

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

BY

Arno Clement Gaebelein

1861-1942

In the Public Domain

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Introduction

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is "Mishle," which is derived from the verb "Mashal," to rule, hence short sayings which are given to govern life and conduct. It also has the meaning of "resemblance," that is a parable. Many proverbs are concentrated parables. our English word "proverbs" comes from the word "proverbia" used in the Latin translation. Traditionally the authorship of the whole book is attributed to Solomon, but the book itself does not claim this, nor does it sustain the Solomonic authorship of the entire collection. The major portion of the book is attributed to Solomon and there can be no question that he is the author of it. In First Kings 4:32 we read that the great king uttered 3,000 proverbs in which the wisdom given to him is illustrated. But the book does not contain this number of proverbs.

Chapter 25 begins with the statement: "These are also proverbs which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, copied out." This pious king must have had a great interest in compiling and preserving certain portions of the Word of God. According to this statement in Proverbs he must have commissioned certain scribes to add to the previous collection of proverbs by Solomon, other proverbs, which up to that time had remained uncollected. Then in chapter 30 we find the words of Agur the son of Jakeh, and in chapter 31 the words of King Lemuel.

From these facts which appear in the book it is clear that the composition of the entire book of Proverbs cannot be attributed to Solomon. The book begins with "The Proverbs of Solomon the Son of David, King of Israel". In the beginning of chapter 10 we read again: "The Proverbs of Solomon". It seems clear then that in chapters 1-24 we have the proverbs of Solomon; chapter 25 to the end contains also proverbs by the king, except the last two chapters. In all probability the scribes of Hezekiah who copied out the proverbs of chapters 25-29 added the last two chapters. What criticism states, that "the later chapters of this book point to the second or third century before Christ," is only an assertion.

Another feature of this book is, that numerous times a person is addressed as "My son," and the personal pronoun is often used "thou, thee, thy," etc. The sections where we find this are chapters 1-9;

19:20--24:34; and 27-29:27. Who then is the person addressed? Does Solomon address some one or is it Solomon himself who is addressed? Dr. J.W. Thirtle in his Old Testament Problems distinguishes between proverbs written by Solomon and those which were written for him. All those which are addressed to "My son," and in which the personal pronoun is used, it is claimed, are given to Solomon by "wise men or teachers" and that all these sententious sayings were given to young Solomon by these men to fit him for rulership. But this produces other difficulties. The proverbs of Solomon would in this case be very few in comparison with the size of the book, and furthermore we do not know who these wise men or teachers were who instructed the king and wrote such words of wisdom.

It seems to us that there is another way in which these sections containing the personal address, "My son," may be explained. When the Lord appeared unto Solomon in Gibeon, He said unto him, "Ask what I shall give thee." Then Solomon asked for an understanding heart, to discern between good and bad. Then the Lord said, "Lo I have given thee a wise and understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:5, etc.). His prayer was answered. Then the Lord must have spoken to him by His Spirit and given him the instructions he needed as the king over His people Israel. It is more than probable that the sections in which the address "My son" and the personal pronoun is used contain the heavenly instructions given to the young king in the beginning of his reign by the Lord Himself. One cannot be dogmatic about this, but if such was the case the difficulties disappear. There is no need to put these proverbs for Solomon into the mouths of unknown wise men. It was the Lord who spoke to Solomon, addressing him thus and Solomon guided by the Spirit of God penned all these words. But it seems that the beginning of chapter 4 contains a brief autobiography of Solomon relating to his training. If wise men or teachers had spoken these words their names would have been mentioned and their sayings would have appeared in a different setting, without being found in different sections of the book.

As Dr. Thirtle has pointed out, these sayings, instructions given to Solomon, as we take it by the Lord in answer to his prayer for an understanding heart, cover certain commands relating to Israel's kings, as given in the law of Moses. These commands we find in Deut. 17:14-20.

"When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may

prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel."

Now in the sections of Proverbs, pointed out above, in which the personal address is used, some instructions are given which correspond to the commandments relating to the king, as found in the passage from Deuteronomy which we have quoted. Of special interest are the repeated warnings against the "strange woman." The strange women against which the Spirit of God warned him in his youth, are the women of other nations, Gentiles. The passage in Deuteronomy says, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away." The Spirit of the Lord anticipated the sad end of the great and wise king and therefore warned him against the strange woman, under the picture of the harlot, who ensnares and whose ways end in death. But the heavenly wisdom which had instructed him and warned was not heeded. It is written, "King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, the Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love" (1 Kings 11). Then followed his downfall. "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Then he worshipped Ashtoreth, Milcom and Chemosh and other idol gods. The words of wisdom the Lord gave him, thus giving him understanding, were not heeded and the allurements of the strange woman, of which his inspired pen had warned, became a mournful fact in his own history.

