witness mocks at justice;
And the mouth of the wicked swallows iniquity. (19:28)

A wicked man receives a bribe out of the bosom,
To pervert the ways of justice. (17:23)

A bribe is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it.
Whithersoever it turns, it prospers. (17:8)

Rob not the poor, because he is poor;
Neither oppress the afflicted in the gate;
For Jehovah will plead their cause,
And despoil of life those that despoil them. (22:22-23)

Remove not the ancient landmark;
And enter not into the fields of the fatherless;
For their Redeemer is strong;
He will plead their cause against thee. (23:10-11)

Remove not the ancient landmark,
Which thy fathers have set. (22:28)

To do righteousness and justice

Is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice. (21:3)

COMMENTS:

These proverbs on the subject of Justice are drawn from the Law of Moses. False weights and measures are dealt with in Leviticus 19:35-37. Respect of persons in judgment is condemned in Exodus 23:3, Leviticus 19:15, and Deuteronomy 1:17. God warns against justifying the wicked and punishing the righteous in Exodus 23:7 (compare Proverbs 24:24). Bribes are forbidden in Exodus 23:8. Oppression of the poor is condemned in Exodus 23:6. The integrity of "landmarks" is spoken of in Deuteronomy 19:14, and 27:17. In the summation of Proverbs 21:3, we have a principle that the prophets speak of, also (Isaiah 1:11-17, Micah 6:6-8, and compare Deuteronomy 10:12-13), and of which Jesus also speaks (Matthew 9:13).

QUESTIONS

1. How many of these proverbs deal with the subject of fair weights and measures?
2. What is the alternative to "respect of persons," according to James 2:8-9?
3. At first reading, 17:8 seems to suggest wisdom in bribes. What is your idea of the teaching of this proverb?
4. Can Exodus 23:3, and 23:6, be reconciled? Why?
5. What are the similarities between Proverbs 22:28, and Deuteronomy 19:14:
6. Both Micah 6:6-8 and Deuteronomy 10:12-13 have the phrase "What doth Jehovah require of thee." In each case, what does God require?

2. Rulers and Justice.

For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof;
But by men of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged. (28:2)

The terror of a king is as the roaring of a lion:
He that provokes him to anger sins against his own life. (20:2)

The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion;
But his favor is as dew upon the grass. (19:12)

A king that sits on the throne of judgment
Scatters away all evil with his eyes. (20:8)

A wise king winnows the wicked,
And brings the threshing-wheel over them. (20:26)

The king that faithfully judges the poor;
His throne shall be established for ever. (29:14)

The king by justice establishes the land;
But he that exacts gifts overthrows it. (29:4)

If a ruler hearkens to falsehood,
All his servants are wicked. (29:12)

COMMENTS:

Even though "the (government) powers that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1)," Solomon suggests in 28:2 that more princes are involved in "transgression of a land" than righteous rulers, but that the "state shall be prolonged" by the minority of wise rulers. Fear of the power of the king is emphasized in 19:12, 20:2 and 20:8 (compare Matthew 5:25). The rest of the proverbs in this section advise the ruler to "winnow (separate) the wicked," "faithfully judge the poor," refuse bribes, and not "hearken to falsehood." These rules are good in any age, for any person.

QUESTIONS

1. Is submission to the "powers that be" required of Christians in all cases?
2. If a king "faithfully judges the poor," what will be the result?
3. What happens if the king "exact gifts?"
4. If a king "hearkens to falsehood," what will happen?

3. The Effect of Injustice on the Victims and the Unjust.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick;
But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life. (13:12)

Much food is in the tillage of the poor;

But there is that (*which*) is destroyed by reason of injustice. (13:23)

He that is greedy of gain troubles his own house;
But he that hates bribes shall live. (15:27)

The violence of the wicked shall sweep them away,
Because they refuse to do justice. (21:7)

COMMENTS:

The first two of these proverbs deal with the effect of injustice on the victim, and the last two with its effect on those who deal with others unjustly. With this evil working both ways, it would seem wise to be just in all things, and to hope for justice always. Jesus shows that we can always depend on God for justice (Romans 3:23-26), and that through earnest, persistent prayer we can even sway the unjust ruler (Luke 18:1-8).

