

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

The Book of Psalms

Mark D. Futato

The Book of Proverbs

George M. Schwab

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort



New Living
Translation.

CORNERSTONE
B I B L I C A L
COMMENTARY

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NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC. CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 7

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The Book of Psalms

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The Book of Proverbs

451

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

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

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

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

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- 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	Psalms, 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	Psalms 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 <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QPs ^a	Psalms
		1QpHab	<i>Peshar Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple ^{ab}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11QTgJob	<i>Targum of Job</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a				

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

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

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

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

- Ⲙ (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 (Claramontanus), 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
 f¹ (a family of manuscripts
 including 1, 118, 131, 209)
 Gospels; 12th–14th
 f¹³ (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

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p> SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian)
 Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus)
 Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire
 NT; 616 </p> | <p> OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellensis) 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 </p> | <p> COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fw} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt) </p> <p> OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian) </p> |
|--|---|---|

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	= '	מ, ם	mem	= m
ב, ן	beth	= b	נ, ן	nun	= n
ג, ן	gimel	= g	ס	samekh	= s
ד, ן	daleth	= d	ע	ayin	= '
ה	he	= h	פ, ן, ף	pe	= p
ו	waw	= w	צ, ן	tsadhe	= ts
ז	zayin	= z	ק	qoph	= q
ח	heth	= kh	ר	resh	= r
ט	teth	= t	ש	shin	= sh
י	yodh	= y	שׁ	sin	= s
כ, ן, ף	kaph	= k	ת, ן	taw	= t, th (spirant)
ל	lamedh	= l			

Vowels

ֿ	patakh	= a	ׁ	qamets khatuf	= o
׀	furtive patakh	= a	ׂ	holem	= o
׃	qamets	= a	׃	full holem	= o
ׄ	final qamets he	= ah	ׅ	short qibbutz	= u
׆	segol	= e	׆	long qibbutz	= u
ׇ	tsere	= e	ׇ	shureq	= u
׈	tsere yod	= e	׈	khatef patakh	= a
׉	short hireq	= i	׉	khatef qamets	= o
ׁ׃	long hireq	= i	ׁ׃	vocalic shewa	= e
ׂ׃	hireq yod	= i	ׂ׃	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
δ	delta	= d	μ	mu	= m
ε	epsilon	= e	ν	nu	= n
ζ	zeta	= z	ξ	ksi	= x
η	eta	= ē	ο	omicron	= o
θ	theta	= th	π	pi	= p
			ρ	rho	= r (ῥ = rh)

σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s	Ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
τ	<i>tau</i>	= t	Ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u		<i>rough</i>	= h (with
φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

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, ^S1247].

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
*Psalm*s

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 unequalled 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

COMMENTARY ON
Psalms

◆ I. BOOK ONE: Psalms 1–41
A. Psalm 1

¹Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.

²But they delight in the law of the
LORD,
meditating on it day and night.

³They are like trees planted along
the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.

⁴But not the wicked!
They are like worthless
chaff, scattered by the
wind.

⁵They will be condemned at the time
of judgment.
Sinners will have no place among
the godly.

⁶For 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 cliché 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 yhw̄h* [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 Tau. Second, note the chiasmic 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 Tau).

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).

END NOTES

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

◆ B. Psalm 2

¹Why are the nations so angry?

Why do they waste their time with
futile plans?

²The 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."

⁴But the one who rules in heaven
laughs.

The Lord scoffs at them.

⁵Then in anger he rebukes them,
terrifying them with his fierce
fury.

⁶For the Lord declares, "I have placed
my chosen king on the throne
in Jerusalem,* on my holy
mountain."

⁷The king proclaims the LORD's decree:

"The LORD said to me, 'You are my
son.*

Today I have become your Father.*

⁸Only ask, and I will give you the
nations as your inheritance,
the whole earth as your possession.

⁹You will break* them with an
iron rod
and smash them like clay pots!"

¹⁰Now then, you kings, act wisely!
Be warned, you rulers of the earth!

¹¹Serve the LORD with reverent fear,
and rejoice with trembling.

¹²Submit 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* [TAZA10120, 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.

¹O LORD, I have so many
enemies;
so many are against me.

²So many are saying,
“God will never rescue him!”

*Interlude**

³But you, O LORD, are a shield
around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds
my head high.

⁴I cried out to the LORD,
and he answered me from his
holy mountain.

Interlude

⁵I lay down and slept,
yet I woke up in safety,
for the LORD was watching over me.

⁶I am not afraid of ten thousand
enemies
who surround me on every side.

⁷Arise, O LORD!
Rescue me, my God!
Slap all my enemies in the face!
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!

⁸Victory 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).