The literary form of these proverbs is mostly in the form of couplets or distichs. The two clauses of the couplet are generally related to each other by what has been termed parallelism, according to Hebrew poetry. Three kinds of parallelism have been pointed out.

1. Synonymous Parallelism. Here the second clause restates what is given in the first clause.

Judgments are prepared for scorners
And stripes for the back of fools.
-- Proverbs 19:29

2. Antithetic Parallelism. Here a truth which is stated in the first clause is made stronger in the second clause by contrast with an opposite truth.

The light of the righteous rejoiceth,
But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.
-- Proverbs 13:9

3. Synthetic Parallelism. The second clause develops the thought of the first.

The terror of a king is as the roaring of a lion--
He that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own life.
-- Proverbs 20:2.

The Proverbs, speaking generally, give moral teachings as to human conduct, often giving the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. But besides this there is much which goes deeper. Many of these short sayings can be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the gospel. There is one portion which speaks definitely of the Son of God, our Lord, who is Wisdom. This is found in chapter 8:22-31. When we read in chapter 13:7, "There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth," we can well think of Him who was rich and became poor for our sake that we by His poverty might be rich. Then there are verses which speak of a friend, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (18:24). "A friend loveth at all times, and is born as a brother for adversity" (17:17). Well do we think, in reading such and similar verses in this book, of our Lord, who is the friend of sinners. Proverbs in spiritual instruction and application has an inexhaustible wealth.

The Spirit of God makes use of this book in quoting from it in the New Testament: Chapter 1:16 is quoted in Romans 3:15; 3:11-12 in Hebrews 12:5-6, also in Rev. 3:19; 3:34; in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5; 4:26 in Hebrews 12:13; 10:12 in 1 Peter 4:8; 11:31 in 1 Peter 4:18; 25:21-22, in Romans 12:20; and 26:11 in 2 Peter 2:22.

Proverbs ought to be studied by believers as diligently as any other portion of God's Holy Word. The prayerful searcher will soon be rewarded by many nuggets of divine truth.

We make another suggestion on the study of this book. Many of the lessons given in these proverbs are illustrated by the lives of the godly and ungodly recorded in the Bible. It will prove a most helpful occupation to fit the experiences of these two classes as found in the Word of God to many of these proverbs.

The Division of Proverbs

As already stated in our introduction the book of Proverbs, as a book, was not in existence in the days of Solomon; it was completed through the interest, no doubt inspired interest, of King Hezekiah. That Solomon wrote the proverbs as attributed to him is beyond question.

The scope of this book is quite simple for it is clearly marked in its contents.

We find seven sections.

- I. INSTRUCTIONS OF WISDOM GIVEN TO SOLOMON: Chapters 1--9
- II. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON: Chapters 10:1--19:19
- III. INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO SOLOMON: Chapters 19:20--24:34
- IV. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON COLLECTED BY HEZEKIAH: Chapters 25--26
- V. INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO SOLOMON: Chapters 27--29
- VI. THE WORDS OF AGUR THE SON OF JAKEH: Chapter 30

VII. THE WORDS OF KING LEMUEL TAUGHT HIM BY HIS MOTHER: Chapter 31

It will be seen at a glance that instructions given to Solomon alternate with the proverbs of Solomon, teaching others as he first had been taught. The description of the virtuous woman in the last chapter is in the Hebrew in the form of an acrostic. The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in these verses, just like in the alphabetic Psalms and in Lamentations.

Analysis and Annotations

A detailed analysis, as we have made it in other books, cannot be fully made in this collection of proverbs. Most of them are detached and each has a message by itself. To interpret each separately, to point out the many spiritual lessons, as well as prophetic application, to show their relation to other portions of the Word of God and to explain them by incidents taken from the Bible, would require volumes; and even then the spiritual meaning would not be exhausted. All we can do is to hint at their meaning and give some annotations which, under God, may be helpful in the closer study of this book

I. INSTRUCTIONS OF WISDOM GIVEN TO SOLOMON

CHAPTER 1

1. The Introduction (1:1-7)
2. Warning against evil companions and covetousness (1:8-19)
3. The appeal of wisdom (1:20-33)