QUESTIONS

1. Is "hope deferred" sometimes the result of slow justice?
2. Can the rewards of hard work often be "destroyed by reason of injustice?"
3. What two unjust acts can harm those who practice injustice, according to these proverbs?

4. Ways to Arrive at Justice.

He that pleads his cause first seems just;
But his neighbor comes and searches him out. (18:17)

The lot causes contentions to cease,
And parts between the mighty. (18:18)

COMMENTS:

In legal matters, these two proverbs show the fact that "cross examination" and such things as the "tossing of a coin" were in vogue in Old Testament matters of justice. In the New Testament, Paul was given the privilege of responding to his accusers, who presented their case first, and "searching it out" regarding the truth of their accusations,

in Acts 24:1-21. The casting of lots (with an appeal to God for the decision) was utilized by the disciples in choosing between two candidates for apostleship, in Acts 1:24-26.

QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, why does it seem true that the one who "pleads his cause first seems just?"
2. Are there modern examples of two contending parties being willing to allow "lots" (such as a toss of a coin) decide an issue for them?

J. THE WORK ETHIC.

1. Work Contrasted to Indolence.

He becomes poor that works with a slack hand;
But the hand of the diligent makes rich. (10:4)

He that tills his land shall have plenty of bread;
But he that follows after vain persons shall have poverty enough. (28:19, and compare 12:11)

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule;
But the slothful shall be put under task work. (12:24)

The slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting;
But the precious substance of men is to the diligent. (12:27)

The soul of the sluggard desires, and hath nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. (13:4)

In all labor there is profit;
But the talk of the lips *tends* only to penury. (14:23)

The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns;
But the path of the upright is made a highway. (15:19)

He that gathers in summer is a wise son;
But he that sleeps in harvest is a son that causes shame. (10:5)

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness;
But every one that is hasty hastens only to want. (21:5)

A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth;
With the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied. (18:20)

A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth;
And the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him. (12:14)

COMMENTS:

The practical sentiments of these proverbs are repeated by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 9:10, and found also in the New Testament, but applied to spiritual things. We are not to be "weary in well doing" (2 Thessalonians 3:13). Diligence in serving the Lord is enjoined in Romans 12:11 and Colossians 3:23.

QUESTIONS

1. From these proverbs, what are the benefits gained by the hard worker?
2. What are those things which come from laziness?

2. The Traits of the Sluggard.

As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes,
So is the sluggard to them that send him. (10:26)

Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep;
And the idle soul shall suffer hunger. (19:15)

He also that is slack in his work
Is brother to him that is a destroyer. (18:9)

I went by the field of the sluggard,
And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns,
The face thereof was covered with nettles,
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.
Then I beheld, and considered well;
I saw, and received instruction:
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep;
So shall thy poverty come as a robber,
And thy want as an armed man. (24:30-34)

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
It wearies him to bring it again to his mouth. (26:15, and compare 19:24)

The desire of the sluggard kills him;
For his hands refuse to labor. (21:25)

The sluggard saith, There is a lion without:
I shall be slain in the streets. (22:13, and compare 26:13)

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the winter;
Therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing. (20:4)

As the door turns upon its hinges,
So doth the sluggard upon his bed. (26:14)

The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit
Than seven men that can render a reason. (26:16)

He that loves pleasure shall be a poor man:
He that loves wine and oil shall not be rich. (21:17)

COMMENTS:

From the revulsion expressed by both God and men against the slothfulness of the sluggard, we have the negative impetus for the "work ethic" that is so closely tied to "Judeo-Christian" tradition. Even though Solomon saw all human achievement as "vanity and a striving after wind," he commended the satisfaction to be derived from labor (Ecclesiastes 2:11, 24, 5:18-20). In these proverbs, slothfulness is connected with sleep (see also Solomon's dissertation to his sons, Proverbs 6:9-10). In the New Testament, Christians are required to withdraw from, and give no assistance to those who will not work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is a sluggard like "vinegar to the teeth," or "smoke to the eyes?"
2. Why is one who is "slack in his work" a "brother" to the "destroyer?"
3. What can we learn by observing the "field of the sluggard?"
4. What two reasons will a sluggard give for not working, according to these proverbs?

