CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

The Book of Psalms

Mark D. Futato

The Book of Proverbs

George M. Schwab

GENERAL EDITOR
Philip W. Comfort

featuring the text of the
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

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CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 7

Psalms: Mark D. Futato
BA, Geneva College;
MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary;
MA, The Catholic University of America;
PhD, The Catholic University of America;
Robert L. Maclellan Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary

Proverbs: George M. Schwab
BS, Drexel University;
MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary;
PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary;
Professor of Old Testament, Erskine Theological Seminary

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2007). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara
bar.	baraita
c.	*circa*, around, approximately
cf.	*confer*, compare
ch, chs	chapter, chapters
contra	in contrast to
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
ed.	edition, editor
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
et al.	*et alli*, and others
fem.	feminine
ff	following (verses, pages)
fl.	flourished
Gr.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
ibid.	*ibidem*, in the same place
i.e.	*id est*, the same
in loc.	*in loco*, in the place cited
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint
M	Majority Text
m.	Mishnah
masc.	masculine
mg	margin
ms	manuscript
mss	manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Text
n.d.	no date
neut.	neuter
no.	number
NT	New Testament
OL	Old Latin
OS	Old Syriac
OT	Old Testament
p., pp.	page, pages
pl.	plural
Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
rev.	revision
sg.	singular
t.	Tosefta
TR	Textus Receptus
v., vv.	verse, verses
vid.	*videtur*, it seems
viz.	*videlicet*, namely
vol.	volume
y.	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
GW	God's Word
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NEB	New English Bible
NET	The NET Bible
NIV	New International Version
NIrV	New International Reader's Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (*Tanakh*)
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NLT	New Living Translation
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TEV	Today's English Version
TLB	The Living Bible

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]

ANEP *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Pritchard) [1965]

ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Pritchard) [1969]

BAGD *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]

BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]

BDB *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]

BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]

CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]

COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]

DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]

DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]

DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]

DLNTD *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* (R. Martin, P. Davids) [1997]

DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]

DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]

DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]

DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]

DTIB *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Vanhoozer) [2005]

EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]

GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Gesenius, Kautzsch, trans. Cowley) [1910]

HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]

IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]

IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]

ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]

KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]

LCL Loeb Classical Library

L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]

LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]

MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]

NA26 *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]

NA27 *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]

NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]

NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]

NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]

NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]

NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]

PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.* (Preisendanz) [1928]

PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]

TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]

TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]

TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]

TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]

TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]

TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]

UBS3 *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]

UBS4 *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]

WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Sam	1 Samuel
Exod	Exodus	Josh	Joshua	2 Sam	2 Samuel
Lev	Leviticus	Judg	Judges	1 Kgs	1 Kings
Num	Numbers	Ruth	Ruth	2 Kgs	2 Kings

1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs	Obad	Obadiah
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah	Jonah	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah	Mic	Micah
Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Ezek	Ezekiel	Hab	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Dan	Daniel	Zeph	Zephaniah
Ps, Pss	Psalm, Psalms	Hos	Hosea	Hag	Haggai
Prov	Proverbs	Joel	Joel	Zech	Zechariah
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Amos	Amos	Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Ps 151	Psalm 151
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Sir	Sirach
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Tob	Tobit
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees		
		3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		
Sus	Susanna	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the *Damascus Document*	1QIsa[b]	Isaiah copy [b]	4QLam[a]	Lamentations
		1QM	*War Scroll*	11QPs[a]	Psalms
1QH	*Thanksgiving Hymns*	1QpHab	*Pesher Habakkuk*	11QTemple[a,b]	*Temple Scroll*
1QIsa[a]	Isaiah copy [a]	1QS	*Rule of the Community*	11QtgJob	*Targum of Job*

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (𝔓 = Papyrus)

𝔓1 Matt 1; early 3rd
𝔓4+𝔓64+𝔓67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1–6; late 2nd
𝔓5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd
𝔓13 Heb 2–5, 10–12; early 3rd
𝔓15+𝔓16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7–8, Phil 3–4; late 3rd
𝔓20 Jas 2–3; 3rd
𝔓22 John 15–16; mid 3rd
𝔓23 Jas 1; c. 200
𝔓27 Rom 8–9; 3rd
𝔓30 1 Thess 4–5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd
𝔓32 Titus 1–2; late 2nd
𝔓37 Matt 26; late 3rd
𝔓39 John 8; first half of 3rd
𝔓40 Rom 1–4, 6, 9; 3rd

𝔓45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
𝔓46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
𝔓47 Rev 9–17; 3rd
𝔓49+𝔓65 Eph 4–5; 1 Thess 1–2; 3rd
𝔓52 John 18; c. 125
𝔓53 Matt 26, Acts 9–10; middle 3rd
𝔓66 John; late 2nd
𝔓70 Matt 2–3, 11–12, 24; 3rd
𝔓72 1–2 Peter, Jude; c. 300
𝔓74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
𝔓75 Luke and John; c. 200
𝔓77+𝔓103 (probably part of same codex) Matt 13–14, 23; late 2nd
𝔓87 Philemon; late 2nd
𝔓90 John 18–19; late 2nd
𝔓91 Acts 2–3; 3rd
𝔓92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
𝔓98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
𝔓100 Jas 3–5; c. 300
𝔓101 Matt 3–4; 3rd
𝔓104 Matt 21; 2nd
𝔓106 John 1; 3rd
𝔓115 Rev 2–3, 5–6, 8–15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

א (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
A (Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th
B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th
D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
D (Claromontanus), Paul's Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)
E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
G (Boernerianus) Paul's Epistles; 9th
H (Coislinianus) Paul's Epistles; 6th
I (Freerianus or Washington) Paul's Epistles; 5th
L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th
P (Porphyrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th
T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th
038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels; 9th
040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matthew, Mark; 6th
044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae) Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 9th
048 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 5th
0171 Matt 10, Luke 22; c. 300
0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 12th
33 All NT except Rev; 9th
81 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 1044
565 Gospels; 9th
700 Gospels; 11th
1424 (or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th
1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
2053 Rev; 13th
2344 Rev; 11th
f^{1} (a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th
f^{13} (a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

SYRIAC (SYR)

syr^{c} (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th
syr^{s} (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th
syr^{h} (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616

OLD LATIN (IT)

it^{a} (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
it^{b} (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
it^{d} (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John; 5th
it^{e} (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
it^{k} (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400

COPTIC (COP)

cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
cop^{fay} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)

OTHER VERSIONS

arm (Armenian)
eth (Ethiopic)
geo (Georgian)

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from nonbiblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	*aleph*	= ʾ	מ, ם	*mem*	= *m*
ב, בּ	*beth*	= *b*	נ, ן	*nun*	= *n*
ג, גּ	*gimel*	= *g*	ס	*samekh*	= *s*
ד, דּ	*daleth*	= *d*	ע	*ayin*	= ʿ
ה	*he*	= *h*	פ, פּ, ף	*pe*	= *p*
ו	*waw*	= *w*	צ, ץ	*tsadhe*	= *ts*
ז	*zayin*	= *z*	ק	*qoph*	= *q*
ח	*heth*	= *kh*	ר	*resh*	= *r*
ט	*teth*	= *t*	שׁ	*shin*	= *sh*
י	*yodh*	= *y*	שׂ	*sin*	= *s*
כ, כּ, ך	*kaph*	= *k*	ת, תּ	*taw*	= *t, th* **(spirant)**
ל	*lamedh*	= *l*			

Vowels

◌ַ	*patakh*	= *a*	◌ֹ	*qamets khatuf*	= *o*
◌ַח	*furtive patakh*	= *a*	◌ֹ	*holem*	= *o*
◌ָ	*qamets*	= *a*	◌ֹו	*full holem*	= *o*
◌ָה	*final qamets he*	= *ah*	◌ֻ	*short qibbuts*	= *u*
◌ֶ	*segol*	= *e*	◌ֻ	*long qibbuts*	= *u*
◌ֵ	*tsere*	= *e*	◌ֻו	*shureq*	= *u*
◌ֵי	*tsere yod*	= *e*	◌ֲ	*khatef patakh*	= *a*
◌ִ	*short hireq*	= *i*	◌ֳ	*khatef qamets*	= *o*
◌ִ	*long hireq*	= *i*	◌ְ	*vocalic shewa*	= *e*
◌ִי	*hireq yod*	= *i*	◌ַי	*patakh yodh*	= *a*

Greek

α	*alpha*	= *a*	ι	*iota*	= *i*
β	*beta*	= *b*	κ	*kappa*	= *k*
γ	*gamma*	= *g, n (before* γ, κ, ξ, χ*)*	λ	*lamda*	= *l*
			μ	*mu*	= *m*
δ	*delta*	= *d*	ν	*nu*	= *n*
ε	*epsilon*	= *e*	ξ	*ksi*	= *x*
ζ	*zeta*	= *z*	ο	*omicron*	= *o*
η	*eta*	= *ē*	π	*pi*	= *p*
θ	*theta*	= *th*	ρ	*rho*	= *r* (ῥ = *rh*)

σ, ς	*sigma*	*= s*	ψ	*psi*	*= ps*
τ	*tau*	*= t*	ω	*omega*	*= ō*
υ	*upsilon*	*= u*	῾	*rough breathing mark*	*= h (with vowel or diphthong)*
φ	*phi*	*= ph*			
χ	*chi*	*= ch*			

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.[1]

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA/ZA	Tyndale/Zondervan Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	S	Strong's Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [^{TG}26, ^{ZG}27], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

The indexing of Aramaic terms differs slightly from that of Greek and Hebrew. Strong's original system mixed the Aramaic terms in with the Hebrew, but the Tyndale-Strong's system indexes Aramaic with a new set of numbers starting at 10,000. Since Tyndale's system for Aramaic diverges completely from original Strong's, the original Strong's number is listed separately so that those using tools keyed to Strong's can locate the information. This number is designated with an S, as in the example, "son" *bar* [$^{TA/ZA}$10120, ^{S}1247].

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., TG1692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., TG2013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.

The Book of Psalms

MARK D. FUTATO

INTRODUCTION TO *Psalms*

PSALMS IS A BOOK OF PRAISES. A crescendo of praise overwhelms the reader at the grand finale of the book of Psalms:

> Praise the LORD!
>
> Praise God in his sanctuary;
> praise him in his mighty heaven!
> Praise him for his mighty works;
> praise his unequaled greatness!
> Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn;
> praise him with the lyre and harp!
> Praise him with the tambourine and dancing;
> praise him with strings and flutes!
> Praise him with a clash of cymbals;
> praise him with loud clanging cymbals.
> Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD!
>
> Praise the LORD!

Harmonizing with the Psalter, Luther opens his own "Preface to the Psalter" with chords of praise:

> *Many of the holy fathers prized and praised the Psalter above all the other books of the Scripture. To be sure, the work itself gives praise enough to its author; nevertheless we must give evidence of our own praise and thanks. . . . The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble Himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book. (Luther 1960:254)*

Similar praise of the Psalter resounds throughout the history of the church, as a few examples make clear.

> *I believe that a man can find nothing more glorious than these Psalms; for they embrace the whole life of man, the affections of his mind, and the motions of his soul. To praise and glorify God, he can select a psalm suited to every occasion,*

and thus will find that they were written for him. (Athanasius, quoted in Bushell 1980:94)

The Law instructs, history informs, prophecy predicts, correction censures, and morals exhort. In the book of Psalms you find all of these, as well as a remedy for the salvation of the soul. The Psalter deserves to be called the praise of God, the glory of man, the voice of the church, and the most beneficial confession of faith. (Ambrose, quoted in Bushell 1980:94)

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul"; for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions, with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated . . . in short, there is no other Book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise. (Calvin 1979:1.xxxvi-xxxvii)

The Psalter is a theatre, where God allows us to behold both Himself and His works; a most pleasant green field, a vast garden, where we see all manner of flowers: a paradise, having the most delicious flowers and fruits; a great sea in which are hid costly pearls: a heavenly school, where we have God for our teacher: a compend of all Scripture: a mirror of divine grace, reflecting the face of our heavenly Father: and the anatomy of our souls. (Paul Gerhard, quoted in Bushell 1980:95)

Such a concert of praise well suits the book of Psalms, whose Hebrew title is *seper tehillim* [TH5612/8416, ZH6219/9335] (Book of Praises).[1] However, this book is not predominantly exhilarating. The dominant mood of the Psalter is characterized by disorientation, sorrow, and perplexity—as the following examples show:

O LORD, why do you stand so far away?
Why do you hide when I am in trouble? (10:1)

O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?
How long will you look the other way?
How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand? (13:1-2 [2-3])[2]

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help? (22:1 [2])

How can "Book of Praises" be the title, when such psalms of negativity outnumber hymns of praise? Simply put, praise is the *final* word (Crenshaw 1986:293; Miller 1986:66). Praise is the final word even in the vast majority of the psalms of negativity (Pss 44 and 88 being exceptions). Praise is also the final word in each of the five major divisions of the Psalter (41:13 [14]; 72:18-19 [19-20]; 89:52 [53]; 106:48; 150). And praise is the final word of the Psalter as a whole (Westermann 1981:250-258). While psalms of negativity dominate the beginning of the Psalter (Pss 3–7, 10–13, etc.), resounding praise concludes the work (Pss 146–150) with

the final line of the final psalm issuing the command: "Let everything that breathes sing *praises* to the LORD!" (150:6; my italics).

As Luther said, "So, then, let us see to it that we thank God for all these unspeakable blessings. Let us receive them and use them diligently and carefully, exercising ourselves in them to the praise and honor of God" (1960:257).

AUTHORS

In order to determine the various authors of the psalms, it is first necessary to understand that many of the titles to different psalms include the name of the author. Out of 150 psalms, 116 have titles. Some titles are as brief as that to Psalm 15, "A psalm of David," while others are as full as that to Psalm 60, "For the choir director: A psalm of David useful for teaching, regarding the time David fought Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and killed 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. To be sung to the tune 'Lily of the Testimony.'" A given title may contain information on the author, the historical background, or matters related to the use of the psalm in worship.

Can we trust that the titles are giving us accurate information about the author of a particular psalm? Even among evangelical scholars there is no consensus on this issue. (For example, compare the views in Craigie 1983:31, Kidner 1973a:32-33, and Young 1949:307.) Dillard and Longman indicate that the "nature and origin of the titles are tricky issues that must be handled with care and scholarly humility" (2006:214). My position is that the preponderance of evidence leads to the conclusion that the titles should be considered canonical. They are as much a part of the Hebrew text as are the titles in 2 Samuel 22:1, Isaiah 38:9, and Habakkuk 3:1, or the editorial notes in Proverbs 10:1, 22:17, and 24:23. The ancient tradition of the Masoretes accents the titles along with the text and thus does not separate the titles from the rest of the text. And the New Testament is at times willing to base a theological argument on information in a title (see Acts 2:29-31). Authenticity does not, however, require a given title to have been written by the original poet (Kidner 1973a:33 and Longman 1995:208 n. 22), any more than it requires Deuteronomy 34:5-8 to have been written by Moses. Authenticity as used here means the titles record accurate information with regard to the particular psalm.

Problems remain in our understanding of some information in several titles. For example, David's concern for the well-being of Absalom in 2 Samuel 18:5, 12, 33 seems to be at odds with his animosity toward his enemies in Psalm 3, written "regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom." And how a song of thanksgiving for restoration from sickness (Ps 30) served as "a song for the dedication of the Temple" also remains problematic.

Many titles contain the prepositional Lamedh followed by a proper name, e.g., *ledawid* [TH3807.1/1732, ZH4200/1858] (David). While some regard this construction as ambiguous (Craigie 1983:34 and VanGemeren 1991:19-20), the prevailing view is that authorship is indicated (Rendtorff 1986:247; Sawyer 1970:26; Waltke 1991:586). "In the headings . . . the connection between *ledawid* and the description of the situation that follows immediately is so close that it is impossible to construe the lamed in *ledawid* as anything else than the *l auctoris*" (Kraus 1988:22).

Other evidence supports this conclusion. The expansion of *ledawid* with, "He sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul" (Ps 18) argues for *ledawid* as "by David" (Dillard and Longman 2006:216), especially in light of the fact that this same poem is embedded in the historical narrative at 2 Samuel 22:1. The title to the psalm in Habakkuk 3 reads *lakhabaqquq* [TH3807.1/2265, ZH4200/2487], which in context must mean "by Habakkuk." Hezekiah's hymn is likewise introduced in Isaiah 38:9 with *lekhizqiyahu* [TH3807.1/2396A, ZH4200/2625] ("by Hezekiah"; see Childs 1971:140). Moreover, Jesus posited an argument for his own identity in the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 (Mark 12:35-37), and Luke posited an argument for the resurrection of Christ in the Davidic authorship of Psalm 16 (Acts 13:25-37).

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

When considering the date and occasion of the Psalms, a distinction must be made between the individual psalms and the collection as a whole. The various individual psalms were composed over a long period of time, spanning the preexilic, exilic, and postexilic eras (Crenshaw 1986:293). Approximately one thousand years separates Psalms 90 and 137. The presence of psalms like Psalm 137 demonstrates that the book as a whole could not have reached its final form before the postexilic period. The book of Psalms as we have it was probably completed by the end of the fourth century BC (Craigie 1983:31; Kraus 1988:20). The theological rationale for the final shape will be explored below.

Only 14 psalms contain historical information in their titles, and all of these are related to the life of David. The specific occasion that gave rise to most psalms is unknown to us. Owing to the frequency of figurative and formulaic language in the psalms, it is often impossible to reconstruct the historical background of a given psalm based on its content. Rather than being a liability, however, this lack of historical specificity has always been an asset in the ongoing use of the Psalms. "The psalms are historically nonspecific so that they may be continually used in Israel's corporate and individual worship of God" (Dillard and Longman 2006:216). Given the difference of our own historical situation from that of the ancient psalmist, our own ability to appropriate these ancient texts is enhanced by their historical nonspecificity.

AUDIENCE

The immediate recipients of the psalms were the musicians and singers who performed them, as well as the congregation of Israel who was also encouraged to sing the praises of the psalms to their God. Many of our 150 psalms were composed to be used in the public worship of God, as is clear from the content of numerous psalms. For example, 100:2, 4 summons the nations with these words:

> Worship the LORD with gladness.
> Come before him, singing with joy.
>
> Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
> go into his courts with praise.

Psalm 68:24-26 [25-27] describes a liturgical procession that culminates in God's people gathering for worship:

> Your procession has come into view, O God—
> the procession of my God and King as he goes into the sanctuary.
> Singers are in front, musicians behind;
> between them are young women playing tambourines.
> Praise God, all you people [congregation] of Israel;
> praise the LORD, the source of Israel's life.

Psalm 35:18 also envisions the assembled community in public worship:

> Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly.
> I will praise you before all the people.