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 *Amen-emope* 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 "semi-tized." 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 “song”) or verb (“sing”) 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).

our life. Solomon of the profligate harem gave his name to the Song of Songs, which cannot teach you how to love. You must first experience the love of God in Christ—then you will be free to love as God intends. And the book of Proverbs is also weak and cannot make you wise. “Solomon himself is . . . the wise king who fell into idolatry and became foolish. But the good news is that one ‘greater than Solomon’ (Matthew 12:42) has come. Once a person has experienced God’s grace through Christ and has been given a new heart, he or she can begin to desire and to live a truly wise life” (Schwab 1995:6). The beginning of wisdom is to first come to Jesus. Then the proverbs will teach you how to wisely follow in ever-increasing measure.

OUTLINE

The hierarchical organization for Proverbs is given in the outline below. In this commentary, the major divisions of the book are called anthologies—large collections of smaller compositions or poems. (I call a unit a “composition” if it is rather eclectic and large, a “poem” if it is smaller or exhibits a tight thematic unity.) Compositions are composed of sections or segments (sections are complex, segments are simple and undivided). Sections are made from stanzas or strophes (a stanza is simple, a strophe is complex), and strophes are subdivided into parts. Thus the hierarchy of the nomenclature is as follows:

- Anthology (of poems and/or compositions)
 - Poem
 - Composition (of sections and/or segments)
 - Segment
 - Section (of stanzas and/or strophes)
 - Stanza
 - Strophe
 - Part

Proverbs can be parsed into five anthologies: the Prologue, Proverbs of Solomon, Thirty Sayings of the Wise, Hezekiah’s Proverbs of Solomon, and the Epilogue. This fivefold division of Solomon’s *torah* [TH8451, ZH9368] (1:8) mirrors the fivefold division of the books of Moses’s *torah* and the five books of Psalms (Pss 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150).

- I. The Prologue (1:1–9:18)
 - A. Title (1:1)
 - B. Opening (1:2–7)
 - C. Father’s Warning about the Gang (1:8–19)
 - D. Wisdom’s Call; Who Listens? (1:20–33)
 - E. Two Paths (2:1–22)
 - F. Wisdom, Yahweh, and Life (3:1–4:27)
 1. Father’s admonition to trust Yahweh (3:1–35)
 2. Father’s admonition to get wisdom (4:1–9)
 3. Life versus stumbling (4:10–27)

- G. Wisdom and Pleasure (5:1–7:27)
 - 1. Advice about sex (5:1–23)
 - 2. Father's warnings (6:1–19)
 - 3. Warnings against immorality (6:20–7:27)
- H. Wisdom, Yahweh, and Life (8:1–36)
- I. Wisdom's Banquet; Who Listens? (9:1–18)
- II. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)
 - A. The Righteous and the Wicked (10:1–11:31)
 - 1. Preface to Solomon's Proverbs (10:1–5)
 - 2. Proverbs about concealing and speaking (10:6–32)
 - 3. Wisdom in the community (11:1–31)
 - B. Speech and Deeds (12:1–28)
 - C. The Way of Wisdom and the Way of Death (13:1–14:27)
 - 1. Desiring and craving (13:1–25)
 - 2. Building the house (14:1–11)
 - 3. Death and how to escape it (14:12–27)
 - D. The Wisdom of Yahweh and the King (14:28–16:15)
 - 1. The wisdom of Yahweh (14:28–16:9)
 - 2. The wisdom of the king (16:10–15)
 - E. The Way of Wisdom and the Way of Death (16:16–19:12)
 - 1. The path of wisdom (16:16–17:6)
 - 2. The path of the fool (17:7–18:7)
 - 3. The strength of wisdom (18:8–19:12)
 - F. Speaking and Doing before Yahweh (19:13–21:1)
 - G. The Wicked and the Righteous (21:2–22:16)
- III. "Thirty" Sayings of the Wise (22:17–24:34)
 - A. Preface (22:17–21)
 - B. The Thirty Sayings (22:22–24:22)
 - C. Appendix to the Thirty Sayings (24:23–34)
- IV. Hezekiah's Proverbs of Solomon (25:1–29:27)
 - A. Title (25:1)
 - B. Discovering Glory (25:2–28)
 - C. Doing What Is Fitting (26:1–16)
 - D. Damaging Speech (26:17–28)
 - E. Domestic Life (27:1–22)
 - F. Wisdom for Leaders (27:23–29:27)
- V. Epilogue to Proverbs (30:1–31:31)
 - A. The Oracle of Agur (30:1–14)
 - B. Poem of Threes and Fours (30:15–33)
 - C. The Words of King Lemuel (31:1–9)
 - D. The Heroine (31:10–31)

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 $5^3 \times 3$), 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)

²Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.

³Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.

⁴These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.

⁵Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.

Let those with understanding receive guidance

⁶by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.

⁷Fear 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 (*khased* [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]), slug-gard (*’atsel* [TH6102A, ZH6789]), adulteress (*zonah* [TH2181B, ZH2390]), and transgressor (*pasha’* [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" (Walteke 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)

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