3. Incentives to Work.

The appetite of the laboring man labors for him;
For his mouth urges him thereto. (16:26)

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty;
Open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. (20:13)

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
And to look well to thy herds:
For riches are not for ever;
And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
The hay is carried, and the tender grass shows itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
The lambs are for thy clothing,
And the goats are the price of the field;
And there will be goat's milk enough for thy food,
For the food of thy household, and maintenance for thy maidens.
(27:23-27)

COMMENTS:

A man's appetite may urge him to labor, but it might also urge him to steal. This is why Paul advises against the latter, in favor of the former (Ephesians 4:28). In this passage, there is also the incentive of creating the ability to practice benevolence. Another incentive for the Christian is seen in the maintaining of a good reputation among those outside the faith (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). The many passages which call for diligence in our labor for the Lord also carry suggestions of various incentives.

QUESTION

1. What are the different kinds of incentives to be found in these proverbs?

4. Ethics of Commerce.

(On Suretyship)

He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it;
But he that hates suretyship is secure. (11:15)

A man void of understanding strikes hands,
And becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor. (17:18)

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger;
And hold him in pledge that is surety for foreigners. (20:16, and compare 7:13)

Be thou not one of them that strike hands,
Or of them that are sureties for debts.
If thou hast not wherewith to pay,
Why should he take away thy bed from under thee? (22:26-27)

(On Liberality)

There is that scatters, and increases yet more;
And there is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends only to want.
The liberal soul shall be made fat;
And he that waters shall be watered also himself.
He that withholds grain, the people shall curse him;
But blessing shall be upon the head of him that sells it. (11:24-26)

(On Risk and Expansion)

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean;
But much increase is by the strength of the ox. (14:4)

(On Bargaining)

It is bad, it is bad, saith the buyer;
But when he is gone his way, then he boasts. (20:14)

(On Diligence)

See thou a man diligent in his business?
He shall stand before kings;
He shall not stand before mean men. (22:29)

(On Priorities)

Prepare thy work without,

And make it ready for thee in the field;
And afterwards build thy house. (24:27)

COMMENTS:

The proverbs here that advise against "suretyship" recall the advice of Solomon to his sons in 6:1-5 (see the Comments in that section). Liberality is taught by Jesus (Luke 6:38), and by the Apostles (Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, 9:6-11). The proverbs on Expansion and Bargaining are good advice, commercially, and can be applied to spiritual labors only in a limited way. On the other hand, the proverbs on Diligence and Priorities have a good application to spiritual work (2 Timothy 2:15 [American Standard Version], and Matthew 6:31-33).

QUESTIONS

1. What is a modern term for suretyship?
2. In what spiritual works are we to be liberal with our money?
3. What does 14:4 teach about the employment of the ox?
4. Is the word "study" in the King James version of 2 Timothy 2:15, different from the phrase "give diligence" in the American Standard version?
5. What is the priority recommended by the Lord to guard us from anxiety?

K. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS.

1. The Effect of Child Behavior on Parents.

A wise son makes a glad father;
But a foolish man despises his mother. (15:20, and compare 10:1)
A foolish son is a grief to his father,
And bitterness to her that bare him. (17:25)

Whoso Keeps the law is a wise son;
But he that is a companion of gluttons shames his father. (28:7)

Whoso loves wisdom rejoices his father;
But he that keeps company with harlots wastes his substance. (29:3)

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad,

That I may answer him that reproaches me. (27:11)

He that begets a fool does it to his sorrow;
And a father of a fool has no joy. (17:21)

Children's children are the crown of old men;
And the glory of children are their fathers. (17:6)

COMMENTS:

Much has already been said in this study of Proverbs about the profit of seeking wisdom, in both the beginning dissertation of Solomon to his sons, and in the other sections that followed. These proverbs, however, tell us of the consequences to the parents from the conduct of children. An unwise parent is not shamed by the action of an unwise son. Only if the parents have high standards can they be dissatisfied in children who follow a low path (See 3 John 4).