USE OF THE PSALMS

Numerous elements of the titles are intended to provide information on the use of the psalms in worship, but the precise meaning of many of these terms is unknown. Only the frequent terms are discussed here. Terms that occur only a time or two will be treated as they occur. (For a comprehensive discussion of this material see Kraus 1988:21-32. For an excellent summary of music in Old Testament worship see Eaton 1986:72-101.)

A title at times provides information on the type of psalm that follows. The general terms *shir* [TH7892, ZH8877] (song) and *mizmor* [TH4210, ZH4660] (psalm) must have held some distinction between them, but their precise meaning cannot be determined. Perhaps the denotation of *shir* is "vocal song," while that of *mizmor* is "song accompanied by instrumentation" (Kraus 1988:21-22; TDOT 4.93, 96-97). Lyrics may not always be in view in the verbal uses of the root *zamar* [TH2167, ZH2376] (see TWOT 1.245), from which *mizmor* is derived. On the other hand, *mizmor* may simply be more specific than *shir,* since it is used only in the Psalter exclusively for religious compositions (Sawyer 1970:32). The expression *shir hamma'aloth* [TH7892/4609A, ZH8877/5092] (song of ascents) occurs in the titles of Psalms 120–134. Psalm 121 is a song for pilgrimage and Psalm 132 has a procession in view. Accordingly, *shir hamma'aloth* is best taken to refer to a song sung by pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple. The meaning of *miktam* [TH4387, ZH4846] is not known.[3]

The term *maskil* [TH4905, ZH5380] occurs for the first time in 32:TITLE. Given that the same root is used in the same stem (Hiphil, meaning "to guide") in the same psalm (32:8), the same sense ("guide/instruct") may be involved: A *maskil* may be a didactic poem. Such a sense would be quite appropriate in 32:TITLE and 78:TITLE, but not all *maskil* psalms are explicitly didactic (e.g., Pss 42, 45, 89, 142). The term *tepillah* [TH8605, ZH9525] (prayer) is used exclusively for "prayer of lament" in psalm titles.

A title may also provide liturgical information. The term *lamenatseakh* [TH5329A, ZH5904] has traditionally been translated "for the choir director," and that is probably correct based on the use of the corresponding infinitive in 1 Chronicles 15:21, though the precise sense in which a given psalm is "for the choir director" is not known.[4] That *lamenatseakh* has a liturgical referent is seen not only in the use of the infinitive in a liturgical context (1 Chr 15:21) but also in the frequently

accompanying phrase *bineginoth* [TH5058, ZH5593]. *Bineginoth*, used only following *lamenatseakh*, means "[played] on stringed instruments."[5] While not occurring in a title, the ubiquitous *selah* [TH5542, ZH6138] is also apparently a liturgical note, though the meaning of this term is also unknown.[6]

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The canonicity of the book of Psalms is readily seen in the use of "Psalms" for the title to the third division of the Hebrew canon. Jesus said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Philo also referred to "Laws, and Oracles given by inspiration through Prophets, and Psalms" (*De Vita Contemplativa* 25). In texts like Luke 24:44 and Philo, "Psalms" was probably used as part for the whole (Crenshaw 1986:292), i.e., "Psalms" represented the whole third division of the Hebrew Bible, because of the Psalter's importance and initial position in the third division (Beckwith 1985:111-112).[7]

The Hebrew text of the book of Psalms is in relatively good condition (Harrison 1969:999). Irregularities exist, however. For example, Psalms 9 and 10 together form one alphabetic acrostic, indicating that the two were probably a single psalm originally (also, the absence of Mem, Nun, and Samekh lines in Psalm 10 indicate that the text has been damaged in transmission). Similarly, the threefold refrain in Psalms 42 and 43 is evidence for the accidental division of a single original psalm. Moreover, a comparison of Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 or Psalms 14 and 53 gives evidence of other textual irregularities—some transmissional, others editorial. While maintaining general confidence in the Masoretic Text, this commentary will deal with textual problems as they are encountered (see Kraus 1988:13-16).

LITERARY STYLE

Poetry. Readers of the Psalms face special difficulties, one of which is the poetic nature of the text (Longman 1993:10). Evidence of this difficulty is found in the fact that numerous introductions to the literature of the Bible find it necessary to provide a special introduction to the poetry of the Bible but not to the prose (Petersen and Richards 1992:1-2). Accordingly, an overview of poetry is included here. (See Berlin 1985, Fokkelman 2001, Longman 1993, Miller 1994, and Schokel 1988 for more detailed treatments of the material covered here.) Some scholars deny the usefulness of using the category of poetry for the Hebrew Bible (Kugel 1981), but most affirm that a difference exists between prose and poetry. In most current discussions, prose and poetry are said to be different points on a continuum: At the extremes the difference is obvious (compare Gen 12 and Ps 34), but the boundary is at times fuzzy (e.g., Is the book of Haggai prose or poetry?). So rather than defining poetry in terms of its unique features over against prose, scholars now list the features that indicate the presence of poetry when these features occur in high concentration (Berry 1995; Longman 1993; Miller 1994b; Petersen and Richards 1992). Before surveying these features, I need to introduce some basic terminology.

A *poem* is "an independent unit of poetry" (Watson 2005:14; see Jonah's thanks-

giving poem in Jonah 2:2-9). Subdivisions of a poem include the stanza, strophe, line, and colon. A *line* (not always equated with a biblical verse) is usually made up of *two* cola (plural of *colon*), and is thus called a *bi*colon; 111:2 provides an example:

Colon A: How amazing are the deeds of the LORD*!*

Colon B: All who delight in him should ponder them.

Alternatively, a line may be made up of a single colon (monocolon), three cola (tricolon), or even four cola (tetracolon). A variety of devices (such as refrains, *inclusios,* repeated key words, chiasms, and acrostics) are used to batch a group of lines together into a *strophe.* So, for example, Psalm 119 is broken into 22 strophes, based on the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In some poems a group of strophes can be batched together into a larger unit that I will call a *stanza.*[8]

Now we can survey the features of Hebrew poetry under four interrelated headings. (For more detailed and differently arranged discussions, see Miller 1994b and Longman 1993.)

1. Terseness. Poetic sentences are consistently terse, owing to a variety of factors. A poetic sentence is short, usually having two to five words per colon. The features mentioned in the following three headings contribute to the terseness of Hebrew poetry.

2. Parallelism. This refers to correspondence between the cola of a poetic line. While one initially may think of the correspondence as semantic (a correspondence in meaning), grammatical (phonological, morphological, syntactical) correspondences are abundant (Berlin 1985). Previous generations understood this correspondence in terms of equivalence: saying the same thing twice with different words. Robert Alter argues, however, that "good poetry at all times is an intellectually robust activity to which such laziness is alien" (Alter 1992:179). Alter goes on to say that "the ancient Hebrew poets are constantly advancing their meanings where the casual ear catches mere repetition" (Alter 1992:179). Not a correspondence of equivalency but a correspondence with development is now understood to be the essence of parallelism (Longman 1993:83). Take 2:4-5 as a simple illustration:

But the one who rules in heaven laughs.
  The Lord scoffs at them.
Then in anger he rebukes them,
  terrifying them with his fierce fury.

Notice the growing intensity in the progression: "laugh," "scoff," "rebuke," "terrify." Parallelism accounts for the symmetry that characterizes poetic lines as well as the frequent use of word pairs. In poetry, word pairs, like "heaven and earth," are typically broken up, one word occurring in each colon, e.g., 73:25:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
  I desire you more than anything on earth.

3. Figures of thought. "Poetry is a language of images" (Ryken 1984:89). Images are concrete and sensory: "The poets of the Bible constantly put us into a world of water and sheep and lions and rocks and arrows and grass" (Ryken 1984:90). The high frequency of concrete word pictures is one key factor that has made the message of the Psalms accessible to readers throughout history. Because the text is

concrete, we readily relate to it, and because the images are usually metaphoric, we can apply them to a variety of analogous situations in our own lives.

An image is "a figure of speech expressing some similarity or analogy" (Watson 2005:251). The reader must compare the topic at hand with the word picture that is drawn and then determine the point of similarity, if it is not explicit. In 51:7 [9] forgiveness is similar to the whiteness of snow: "Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." And in 68:14 [15] the scattered enemies are similar to scattered flakes of snow: "The Almighty scattered the enemy kings like a blowing snowstorm on Mount Zalmon."

A wide variety of figures of thought fills the pages of the Psalter: simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, personification, etc. Numerous works discuss these and other particular images in detail (Beekman and Callow 1974:124-150; Bullinger 1968; Caird 1980; Ryken 1984:88-103; Watson 2005:251-272).

4. Grammar. The grammar of poetry sets it apart from prose. Again, however, we are speaking of a continuum based on the frequency of grammatical features, rather than a set of features unique to poetry. One delimiter of poetry is the relative absence of the definite article, the direct object marker, and the relative pronoun (Freedman 1987). Along with this is the broader paratactic nature of poetry, i.e., "the juxtaposition of clauses without syntactical indicators" (Miller 1994b:222), as in "I saw the shirt you bought" instead of "I saw the shirt *that* you bought," and the frequent use of ellipsis, particularly of the verb, where words are left out and are to be supplied by the reader, as in "She is taller than you [are tall]." Also, the alternation of the perfect and the imperfect in parallel cola for stylistic rather than semantic reasons is typical in poetry (Berlin 1985:36).

So why poetry? An ultimate answer cannot be given, but two perspectives can be offered.[9] Poetry is *pleasurable.* Prose narrative has one kind of beauty, poetry another. The symmetrical lines filled with images is simply a pleasure to read. Poetry is *powerful.* Poetry powerfully informs the intellect. Whether at the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 15) or the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79), God seems to use poetry when he "has something important to say" (Frame 1986:1). The power of poetry makes it memorable so that virtually all key events in redemptive history are commemorated in poetry. Poetry also powerfully moves the feelings and the will (Longman 1993:81), in particular through the pictures it paints: "The LORD is my shepherd" (23:1); "God is our refuge and strength" (46:1 [2]); "The hillsides blossom with joy" (65:12 [13]); "Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk" (131:2).

God wants us to be overwhelmed by his truth. It is not enough to agree; we must be shaken. We must see the earthshaking importance of what he is telling us (Frame 1986:2). As we learn more about Hebrew poetry, we are better equipped to surmount the difficulties and experience the pleasure and power of the Psalms.

Genre. Another inescapable literary category is genre. Without using the term, we have already had to employ the concept. In saying that the Psalms are poetry, not prose, we are saying the Psalms are one genre and not another.

Written materials can be organized into a variety of groups, based on features they share. A genre is a group of texts with common characteristics (Woodward and

Travers 1995:29) or more simply a category (Fisher 1980:291). Genres ought not to be thought of as rigid categories, however (Giese 1995:16; Longman 1985:56-58), as the discussion of the prose and poetry genres has already made clear. As we will see, whether a psalm is a hymn or a thanksgiving song is at times difficult to say, for it is a matter of degree. In addition, the same psalm may be studied, for example, in the context of both creation hymns and wisdom psalms.

Our concern with genre "is not so much to classify as to clarify" (Frye 1971:247-248). Our work is not done when we have put all of the psalms into genre boxes. Genre analysis is one part of a holistic approach to interpretation. Recognizing the genre provides the reader with a reading strategy and thereby shapes the interpretation (Longman 1985:67; Longman 1988:21-23). For example, by knowing the genre, a reader will be aided in determining whether to understand a particular text literally or figuratively.

What genres are found in the Psalms? Based on the work of Claus Westermann, it has become customary to group most psalms into one of two genres: lament or praise (Clines 1969; Giese 1995; Murphy 1959).[10] The genre of praise, however, is regularly divided in two, resulting in three basic genres: lament, thanksgiving, and hymn. In general terms the lament articulates the troubles of life in all their variety, the thanksgiving song expresses gratitude for deliverance from such trouble, and the hymn offers praise for a well-ordered world (Brueggemann 1984).

1. Lament. The words of 90:10 resonate deep within the human soul:

> Seventy years are given to us!
> Some even live to eighty.
> But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble.

"Filled with pain and trouble" characterizes human existence in a world filled with sin and its misery. Rather than denying this dark side of life, the Psalms bring it into full view through the laments. Almost half of the psalms fall into this category (Longman 1995:203).

The lament is a psalm of disorientation (Brueggemann 1984:51-57), an expressing of the sorrow, distress, fear, anger, guilt, or perplexity of life. The lament articulates our agonizing questions:

> O LORD, why do you stand so far away?
> Why do you hide when I am in trouble? (10:1)

> O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?
> How long will you look the other way? (13:1 [2])

> Lord, where is your unfailing love?
> You promised it to David with a faithful pledge. (89:49 [50])

The lament voices our stinging assertions:

> All this has happened though we have not forgotten you.
> We have not violated your covenant. (44:17 [18])

> You have taken away my companions and loved ones.
> Darkness is my closest friend. (88:18 [19])

Such expressions are not indications of doubt but affirmations of faith (Brueggemann 1984:52). In commenting on the agonizing questions of 13:1-2 [2-3], Calvin said that David thereby exercised great faith: "Had it been otherwise, how could [David] direct his groanings and prayers to [God]?" (Calvin 1979). All of our dark emotions come to expression in the laments (Allender and Longman 1994). Yet the laments are not typically unmitigated darkness, as their common structure makes clear. The fundamental movement in the lament is from plea to praise. The plea typically begins with an address to God and an initial cry for help. Then follows the recounting of the distress in terms of a complaint about one's circumstances, one's enemies, or God himself, joined by a confession of sin or innocence, depending on the circumstances. The heart of the plea is the petition for God to act in a saving way on behalf of the psalmist. The final note, however, is usually praise[11] in the form of a concise hymn of praise or a vow to praise or a statement of confidence in being heard. The laments are not literature of despair, but ultimately of hope (see Coetzee 1992 for a survey of research on the laments).

2. Thanksgiving Song. The thanksgiving song is the reflex of the lament, as singing the thanksgiving song is one aspect of the paying of the vow made when the psalmist was in trouble. The psalmist does not give thanks by saying, "Thank you," but by confessionally acknowledging who God is and what he has done in delivering him from distress (Brueggemann 1984:125).

The thanksgiving song typically begins with an expression of the intention to praise and perhaps a brief and general summary of the previous distress and deliverance, as in 30:1-5 [2-6]:

> I will exalt you, LORD, for you rescued me.
> You refused to let my enemies triumph over me.
> O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
> and you restored my health.
> You brought me up from the grave, O LORD.
> You kept me from falling into the pit of death.
>
> Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones!
> Praise his holy name.
> For his anger lasts only a moment,
> but his favor lasts a lifetime!
> Weeping may last through the night,
> but joy comes with the morning.

The heart of the thanksgiving psalm follows with a recounting of the distress, the petition, and the deliverance, as in 30:6-10 [7-12]:

> When I was prosperous, I said,
> "Nothing can stop me now!"
> Your favor, O LORD, made me as secure as a mountain.
> Then you turned away from me, and I was shattered.
>
> I cried out to you, O LORD.
> I begged the Lord for mercy, saying,

I look to you for help, O Sovereign LORD.
You are my refuge; don't let them kill me. (141:8)

Then I pray to you, O LORD.
I say, "You are my place of refuge." (142:5a [6a])

Praise the LORD, who is my rock.
He trains my hands for war
and gives my fingers skill for battle.
He is my loving ally and my fortress,
my tower of safety, my rescuer.
He is my shield, and I take refuge in him.
He makes the nations submit to me. (144:1-2)

Quite a dramatic accumulation of words for refuge! It is fair to say that the book of Psalms does not disappoint the reader. Having created the expectation that Yahweh as refuge would be a dominant motif (Ps 2), the book of Psalms plays on this motif from beginning to end. Psalms 93:1 and 2:12 adequately summarize the basic theology of the book of Psalms:

The LORD is king!
What joy for all who take refuge in him!

ENDNOTES

1. The English title "Book of Psalms" derives from the Latin title *Liber Psalmorum*, which derives from the Greek title *biblos psalmoi*. *Psalmos* is not the translation-equivalent to *tehillah* [TH8416, ZH9335] (praise), but to *mizmor* [TH4210, ZH4660] ("song" [accompanied by instruments]).
2. At times there is a difference between the verse numbers in the Hebrew Bible and the NLT because the Hebrew Bible includes the title in the versification but the NLT (along with all other English translations) does not. The NLT verse number will be given first, followed by the Hebrew in brackets.
3. For a brief survey of opinions and a defense of the meaning "inscriptional poem," see Craigie 1983:154.
4. Sawyer (1970:35-36) argues for "to be recited by the official in charge."
5. Originally, *lamenatseakh* + optional prepositional phrase (e.g., *bineginoth*) was probably a postscript to the preceding psalm, rather than being part of the superscript (Waltke 1991).
6. For a full discussion and bibliography see Kraus 1988:27-29.
7. In the Talmudic tradition, the book of Ruth heads the third division, but Ruth, with its David genealogy, probably served as an introduction to the Psalter (Beckwith 1985:112; Childs 1979:502).
8. As with the prose-poetry distinction, some would deny the presence of strophes and stanzas in Hebrew poetry (G. Anderson 1973). But given the qualification that strophes and stanzas may be variable rather than uniform (Abrams 1985:177) and the fact that readers segment poems into units as they read (Petersen and Richards 1992:60), we are justified in segmenting poems into strophes and stanzas and in using this nomenclature.
9. For another approach to this question, see Miller 1994b.
10. Note that one recent guide to genres in the Old Testament (Sandy and Giese 1995) contains a chapter on lament and praise but nothing on other psalm genres.
11. Psalms 44 and 88 are the true exceptions, as they end bleakly. Psalms 38 and 39 also end on fairly negative notes.