QUESTIONS

1. What are the consequences which come to parents from unwise children:
2. What gave the Apostle John his greatest joy?

2. The Fruit of Rebellion Against Parents.

He that does violence to his father, and chases away his mother,
Is a son that causes shame and brings reproach. (19:26)

Whoso robs his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression,
The same is the companion of a destroyer. (28:24)

The eye that mocketh at his father, and despises to obey his mother,
The ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. (30:17)
Whoso curses his father or his mother,
His lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness. (20:20)

An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning;
But the end thereof shall not be blessed. (20:21)

COMMENTS:

The Law of Moses dealt harshly with children that sinned against their parents (see Exodus 21:15, 17; Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Jesus treated the failure of men to requite their parents as a form of robbery (Mark 7:8-13). The last proverb in this section (20:21) reminds us of the younger Son of the parable, who demanded his inheritance early, and wasted it (Luke 15:11-14).

QUESTIONS

1. List the sins and crimes against parents that are found in these proverbs:
2. What punishment did the Law of Moses prescribe for offenders against parents?

3. Discipline of Children.

He that spares his rod hates his son;
But he that loves him chastens him betimes. (13:24)

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child;
But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. (22:15)

Withhold not correction from the child;
For if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die.
Thou shalt beat him with the rod,
And shalt deliver his soul from Sheol. (23:13-14)

The rod and reproof give wisdom;
But a child left to himself causes shame to his mother. (29:15)

Correct thy son, and he will give thee rest;
Yea, he will give delight unto thy soul. (29:17)

Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope;
And set not thy heart on his destruction. (19:18)

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And even when he is old he will not depart from it. (22:6)

COMMENTS:

The advice of this section is ridiculed by modern psychologists, who campaign against corporal punishment, and even against strong disciplinary actions. However, the sentiments here are not obsolete, having the approval of an all-wise God. Discipline is still profitable for children, if we take the New Testament as our guide (See Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, Hebrews 12:6-11).

QUESTION

1. What benefits are shown in these proverbs from chastising a child with a rod?

L. DISCRETION IN HUMAN RELATIONS.

1. Using Good Will to Motivate Human Relations.

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
For thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head,
And Jehovah will reward thee. (25:21-22)

Whoso keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof;
And he that regards his master shall be honored. (27:18)

COMMENTS:

The first proverb in this section is easily recognized as the source of Paul's statement in Romans 12:20. This shows that the moral behavior expected of men in both the Old and New Testaments comes from the "Word" (identified with Jesus in John 1:1,14), who commands a love of enemies in Matthew 5:43-48 as an emulation of God's love (compare Leviticus 19:17-18, Exodus 23:4-5, and Deuteronomy 7:1-5). The second proverb, which teaches the servant to respect his master in order to obtain a good relationship, is also taught in 1 Peter 2:18-23, and Ephesians 6:5-8.

QUESTIONS

1. Does Paul's quotation of 25:21-22 confirm the fact that the Book of Proverbs is inspired? Why?
2. How were the Israelites to treat their idolatrous enemies, according to Moses?

3. How were they to treat their enemy's animals?
4. Was the command, "Love thy neighbor," in Leviticus 19:17-18, limited in its application?
5. Was the same command in Romans 13:8-10 limited?
6. Toward what kinds of masters is the Christian servant to be in subjection, according to Peter?

2. Dangers of Offensive Behavior.

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city;
And such contentions are like the bars of a castle. (18:19)

He that blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning,
It shall be counted a curse to him. (27:14)

Iron sharpens iron;
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. (27:17)

COMMENTS:

Paul expands the sentiment of 18:19 by showing the evil results of offending our weak brethren (Romans 14:15-21). In the next proverb, the wise man shows that even the blessing of a friend needs to be at an appropriate time, or else it seems to be a curse. "Sharpness" in the third proverb is interpreted by commentators in both in a good sense, and in a negative sense. If taken in the negative sense (as it is in some places, Titus 1:13), sharpness sometimes generates a "sharp" response.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are offenses hard to make right again?
2. What conditions turn a blessing into a curse, according to 27:14?
3. Did the Israelites have a means of sharpening iron with iron? (see 1 Samuel 13:19-21)
4. Who needs to be rebuked sharply, according to Paul?

3. Servant-Master Relations.

He that delicately brings up his servant from a child
Shall have him become a son at the last. (29:21)

A servant will not be corrected by words;
For though he understand, he will not give heed. (29:19)

Slander not a servant unto his master,
Lest he curse thee, and thou be held guilty. (30:10)

COMMENTS:

Some commentaries treat 29:21 as if it were a problem to have a pampered servant aspire to be a son. The suggestion is that the servant must be kept in his place. However, the Law of Moses commanded kind treatment of servants (Deuteronomy 23:15-16, Leviticus 25:39-43), and there are examples of masters holding servants in high esteem, like sons (Genesis 15:2-3, Luke 7:2-3). It is true, however, as in 29:19, that many servants nurture a strong resentment which causes them to be deaf to their master's orders. Corporal punishment of servants was permitted under the Law (Exodus 21:20-21, and compare 10:13 and 26:3). But, in 30:10, we see that masters are often prone to defend the honor of their slaves against slanderers, and this principle is used by Paul in Romans 14:4.

QUESTIONS

1. Who treated their servants with honor in Gen. 15 and Luke 7?
2. What causes servants to have the attitude of hearing their masters, but not giving heed?
3. Why should we not judge our brother, according to Paul?

4. The Value of Friends.

He that makes many friends does it to his own destruction;
But there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. (18:24)

As a bird that wanders from her nest,
So is a man that wanders from his place.
Oil and perfume rejoice the heart;

So doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of hearty counsel.
Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not;
And go not to thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity;
Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off. (27:8-10)

As in water face answers to face,
So the heart of man to man. (27:19)

COMMENTS:

In 18:24, we learn that there is a lack of discretion in making friends with everyone you meet, because there is no way to be certain that so many friendships can become strong, or that they are reciprocated to the same degree. There are friends closer than brothers, however, and they are always ready to help. This is brought out in the last phrase of 27:8-10. These verses also show, in a very sentimental way, the value of having friends close by. Man, being a social creature, needs to respond to the hearts of other men, just as "in water (as a mirror) face answers to face" (27:19). Friendship with Christ depends on a proper response to Him (John 15:13-15, and compare James 2:21-23).

QUESTIONS

1. What, in your opinion, are the dangers in making many friends, which could bring "destruction?"
2. Why do you think that the proverb advises dependence on the near friend, in the "day of thy calamity," than on the distant brother?
3. On what basis can we be friends of Christ?
4. How did Abraham become a "friend of God?"

5. Caution in human relations.

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger;
And it is his glory to pass over transgression. (19:11)

Say not thou, I will recompense evil:
Wait for Jehovah, and he will save thee. (20:22)

When thou sits to eat with a ruler,

Consider diligently him that is before thee;
And put a knife to thy throat,
If thou be a man given to appetite.
Be not desirous of his dainties;
Seeing they are deceitful food. (23:1-3)

Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye,
Neither desire thou his dainties;
For as he thinks within himself, so is he:
Eat and drink, saith he to thee;
But his heart is not with thee.
The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up,
And lose thy sweet words. (23:6-8)

Go not forth hastily to strive,
Lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof,
When thy neighbor hath put thee to shame.
Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself,
And disclose not the secret of another;
Lest he that hears it revile thee,
And thine infamy turn not away. (25:8-10)
Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbor's house,
Lest he be weary of thee, and hate thee. (25:17)

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble
is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. (25:19)

COMMENTS:

The first proverb in this section (19:11) shows that man can imitate God in "passing over" transgression (see Micah 7:18, and Romans 3:23-25). The second teaches the same principle found in Romans 12:19 (a verse that precedes another drawn by Paul from Proverbs 25:21-22). In two longer sections (23:1-3 and 23:6-8), discretion is advised when eating the "dainties" of rulers, or those with an evil eye. This reminds us of the refusal of Daniel and his friends to "eat of the king's dainties" for fear of defilement (Daniel 1:3-16). In the third larger section (25:8-10), the Wise Man advises against haste, and the public airing of grievances, recalling to our minds, again, the guidelines of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17. The two final proverbs (25:17, 19) counsel discretion in the amount of time to spend in your neighbor's house, which he cherishes as his *private* domain, and reveals the figurative consequences of trusting in the unfaithful, when trouble comes.