12. Consider the following quotations, cited in Zenger 1994:37-38: (1) The Psalter is "only a heap of individual elements formlessly juxtaposed" (Walter Zimmerli), and (2) "In my opinion it is the right and duty of the exegete of the psalms to counteract the lack of intrinsic structure of the total volume of material by providing a suitable ordering principle. . . . We have arranged the psalms according to *literary-historical* types" (Willy Staerk).
13. Wilson (1993:81) and McCann (1993b:43) say yes.
14. Psalms 25:10, 14; 44:17 [18]; 50:5, 16; 74:20; 78:10; 89:3 [4], 28 [29], 34 [35], 39 [40]; 103:18; 105:8, 10; 106:45; 111:5, 9; 132:12. Psalms 55:20 [21] and 83:5 [6] also use the word *berith* [TH1285, ZH1382].
15. Psalms 89 and 132. See Longman 1988:57.
16. Mowinckel is typically criticized for importing the Babylonian *akitu* festival into the OT. But a more accurate reading shows that Mowinckel used the Babylonian material as a supplemental confirmation of what he found in the OT and not as a methodological basis for his position (Day 1995:69).
17. The best concise and recent defense of the incipient sense, which indicates the initial stage of a situation, is found in Day 1995:75-82, which is summarized here. (1) On philological grounds "became king," "reigned," or "has become king" are possible and attested elsewhere, but "is king" in an ongoing sense has no certain attestation. The first two possibilities are obviously to be dismissed on contextual grounds. Moreover, contrary to the opinion of some, the word order is irrelevant, since both subject + verb (1 Kgs 1:18; 16:29; 2 Kgs 15:13) and verb + subject (1 Kgs 15:1, 9) are found with the incipient sense. (2) Psalm 47:3-4 [4-5] clearly has an event, a victory, in view, after which God ascends the throne to the sound of the horn (47:5-7 [6-8]). Psalm 47 finds nice conceptual parallels in 2 Sam 15:10 and 2 Kgs 9:13, where the enthronement of a new king is accompanied by the sounding of the horn. (3) The new song presumes that something new has taken place, which worshipers are to sing about. (4) Zechariah 14:9 has in view Yahweh becoming king over all the earth in a different sense than that in which he is currently king. (5) The New Testament shares this concept of God beginning to reign in a new sense at the consummation of history (Rev 11:17; 19:6). Two other considerations should be added: (1) The Greek of Rev 11:17, 19:6, and 20:4 is the same as the Greek translation of Pss 93:1, 96:10, 97:1, and 99:1—*ebasileusen*, an incipient aorist. (2) In the Psalms *yhwh malak* is a speech act: lit., "Say among the nations, the LORD has become king" (96:10). The closest parallels are texts like 2 Kgs 9:13, where there is the speech act "Jehu is king" in the context of the beginning of the king's reign.
18. Note that Ps 29, which celebrates the kingship of Yahweh in the context of a fall rainstorm (see Futato 1984), is associated with the Festival of Shelters in the Septuagint by means of the title.
19. The present discussion draws heavily on Creach 1996.

COMMENTARY ON

Psalms

I. Book One: Psalms 1–41

A. Psalm 1

**[1] Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.
[2] But they delight in the law of the LORD,
meditating on it day and night.
[3] They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.
[4] But not the wicked!
They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
[5] They will be condemned at the time of judgment.
Sinners will have no place among the godly.
[6] For the LORD watches over the path of the godly,
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.**

NOTES

1:1 ***Oh, the joys of those who.*** The first word of the psalm, *'ashre* [TH835A, ZH897] (traditionally translated "blessed"), is a key word that runs through the Psalter from beginning to end. No single English word captures the full sense of *'ashre.* Those who are *'ashre* are in a state of total well-being: They lack nothing (34:8-10 [9-11]), are delivered from trouble (41:1-2 [2-3]; 94:12-13), and are wealthy and have successful children (112:1-3; 128:1-4; 144:12-15). No wonder they are so happy! The Psalms are about how to experience this profound happiness (Mays 1989:40): Yahweh must be your God (33:12; 144:15; 146:5), and you must trust him (40:4 [5]; 84:12 [13]) and delight in obeying his teaching (94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1). Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes complements what the Psalms express with *'ashre.* This opening clause stands outside the poetic structure (Petersen and Richards 1992:92; see also Miller 1986:82).

not follow the advice of. The word translated "advice" (*'etsah* [TH6098, ZH6783]) can also mean "counsel," but the exact expression "walk in the *'etsah* of" occurs in 2 Chr 22:5, and the phrase *'atsath resha'im* [TH6098/7563A, ZH6783/8401] occurs in Job 10:3, 21:16, and 22:18, establishing the meaning "follow the advice of."

not follow . . . or stand . . . or join. Lit., "not walk . . . not stand . . . not sit." The *'ashre* formula is characteristically followed by a positive description; here the threefold negative perspective keeps the formula from being a cliche and creates dramatic tension by delaying the expected positive note until 1:2 (Gitay 1996:234). The negative description connotes moral decline that begins with taking the wrong advice ("walk"), proceeds to acting the

wrong way ("stand"), and results in becoming the wrong kind of person ("sit"); for the reversal of this decline, see Rom 12:2.

1:2 ***delight.*** The Lord's instruction is not burdensome (see 119:1-2, 14, 16, 45, 47).

law. Heb. *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368], here translated "law," has the broad sense of teaching (see Introduction and McCann 1992:27). The teaching in view is in written form (see Josh 1:8 and Mays 1989:41), and can be found, for example, in the Five Books of Moses or, closer at hand, the Five Books of the Psalms (see "Major Themes" in the Introduction). The poet focuses our attention on the "teaching" of Yahweh by using the term twice in one line, the usual poetic convention being to use a term once, followed by a synonym (Gitay 1996:235). The expression *torath yhwh* [TH8451/3068, ZH9368/3378] occurs in the Psalms only here, in 19:7 [8], and in 119:1.

meditating. Heb. *hagah* [TH1897, ZH2047] and its cognates are used for a low sound like the cooing of a dove (Isa 38:14) or the growling of a lion (Isa 31:4), so meditating on the word of God may have involved an intoned reading of the text (TWOT 1.205 and Craigie 1983:58). The imperfect verb contrasts with the perfect verbs of 1:1, and stresses the enduring nature of the pious (Gitay 1996:235).

day and night. Not just once during the day and once during the night, but continually (see 32:4; 42:3 [4]; 55:10 [11]; Isa 60:11). The Lord's instruction must govern the whole of life (see Deut 6:4-9).

1:3 ***They are like trees.*** The poet introduces a metaphor at this point to give concrete form to the more abstract concept of being *'ashre.* Whereas a tree in the steppe or desert may live but not thrive, this tree intentionally planted by an irrigation canal will always be productive.

they prosper in all they do. This prosperity includes material prosperity, but success in the sense of attaining one's goals is the broader meaning (see 1 Kgs 22:12).

1:4 ***not the wicked!*** The terseness emphasizes the brevity of the wicked's life. This is also underscored by the relative brevity of the chaff metaphor (6 words in Hebrew) over against the tree metaphor (17 words).

chaff, scattered by the wind. This is a prevalent image of divine judgment (see Isa 17:13; 29:5; 40:23-24; Jer 13:24; Hos 13:3). Zephaniah 2:2 makes explicit what is implicit elsewhere: The image of chaff driven before the wind is an image associated with the day of the Lord.

1:6 ***the LORD watches over.*** This expresses the Lord's intimate knowledge of and care for his people and is the ultimate basis of the experience of being blessed.

path. The word "path" is a frequent metaphor in the Wisdom Literature for the life one lives. There are two such paths: that of the righteous/wise and that of the wicked/fool. Each leads to its own inevitable destiny (cf. Matt 7:13-14).

destruction. As the last word in the Hebrew text, *to'bed* [TH6, ZH6] serves as a fitting antonym of *'ashre* [TH835A, ZH897].

COMMENTARY

The main message of this wisdom psalm can be articulated in two ways: (1) the pious experience total well-being, but the wicked perish, or (2) the pious prosper, but the wicked do not. This message is communicated by the form of the poem, as well as by its content. First, note that the opening word, *ashre* [TH835A, ZH897] (joy), begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, while the closing word, *to'bed* [TH6, ZH6] (destruction), begins with the last letter of the alphabet (see Ps 112 for this same poetic device). The psalm is thus an "incipient acrostic" (Petersen and Richards

1992:94), articulating the diametric opposition between life and death: The two are as far apart as Aleph and Taw. Second, note the chiastic structure of the whole:

Summarizing Introduction (1:1)
A. Description of the Righteous; key terms: wicked, sinners, not stand, advice (1:1-2)
  B. Metaphor for the Righteous; key phrase: like trees (1:3a)
    C. Fruition of the Righteous; key term: prosper (1:3b)
    C′. Fruition of the Wicked; key term: not (1:4a)
  B′. Metaphor for the Wicked; key phrase: like chaff (1:4b)
A′. Description of the Wicked; key terms: wicked, sinners, not stand (NLT, "be condemned"), no place (1:4-5)
Summarizing Conclusion (1:6)

This structure focuses our attention on the central point (see Petersen and Richards 1992:95-96): "They prosper in all they do. But not the wicked!" (1:3b-4a).

How does one come to enjoy the prosperity of the righteous? Whereas the Psalms as a whole provide a full answer to this question (see the first note above for a summary), Psalm 1 focuses on a key aspect of the answer: Live in the light of the Lord's teaching.[1] This means not giving heed to teaching that is contrary to the Lord's, for that would lead to wrong actions and attitudes. Rather, you must delight in the Lord's teaching and study it thoroughly. And, in fact, the Psalms provide you with the Lord's teaching from A to Z (or perhaps we should say Aleph to Taw).

If taken out of the context of the book of Psalms as a whole, Psalm 1 could be misunderstood in two critical ways. First, it could be taken as an expression of self-righteousness: If *I* do not follow the wrong advice and if *I* delight in doing everything the Lord wants and if *I* think about his teaching all the time, then *I* will be joyfully prosperous. Such a self-righteous reading of the psalm, however, ignores parallel texts like 40:4 [5], "Oh, the joys of those who trust the LORD" and 84:12 [13], "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you" (see also Jer 17:7-8), and goes against the grain of the wholesale critique of misplaced trust developed in the book (see Introduction).

Second, Psalm 1 could be taken as articulating a simple recipe for ensuring an easy life: If I just do what is right, then I will be blessed—*automatically.* Such a "health-and-wealth" reading of the psalm ignores the tension that arises when 1:3b-4a, "They prosper in all they do. But not the wicked," is read in the context of texts like 37:7b, "Don't worry about *evil people who prosper*" and 73:3 "For I envied the proud when I saw them *prosper despite their wickedness*" (italics mine). "The poet, who sought to be a true believer, notices the 'real world' turns upside down his own religious view" (Gitay 1996:236). Reading in context precludes a simplistic understanding of the text and life itself.

The teaching of Psalm 1 is idealistic (VanGemeren 1991:52) but true nonetheless: The righteous will be joyfully prosperous, but the wicked will not. This is true in part in this life, but in fullness only in the life to come. So as David thought about the prosperity of the wicked, his mind turned to the way their *lives will end up* (37:9, 10, 12-13). So, too, Psalm 1 points us forward to the time of judgment

beyond this life (see Day 1995:44). Psalm 1 thus gives the Psalter an eschatological orientation from the start.

We are responsible to delight in and think about the Lord's teaching and to put that teaching into practice. But we are not to trust in any of this activity for our happiness in this life or the life to come. Rather, we are to trust in the Lord who watches over all our steps (1:6), whether those steps are on the heights of prosperity (23:2) or in the valley of adversity (23:4), knowing that ultimately he will bless us (94:12-15).

ENDNOTES

1. For the centrality of the *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] in this psalm, see Botha 1991.

B. Psalm 2

1 Why are the nations so angry?
Why do they waste their time with futile plans?
2 The kings of the earth prepare for battle;
the rulers plot together
against the LORD
and against his anointed one.
3 "Let us break their chains," they cry,
"and free ourselves from slavery to God."

4 But the one who rules in heaven laughs.
The Lord scoffs at them.
5 Then in anger he rebukes them,
terrifying them with his fierce fury.
6 For the Lord declares, "I have placed my chosen king on the throne
in Jerusalem,* on my holy mountain."

7 The king proclaims the LORD's decree:
"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son.*
Today I have become your Father.*
8 Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
the whole earth as your possession.
9 You will break* them with an iron rod
and smash them like clay pots.'"

10 Now then, you kings, act wisely!
Be warned, you rulers of the earth!
11 Serve the LORD with reverent fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
12 Submit to God's royal son,* or he will become angry,
and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—
for his anger flares up in an instant.
But what joy for all who take refuge in him!

2:6 Hebrew *on Zion.* **2:7a** Or *Son;* also in 2:12. **2:7b** Or *Today I reveal you as my son.* **2:9** Greek version reads *rule.* Compare Rev 2:27. **2:12** The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

NOTES

2:1 ***angry.*** The verb *ragash* [TH7283, ZH8093] occurs only here; related nouns occur in 55:14 [15] (*regesh* [TH7285, ZH8094]; see NASB, "throng") and 64:2 [3] (*rigshah* [TH7285A, ZH8095]), with the sense "uproar" (Zorell 1963:757), which may be positive (55:14 [15]) or negative (64:2 [3]). The verb carries a negative connotation in 2:1.

they. "They" translates the Hebrew word *le'om* [TH3816, ZH4211], which means "people" (HALOT 2.513), contra Craigie (1983:63), who proposed that it means "warriors." Hebrew dictionaries do not recognize "warrior" as a gloss for *le'om,* which is elsewhere, as here, parallel with terms for "people" (see, e.g., 44:2 [3]; 105:44; Gen 25:23; Isa 34:1).

futile plans. The verb underlying this phrase is the same verb used in 1:2, where it has the sense "think/meditate." In 2:1 it has the sense "plan/plot/conspire," as in 38:12 [13] and Prov 24:2. A contrast is thus drawn between those who "think" about the Lord in order to submit to him and those who "plot" to rebel against him.

2:2 ***against the LORD and against his anointed one.*** The conspiracy is explicitly against both the Lord and his anointed king. For "anointed one" in reference to the human king, see 18:50 [51] and 20:6 [7] (see also 1 Sam 10:1 and 16:6).

2:3 ***break their chains . . . from slavery.*** The Hebrew text speaks of "chains" and "ropes." The picture is that of oxen whose yokes are tied together (see Jer 27:2). The NLT captures the import of this picture with the word "slavery," because the "chains" and "ropes" refer to the servitude imposed upon a vanquished foe (see Isa 52:2 and Jer 27:2-8; see Keel 1997:302-303 for graphic representations). "Breaking chains" can be a positive symbol of freedom from slavery (see Jer 2:20) or a negative symbol of rebellion against authority (Jer 5:5); in 2:3 it is negative. The pronoun "their" refers to the Lord and his anointed one and shows the close association of the two (VanGemeren 1991:67).

2:4 ***the one who rules.*** Lit., "the one who sits," but when it is a king who sits, the sense is "rules" (Zorell 1968:334; see 29:10). There are two kinds of sitting at the opening of the Psalms: the "sitting" of scoffers ("join in"; 1:1, NLT) and the "sitting" of the LORD (2:4). Those who sit to scoff do so at the sitting/ruling of the LORD.

laughs . . . scoffs. There is movement from the general "laughs" to the specific "scoffs." This movement continues in 2:5.

2:5 ***rebukes . . . terrifying.*** The scoffing becomes a rebuke. Terror follows the rebuke.

2:6 ***I have placed my chosen king on the throne.*** The Hebrew is *wa'ani nasakti malki* [TH5258A/4428, ZH5820/4889]. The precise sense of the verb *nasakti* is in doubt. There have been numerous suggestions: (1) from *nasak* [TH5258, ZH5818] (pour out), meaning "dedicate by means of a libation" (Kraus 1988:129) or "pour out," "pour wide and firm," "set firmly in place" (Delitzsch 1982:94); revocalized as a Niphal, meaning "be consecrated by a drink offering" (HALOT 2.703); (2) from *nasak* II [TH5259, ZH5820] (constitute)—so Zorell 1968:520; (3) revocalized as a Niphal from *suk* [TH5480, ZH6057], meaning "be anointed" (Dahood 1965:10). All suggestions orbit around the general idea of the installation of the king, which is undoubtedly what the context requires.

2:7 ***proclaims the LORD's decree.*** The use of the verb *sapar* [TH5608, ZH6218] with the preposition *'el* [TH413, ZH448] instead of the direct object marker is unusual, but it does occur in 69:26 [27] with a similar sense as here ("tell of the pain," NASB). The "LORD's decree" refers to the royal covenant made with David and his descendants, and the central content is provided by the rest of 2:7b-9: the sonship of the anointed king (2:7; see 89:26-27 [27-28] and 2 Sam 7:14) and the promise of universal dominion (2:8-9; see 89:25 [26]; see also 2 Sam 7:16 for the analogous promise of an enduring dynasty). There may be a reference here to a copy of the decree/covenant given to the king at his coronation (see 2 Kgs 11:12).

2:9 ***You will break them.*** The NLT accurately translates the Heb. *tero'em* [TH7489A, ZH8318]. Revelation 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15, however, use a word meaning "rule," in keeping with the LXX; these Greek translations point to a Heb. *tir'em* [TH7462, ZH8286] ("shepherd," "rule"; Zorell 1968:783). The two alternatives are not unrelated because "the promise that the Davidic king can break and smash the nations is conventional royal language for the power to rule" (Mays 1994:47). The same Hebrew verb for "shepherd" is used in Ezek 34:23 for the future Davidic king.

2:10 ***Now then.*** The Heb. *we'attah* [TH6258, ZH6964] introduces an exhortation to take a wise course of action (VanGemeren 1991:71; see Job 42:8; Prov 5:7; 7:24; 8:32).

2:11 ***rejoice with trembling.*** This expression creates tension in the mind of a modern reader, but "the tension between the rejoice at the Lord [*sic*] and the fear of him seems to be integrated in the OT experience of God" (Vang 1995:176); "rejoice" is used in the context of celebrating the Lord's kingship (see 97:1, 8-9; 149:2; 1 Chr 16:31), and this rejoicing is at times coupled with trembling (97:1, 4). "Rejoice with trembling" makes sense in the context of foreign kings being terrified, on the one hand (2:5), and being invited to join the joyous ranks of the righteous, on the other (2:12).

2:12 ***Submit to God's royal son.*** Lit., "kiss [the] son," which is problematic on two counts: (1) the Aramaic word *bar* [TA/ZA10120, S1247] is used for "son" instead of the Heb. *ben* [TH1121, ZH1201], as in 2:7, and (2) there are no precise parallels for kissing the king as an act of submission. (See, however, Keel 1997:268 for a picture of vanquished Elamite nobles about to kiss the feet of the Assyrian king.)

what joy. This provides an *inclusio* with 1:1 and thus brings the introduction to the Psalms to a close.

COMMENTARY

"Why are the nations so angry?" sounds rather dissonant against the harmonious, "They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season" (1:3). In Psalm 2 the reality of hostility resounds in the believer's ears. The nations are raging against the Lord and his anointed king (2:2b). There is a conspiracy afoot (2:2a), and the goal of this conspiracy is autonomy: liberation from God's authority, and that means from the authority of his anointed king (2:3). The Davidic kings were certainly the objects of this raging from time to time and to varying degrees, but this raging reached its climax when "Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, [the Lord's] holy servant, whom [he had] anointed" (Acts 4:27). The raging of the nations against the Lord Jesus entailed the raging of the nations against his disciples in the apostolic church: "And now, O Lord, hear their threats" (Acts 4:29)—a prayer offered in the wake of Peter and John being arrested for preaching that "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This raging continues in our own day, whether in the form of physical or political or social attempts to silence those who would proclaim Jesus Christ as the exclusive way to God (John 14:6).

To God, however, such raging is ultimately a colossal waste of time (2:1). So certain is his sovereign rule over the nations that he can "sit" in heaven and laugh. But eventually his laughing changes to scoffing, and his scoffing gives way to angry rebuking, until finally he is found to be "terrifying them with his fierce fury" (2:5). Now, what could possibly strike terror in the hearts of the raging nations? The declaration that God's "chosen king [is] on the throne" (2:6)!