QUESTIONS

1. When God "passes over transgression," does this mean that he forgives, unconditionally? (compare Heb. 2:2)
2. Why is it wise to let God do the avenging, rather than ourselves?
3. In what way, do you think, are the dainties of rulers "deceitful food?"
4. What can we learn about the character of the one with the "evil eye" from 23:6-8?
5. If we know a man is unfaithful, is it wise to trust him when we are in trouble?

6. The Fallacy of Meddling.

The heart knows its own bitterness;
And a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy. (14:10)

He that passeth by, and vexes himself with strife belonging not to him,
Is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. (26:17)

COMMENTS:

Bitterness and joy are often very private matters, and the meddler is not welcome in either case. We are to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15), but we are also warned against being a "meddler in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15). We need to find "middle ground" between these two admonitions. Keil and Delitzsch translate 26:17: "He seizes by the ears a dog passing by, who is excited by a strife that concerns him not," and comment, "To seize one's own dog by the ear is not dangerous, but it is not advisable to do this with a strange dog."

QUESTION

1. In what relationship should we be willing to suffer, if not as a "meddler in other men's matters?"

M. WIVES--GOOD AND BAD.

1. The good wife.

Whoso finds a wife finds a good thing,
And obtains favor of Jehovah. (18:22)

House and riches are an inheritance from fathers;
But a prudent wife is from Jehovah. (19:14)

A worthy woman who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,
And he shall have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax,
And works willingly with her hands.
She is like the merchant-ships;
She brings her bread from afar.
She rises also while it is yet night,
And gives food to her household,
And their task to her maidens.
She considers a field, and buys it;
With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
She girds her loins with strength,
And makes strong her arms.
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable;
Her lamp goes not out by night.
She lays her hands to the distaff,
And her hands hold the spindle.
She stretches out her hand to the poor;
Yea, she reaches forth her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid of the snow for her household;
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
She makes for herself carpets of tapestry;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.
She makes linen garments and selleth them,
And delivers girdles unto the merchant.
Strength and dignity are her clothing;
And she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom;
And the law of kindness is on her tongue.
She looks well to the ways of her household,
And eats not the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up, and call her blessed;

Her husband also, and he praises her, saying
Many daughters have done worthily,
But thou excels them all.
Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
But a woman that fears Jehovah, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands;
And let her works praise her in the gates. (31:10-31)

COMMENTS:

Since the finding of a wife is a "good thing," the use of the term "wife" in 18:22 evidently carries a good definition. In the section following this one, which deals with the bad wife, we see that the word "woman" is used more than "wife." The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says of the word "wife," "She is depicted as the physical counterpart of man, deserving of his unswerving loyalty." When God brought Eve to Adam, He described her as his "helpmeet" (Genesis 2:18). Many good wives are depicted in the history of the Old Testament, so it is fitting that the tribute paid to the "worthy woman" by King Lemuel in the last chapter of Proverbs should become one of the best-loved word pictures in the literature of the world.

QUESTIONS

1. What sort of "favours of Jehovah," do you think, come to the man who "finds a wife?"
2. In what way does a prudent wife come from Jehovah?
3. What characteristics of the "worthy woman" are depicted by her actions in 31:10-31?

2. The bad wife.

A worthy woman is the crown of her husband;
But she that makes ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. (12:4)

As a ring of gold in a swine's snout,
So is a fair woman that is without discretion. (11:22)

A foolish son is the calamity of his father;
And the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. (19:13)

A continual dropping in a very rainy day
And a contentious woman are alike:
He that would restrain her restrains the wind;
And his right hand encounters oil. (27:15-16)

It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop,
Than with a contentious woman in a wide house. (21:9, 25:24)

It is better to dwell in a desert land,
Than with a contentious and fretful woman. (21:19)

COMMENTS:

In contrast to the virtues of the "worthy woman," Solomon turns to consider the things that cause a woman to be unworthy. In 12:4 and 11:22, the woman who shames her husband by her conduct, and who is without discretion (even if she is "fair," or beautiful), violates the pattern of conduct God intended for wives. The Law of Moses permitted a man to divorce a wife who possessed offensive vulgar characteristics (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). This reason is not allowed, however, in the New Testament. Only the cause of unfaithful fornication on the part of a spouse can be cited as grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:1-9, and compare Mark 10:11-12). Therefore, men and women under the New Covenant should be very discreet and selective in the choice of a spouse.