Yes, the Lord reigns, but he exercises his reign through his anointed king. The Davidic king at his coronation would have declared his exalted position as son of the Father, his destiny as ruler of the nations, and ruler of the ends of the earth. But the Davidic king was only a shadow of the true King Jesus, who became Son of the Father in a special sense when he was raised from the dead (Acts 13:32-33). After

his resurrection, when he entered into his messianic sonship, he could say, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18).

Though the day will come when Jesus will use his authority to "break them with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots" (2:9; see Rev 19:15), this is not that day. Presently, while warning them of the destruction that lies ahead, he invites them to take the wise course of action and submit to God's authority, which is not a path to slavery but to true freedom (see 119:45 and John 8:32). To his disciples today he still says, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt 28:18-19).

The concluding beatitude is addressed not only to believers who need protection from the raging of the nations but also to the people of the nations who need protection from the fierce fury of the king: "But what joy for all who take refuge in him!" (2:12).

◆ C. Psalm 3

A psalm of David, regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom.

1 O LORD, I have so many enemies;
so many are against me.
2 So many are saying,
"God will never rescue him!"
Interlude*

3 But you, O LORD, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
4 I cried out to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy mountain. ***Interlude***

5 I lay down and slept,
yet I woke up in safety,
for the LORD was watching over me.
6 I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies
who surround me on every side.

7 Arise, O LORD!
Rescue me, my God!
Slap all my enemies in the face!
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
8 Victory comes from you, O LORD.
May you bless your people.
Interlude

3:2 Hebrew *Selah.* The meaning of this word is uncertain, though it is probably a musical or literary term. It is rendered *Interlude* throughout the Psalms.

NOTES

3:TITLE ***A psalm of David, regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom.*** While David was the implicit joyous person of Ps 1 and king of Ps 2, he is now the explicit person praying in Ps 3. The apparently differing attitudes of David toward his enemies in Ps 3 and toward Absalom in 2 Sam 15–19 present us with a certain level of difficulty, but sufficient parallels exist between the psalm and the narrative to justify the title (Craigie 1983:73). The situation envisioned in Ps 3 is that of a besieged David asking the Divine Warrior for victory (Brettler 1993:14-42), but the language is general enough to have allowed other Davidic kings and even lay people to have used the psalm, as each faced a variety of "enemies" (Craigie 1983:72).

3:2 The NLT (following most commentators) separates 3:2 from 3:3, no doubt in part because of the *selah* [TH5542, ZH46138] (interlude), but *selah* does not always occur at the boundary between stanzas (see Craigie 1983:76).

3:3 ***you . . . are a shield.*** The *magen* [TH4043, ZH4482] was a small, round shield, as opposed to the *tsinnah* [TH6793A, ZH7558], which was a body-length shield (TDOT 8.74). In contrast to the small shield, which protects from only one side, the Lord "protects from every side" (Keel 1997:222-223). The image of God as *magen* (used 13 times in the Psalter: 3:3 [4]; 7:10 [11]; 18:2 [3], 30 [31]; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11 [12]; 84:11 [12]; 115:9, 10, 11; 119:114; 144:2) communicates the idea of protection, since the shield was a defensive part of the warrior's panoply and evokes the related image of God as warrior. As part of the "refuge" semantic domain (see Introduction), *magen* connects Ps 3 with 2:12.

you are my glory. Some have taken *kabod* [TH3519, ZH3883] as a divine title, "My Glorious One" (Dahood 1965:1.17; VanGemeren 1991:75; NIV). While this reading is not impossible, "glory" is better taken in reference to the psalmist with God being the source. "Glory" is something God gives someone in connection with being that person's shield (84:11 [12]) and is that which makes a person respectable (Kraus 1988:140). In the very next psalm (4:2 [3]) and in 7:5 [6] the same word is used in the sense of the psalmist's reputation/honor, and in 62:7 [8] God as the psalmist's glory (or honor) is used in conjunction with God being a rock, fortress, and refuge, as he is the psalmist's shield in 3:3 [4]. The sense of 3:3 is that the Lord will protect David on the one hand ("shield") and give him victory over his enemies on the other ("my glory" and "holds my head high").

3:4 ***cried out.*** The verb is an imperfect for repeated action in the past (Joüon and Muraoka 1991:§113e).

holy mountain. As the Lord had anointed David on his "holy mountain" (2:6), he answered his prayer from this same "holy mountain."

3:5 ***was watching.*** The verb is an imperfect for durative action in the past (Joüon and Muraoka 1991:§113f).

3:6 ***ten thousand enemies.*** These ten thousand people or enemies (*ribeboth* [TH7233, ZH8047]) are a particular instance of the "nations" and "people" of 2:1 who oppose the anointed king.

3:7 ***Arise, O LORD!*** This petition evokes Num 10:35, where Yahweh as Divine Warrior was summoned to arise and scatter his enemies. There is irony in Ps 3, however, since *ribeboth* [TH7233, ZH8047] refers to foes, whereas in Num 10:36 it refers to friends. Yahweh arising to rescue David provides a contrast with the many who were rising against him in 3:1 (VanGemeren 1991:77).

Slap. . . . Shatter the teeth. Wedged between the imperatives of 3:7a and the wish formula of 3:8, the perfects in 3:7b are precative, i.e., they express a prayer, often, as here, in the form of an imprecation or a curse (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:§30.5.4c-d). The idea of "shattering the teeth" is used with different vocabulary in 58:6 [7] and Job 4:10, 29:17. The exact cognate expression occurs in a thirteenth-century Akkadian legal document from Emar: "If they contest, this tablet will break their teeth" (Hackett and Huehnergard 1984:262). The expression originated in the ancient Near Eastern legal context of punishment for breach of contract and describes a talion-type punishment for verbal offense (Hackett and Huehnergard 1984:262-263, 273).

the wicked! Those who oppose the king are among the wicked of 1:1, 5.

COMMENTARY

How ironic that the David who is promised the nations in Psalm 2 is fleeing his son in Psalm 3! Delighting in the instruction (Ps 1) of the king who reigns in heaven

(Ps 2) is obviously no guarantee of a trouble-free life. So in Psalm 3 the psalmist puts the message of Psalm 2 into practice by praying to the Divine Warrior for protection from hostile forces. This prayer has a threefold focus.

Psalm 3:1-3 (second-person address) focuses on the psalmist's enemies: "so many . . . so many . . . so many." The vocative "O LORD" forms an *inclusio* around the whole. As the kings and rulers were "against the LORD and against his anointed one" in 2:2, "many are against" the king here. The hostile forces speak, as in 2:3, and this taunt against the king ("God will never rescue him!") is also an attack on God, since it presumes to limit what God can and cannot do (Mays 1994:52). Is the taunt true? The king does not believe so, as is clear from the contrastive, "But you, O LORD, are a shield around me." In 3:3 the psalmist confesses that "the one who rules in heaven" (2:4) is the Divine Warrior (Brettler 1993:140-142), who is always ready to protect and to grant victory over opposing forces.

Psalm 3:4-6 (third-person address) focuses on the psalmist himself: "I cried out. . . . I lay down and slept . . . I woke. . . . I am not afraid." In the evening the psalmist had repeatedly cried out to the Lord, until the Lord finally answered, perhaps through a priestly oracle. So the king was able to lie down and sleep through the night and then wake in safety the next morning, since his prayer had secured the watchful care of God through the night as a foreshadowing of his care for the day that lay ahead. Thus protected by God, the king could face the new day without fear, in spite of being surrounded by a myriad of enemies.

Psalm 3:7-8 (second-person address) focuses on the psalmist's God: "Arise. . . . Rescue. . . . Slap. . . . Shatter. . . . Victory comes from you . . . you bless." As in 3:1-3, the vocative "O LORD" forms an *inclusio* around the whole of 3:7-8. The request grows more intense as two terse petitions are followed by two longer petitions in 3:7. Not self-reliance, but prayer, is the path to finding protection (2:12) from otherwise insurmountable foes. Such prayer leads to the assurance that the Lord will grant "victory." This repetition "traces the psalmist's growing faith in Yahweh the warrior's ability to deliver him" (Brettler 1993:142), since "no trouble is beyond help and no human hostility can limit God's help" (Mays 1994:53).

While Psalm 1 promises joyous prosperity and Psalm 2 affirms the sovereign rule of God to guarantee such prosperity, Psalm 3 confronts us with the sobering truth that along "the path of the godly" (1:6) there will at times be seemingly overwhelming trouble. Thus "the path of the godly" must be the path of prayer. We should not be surprised at this, for this was the path that Jesus walked before us and for us:

> *While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God. . . . In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. (Heb 5:7, 9)*

Because Jesus prayed and God answered, we can pray knowing that God will answer by providing protection no matter what the problem.

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The Book of Proverbs

GEORGE M. SCHWAB

INTRODUCTION TO *PROVERBS*

PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS FOOLS. No doubt you, the reader, already feel wise in choosing to advance in your understanding of the book of Proverbs. After all, no fool would seek out God's wisdom! You may consider yourself particularly savvy before even opening the pages of this book. This is why it is important that before continuing to read, you stop and hold up true wisdom as a mirror, seeing how you fare when critiqued by Proverbs. True wisdom does not consist in mere abstractions but is eminently practical. How do you fare when you measure yourself by the ideals in Proverbs?

- Do you listen thoroughly before you respond to people (18:13)? Do you know when to keep your mouth shut (10:19)?
- Do you show moderation in food and drink (20:1; 23:20-21)? Are you drawn in by illicit pleasures (ch 5)?
- Do you lose your temper under pressure (12:16; 14:29)?
- Do you readily take advice? Do you receive criticism with a humble attitude (13:10)? Do you seek honors for yourself (25:27)?
- Do you know how to work diligently (14:23)? Are your two primary counselors Pastor Pillow and Deacon Sheets (26:14)?
- Do you plan ahead and save some of your money (21:20)? Or is money an all-consuming thought for you (23:4)?
- Are you considerate of your friends and their schedules (25:17)?
- Are you responding with concern for the poor (21:13)?

This short self-evaluation is a reminder that every person behaves foolishly in some areas of life and needs to grow in wisdom. Reading and applying the book of Proverbs can help that growth. Enter the school of Wisdom and expect to grow in the very areas of life in which you judge yourself lacking.

AUTHORS AND DATES OF WRITING

The book of Proverbs is the work of several authors spanning many years. The primary author of Proverbs is undoubtedly Solomon. Unless everything the Bible records concerning Solomon is dismissed and he is treated as a virtual fiction, he towers over the wisdom enterprise of the Old Testament and must be acknowledged as constitutive. Many cognate wisdom materials predate Solomon and reveal that Wisdom Literature was extant long before his reign. For example, the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* seems to share particular affinity with the Sayings of the

Wise (22:17ff). Between the Exodus and the chaos near the end of Judah's monarchy, Solomon was the only king the Bible records as cultivating friendly relations with Egypt (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:1). The Bible ascribes the authorship of many such writings to Solomon (1 Kgs 4:32), as does Proverbs (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). Although one cannot *prove* his authorship to critics distrustful of this witness, it is patently obvious that Solomon *could have* produced something like it. Brueggemann (1990:130-131) considers it "sociologically probable" that Solomon patronized the wisdom effort—since under his administration "everything seemed to work. The creation functioned, as did the social system"—a condition conducive to producing material like Proverbs, which commends a predictable world.

Citing no fewer than 30 instructional texts from Mesopotamia and Egypt, Kitchen (1977:85) is able to characterize Proverbs 1–24 as straddling the second and first millennia BC. Earlier texts often include prologues appealing to sons to hearken. Although the content of Proverbs's Prologue (chs 1–9) seems early, its length is more typical of first-millennium texts; on the other hand, these texts are more autobiographical and do not include extended appeals to listen. "In terms of date, such a transitional role would undoubtedly fit best at the end of the 2nd millennium BC and into the early 1st millennium BC—exactly the period when Solomon reigned." To claim that the Prologue is postexilic seems as anachronistic as claiming the same for the Sayings of the Wise!

Steinmann has extensively compared the vocabulary, conceptualizations, and modes of expression of the first nine chapters with the rest of the book, and his statistics indicate that one author produced chapters 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29, "exactly as the book itself indicates" (2000:674). He also observes that the Sayings of the Wise are similar to these, as is the poem of 31:10-31, which might also be Solomonic. The acrostic poem about the Woman of Virtue (31:10-31) references trading ships and merchants (Canaanites, 31:24), which seems to Crook most comfortable in the Solomonic era and not later (1954:137-138). Lyons also argues on economic grounds for the poem's early date (1987:238, contra Yoder 2003:429).

Proverbs's first recension might have featured a version of chapters 1–9, adopting the convention of many ancient instructional works to begin with a prologue. This was followed by an anthology of proverbs that crystallized into what we presently know as 10:1–22:16. Then a piece of Yahwetized Egyptian wisdom akin to *Amenemope* was appended—the Sayings of the Wise (22:17–24:22). Perhaps the book closed with the Woman of Virtue, an acrostic poem, as an epilogue (31:10-31), balancing the image of Lady Wisdom in the Prologue. Of course, this early edition was only a sample of all the literature Solomon produced.

About 250 years later, Hezekiah's court assembled and included other smaller Solomonic compositions (approximately 25:1–29:27) after the Sayings but before the Woman of Virtue acrostic poem, leaving her as the climax of the work. According to Steinmann (2000), these enjoy a high probability of having been cut from the same cloth as the earlier chapters.

Four units of text seem to have been late in their final placement: the oracle of Agur (30:1-14), the poem of threes and fours (30:15-33), the oracle of Lemuel (31:1-9), and the appendix to the 30 sayings (24:23-34). Their locations were finally

standardized in the Hebrew text, apparently after their translation into Greek. (See the overview to the Epilogue, 30:1–31:31, for more details concerning this stage in Proverbs's growth).

Editorial activity probably continued. For example, Wolters (1985:580) posits a Greek wordplay in 31:27, which would indicate editing as late as the Hellenistic era. A number of Aramaic terms appear, which may be vestiges of the Persian period (see note on 22:21). The Septuagint includes proverbs absent in the Masoretic Text, indicative of creative subediting. Scribes likely polished Proverbs well into the Hellenistic era, culminating a tradition that began long before Solomon assumed the ancient task of inscripturating his great wisdom.

Sources for Proverbs. The Bible depicts Israel's faith in Yahweh (which scholars of the ancient Near East refer to as Yahwism) as unique in its monotheism and self-consciously distinct from the surrounding religions. However, Egyptian wisdom in particular predates Proverbs and yet exhibits distinctive similarities to it. This makes it apparent that the authors of Proverbs incorporated existing material into the biblical text—material that originated outside Israel's worship of Yahweh.

The adoption of alien elements into the biblical text was not mechanical but living and organic. Israel's faith controlled the recycling process without compromising the character of that faith. This is analogous to an organism's consumption of food—the food becomes part of it. Without food it would starve, yet the food does not change the creature's unique biological structure (or else it would die). The stuff of culture was reorganized in accordance with the spiritual dynamics of Yahwism.

Craigie identified modes of incorporating non-Israelite material into biblical wisdom texts. The first is "direct borrowing," the second is "adaptation of foreign materials" (called "Yahwization"), and the third is "creativity in the use of the resources of oral poetry" (Craigie 1971:28-30). Bryce submits a similar scheme. The first is the "adaptive" stage, where a proverb's Egyptian origin can be discerned; the second is the "assimilative" stage, where Egyptian materials have become "semitized." Thirdly, the "integrative" stage is where foreign material is fully dissolved into an Israelite text (Bryce 1979:58-114).

In creating a statue, a sculptor imposes an aesthetic quality on marble that was not present before the sculpting. It becomes a work of art according to aesthetic principles that transcend the marble itself—even though there is no part of the work not composed of marble and the marble itself is unchanged as marble. Canaanite, Babylonian, and Egyptian materials, having been molded into something new, should not be understood on the basis of its raw form, but according to the higher order that was imposed on the lower. (Even "direct borrowing" realigns the borrowed material through fresh context, changing its meaning. A raw piece of marble intentionally attached to a sculpture serves an artistic purpose.) A transcendent framework controlled the incorporation of cultural artifacts into what became the inspired canon. Egyptian wisdom has been recycled according to the principle of Yahwism, altering its original message and creating new expressions of Israelite faith.

A student of Scripture must presuppose this spiritual dynamic when comparing cognate texts with Proverbs. When comparing Proverbs and the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*, for example, one really compares the whole Israelite culture

(of which Proverbs is a part) with the whole Egyptian culture (*Book of the Dead* and all). This comparison clarifies how Israelite tradition demanded that Yahweh explicitly be named as the beginning and end of *khokmah* [TH2451, ZH2683] (wisdom). Something like the *Instruction of Amenemope* was the model for Proverbs's Sayings of the Wise (see the overview of the anthology 22:17–24:34)—and yet it was modified to be Yahweh-centric (see note on 22:19).

But in what culture and belief system did Amenemope ruminate? Egyptian literature speaks of the *ma'ath*, "truth, justice, and order" that holds together creation (Purdue 1994:37). But the religion of Egypt also included a well-developed doctrine of the afterlife. Any theory of Proverbs's dependency upon Egypt by definition acknowledges that this wisdom tradition developed in the shadow of the pyramids (monuments to their belief in the hereafter). Apparently, wisdom material has never existed in any context in which an afterlife was not acknowledged. Thus, the modern exegete should not exclude this viewpoint from the biblical Proverbs (see 12:28; 15:24).

Nonetheless, some have posited an early form of *khokmah* that exhibits no religious context, no faith in the divine to guarantee order, and no doctrine of eternal life. This theorized "wisdom" simply spoke to pragmatic matters of life. McKane, for example, divides his treatment of proverbs into three categories: Class A, which are "old wisdom" proverbs designed to promote the individual's success; Class B, which are community-minded; and Class C, which "are identified by the presence of God-language . . . expressive of a moralism which derives from Yahwistic piety" (1970:11). McKane understands Class C as a later "reinterpretation" of Class A. Thus, his commentary is difficult to read, since he perpetually deconstructs the integral text of Proverbs according to his assumptions. It is as if he wrests proverbs out of both ancient Egyptian and Israelite religious contexts and transposes them into the modern world where "secularity" has meaning! "To ascribe a primitively 'secular' character to the origins of any phase of human life in ancient times . . . is to go against all that we really know of ancient man" (Skehan 1971:23). The extant book of Proverbs clearly is religious and knows of no wisdom apart from trusting Yahweh.

Some of the Egyptian Wisdom Literature claims to be written for training officials' sons as courtiers (R. Williams 1990:19-20). It would not be surprising, then, for portions of Proverbs to have arisen within the Israelite court. Modern exegetes should not eschew this provenance for at least some parts of the book, especially given its claims of royal patronage (1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 31:1).

AUDIENCE

As the book of Proverbs grew over time, the intended audience also changed. It is possible that some of the smaller units were written as part of an educational program to train young sons to serve in government and to be able to successfully navigate and converse in the royal court. Literacy was largely the privilege of the elite; outside of religious and political circles, few would have been privy to the original book of Proverbs.

In time, the wisdom perspective became more and more popular in religious communities throughout Israel. This was especially the case in the Second Temple

period, when many more wisdom books were written and disseminated throughout the Jewish communities of faith. The seminal viewpoint of Proverbs had by this time worked its way into the hearts and minds of all the people and had become fully democratized. Every citizen could embrace Wisdom, love her, and commit to fully walk her path—including rich and poor, man and woman, slave and free. No doubt Proverbs by Jesus' time was as widely read and cherished as the Psalter or Isaiah or any other book sacred to the Jews.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The Hebrew Bible can be divided into three large sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Writings include the wisdom books such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Songs. Other books in this collection are the Psalms, Lamentations, some historical works, and Daniel. In the Septuagint and English versions, the poetical books are in the center of the Old Testament, with the prophetic books at the end. The Hebrew Bible, however, ends with the Writings.

In the order of the Hebrew Bible, the book of Proverbs, which ends with the exemplary woman of Proverbs 31, neatly gives way to a historical example of just this sort of woman as recorded in the book of Ruth (2:11; 3:11). This in turn gives way to the Song of Songs, which explores in full measure the wise choice of the sage in selecting the woman of great worth as his lifelong partner in making a satisfying life.

The Masoretic Text. Between the fall of ancient Rome and the rise of the early Middle Ages (roughly AD 500–800), Christian Europe experienced its "dark ages." But Jewish scholarship flourished, and great advances were made by the Masoretes—scholars who preserved, stabilized, enhanced, and transmitted the Hebrew text.

In the early stages of the written Hebrew language, vowels were not written. The vowels were learned through orally reciting the text. (This is why the correct pronunciation of God's name YHWH has been lost—because the Jews stopped speaking it for fear of violating the commandment not to misuse God's name—see Exod 20:7 and Deut 5:11.) The Masoretes added vowels in the form of dots (points) above, below, and within the consonants. (Some consonants, such as Waw and Yodh, are also sometimes used as vowels.) These points indicate how the word is *vocalized*—how to pronounce it when reading. When a scholar suggests changing these, it is called *repointing* (e.g., see note on 27:25).

The vast majority of Hebrew words are built on a three-consonant root. Consider the English word "song." This word has three consonants that define its basic meaning, "s_ng." Supplying a vowel (such as "a," "i," "o," or "u") produces a noun or verb associated with the basic meaning of the root, that is, a musical performance with words. Depending how the Masoretes added vowels, a group of Hebrew consonants becomes a noun (as with English "s*o*ng") or verb ("s*i*ng") and so on. The many words that can be built on the same root are called *cognates.* For example, the note on 3:13 refers to several cognates from the same root (see also note on 29:5). Sometimes translations differ in their identification of a word's root and thus its meaning. In 26:10, for example, the NLT and KJV greatly differ due to identifying different roots for the same word (see note).

The Masoretes also divided the verses in Proverbs in halves, indicating the primary structure of each verse. In this commentary, a slash is used to represent this division (e.g., "The fear of Yahweh is discipline for wisdom / And before glory comes humility"; see note on 15:33). In addition, the Masoretes made marginal notes in the text, suggesting alternative readings where they believed the text had suffered a copyist's error or had been damaged in some way. "What is written" (the suspicious original) is called the *Kethiv*; "what to read" (their suggested alternative) is called the *Qere.* It is normal practice for scholars to follow Qere. Many Kethiv-Qere issues are not noted in this commentary; Qere is simply followed (compare note on 16:19).

The result of the Masoretes' work is called the Masoretic Text (MT). The best representative complete copy of their work extant today is Codex Leningradensis, which dates to about AD 1000.

The Ancient Versions. The Old Testament had been translated in antiquity into many different languages. Each of these versions witness to the original Hebrew text from which it was made, called its *Vorlage.* The Jewish Targum is an Aramaic translation; the Vulgate was a widely used Latin translation. There are also the Peshitta (Syriac translation), and, most importantly, the Old Greek translation, sometimes called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX, from the Roman numeral for "seventy"—the traditional number of Greek translators).

When struggling with a difficult Hebrew text, often scholars will employ the Septuagint to suggest a different *Vorlage* that resolves the difficulty. Unfortunately, it is likely that the Greek translator struggled with the same difficult verse as his modern-day counterpart! As such, the usefulness of the Septuagint in shedding light on particularly troublesome verses is almost negligible. Of course, easily understood and sensible verses have no need of "correction." Thus, the Septuagint is most useful for only mildly difficult verses. Even here, the Septuagint is often of marginal value, since it is, after all, only a translation, and the translator had his own style and agenda. For example, the Septuagint often seeks to facilitate the text, to make it flow better, sometimes by *interpolating,* i.e., adding explanatory material (a word here, a phrase there; see notes on 2:6; 12:12; 13:15; 19:29). The Septuagint exhibits a different macrostructure from the Masoretic Text, seemingly translated from a *Vorlage* predating the final form of Proverbs's various parts. (See the commentary on the Epilogue, 30:1–31:31.)

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. The critical text of the thousand-year-old Codex Leningradensis is published as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS); it continues the Masoretes' work in suggesting alternative readings to suspicious texts, called *conjectural emendations.* No two ancient manuscripts are identical. Errors of transmission plagued every ancient text. For example, when two instances of the same letter were juxtaposed, sometimes a scribe accidentally skipped one, and it was not transmitted to subsequent copies. This is called *haplography* (see note on 16:22). Or, perhaps a sleepy scribe might unintentionally write the same word(s) more than once (*dittography*)—see notes on 10:10 and 16:16. In such cases, BHS suggests ways to "restore" the text to its precorrupted state.

Suspect texts put scholars between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, if it

is in fact a misprint, then the text is damaged and any attempt to read it in a straightforward manner will result in a meaning unintended by its author. On the other hand, if the text is baffling yet perfectly preserved, and the commentator mistakes it for an error and "corrects" it, the result will be an artificial verse of the scholar's own imagination—and *not* the biblical text! For example, Driver (1951:191-192) emends three out of four words of 28:2, generating a completely different verse (cf. notes on 21:4; 22:5, 10). Waltke and Garrett spin out nuance and meaning from a word in 28:6 that may be a simple pointing error (see note).

Let us also look at 26:23. The Hebrew reads "burning lips," which NLT rejects in favor of the emendation "smooth lips" (see note). If it is in fact an error, then to assign a meaning of "a kiss of warm friendship or love" is to spin out implications on a misspelled typo (Whybray 1994a:378). But Waltke (2005:362) emends the text to "smooth"—then proceeds to make commentary on his own invented proverb, which is *not* before him on the page of his Hebrew text! Only one of these two readings is correct, but there is no unequivocal way to decide which. Errors of transmission or damage due to mishap have done irreversible harm to the text's clarity, much to the dismay of the community of faith. But scholars of the church such as Whybray or Waltke, continuing the work of the Masoretes, must decide such matters.

A number of criteria are at issue in making these decisions. First, the unchanged proverb should be confusing to read, but not nonsensical. If the verse were unintelligible, no emendation would be valid, since any proposal would be reflective of the scholar's imagination, not the Hebrew text (see note on 19:7). The smaller the proposed change, the more persuasive it is. A word found only once in the Hebrew Bible (called a *hapax legomenon*) is often emendation bait, since it may be simply a misspelling of a more common word. (But sometimes these must be left untranslated; see note on 29:21.) In addition, words of similar spelling—even cognates from other languages (Aramaic, Arabic, etc.)—when substituted for the suspicious one may yield very good sense. It is also helpful if the versions (like LXX) provide an alternative reading that confirms the conjecture. Some well-understood mechanism of error (e.g., haplography, dittography) should be suggested to explain how the error arose.

In the end, the scholar's judgment is a matter of taste and discretion; textual criticism is an art, not a science. There is no mechanical or automatic way to identify an error and how to correct it. In this commentary, the predilection is to give Masoretic Text the benefit of the doubt in the absence of compelling data to the contrary.

LITERARY STYLE

Poetics.

Parallelism. The distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetry is its parallelism. Virtually every verse in Proverbs is a pair of lines (cola), the second line usually relating to the first and carrying its thought further (Kugel 1981:52). There are various ways the two cola may relate to each other.

Each colon states its case in either a positive or a negative sense. For example, speaking of the wickedness of fools and their comeuppance is negative; applauding the wise or righteous is positive. A verse with a negative and positive line—a "parallelism of opposites" (Longman 2002:41)—is called *antithetic* (see note on 12:12). Examples of this are as follows: "A wise child brings joy to a father; / a foolish child brings grief to a mother" (10:1); "Lazy people are soon poor; / hard workers get rich" (10:4); "The godly care for their animals, / but the wicked are always cruel" (12:10).

Synonymous proverbs emphatically reword in the second line what the first line asserts: "The way of the godly leads to life; / that path does not lead to death" (12:28); "Evil people will bow before good people; / the wicked will bow at the gates of the godly" (14:19). *Comparative* proverbs complete the thought of the first line in the second: "There is a path before each person that seems right, / but it ends in death" (14:12); "The poor are despised even by their neighbors, / while the rich have many 'friends'" (14:20); "The LORD is watching everywhere, / keeping his eye on both the evil and the good" (15:3). *Emblematic* proverbs set a symbol parallel with its referent, as with each verse of 27:17-22: "As iron sharpens iron, / so a friend sharpens a friend" (27:17); "As a face is reflected in water, / so the heart reflects the real person" (27:19); "Lazy people irritate their employers, / like vinegar to the teeth or smoke in the eyes" (10:26). *Consequential* proverbs set two lines in logical sequence: "When the wicked die, their hopes die with them, / for they rely on their own feeble strength" (11:7); "A king detests wrongdoing, / for his rule is built on justice" (16:12). *Focusing* proverbs move from the general case in the first line to the specific in the second: "Punishment is made for mockers, / and the backs of fools are made to be beaten" (19:29).

Pithiness, imagery, wordplay. Hebrew poetry strives to say much with few words; it is crisp, brief, terse (Longman 1987:121; for examples, see 25:18; 29:17). Thus, it characteristically lacks particles and helpful modifiers, often leaving to the reader the job of supplying missing words. Proverbs may express a word in the first line, which is "gapped" or "elided" in the second line, or vice versa. This is called *elision* or *ellipsis* (see 10:23; 11:10)—yet another way the proverb remains pithy (Longman 1987:122). For example, 14:14 reads in Hebrew, "The faithless of heart will be sated with his ways / And a good man from his own." The second line is meant to be read with the first line supplying necessary verbiage: "A good man [will be sated] from his own [ways]."

Another attribute of biblical poetry is its use of imagery and figures of speech. For example, Proverbs presents the image of the two paths to signify two life directions and two lifestyles. Throughout Proverbs many images are utilized that forcefully convey its overarching themes, such as the image of Lady Wisdom (ch 8).

Various figures of speech are also employed in the book of Proverbs. *Merism* is the juxtaposition of two opposites to convey the whole, such as "day and night" or "heaven and earth." Another example is, "The rich and poor have this in common: / The LORD made them both" (22:2)—i.e., he made everyone. *Synecdoche* replaces a broader term with a narrower or vice versa (such as "bread"

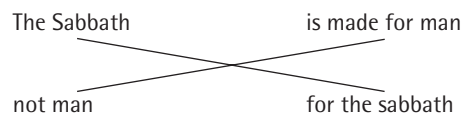
for "food"). In 30:4, "breath" (NLT, "wind") might be a synecdoche for "life" (see note). *Metaphor* (see 30:5; note on 14:14) compares two things to suggest a common trait: "Wisdom is a tree of life" (3:18); "He is a shield" (30:5). Metaphor is another device that makes proverbs terse; a simple comparison conveys much with few words. If "God is a shield" were restated in nonmetaphorical speech, how many words would be required to unpack all that the metaphor implies? *Simile* is like a metaphor, but uses "like" or "as." Examples of this in Proverbs are as follows: "Poverty will pounce on you like a bandit" (6:11); "A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping" (19:13); "They have teeth like swords" (30:14). *Allegory* is an extended metaphor, such as in 27:23-27, which treats shepherds and flocks, but allegorically addresses kings and kingdoms (see also 5:15-23).

Other poetic devices are employed in Proverbs. Take note of the use of *paronomasia* (punning and wordplay). This takes similar- or identical-sounding words and juxtaposes them to ornament the maxim and to add amusement, and perhaps to help in memorization. (For examples, see 6:27; 13:20; 26:10, 18; 31:27.) A single word may also have two meanings (double entendre). Sometimes when two senses are possible, both are meant to be considered (13:7; 17:17; 19:22).

"What is the effect of a proverb as we ponder it? Most emphatically, a good proverb is not designed to put an end to thought on a subject but instead to stimulate further thought and application. The proverb is a catalyst to reflection" (Ryken and Longman 1993:277). Ryken's salient point should be kept in mind when struggling with difficult verses. For example, what is the meaning of 22:6, "Direct your children onto the right path, / and when they are older, they will not leave it"? The ramifications of that proverb alone require another whole book. This commentary is meant to help stimulate thought, not to give the definitive answers to the meanings of every proverb.

Literary Structuring of the Proverbs. Various identifiable devices are implemented in Proverbs to help organize and group units of text. One noted above is the *acrostic* poem. The Woman of Virtue (31:10-31) is comprised of 22 verses, each beginning with a successive Hebrew letter. This identifies the poem as a unit of text. Other units in Proverbs, though not alphabetic acrostics, seem modeled upon the form and also should be approached as units (e.g., 2:1-22; 27:1-22).

Another way to bind together verses into units is the device of the *chiasmus* or *chiasm*. The word derives from the Greek letter chi (X), because it compares the first element of a unit with the last, and the second to the second-to-last, forming a conceptual "X." For example, consider "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath." This may be analyzed as follows:



One may diagram the sentence as A B B′ A′. More complex chiasms include many other elements. Such a complex chiasm no longer looks like an X. In these cases, the chiasm is better represented in this manner:

A. the fool and folly (*'ewil* [TH191A, ZH211]) 12:15-16
  B. concealing (*kasah* [TH3680, ZH4059]) by the prudent (*'arum* [TH6175, ZH6874]) 12:16
    C. the truth (*'emunah* [TH530, ZH575]) 12:17
      D. the righteous (*tsedeq* [TH6664, ZH7406]) and the witness of falsehoods (*sheqer* [TH8267, ZH9214]) 12:17
        E. tongue of the wise brings healing 12:18
        E′. lips of truth are established forever 12:19
      D′. the righteous (*tsaddiq* [TH6662, ZH7404]) and Yahweh's detesting of falsehoods (*sheqer*) 12:21-22
    C′. Yahweh's delight in truth (*'emunah*) 12:22
  B′. the prudent (*'arum*) conceals (*kasah*) 12:23
A′. the fool and folly (*'iwweleth* [TH200, ZH222]) 12:23

Often, such an arrangement is designed to highlight its central material; the center verse of a unit enjoys pride of place even when not chiastic (for examples, see notes on 11:19 and 12:4).

The book also binds verses together into larger blocks of text by utilizing key words. For example, 16:1-9 employs the divine name Yahweh eight times; 16:10-15 repeatedly uses the word "king." These verses are not together accidentally, but are obviously grouped according to these key words. Many such key words are used throughout the book, which is sometimes obscured in English translation. For example, 15:29-32 uses the root *shm'* [TH8085, ZH9048] four times in four verses, glossed as "hears," "news," and "listen" in the NLT. Sometimes key words bind a unit tightly; sometimes they are merely suggestive.

Inclusion is a method of creating a unit's boundary by beginning and ending with a similar word or phrase. For example, the Hebrew of 1:2 reads *lada'ath khokmah umusar* [TH1847/2451/4148, ZH1981/2683/4592] (lit., "for knowledge, wisdom, and discipline")—three words precisely duplicated in 1:7, delineating 1:2-7 as a unit. Another example is found in 3:13-18, where the first word (*'ashre* [TH835A, ZH897]) and last word (*'ashar* [TH833A, ZH887]) come from the root *'shr,* "joyful, happy," enclosing the unit of text.

Sometimes a word occurs in two successive verses not to bind them together but to form a seam between them. This may be illustrated from prose. Ruth 1:19 in Hebrew uses "came to Bethlehem" twice, the first to end a paragraph, the second to begin a new one. Proverbs 5:15-19 ends with *shagah* [TH7686, ZH8706] (go astray), forming a seam with 5:20-23, which is also bounded by *shagah.* Sometimes two successive units will begin (or end) with the same word or phrase (a "head-head" or "tail-tail" pattern). For example, 8:5-11 and 8:12-16 both begin with "good judgment." Another instrument is the bridge (also called the *janus*), a verse or unit that relates both to what precedes and follows (e.g., 22:16).

Of course, material bounded by inclusion or similar devices ideally will treat a common theme. If a hypothetical inclusion is inferred but the enclosed proverbs

COMMENTARY ON

Proverbs

◆ I. The Prologue (1:1–9:18)

A. Title (1:1)

These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel.

NOTES

1:1 *Solomon.* The consonants of Solomon's name (*shelomoh* [TH8010, ZH8976]) have numerical values that add up to 375 (*sh* = 300, *l* = 30, *m* = 40, *h* = 5; also equal to 5^3 x 3), which is the number of verses in the first anthology of Solomon's proverbs (10:1–22:16). This correspondence is likely the product of later work in the book. This feature shows an order that transcends the individual proverbs themselves.

COMMENTARY

The title names the historical author, a typical practice for late-second and early-first-millennium Wisdom Literature (Kitchen 1977:95). Steinmann finds in his study of Proverbs's vocabulary, thought, and modes of expression that chapters 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29 were all authored by the same person. There is no reason to suppose that the Prologue was not part of the whole book from the beginning (Steinmann 2000:659-674).

The first nine chapters of Proverbs constitute its Prologue. This initial anthology of compositions is where the theological foundation is laid and the issues are framed for the remainder of the book—the "proverbs of Solomon" that begin in 10:1. It is here that the book unequivocally establishes its Yahweh-centric orientation. Wisdom is a matter of reverencing God and learning how to live a righteous life before him. The book is first of all instruction material for young people to help guard them from beguiling influences and point them in the right direction for life. What is at issue in this material is the soul, the life, the ultimate destiny of a person. Abundant and eternal life comes by a relationship with Yahweh in the context of a community of faith. By this criterion, Proverbs is of course also profitable and beneficial for every teachable soul to read and internalize. Hear, all you who are weary and burdened; take up the discipline of wisdom and learn from it, and you shall find wisdom for your souls (3:1-2).