A lack of discretion was what Paul deplored in the women he rebuked in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10. The last four references in this section speak of the "contentious woman." This, again, is the result of a failure to keep the humility and submissive spirit characteristic of the "place" of woman, relative to man (see 1 Timothy 2:11-15).

QUESTIONS

1. To what does Solomon compare a fair woman without discretion?
2. To what monotonous and annoying condition do some of these proverbs compare the contentious woman?
3. What things are better for a man than to live with a contentious woman?

N. THE NATURE OF MAN.

1. Emotional Traits Found in Man.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful;
And the end of mirth is heaviness. (14:13)

A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance;
But by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken. (15:13)

All the days of the afflicted are evil;
But he that is of a cheerful heart hath a continual feast. (15:15)

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart;
And good tidings make the bones fat. (15:30)

A cheerful heart is a good medicine;
But a broken spirit dries up the bones. (17:22)

COMMENTS:

Man is a complex creature. He, only, of all God's creatures, is capable of laughter, and even then his laughter may be superficial, covering a sorrowful heart (14:13). Mankind responds to stimulants of joy and sorrow, and is so deeply influenced by them that either good health or illness may be the result.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do people often seek "comic relief," when they are sad?
2. Can we influence others by outward displays of emotions?
3. Does the Lord command us to be responsive to the emotional experiences of others? (see Romans 12:15)

2. The Benefits of Heart and Spirit in Man.

A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh;
But envy is the rottenness of the bones. (14:30)

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;
But a broken spirit who can bear? (18:14)

The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah,
Searching all his innermost parts. (20:27)

COMMENTS:

Man has a certain control over his "spirit," or his inner man, the "heart." As Paul purposed in his spirit to travel in certain ways (Acts 19:21), so we can change from having an "evil spirit of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12), to having a desire to cleanse "flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Women are to cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4), and it is well that we all imitate Paul in serving God in our spirits (Romans 1:9).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is "envy" used in contrast to the "tranquil heart" in 14:30?
2. In what way, do you think, is the "spirit of man" a "lamp of Jehovah?"

3. The Need for Self-control in Man.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler;
And whosoever errs thereby is not wise. (20:1)

Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee,
Lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. (25:16)

It is not good to eat much honey;
So for men to search out their own glory is grievous. (25:27)

He whose spirit is without restraint
Is like a city that is broken down and without walls. (25:28)

Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint;
But he that keeps the law, happy is he. (29:18)

COMMENTS:

Self-control is often discussed by command and example in the New Testament (Acts 24:25, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Galatians 5:23, 2 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:8, 2 Peter 1:5-6). Temptations to practice harmful indulgence, whether with drugs like alcohol, or wholesome food like honey, must be resisted. Without self-restraint, we make ourselves defenseless, like a city with broken walls (25:28).

QUESTIONS

1. Christians are commanded not to be drunk with wine (Ephesians 5:18), but what are the alternatives suggested in the context?

2. Why, in your opinion, is "searching out one's own glory" compared to "eating much honey," according to 25:27?
3. What sort of trouble comes from having a city without walls, according to Nehemiah 2:17, and Ezekiel 26:12?

4. The Relation of Age to Virtue in Man.

The hoary head is a crown of glory;
It shall be found in the way of righteousness. (16:31)

The glory of young men is their strength;
And the beauty of old men is the hoary head. (20:29)

Even a child makes himself known by his doings,
Whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. (20:11)

COMMENTS: (next page)

Age and wisdom are often related in folk tradition, though some elders need to be taught wisdom (Psalms 105:17-22 American Standard Version). But here, in 16:31, the "hoary head," which indicates age, "shall be found in the way of righteousness." When Paul records the qualifications of bishops, "novices" are excluded, since they might "fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6). The grey head is, by its very nature, deserving of respect (Leviticus 19:32). Yet, even a child can reveal his good works to others.

QUESTIONS

1. What does God seek to find under the grey hair of man, besides the practical wisdom that comes from experience?
2. Can the nature of a child be "known by its fruits," as Jesus said?