The Prologue is composed of eight major compositions or poems (plus a one-verse title), as shown:

Title (1:1)
Opening (1:2-7)
Father's warning about the gang (1:8-19)
Wisdom's call; who listens? (1:20-33)
Two paths (2:1-22)
Wisdom, Yahweh, and life (3:1–4:27)
Wisdom and pleasure (5:1–7:27)
Wisdom, Yahweh, and life (8:1-36)
Wisdom's banquet; who listens? (9:1-18)

"Wisdom speaks for herself at the beginning (1:20-33) and at the end (8:1-36; 9:1-6; also 9:11-12?). In between, the sage formulates his own teaching, subordinate to that of Wisdom" (Skehan 1971:1). The Opening promises to every tractable person a disciplined mind, which will be able to distinguish right from wrong in various circumstances. The next section portrays one potentially attractive threat to a juvenile: peer pressure. Another evil voice is the loose woman, whose sales pitch veils her fatal reward. Opposite her is the wisdom of God, personified as a woman, that is transmitted by the wise parents and calls the inexperienced to be savvy and to fear Yahweh. Two paths are set before a young person—with two destinations. Some voices call to one, the parents call to the other. The way of wisdom is guarded by Yahweh and leads to life. Contrary to this is the seduction of the loose woman, perhaps the greatest peril the young man will face.

After describing all the wiles of the loose woman, Lady Wisdom is given voice, sets her banquet, and invites all interested in learning to dine. Then the meal begins in the rest of the book.

◆ B. Opening (1:2–7)

2 Their purpose is to teach people
wisdom and discipline,
to help them understand the
insights of the wise.
3 Their purpose is to teach people
to live disciplined and successful
lives,
to help them do what is right, just,
and fair.
4 These proverbs will give insight to the
simple,
knowledge and discernment to the
young.
5 Let the wise listen to these proverbs
and become even wiser.
Let those with understanding
receive guidance
6 by exploring the meaning in these
proverbs and parables,
the words of the wise and their
riddles.
7 Fear of the LORD is the foundation of
true knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and
discipline.

NOTES

1:2 ***Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.*** Lit., "For knowledge, wisdom, and discipline / To understand sayings of those with understanding."

1:3 ***disciplined.*** *Musar* [TH4148, ZH4592], as in 1:2.

1:4 ***insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.*** The "simpletons" or the "naive" are closely linked with the "youth." The term for simple, *petha'yim* [TH6612, ZH7343], is similar to the Hebrew word for "open"—their minds are open, empty, unfurnished rooms needing to be filled with knowledge; they are open-minded, that is, open to anything, easily influenced, impressionable. Youths have not yet made a commitment to a path in life. Proverbs promises that their needs will be met if they will only read. See Waltke's discussion on *petha'yim* (2004:111).

1:5-6 The Opening claims another benefit. The meaning of proverbs (*mashal* [TH4912, ZH5442]), the enigmatic and counter-intuitive lessons of the sage, will become perspicuous—the "light will go on" and the reader will "get it."

Jesus spoke in parables, and his disciples did not understand. Later and privately he explained them. In a similar way, read Proverbs and you will experience the "Aha!" of comprehending what those wiser than you have counseled but until now have not understood. Read and be guided onto the path of wisdom. Ideas and locutions with elusive signification will become clear. But it is not only youths and simpletons who benefit by reading: The person of understanding who is already wise will grow in learning and counsel by heeding Proverbs (Cascante Gómez 1998:408).

1:5 ***Let the wise listen.*** Note the imperative mood; this is a command.

COMMENTARY

The opening to the book of Proverbs quickly sets the tone for the book and frames the issues. Proverbs 1:2 begins with the words *da'ath khokmah umusar* [TH1847/2451/4148, ZH1981/2683/4592] (knowledge, wisdom, and discipline), which are repeated in 1:7—an inclusion that bounds 1:2-7 as a unit and serves as the book's opening. All who desire to learn wisdom are invited to enter into the world of Proverbs and learn. Those who do not are already condemned as fools. The Opening clearly identifies wisdom with a religious life, a life that acknowledges God.

Note the rich wisdom vocabulary. No fewer than eight verbs and at least sixteen nouns are employed to communicate that "these proverbs were written for you to become wise" (Tepox 2001:216-222). This lavish use of language invites the reader to enter and partake of the rich meal prepared therein.

Knowledge is introduced here as anything but an abstract philosophy. This is akin to James 3:13-18:

> *If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*

The book of Proverbs is not for those who desire a philosophical explanation of the world. It is for those who want to live an upright life in the community. Wise

instruction is immediately connected with the skill of living in community. Wisdom is the art of justice, of playing fair, of doing right. Knowledgeable people are those who behave appropriately in society.

In the book of Proverbs, there are three kinds of people: those who love wisdom, those who are uncommitted, and those who despise wisdom. The nomenclature of the first category includes the wise (*khakam* [TH2450A, ZH2682]), the understanding (*nabon,* Niphal participle of *bin* [TH995B, ZH1067]), the faithful (*khasid* [TH2623A, ZH2883]), the good (*tobim* [TH2896, ZH3202]; cf. 2:20), the righteous (*tsaddiq* [TH6662, ZH7404]), the upright (*yesharim* [TH3477A, ZH3838]), and the blameless (*tamim* [TH8549, ZH9459]).

The uncommitted, who are not clearly on one path or another, to whom appeals are needed, include the child (*beni* [TH1121/2967.1, ZH1201/3276]; lit., "my son"), the youth (*na'ar* [TH5288, ZH5853]), and the naive (*petha'yim* [TH6612, ZH7343]; see note on 1:4). "Only *petha'yim* believe everything they're told! / The prudent carefully consider their steps" (14:15). "If you punish a mocker, the *petha'yim* become wise; / if you instruct the wise, they will be all the wiser" (21:11). "The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the *petha'yim*" (Ps 19:7). The *petha'yim* need good teaching most of all. As the *petha'yim* learn prudence and knowledge, they cease to be empty and open and are filled with wisdom. Children and youth (*na'ar*) require discipline. "Don't fail to discipline your children. They won't die if you spank them. Physical discipline may well save them from death" (23:13-14). Good teaching and imposed discipline fill up the simple with wisdom and provoke the youth to choose it.

Those who hate instruction include the fool (*'ewil* [TH191A, ZH211]), sinner (*khatta'im* [TH2400, ZH2629]), fool (*kesil* [TH3684, ZH4067]), scoffer (*lets* [TH3887A, ZH4370]), evil (*ra'* [TH7451A, ZH8273]), alien (*nokri* [TH5237A, ZH5799]), wicked (*rasha'* [TH7563A, ZH8401]), treacherous (*bogedim* [TH898, ZH953]), stranger (*zarah* [TH2214C, ZH2424]), sluggard (*'atsel* [TH6102A, ZH6789]), adulteress (*zonah* [TH2181B, ZH2390]), and transgressor (*pesha'* [TH6588, ZH7322]). "No harm comes to the godly, but the *resha'im* have their fill of trouble" (12:21). "*'Ewil* think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others" (12:15).

Lovers of wisdom heed instruction and grow ever wiser, haters of discipline reject the good and perish, and the undecided could go either way. Haters of wisdom do not listen to good counsel, and Proverbs has nothing to say to them.

Having listed the benefits of reading and the classes of people whom Proverbs serves, two great alternatives for human life are spelled out (1:7). On the one hand, the beginning of knowledge is to fear Yahweh. On the other hand, fools despise the essence of what Proverbs offers. This choice is before the reader: Will you revere Yahweh, or will you scorn knowledge? To be wise is to conduct oneself equitably in society and reverently before God; fools care nothing for this and thus are contemptible. The gauntlet is thrown down; the line is drawn in the sand—what kind of a person will you be? If a fool, then stop reading Proverbs—and this commentary—and go live your short life of folly. If a wise person, then read on and benefit.

◆ C. Father's Warning about the Gang (1:8–19)

8 My child,* listen when your father corrects you.
Don't neglect your mother's instruction.
9 What you learn from them will crown you with grace
and be a chain of honor around your neck.

10 My child, if sinners entice you, turn your back on them!
11 They may say, "Come and join us.
Let's hide and kill someone!
Just for fun, let's ambush the innocent!
12 Let's swallow them alive, like the grave*;
let's swallow them whole, like those who go down to the pit of death.
13 Think of the great things we'll get!
We'll fill our houses with all the stuff we take.
14 Come, throw in your lot with us;
we'll all share the loot."

15 My child, don't go along with them!
Stay far away from their paths.
16 They rush to commit evil deeds.
They hurry to commit murder.
17 If a bird sees a trap being set,
it knows to stay away.
18 But these people set an ambush for themselves;
they are trying to get themselves killed.
19 Such is the fate of all who are greedy for money;
it robs them of life.

1:8 Hebrew *My son;* also in 1:10, 15. **1:12** Hebrew *like Sheol.*

NOTES

1:8 ***listen.*** The appeal to listen (1:8-9) precedes the description of the gang's solicitation.

instruction. Heb., *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] (law). The only "law" in Proverbs is the parents' heartfelt and impassioned entreaty to heed wisdom. Proverbs's *torah* (like Moses's) has five major divisions (see "Outline" in the Introduction).

1:9 ***crown you with grace.*** Egyptians wore pendants of the goddess Ma'at about the neck, symbolizing "eternal life" (Waltke 2004:188). Perhaps this is a parallel with wisdom's benefits.

1:10 ***My child.*** Precisely, "my son" throughout.

entice you. Lit., "attempt to persuade" (Clines and Gunn 1978:23).

1:11 ***Just for fun.*** Lit., "Without cause." This is the same term as Job 1:9, lit., "Does Job serve God *for nothing?*" and Job 2:3, "You urged me to harm him *without cause.*"

1:14 ***we'll all share the loot.*** Lit., "There shall be one purse to all of us." The solidarity and unity of the gang is highlighted.

1:15-16 ***Stay far away. . . . They rush.*** The Hebrew uses "feet" in each of these two phrases as a synecdoche for life direction.

1:17 ***bird.*** Lit., "possessor of wing." This is parallel to 1:19; the "possessor" of violent gain is ensnared and robbed of life.

being set. Lit., "being scattered." Driver reads *mezorah* [TH2219, ZH2430] (scattered) as *mezurah* [TH2115, ZH2318] (pressed) with the versions (cf. Obad 1:7). The verb would then refer to the action of springing a trap: "In vain is the net drawn tight" (1951:173-174). The bird will escape if the net is not yet drawn tight. However, the action of "spreading" a net is similar to that of "scattering" seed, consistent with *mezorah* as in the MT.

COMMENTARY

After the Opening's verses, the first example of wisdom's challenge is a warning against the seductive gang. The first wise voice is the father who pleads with his son to stand firm. This is followed by a description of the gang, which speaks of blood no less than three times. Wisdom avoids violence and does not exploit the helpless.

The first voice heard in the book (besides the parents') belongs to the gang. The gang offers camaraderie. They share one purse and have a common lot; they act as a brotherhood. In addition, they promise riches; precious wealth, spoil from their victims, belongs to the fraternity. There is a third seduction—the thrill of possessing and wielding the power of life and death. They lie in wait for murder; they identify themselves with the power of the grave and the pit. They are hell's agents, grim reapers who swallow the innocent alive—death incarnate. This excitement and pleasure beguiles and enlivens the band and calls to the youth to join.

The wise parents also appeal to the youth, claiming that the gang cannot deliver on its promises. As birds are ensnared by the invisible net, so the gangsters cannot see the trap they have set for themselves. They lie in wait for their own blood. In the end, the grave swallows them, and the pit takes them.

In Proverbs, consideration of a thing's end is wisdom. To see where a path leads is to discriminate whether it is fit for travel. Consider the end of the gang and be wise. For all its promises, it ultimately cannot deliver anything but death. The voice of peer pressure requires the antidote of parental instruction. In opposition to the gang, true wisdom is a garland of grace and a chain of honor around the neck. Choose this!

◆ D. Wisdom's Call; Who Listens? (1:20-33)

20 Wisdom shouts in the streets.
She cries out in the public square.
21 She calls to the crowds along the main street,
to those gathered in front of the city gate:
22 "How long, you simpletons,
will you insist on being simpleminded?
How long will you mockers relish your mocking?
How long will you fools hate knowledge?
23 Come and listen to my counsel.
I'll share my heart with you
and make you wise.
24 "I called you so often, but you wouldn't come.
I reached out to you, but you paid no attention.
25 You ignored my advice
and rejected the correction I offered.
26 So I will laugh when you are in trouble!
I will mock you when disaster overtakes you—
27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster engulfs you like a cyclone,
and anguish and distress overwhelm you.
28 "When they cry for help, I will not answer.
Though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me.
29 For they hated knowledge
and chose not to fear the LORD.
30 They rejected my advice
and paid no attention when I corrected them.

31 Therefore, they must eat the bitter
fruit of living their own way,
choking on their own schemes.
32 For simpletons turn away from me—
to death.
Fools are destroyed by their own
complacency.
33 But all who listen to me will live in
peace,
untroubled by fear of harm."

NOTES

1:20 ***Wisdom.*** Heb., *khokmoth* [TH2454, ZH2684], a plural form rather than the singular form (*khokmah* [TH2451, ZH2683]) used of Wisdom in 8:1. It is a feminine plural parsed as a singular. This is similar to the plural *'elohim* [TH430, ZH466] for God or the masculine singular *behemoth* [TH929, ZH989] (Job 40:15). She, Wisdom, is a larger-than-life single entity, omnipresent and inescapable—the matrix of life.

shouts . . . cries out. Wisdom is personified as a woman. Here, her evangelistic message is portrayed as impossible to ignore: She cries aloud, gives her voice, calls, and speaks. She delivers her loud appeal in the most public places—the heights, the city square, and the gates (1:21). To avoid Wisdom one must shut one's eyes and stop one's ears and commit oneself to folly.

1:22 ***insist on being simpleminded.*** Lit., "love simplicity?"

mockers . . . fools. The mocker or scoffer (*lets* [TH3887A, ZH4370]) and the fool (*kesil* [TH3684, ZH4067]) are committed to a self-destructive path. They are part of the anti-wisdom complex, the company of those who despise the teachings found in the book of Proverbs. "Anyone who rebukes a *lets* will get an insult in return. Anyone who corrects the wicked will get hurt. So don't bother correcting *lets;* they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you" (9:7-8). See 26:1-12 for verses that pertain to the *kesil.*

1:23 ***I'll share my heart with you.*** Lit., "I will pour out my Spirit upon you." *Ruakh* [TH7307, ZH8120] (spirit) could be glossed "wrath" (cf. Judg 8:3). Emerton suggests *ruakh* connotes "utterance" (1968:612).

1:24 ***I called you so often.*** Each segment begins with a reference to calling. Wisdom calls upon the city to listen in the first two (1:20, 24); in the third, fools call to her after it is too late to save them (1:28). She urgently pleads with mockers and fools to listen, but they refuse.

1:25 ***advice.*** Waltke argues that "prophet, priest, and sage all speak with divine authority" (1987:65-78)—this is "advice" necessary to your soul.

1:26 ***I will laugh.*** She laughs at the folly of fools who bring about their own easily avoidable calamity. Laughter in the face of future events also characterizes the woman of virtue (31:25).

1:27 ***overwhelm you.*** Folly results in devastation like a tsunami. Wisdom has sent out the storm warning; the sirens have blared, but to no avail. Fools ignored her. Now the wave has swept over them, and any drowning cries for help go unanswered, since nothing can be done.

1:28 ***When they cry.*** The first word in Hebrew, *'az* [TH227, ZH255], is a time marker that often starts a new section. For the third time, the verb *qara'* [TH7121, ZH7924] (to call) is employed (see 1:20, 24). Finally, fools call upon Wisdom, but she has gone.

1:29 ***to fear the LORD.*** For the second time in ch 1, the benchmark for wisdom—the fear of Yahweh—is advised. To choose not to revere Yahweh is to hate knowledge. The wisdom of Proverbs is anything but secular; true wisdom is found in one's religious attitude toward the true and living God.

1:30 ***corrected.*** Three times Wisdom mentions counsel and correction (1:23, 25, 30). Fools and mockers do not wish to change; they hate to be rebuked. Thus the very thing that could have saved them they reject—and this has a humorous side. It is like a man sitting on the branch of a tree and sawing it off, not realizing he will fall. The branch is Wisdom's reproof, and the fall is final. On the way down, the fool cries, "Help!"—but it is too late because the branch is sawed off!

1:32 ***simpletons . . . Fools.*** The words *petha'yim* [TH6612, ZH7343] and *kesil* [TH3684, ZH4067] are again mentioned in the summation (see 1:22). The *petha'yim* have remained wayward, and the *kesil* have continued in self-delusion with a false sense of security.

COMMENTARY

Having been entreated by the voice of the gang, the reader now hears the call of Wisdom in three segments. "She calls to the crowds" (1:21), saying, "I called you so often, but you wouldn't come" (1:24). Finally, fools in distress call for help, but Wisdom will not answer them. The time to heed her call is today—to avoid the calamity of folly tomorrow.

Wisdom is here personified in the image of a woman. The commentary on chapter 8 discusses this at greater length. At this point, she is not yet associated with the wisdom of Yahweh, nor with creation. However, she is related to the community and the city; with an in-your-face approach, she makes known the path of knowledge. The text suddenly gives her voice after the wise father summarizes the fate of the gangster, and her warnings are immediately followed by the father's further admonition to listen: "My child, listen to what I say. . . . Tune your ears to wisdom" (2:1-2). Wisdom seems to be the personification of the parents' admonitions and warnings. She is the antidote to the gang. Everywhere the child turns there is seduction to folly, but also echoes of lessons learned at home. (See commentary on 3:13-20.)

Wisdom is not esoteric and cryptic, hidden knowledge known only to the initiated. Rather, wisdom is everywhere! Children are raised with it. It shouts from the highest place in the city; it guards the gate; it is unavoidable. The father's words are at one with reality and the facts of life, which are encountered every day. To not listen, then, is an active choice. The fool *chooses* folly. The mocker is engaged in misinterpreting every fact encountered from the moment he wakes until he returns to sleep at night.

The reason for this is that the simpleton *loves* being simple, the mocker *relishes* mocking, and the fool *hates* knowledge (1:22). Elsewhere Wisdom claims, "All who hate me love death" (8:36). The primary motive of a human being is love; people pursue their hearts' desires. Those in the anti-wisdom complex have hearts that love folly, love naiveté, and, ultimately, love death. The wise love wisdom (4:6).

Every person's defining moment is religious; it is whether or not they revere the Lord. Proverbs envisions a dynamic and vital relationship between the sage and the God of Israel. Wisdom ultimately is a gift from God, so learning a set of truisms does not automatically make one wise. Wisdom is learning the precepts of societal living before the face of the living God. Fools choose to reject this and thus lose any hope of acquiring a realistic understanding of the world.

◆ E. Two Paths (2:1-22)

1 My child,* listen to what I say,
and treasure my commands.
2 Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
3 Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
4 Search for them as you would for silver;
seek them like hidden treasures.
5 Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD,
and you will gain knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD grants wisdom!
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
7 He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
8 He guards the paths of the just
and protects those who are faithful to him.
9 Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,
and you will find the right way to go.
10 For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will fill you with joy.
11 Wise choices will watch over you.
Understanding will keep you safe.
12 Wisdom will save you from evil people,
from those whose words are twisted.
13 These men turn from the right way to walk down dark paths.
14 They take pleasure in doing wrong,
and they enjoy the twisted ways of evil.
15 Their actions are crooked,
and their ways are wrong.
16 Wisdom will save you from the immoral woman,
from the seductive words of the promiscuous woman.
17 She has abandoned her husband
and ignores the covenant she made before God.
18 Entering her house leads to death;
it is the road to the grave.*
19 The man who visits her is doomed.
He will never reach the paths of life.
20 Follow the steps of good men instead,
and stay on the paths of the righteous.
21 For only the godly will live in the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it.
22 But the wicked will be removed from the land,
and the treacherous will be uprooted.

2:1 Hebrew *My son.* **2:18** Hebrew *to the spirits of the dead.*

NOTES

2:1 ***My child, listen to what I say.*** Lit., "My son, if you receive my words." This introduces a new section. Proverbs 2:1 and 2:3-4 each begin with the particle *'im* [TH518, ZH561], often glossed "if." *If* you take my words . . . *if* you call to understanding . . . *if* you seek it. Proverbs 2:5, 9 each begin with *'az* [TH227, ZH255] (then). *If* the child heeds the call of wisdom, *then* the specified results follow. Proverbs 2:1-4 sets up the condition, 2:5-9 the benefits.

commands. As *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] was the mother's instruction in 1:8, so here "commandment" (*mitswah* [TH4687, ZH5184], as in "bar mitzvah" or "son of the law") is the father's earnest appeal. Language that elsewhere in Scripture refers to the Mosaic law here invokes parental guidance. This is part and parcel of Wisdom Literature—not the heavy-handed thunder from Sinai, but the reasoned persuasion of trusted parents is what protects the child.

2:2 ***concentrate.*** Precisely, "incline (*tatteh* [TH5186, ZH5742]) your heart."

2:3 ***Cry out for insight.*** Lit., "If for insight you cry out." The youth is expected to "cry out" and to "give voice" for wisdom—reflecting the actions of Wisdom herself (1:20-21).

2:4 ***Search for them as you would for silver.*** Lit., "If you seek her as silver."

2:5 ***Then . . . fear the LORD.*** If the exhortation of 2:1-4 is heeded, then (*'az* [TH227, ZH255]) benefits follow—the first and most important being to understand how to venerate Yahweh and know God. The chief skill in life is to know how to live righteously before the Lord.

2:6 ***For the LORD grants wisdom!*** Wisdom is a gift from Yahweh. He speaks knowledge and understanding. Again, wisdom is not chiefly knowledge of the world; it is knowledge of and from God.

From his mouth. The LXX reads "from his presence," apparently reflecting *mppnyw;* this diverges from the consonantal Hebrew text (*mppyw*) by one letter.

2:7 ***common sense.*** See note on 3:21.

He is a shield. Yahweh is a shield to guard the paths of the just (2:8).

2:8 ***those who are faithful to him.*** Reading Qere, "He guards the path of his faithful ones" (from *khasid* [TH2623A, ZH2883]). The "path" is cited twice in the verse (*'orakh* [TH734, ZH784], "path"; *derek* [TH1870, ZH2006], "way"). The *khasid* (as in "Hasidic Jew") is one who shows *khesed* [TH2617, ZH2876], covenant fidelity (see Waltke 2004:100).

2:9 ***Then.*** The second "then" clause follows the preceding "if" statements.

fair. Lit., "equitable," Heb., *umesharim* [TH4339, ZH4797]. The LXX reads as a verb: "*directing* all your paths aright."

the right way. A third term in two verses is employed for life direction: *ma'gal* [TH4570A, ZH5047], meaning "course, track." In the remainder of ch 2, these words average about one per verse. The orientation of one's life is the crucial question.

2:12 ***Wisdom will save you from evil people.*** Lit., "To save you from the path of evil."

twisted. Lit., "perversities," Heb., *tahpukoth* [TH8419, ZH9337], also in 2:14; found 10 times in the OT, once outside Proverbs: "They are a twisted generation, children without integrity" (Deut 32:20). There, Yahweh is disgusted because they worship idols. A man with a heart of *tahpukoth* plots evil and stirs up trouble (6:14; 16:28). This pervert is a whisperer, one who through his mouth seeks only to destroy. God hates this (8:13), and in the end the deviant will be silenced (10:31). The path of evil is to heed the man of twisted words.

2:13 ***turn from.*** Lit., "abandon," Heb., *'azab* [TH5800, ZH6440].

2:14 ***evil.*** Heb., *ra'* [TH7451A, ZH8273], used twice in 2:14 ("Delighting to do evil / Rejoicing in the perversities of evil") and found also in 2:12. Like the English word "evil," it has a broad semantic range. In this context it refers to the destructive character of those who abandon the straight for the perverse.

2:15 ***actions.*** Lit., "paths." The NLT emphasizes the point that a literal "path" is not in view, but rather "actions," "evil people," and so on. The path is an image for life direction and associated behaviors and attitudes.

2:16 ***immoral.*** Heb., *zarah,* from *zur* [TH2114C, ZH2424], meaning "be estranged, be foreign." The woman's principle characteristic is that she has made herself a stranger to the community. Waltke calls her the "unchaste wife," "an outsider" who "remains at heart a prostitute" (2004:120).

seductive words. The last few verses warned against the twisted words of the evil man; now the smooth words of the loose woman call to the youth. LXX clarifies her symbolic value by translating this verse as "To make you far from the straight way, and estranged from right judgment." "Whereas the MT . . . speaks of a certain kind of (apparently literal) woman, the LXX speaks of the dangers of evil counsel" (Giese 1993:290-291).

2:17 ***abandoned her husband.*** The Hebrew verb is *'azab* [TH5800, ZH6440], also in 2:13. There, people abandon the upright path; here, she abandons "the partner of her youth." For a discussion of the youth (*ne'urim* [TH5271, ZH5830]; see also *na'ar* [TH5288, ZH5853]), see commentary on 1:2-7. The youth is warned of women who forsake the covenants made in their youth.

covenant. This word is found only here in Proverbs. The term in this context has no significance beyond the marriage vow. The covenant is similar in this respect to the reference to "land" (see note on 2:21 and Garrett 1993:76). In the same way, *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] and *mitswah* [TH4687, ZH5184] do not signify the Mosaic law but the admonitions of the parents.

before God. To abandon one's spouse is to abandon God. It is God who is ignored by the one who forsakes marital vows.

2:18 ***death . . . grave.*** The immoral woman is associated with death, using language reminiscent of the gang (1:12). Like the gang, she is an agent of hell. The verse is lit., "For her house bows down to death, / her tracks to the shades." The *repa'im* [TH7496, ZH8327] (shades) are spirits of the dead (Job 26:5; Ps 88:10 [11]; Isa 14:9). We should perhaps emend *shakhah* [TH7743, ZH8755] (sinks down) to *shukhah* [TH7745, ZH8757] (pit), yielding, "Her house is a pit extending to death." This restores gender agreement with "her house," *bethah* [TH1004/1886.3, ZH1074/2023] (Whybray 1994a:56).

2:19 ***The man who visits her.*** Lit., "all who go in to her." This is a euphemism for coitus; her vagina is a gateway to damnation and death. Her seductive power is fatal.

paths of life. Wisdom is not a matter of self-actualization or self-improvement. It is not about enhancing one's portfolio or learning healthy habits or pragmatic ways to get more of what you want out of life. Rather, wisdom is about *life and death.* If the boy does not take to heart and incorporate within himself the lessons of the father, he will *lose his life!* This is why the father is so persistent and impassioned in his insistence that he is listened to (and that the law of the mother is heeded); this is why Wisdom shouts publicly to all, demanding that the simple give up their ways. *Salvation* is the work of Wisdom.

2:20 ***instead.*** Lit., "therefore." In Hebrew this is the first word, which denotes the beginning of the conclusion. Note the dual mention of the path.

2:21 ***land.*** It would be inconsistent with wisdom material and the message of Proverbs to see in the word "land" an implied reference to the history of Israel. "Land" here signifies "community" with overtones of peace, wealth, and long life (see also 28:19).

2:22 ***removed.*** Lit., "cut off." They are, in fact, removed from the "land" into the realm of the shade and the grave (2:18).

COMMENTARY

Chapter 2 begins with "my child" and clearly outlines the two paths in life that are set before the youth. Proverbs 2:1-11 promises wisdom, understanding, and knowledge—gifts from Yahweh. The first two stanzas of 2:12-19 begin with the phrase "To save you." These delineate from what, or from whom, the youth needs saving. The poem concludes with an adjuration to walk the good path (2:20-22).

To heed Wisdom is to learn to fear Yahweh, and Yahweh gives this wisdom to those who fear him. It is not a body of truths or principles or the cosmic/social order that constitutes Wisdom, as if Wisdom is a demiurge standing between people and God; it is with Yahweh that the sage has to reckon. Wisdom is direct knowledge of God, not indirect knowledge mediated by the natural order. Knowledge of the world flows from this primary knowledge. The book of Proverbs is about learning to revere Yahweh. To learn wisdom, then, is to please God.

The Benefits of Wisdom (2:1-11). *If* you receive and treasure the commands and words of the parent; *if* you are attentive to wisdom and incline yourself to understanding; *if* you cry out for discernment; *if* you seek it like silver or search for it like treasure: *then* you will know Yahweh and will find God; *then* Yahweh will speak wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to you; *then* God will be a shield to you and will guard your blameless paths; *then* you will discern how to live rightly in society and what is good; *then* wisdom and knowledge will be internalized in you, and you will have joy and be guarded in whatever you do. "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking" (Jas 1:5).

The promise to sons and daughters is that Yahweh will guard the steps of all who internalize wisdom. "Wisdom means not only knowing but also *wanting* to do what is right and to avoid sin. This desire will protect you from the tragic consequences of immorality" (Fox 1994:243). Rich vocabulary is again employed to convey the major theme—a person needs to be *guarded.* God is a shield; in 2:8 he guards you (*natsar* [TH5341, ZH5915]) and keeps you (*shamar* [TH8104, ZH9068]); in 2:11 discretion keeps you (*shamar*), and understanding watches over you (*natsar*). What God does, wisdom does—guards you, watches over you, and keeps you. But guards you from what? Why is the function of vigilance and protection so important? What is so dangerous that the path must be defended? From what must the minor be saved? These are the subjects of the next section.

To Save You (2:12-22). Proverbs 2:12-15 and 2:16-19 each begin with the phrase "To save you from." As noted above, various terms are used for the "path," "way," or "course." At issue is life direction. What will define your life? To what end is your personality and whole existence trending? Are you equipped to resist the temptation to redefine what is "good" for you? The only thing that can save you is to be prepared in advance. Orient yourself toward God. Commit to live blamelessly before Yahweh. Heed the words of wisdom, or else you will lose your shield.

The second chapter of Proverbs introduces the reader to the image of the two paths. For the uncommitted youth, two directions are possible. One, the "path of wisdom," leads to prosperity, honor, health, and life. The "path of folly" leads to poverty and loss, shame and disgrace, disease and death. Note that there is no middle ground, no moderate path between the two. One cannot have a little folly mixed in with a life of wisdom and expect the rewards of wisdom. This is so because of the overarching paradigm of life direction. One's life is either given to wisdom, or it is not. If it is given to wisdom, foolish ways will be eschewed.

Along the way, the youth is subject to multifarious voices that call out for a hearing, trying to turn the uncommitted to their way of life. So far in Proverbs, the

reader has been introduced to the voice of the wise parents, the call of the gang, the enticements of the loose woman, and the preaching of Wisdom. The gang and the loose woman offer tangible goods and services: pleasures, powers, and attractive rewards. All that the parents have to offer are words. "When the end of the matter is not yet in sight . . . the only thing he has to counterbalance the appeal of folly is faith that the path of wisdom is better. In other words, the content of the counselor's instruction is all that the counselee has to protect him from death" (Schwab 1995:8). Parental cajoling, instruction, and imposed discipline are all there is to save the youth's soul. Faith is required—faith that father and mother know better and have the child's best interest at heart.

Along with the image of the two paths, chapter 2 also features the image of two women. The first woman is not an actual human being, but a symbol for the wise counsel of the parents that is encountered and echoed in all of life. This wisdom that begins at home shouts at passersby to turn and be saved. The other woman is a human being, the loose woman who illustrates the kinds of temptations to the path of folly that menace the youth. She and the gang lead only to death; the other woman offers life. This feminine imagery is developed in later chapters.

Chapters 1–2 provide the reader's first impressions of the book. To know Yahweh is to walk the right path. Yahweh presents through the parents a wisdom that is reflected in the entire world for the discerning to recognize; folly speaks through the gang and the loose woman to turn the youth awry. Many temptations jeopardize the life of the child; heeding Wisdom is a matter of life and death. This defines the theological framework within which the proverbs of Solomon in subsequent chapters should be understood. Christianity is *the* Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) of life.

Chapter 2 has 22 verses, the same number as letters in the Hebrew alphabet (cf. 31:10-31). Waltke calls chapter 2 an acrostic poem (2004:216-217) and discovers that the sections of his divisions begin with the first and middle letters of the alphabet in sequence (Aleph, Lamedh). The second word of the final stanza (2:20) follows a logical particle and begins with Taw, the final Hebrew letter. Thus there are formal correspondences between chapter 2 and 31:10-31. When Proverbs draws to a close, the issues raised in chapter 2 are resolved with the youth, now no longer a youth but an adult, committed to Wisdom, making an abode in her house. Love for Wisdom has been chosen, love of death rejected.

◆ F. Wisdom, Yahweh, and Life (3:1–4:27)

1. Father's admonition to trust Yahweh (3:1-35)

[1] My child,* never forget the things
I have taught you.
Store my commands in your heart.
[2] If you do this, you will live many years,
and your life will be satisfying.
[3] Never let loyalty and kindness leave
you!
Tie them around your neck as
a reminder.
Write them deep within your heart.
[4] Then you will find favor with both
God and people,
and you will earn a good
reputation.

[5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart;
do not depend on your own
understanding.

6 Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take.

7 Don't be impressed with your own wisdom.
Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil.
8 Then you will have healing for your body
and strength for your bones.

9 Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the best part of everything you produce.
10 Then he will fill your barns with grain,
and your vats will overflow with good wine.

11 My child, don't reject the LORD's discipline,
and don't be upset when he corrects you.
12 For the LORD corrects those he loves,
just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.*

13 Joyful is the person who finds wisdom,
the one who gains understanding.
14 For wisdom is more profitable than silver,
and her wages are better than gold.
15 Wisdom is more precious than rubies;
nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 She offers you long life in her right hand,
and riches and honor in her left.
17 She will guide you down delightful paths;
all her ways are satisfying.
18 Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her;
happy are those who hold her tightly.

19 By wisdom the LORD founded the earth;
by understanding he created the heavens.
20 By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth,
and the dew settles beneath the night sky.

21 My child, don't lose sight of common sense and discernment.
Hang on to them,
22 for they will refresh your soul.
They are like jewels on a necklace.
23 They keep you safe on your way,
and your feet will not stumble.
24 You can go to bed without fear;
you will lie down and sleep soundly.
25 You need not be afraid of sudden disaster
or the destruction that comes upon the wicked,
26 for the LORD is your security.
He will keep your foot from being caught in a trap.

27 Do not withhold good from those who deserve it
when it's in your power to help them.
28 If you can help your neighbor now, don't say,
"Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you."

29 Don't plot harm against your neighbor,
for those who live nearby trust you.
30 Don't pick a fight without reason,
when no one has done you harm.

31 Don't envy violent people
or copy their ways.
32 Such wicked people are detestable to the LORD,
but he offers his friendship to the godly.

33 The LORD curses the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the home of the upright.

34 The LORD mocks the mockers
but is gracious to the humble.*

35 The wise inherit honor,
but fools are put to shame!

3:1 Hebrew *My son;* also in 3:11, 21. **3:12** Greek version reads *And he punishes those he accepts as his children.* Compare Heb 12:6. **3:34** Greek version reads *The LORD opposes the proud / but favors the humble.* Compare Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5.

NOTES

3:1 ***the things I have taught you . . . my commands.*** Again, *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] and *mitswah* [TH4687, ZH5184] do not denote the law of Moses given at Sinai and constitutive of a special covenant with Israel. Rather, *torah* and *mitswah* signify the father's wise tutelage of the minor.

in your heart. The human heart is one theme in 3:1-4 and is mentioned in the first verse of the following section (3:5).

3:2 ***you will live many years.*** Precisely, "for length of days and years of life . . . will be added to you." Is this promise merely for this life, or does it have in view a life beyond the grave? Although the language here apparently anticipates nothing beyond the ripe old age of the sage who will finally die, Proverbs as a whole anticipates a grander fate for the wise. Waltke (2004:104) notes that the phrase here, "length of days and years of life," is used in Isa 53:10 to anticipate the Suffering Servant's life after being made an offering for sin—it prophesies Christ's resurrection. Might not 3:2 also project a dimension beyond natural death? See notes on 12:28 and 15:24.

3:3 ***Never let loyalty and kindness leave you.*** That is, "faithfulness" (*khesed* [TH2617, ZH2876]) and "truth" (*'emeth* [TH571, ZH622]). These are often paired in Proverbs, denoting unwavering, unfailing, constant faithfulness to Yahweh. "Leave you" is from *'azab* [TH5800, ZH6440], the same word as in 2:13 and 2:17, where evil men "turn from the right way" and the promiscuous woman abandons her husband. Do not leave *khesed* and *'emeth* as she left her beloved.

Tie them around your neck. Overland (2000:424-440) suggests that the use of *qashar* [TH7194, ZH8003] (bind) as a metaphor is derived from Deut 6:8, "Tie them [the commands] to your hands and wear them on your forehead." The only occurrences of the word in a figurative sense are in Proverbs and Deuteronomy. He also argues that *khesed* connotes covenantal love, the kind of loyalty demanded in Deut 6:5.

Write them deep within your heart. This line appears superfluous and is absent from the LXX (but present in other ancient versions); perhaps it is an interpolation from 6:21 and 7:3. In any case, discussion of the heart introduces this stanza and the next and is appropriate to the immediate theme of the internalization of wisdom. Overland (2000:428) argues that the pairing of *qashar* (bind) with *kathab* [TH3789, ZH4180] (write) derives from Deut 6:8-9.

3:4 ***with both God and people.*** Lit., "in the eyes of God and man." In Proverbs, the important question is in whose eyes a thing is viewed. See notes on 3:7 and 17:8.

3:5 ***Trust in the LORD with all your heart.*** Proverbs 3:5-12 uses the divine name five times in eight verses. Again the theme of the human heart is at issue; think Yahweh's thoughts after him and pursue his agenda rather than your own. Overland (2000:428-429) argues that the unique reference in Proverbs here to the "whole heart" suggests a well-known exemplar behind it, such as Deut 6:5 (see notes on 3:3).

3:6 ***Seek his will.*** Lit., "know him," that is, experience him, acknowledge him. Johnson (2002:278-284) suggests that the implied antecedent is "trust, security, confidence."