5. Evil Tendencies in Man.

He that separates himself seeks his own desire,
And rages against all sound wisdom. (18:1)

Who can say, I have made my heart clean,
I am pure from my sin? (20:9)

There is a way that seems right unto a man;
But the end thereof are the ways of death. (14:12, 16:25)

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes;
But Jehovah weighs the hearts. (21:2)

A man's goings are of Jehovah;
How then can man understand his way? (20:24)

Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming;
But who is able to stand before jealousy? (27:4)

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied;
And the eyes of man are never satisfied. (27:20)

COMMENTS:

The anti-social person, or "loner" (18:1), goes against the common nature of man and "against all sound wisdom" (compare Romans 14:7-8). The fault discussed in 20:9 was a real problem under the Old Law, since "the blood of bulls and goats" could not provide lasting forgiveness (Hebrews 10:1-4), but in its New Covenant context, this problem is also reproved by 1 John 1:8-10. The self-deceit mentioned in 14:12 and 21:2 is a dangerous trait (see Galatians 6:3), but the solution is in 20:24 (compare 3:5, 12:15, Psalms 37:23-24, Jeremiah 10:23-24). The evil effects of wrath and jealousy (27:4) are also rebuked in James 4:1-6. The "lust of the eyes" (27:20) leads to many sins, since it is one of the prime means of temptation in this world (see 1 John 2:15-17).

QUESTIONS

1. What causes a man to "separate himself?"
2. "If we say we have no sin," what does that tell us about ourselves?
3. What should a man do, if he thinks that only his way is right?
4. What evil things result from having a spirit of envy, according to James?
5. According to the Apostle John, what are the other things that lead to sin, besides the "lust of the eyes?"

O. THE NATURE OF GOD.

1. Powers of God.

The eyes of Jehovah are in every place,
Keeping watch upon the evil and the good. (15:3)

There is no wisdom nor understanding
Nor counsel against Jehovah. (21:30)

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye,
Jehovah hath made even both of them. (20:12)

COMMENTS:

These three proverbs speak of the three traits of God, Omniscience (all-knowing), Omnipresence (all-seeing), and Omnipotence (all-powerful). Though most of the Proverbs we have studied speak of practical human wisdom, it is also a part of practical wisdom to recognize the total authority of God. Compare Matthew 6:4, 8; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 3:8-9; Hebrews 4:13, and Revelation 19:6.

QUESTIONS

1. What New Testament passage affirms Proverbs 15:3?
2. According to Paul, can anyone instruct God?
3. In what acts of creation did Jesus participate? (See John 1:3, Colossians 1:16)
4. Does Jesus have these powers of God?

2. The Power of God in the Dispositions of Men.

The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses;
He turns it whithersoever he will. (21:1)

The horse is prepared against the day of battle;
But victory is of Jehovah. (21:31)

Many seek the ruler's favor;
But a man's judgment cometh from Jehovah. (29:26)

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold;

But Jehovah tries the hearts. (17:3)

Sheol and Abaddon are before Jehovah;
How much more then the hearts of the children of men! (15:11)

The lot is cast into the lap;
But the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah. (16:33)

Every word of God is tried;
He is a shield unto them that take refuge in him.
Add thou not unto his words,
Lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (30:5-6)

COMMENTS:

Providential dispositions of God through kings have numerous example in the Word of God (see Ezra 1:1, 6:22, Isaiah 44:28, etc.). The kings of Israel, often without horses and chariots, were able to defeat formidable well-equipped foes by trusting in God (Psalms 20:7-9, 33:17-19; Isaiah 31:1-3). The "hearts" of men were always under the eyes of God, and he reigned in their affairs for their good (Daniel 4:28-32), even to governing the casting of lots, when men turned any decision over to him by that means (Acts 1:23-26). The last proverb in this section states the same rule found in all sections of the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and Revelation 22:18-19), and forms a fitting climax to our study of this portion of the inspired Scriptures.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that God still controls the affairs of nations? Why?
2. Why should rulers trust in God for victories, rather than in "horses?"
3. Do you think that God still answers men through the casting of lots? Why?
4. Proverbs 30:6 warns against "adding" to God's words. What other warning is given in Deuteronomy 12:32, and Revelation 22:18-19?

“The End”