3:7 ***Don't be impressed with your own wisdom.*** For the second time in this section, the child is warned against trusting in the self, lit., being "wise in your own eyes." This is set off against the fear of Yahweh. To reverence God is to *not* have faith in yourself and your own grasp of the situation.

3:8 ***for your body.*** Heb., *leshorreka* [TH8270, ZH9219], traditionally translated "for your navel." The LXX reads "for your body," which could imply the Hebrew form *lish'ereka*

[TH7607, ZH8638]. The word *shor* [TH8270, ZH9219] is found elsewhere only in Ezek 16:4 and possibly also Song 7:2 [3] and Job 40:16. In Ezek 16:4 it means "umbilical cord"; in Job 40:16, perhaps "loins"; in Song 7:2, it is probably "vagina." The Arabic *sirr* can mean "coitus." If translated "navel," it serves as a synecdoche for the whole biological life of the person, thus NLT glosses "body" (with LXX). But if rendered "loins," it additionally refers to one's sex life, the power to engender, which leads naturally to the next lengthy section on sex and wisdom.

and strength for your bones. "Strength" is lit., "drink" or "refreshment." In parallel with "healing" this might mean "medicine." The Hebrew word for "bones" (*'etsem* [TH6106, ZH6795]) is found five times in Proverbs (3:8; 12:4; 14:30; 15:30; 16:24). Psychological distress and pleasure are both experienced "in the bones." The word depicts the condition of body and mind, the status of the whole person; this is similar to the contemporary colloquialism, "He felt it deep in his bones."

3:9 ***the best part.*** Lit., "firstfruits." This is a rare reference in Proverbs to a cultic act—that of offering a sacrifice to Yahweh. Although Proverbs is Wisdom Literature and does not argue from redemptive themes, it should not be read as separate from the religious life and rich faith of Israel.

3:10 ***he will fill your barns.*** This is a straightforward promise of wealth and prosperity to the one who participates in the right worship of Yahweh.

3:11 ***the LORD's discipline.*** The discipline of Yahweh requires honoring him through the prescribed rituals of worship. Again, the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.

3:12 ***just as a father corrects a child.*** The stanza is bound as a unit by the preponderance of the divine name. It climaxes in this verse with the revelation that Yahweh adopts the one who honors him by accepting his discipline and reproof and revering him with the firstfruits of labor. God becomes the father who delights over his child. God's love is seen in his reproof, for the Lord is committed to the youth's blessed life.

3:13 ***Joyful.*** Heb. *'ashre* [TH835A, ZH897] is an introductory word of blessing, the first word in the verse. The last word of 3:18 is the cognate participle *me'ushar* [TH833A, ZH887]. See Gen 30:13: "And Leah named him Asher (*'asher* [TH836, ZH888]), for she said, 'What joy (*'asher* [TH833A, ZH887]) is mine! Now the other women will celebrate (*'ashar*) with me.'" Maidens praise (*'ashar*) the girl in Song 6:9; the wise woman's children bless (*'ashar*) her in Prov 31:28. In the condition of *'ashre* blessedness, the person or nation has "arrived." Leah entered this state of perfection after having birthed Asher.

the person . . . the one. Heb. *'adam* [TH120, ZH132], here used for humanity in general, can also be glossed as a personal name, "Adam." It is unusual for the word to be used twice in a single verse of Proverbs (the only other occurrence is in 27:19, lit., "The heart of a man reflects the man"). Whybray calls the repetition here "surprising" (1994a:66). This dual occurrence draws the reader to notice the word and might convey unusual significance; perhaps it is a double entendre for humanity in general with an echo of the Garden of Eden. (See note on 3:18.)

3:15 ***rubies.*** Heb. *peninim* [TH6443, ZH7165] is found also in 8:11, 20:15, and 31:10, probably with the meaning "ruby corals."

3:16 ***long life.*** Lit., "length of days." The benefits of finding wisdom are beginning to accumulate; the next verse promises *shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934], and 3:18 illustrates the full measure of "long life" in the image of the tree of life, which elsewhere signifies immortality.

3:17 ***satisfying.*** Heb. *shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934] connotes satisfaction, peace, and well-being. The Christ is the Prince of *shalom* (Isa 9:6).

3:18 ***tree of life.*** McKinlay (1999:73-84) identifies the tree of life with Wisdom herself. The fruit of the righteous is the fruit of the tree of life (11:30). A dream fulfilled is a tree of life (13:12). Gentle words are a tree of life (15:4). Outside of Proverbs the phrase only occurs in Genesis 2–3, where any who eat of it live forever (Gen 3:22). Proverbs 3:18 is followed by a brief recollection of Genesis. There is a motif of eternal life associated with the acquisition of wisdom—in some manner, to lay hold of wisdom is to enter a state of blessedness analogous to what Adam would have experienced had he eaten of the tree of life. Perhaps this is why the section begins by citing the name of Adam twice: "Joyful is *'adam* [TH120, ZH132] who finds wisdom, / *'adam* who gains understanding" (3:13). The wise man or woman is such an Adam partaking of the fruit of life. "In the wider canonical perspective . . . the tree of life speaks of immortality" (Estes 1997:58).

3:19 ***earth . . . heavens.*** The same words found in Gen 1:1.

wisdom . . . understanding. The same words (*khokmah* [TH2451, ZH2683] and *tebunah* [TH8394, ZH9312]) are utilized in 3:13 referring to humanity's/Adam's blessedness. For the first time, Wisdom is identified as involved in the creation of heaven and earth. Yahweh, who made the world with wisdom and placed in it the tree of life for Adam, also makes this wisdom available to all humanity.

3:20 ***deep fountains.*** This is the same word as in Gen 1:2, "deep waters," another reference to the Creation in Genesis.

3:21 ***common sense.*** This is a wisdom term found twice outside Proverbs and Job, denoting ability to perform effectively (Job 5:12, "succeed"; Isa 28:29; Mic 6:9).

3:22 ***refresh.*** Lit., "give life to" (*khayyim* [TH2416, ZH2644]) as in "tree of life" (*'ets-khayyim* [TH6086, ZH6770]; 3:18).

necklace. From *gargeroth* [TH1621, ZH1738], meaning "neck." With the prefix *le* [TH3807.1, ZH4200], the Hebrew phonemes *r, g,* and *l* are heard that comprise the Hebrew *regel* [TH7272, ZH8079] (foot). This leads into the following four verses, bound by the repeated word "foot." These verses follow this pattern:

A Then . . . your foot will not stumble (3:23)
  B When you lie down, you will not fear (3:24)
  B′ You will not fear (3:25)
A′ For Yahweh will guard your foot (3:26)

3:23 ***on your way.*** The sage is securely oriented—his feet (life direction) do not misstep.

3:24 ***bed.*** Waking and sleeping, the wise are secure, i.e., all the time, in every circumstance (see 6:22).

3:25 ***afraid of sudden disaster.*** Lit., "do not fear a sudden fear."

3:26 ***the LORD is your security.*** The stanza ends again with Yahweh, who guarantees all these benefits promised to the wise and discerning. It is not a clever understanding of the world order that watches over the wise; it is Yahweh who keeps the foot—the life direction—from slipping. Therefore, the faithful need not fear.

3:27 ***Do not.*** Each verse of this stanza begins with the negative particle *'al* [TH408, ZH440], "do not" or "is not." This device binds these verses together as a unit.

those who deserve it. Lit., "those who possess it." Do not withhold tangible good from those who possess internal goodness. One with ethical good has a claim on good things; the fool and sluggard have no such claim.

3:28 ***If you can help your neighbor now.*** Precisely, "When you have it with you." The last word, "with you," is also the last word of the next verse, a device that helps tie the

two verses together. Garrett suggests that those who deserve good (3:27) may be "laborers who have earned their pay" (1993:84). The LXX adds, "For you do not know what tomorrow will birth." Fox (1984:63-69) argues from Egyptian wisdom that LXX has behind it a Hebrew original.

3:30 ***harm.*** This verse ends with "harm," the word used in 3:29, which helps to tie the two verses together. Here, however, the topic is broader than "your neighbor"; a general word for humanity is used (*'adam* [TH120, ZH132]).

3:31 ***violent people.*** Lit., "the man of violence" (*khamas* [TH2555, ZH2805]). The climax of the stanza comes with the admonition not to envy the violent one. To do the things against which the stanza counsels is to walk the path of violence. A youth might envy the power that the violent man seems to wield, and so one may consider *khamas* to be yet another voice that tempts the youth to a path of destruction.

3:32 ***Such.*** The verse begins with *ki* [TH3588, ZH3954], which in this case functions to continue the thought from the previous verse. Proverbs 3:31 is tied to the prior stanza by the device of the initial *'al* [TH408, ZH440] (not), which 3:27-31 shares. Waltke calls 3:31 a "janus" which serves to tie the stanzas together; it is the "emphatic center line" between two units (2004:269). This stanza could just as well be defined as 3:31-35.

detestable. Lit., "an abomination," *to'ebah* [TH8441, ZH9359]. In the Mosaic law, an abomination is to bring together that which natural order and religious duty would keep separate, e.g., with regard to sexual relations (Lev 18:22-30; 20:13), idols (Deut 7:25-26), consuming animals (Deut 14:3), or dishonest scales (Deut 25:16). This last definition is echoed in Proverbs (11:1; 20:23). Yahweh rightly judges and abhors the perpetrators of harm. The path of wisdom is the skill of living a righteous life before the Lord.

3:33 ***curses . . . blesses.*** Although Wisdom Literature does not argue from redemptive history, neither is it hermetically sealed off from the traditions of Israel. The motif of Yahweh issuing curses and blessings draws upon a knowledge of the covenant in Deut 28. Those who abominate their ways are cursed by Yahweh; he blesses the godly and upright. There are two paths: one of cursing, one of blessing.

3:34 ***gracious to the humble.*** James 4:6 quotes this verse, exhorting Christians to resist the devil and draw close to God. He does this in the context of a discussion on what may be described as two paths: friendship with the world or friendship with God (Jas 4:1-10). The struggle is an inner one, a matter of the heart. First Peter 5:5 also cites the verse to illustrate how the church should function as a community of faith. Like James, in close proximity he also warns of the devil (1 Pet 5:8-9). Beware of the devil, who would tempt you from the right path.

3:35 ***inherit.*** This renders the word *yinkhalu* [TH5157, ZH5706]. Driver (1951:177) questions how the wise can *inherit* honor and so emends to *nekhelu* [TH2470C, ZH—], yielding, "the wise are *adorned with* honor." Perhaps the use of "inheritance" language, like so much else in ch 3, echoes sacred history. As the Israelites were to inherit the land, so the wise inherit wisdom, appropriated by trust in Yahweh (3:32-33).

honor. Lit., "glory." The prime example of this is the glory of Solomon the wise (1 Kgs 3:10-14).

COMMENTARY

The themes introduced in the preceding two chapters are developed more fully in this chapter. Again the father admonishes the child to get wisdom, that is, to trust Yahweh. He promises more benefits absolutely, and warns against more dire

consequences. The psychology of the heart is developed as the repository and center of a person's wisdom. One notably absent image in this composition is that of the woman, either positive or negative. This is reserved for the next composition. Chapter 3 comprises the father's heartfelt urging for the undeveloped child to learn wisdom. Various dimensions of meaning are supplied to flesh out how this takes place and what it entails. In chapter 4, the father at length exhorts the youth to choose the right path, and again targets the heart as the religious axis. All this is necessary to prepare the youth for the major temptation he will soon face—sex.

Chapter 3 begins with the father's enjoining the child to listen; he reveals that it is Yahweh who truly adopts the child in wisdom. With wisdom comes manifold promises, not the least of which is a long and happy life. Wisdom is identified with Yahweh's creative activity. The universe itself was fashioned with the same wisdom that the child is urged to acquire. After focusing his attention on various snares along the way, the father again returns to his major thesis: Yahweh and wisdom are one.

The First Stanza (3:1–4). The section opens with the father again urging the morally unformed youth to internalize the lessons of childhood, to commit to *khesed* [TH2617, ZH2876] and *'emeth* [TH571, ZH622], to write the instructions of prudence and virtue on the heart. He gives an unqualified promise: Life and favor with God and the community will follow. The next stanza unequivocally nails down the foundational principle of wisdom: The true Father of a person is Yahweh; the earthly parents' *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] and *mitswah* [TH4687, ZH5184] are the words of God. It is in response to the parents' words that the juvenile must decide between wisdom and folly.

Proverbs 3:1-35 is the first of three sections in the composition consisting of chapters 3–4. Its six stanzas treat the heart, wisdom's overarching value, Yahweh as the true subject of wisdom, and how this impacts the behavior of the wise in community.

The Second Stanza (3:5–12). The first stanza (3:1-4) begins the section with the urgent parental entreaty to dedicate oneself to *khesed* [TH2617, ZH2876] and *'emeth* [TH571, ZH622], to internalize the lessons taught by the father—and by God. This thought is continued in the second stanza (3:5-12), where the promise of being adopted as Yahweh's child is offered. It is as if the text dares the reader to reread the phrase "my child" no longer as an appeal from the mouth of the parents, but rather from the mouth of Yahweh. Hebrews 12:5-6 admonishes Christians to take this seriously, embrace the Father's discipline, and walk the path of the Suffering Servant while awaiting the assured benedictions.

Trust Yahweh. Know him. Fear him. Honor him with the firstfruits. Do not lean on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Turn from evil. Do not reject his discipline. Do not loathe his reproof. Do this, and he *guarantees* that he will make your paths smooth, keep your body vigorous and strong, fill your barns and vats to overflowing, and love you and adopt you as his own child.

The wisdom offered in the book is for those who desire to know their God, who honor him with gifts and offerings, and who want to know the straight way. God adopts such people and assumes the task of their instruction—which is not always pleasant (hence the admonition not to shun it). The climactic verses of the stanza

are quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6. Hebrews 12:1-13 argues that the Christian life is one of struggle against sin. In this struggle, Christians are called to remember Jesus on the cross—enduring shame and hostility from evil people. Christ suffered what is proper for those on the path of folly to suffer. His innocent blood was shed by a "gang" (see 1:11-12). As Christians follow Jesus, their willingness to bear pain for the sake of ultimate honor also inspires them to submit willingly to painful discipline. Christians are called to trust him and not their own understanding, to embrace his reproof and discipline and thus experience the love of the Father.

Thus, the unqualified guarantee of health and wealth is given in the context of the overall program of learning wisdom—so difficulties and setbacks (the correction of the Lord) can be expected. The ultimate example of this is Christ on the cross, who "learned obedience from the things he suffered" (Heb 5:8). Christians also enjoy the blessedness of God's favor, understanding that the blessings of health and wealth serve the higher goal of knowing God. The long life that is promised uses the language of the resurrected Christ in Isaiah 53:10, and the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of Proverbs may be regarded along the lines of that enjoyed by the Suffering Servant—after the travail of his soul.

Overland (2000:435-440) persuasively argues that 3:1-12 reflects Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

> *Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Proverbs employs this material to convey the overriding importance of being wise before Yahweh. The covenant called Israel to love Yahweh with a whole heart; the wise trust him with a whole heart. Moses says to bind commands on one's hands and forehead; the prudent tie loyalty and kindness to the neck and heart. Deuteronomy calls Israel to love Yahweh with their "strength" (*me'od* [TH3966A, ZH4394], perhaps connoting material wealth); the sage honors God from the vats and barns. The devout attitude toward Yahweh adjured in Deuteronomy is made to serve the kerygma of the sage. To love wisdom is to love Yahweh; the instructions of the wise are not secondary revelation but encounters with the living God.

The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Stanzas (3:13–31). The third stanza of this section (3:13-20) is actually a strophe consisting of two parts, 3:13-18 and 3:19-20. The former is bounded by an inclusion of "joyful, happy" (*'ashar* [TH833A, ZH887]). The first verse of this part and the next contain "wisdom" (*khokmah* [TH2451, ZH2683]). The creative wisdom of Yahweh and its surpassing value are at issue in both parts. Drawing on creation language and themes, the writer presents Wisdom as incomparably beneficial to whoever finds her. She is compared with precious jewels that people value and pursue. But those cannot offer what she offers—long life and blessedness.

The third stanza (3:13-20) as a whole again promotes the surpassing worth of

gaining understanding and wisdom—the wisdom of God by which he created the heavens and the earth. This wisdom is omnipresent; to reject it, one must hate all creation. For the first time in Proverbs, Wisdom is revealed as constitutive in Yahweh's work of creation. The same "wisdom" and "understanding" with which Yahweh founded the heavens and earth is available to every person who heeds her call. This sheds new light on why Wisdom was inescapable to the youth in 1:20-33. All of creation reflects the infinite sagacity of the Creator. This limitless sapience obtrudes on humanity, exacting a response of love or hatred from every person. The fool walks a path against the grain of existence itself; the parents' wise counsel is in harmony with reality. "[Lady Wisdom] is, then, the revelation of God, not merely the self-revelation of creation. She is the divine summons issued in and through creation, sounding through the vast realm of the created world and heard on the level of human experience" (Murphy 1985:9-10).

The fourth stanza (3:21-26) addresses a person's inclination in life with the image of the foot. Yahweh will ensure that your "foot" will not stumble; therefore, waking or sleeping, you need not fear. This inclination of mind has ramifications in the social sphere. The fifth stanza (3:27-31) contrasts the path of doing good to your neighbor with the path of doing violence. This spells out what it means to be wise and what it takes to acquire the life promised in the earlier stanzas of the section. One should treat the innocent neighbor, in Jesus' words, as one would like to be treated (Matt 7:12). He said this is the essence of the law and the prophets—and it is also the essence of Proverbs.

The Sixth Stanza (3:32-35). The final stanza of this section returns explicitly to Yahweh as the one with whom all people must reckon. Yahweh mocks the mockers and shames the fool, but he gives grace and honor to the wise. The third stanza uses images and motifs from the Garden of Eden and challenges the reader to partake of the fruit of the tree of life—and so become a child of God. The final stanza uses language that echoes the glory of Solomon, who inherited the kingdom, and again challenges the reader to avoid what Yahweh hates (such as Solomon's idolatry, 2 Kgs 23:13) and comport oneself as a just and upright member of the community. In all this, life and glory and freedom from fear will accompany the wise in whatever they do and wherever they go.

In chapter 3, sacred history is not simply ignored. Motifs and images such as *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] and *mitswah* [TH4687, ZH5184], creation and the tree of life, covenantal blessings and curses, the ritual offering of firstfruits, references to the Shema, and language of abomination and glory are transformed and made to serve the kerygma of the sage. To possess wisdom is to fulfill the Old Testament ideals of Yahwism: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

◆ 2. Father's admonition to get wisdom (4:1-9)

[1] My children,* listen when your father corrects you.
Pay attention and learn good judgment,
[2] for I am giving you good guidance.
Don't turn away from my instructions.
[3] For I, too, was once my father's son,

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