Verses 1-7. The introductory words of these verses present the object of the book. These proverbs were given to Solomon, and contain instructions he received from the Lord. They are given to him that he might know wisdom. The word "wisdom" is the characteristic word of this book for it occurs in the original language 42 times, which is 6 times 7. Six in Scripture is the human number, while 7 is the divine number. Wisdom is the first thing to be acquired, and that is followed by instruction, or admonition, to receive the instruction, the discipline of wisdom. The instructions are in justice, judgment and equity and they give subtilty to the simple. The word "subtilty" means prudence; the word "simple" has the meaning of "guileless." Solomon was a young man when the Lord answered his prayer for a wise and understanding heart, and in these proverbs given to him he received "knowledge and discretion" (thoughtfulness). Thus by the Word of God comes wisdom and that produces understanding and a moral character in the man who trusteth in the Lord and is obedient to Him. To hear marks the wise man, and hearing will increase learning, learning will give understanding so that proverbs can be understood and also the interpretation. The latter word is only used once more in the Old Testament. It has the meaning of "satire." The words of the wise and their dark sayings (riddles) are the words of the wise men of this world, the philosophers. The meaning is not that these wise men were the instructors of the young monarch, but that the divinely given proverbs rightly understood would protect him from accepting the foolish things of human wisdom, of philosophy. "This verse (6) intimates that the aim of the book is to confer an initiation which will make the

possessor free of all the mysteries of the wise" (T.T. Perowne).

Verse 7 contains the keynote to the entire book. (See 9:10; Eccles. 12:13; Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10.) The word "fear" means a godly fear, reverence. This fear of the Lord is mentioned fourteen times in Proverbs. This childlike reverence, so sadly lacking among the young of our day, is the beginning of knowledge; there is no true knowledge apart from the fear of the Lord. It means to acknowledge the Lord, adore and worship Him, bow in faith to His revelation and put it above everything else. The foolish despise wisdom and instruction, they follow the philosophies of this world. To acknowledge the Lord to reverence and fear Him is thus written over the portal of the house of wisdom.

Verses 8-19. The practical instructions begin with an exhortation of obedience to the father and mother. "My son" is the address of the Lord to Solomon, who thus acknowledges him as His child. Obedience to parents is not only commanded in the law dispensation; it is as prominent in the dispensation of grace, as we learn from Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20. One of the marks of the last days among those who profess Christianity who have the form of godliness but have not the power of it, is "disobedience to parents" (2 Timothy 3). Such disobedience, so prominent today among professing Christians, is coupled with disobedience to God and rejection of His Word. Much of the ungodliness today has its source in this disobedience. This is followed by warning against wicked associates, those who are lawless and desperate men, thieves and murderers, who pass through the country greedy for gain. Solomon is exhorted not to walk in the way with them. The one who fears the Lord walks in separation and keeps away from the paths of the wicked. Verse 16 is quoted by Paul in the third chapter of Romans. There is a striking resemblance of this passage to Psalm 10 in which we have a description of the wicked, prophetically indicating the man of sin. (See annotations on that Psalm.)

Verses 20-23. Wisdom now speaks and wisdom in this first section of Proverbs is a person, a divine person. The eighth chapter gives us a wonderful vision of that Person, the Son of God, who is the Wisdom. First stands the call of Wisdom. The call may be answered or rejected. Wisdom promises if the call is obeyed, "Behold, I will pour my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." But if the call is refused the consequences will be disastrous. The appeal of wisdom closes with a precious promise.

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely
And shall be quiet from fear of evil.

This appeal of wisdom, the call, the promise, the refusal and the calamity of the refusal to listen to Him who speaks furnishes an excellent theme for preaching the Gospel to the unsaved.

CHAPTER 2

1. The pursuit of wisdom and its results (2:1-9)
2. Preservation from the evil man and the strange woman (2:10-19)
3. The path of the righteous (2:20-22)

Verses 1-9 This second chapter of divine instructions begins with an

exhortation to pursue after Wisdom. The sayings of Wisdom, that is the Word of the Lord, must be received, laid up, the ear must incline to hear them, the heart must be applied to understanding. In verse 3 mention is made of prayer. There must be crying after knowledge and for understanding and that must be followed by seeking and searching. If these conditions are fulfilled then the fear of the Lord is one's portion as well as the knowledge of God. These are excellent instructions for the study of the Word of God. If followed then the Lord will give wisdom (James 1:5). He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous. He Himself is the Wisdom and in Him are laid up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). He also is a shield (the better word for buckler) to them that walk uprightly, and the way of His saints is preserved by Him.

Verses 10-19. When Wisdom entereth the heart and the soul rejoiceth in true knowledge, what blessed consequences will follow! There is preservation and deliverance. The way of the evil man, the proud, the ungodly and their crooked ways hold out no attraction to those who love and seek wisdom. Then for the first time the strange woman, the foreign woman is mentioned. While a prostitute is meant, the warning to Solomon was to beware of the allurements of those who were outside of the commonwealth of Israel, the heathen Canaanitish cults in which prostitution played such a prominent part. If we look on these instructions as given to a young man, we see the temptations outlined which are peculiar to the young-disobedience to parents, evil companions and the lust of the flesh.

Verses 20-22. He who ordereth his conduct according to divine instruction will walk in the way of the good and keep the paths of the righteous, dwelling in the land of promise while the wicked have no such hope.

CHAPTER 3

1. The call and promise of wisdom (3:1-10)
2. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom (3:11-20)
3. Promise and instruction (3:21-25)

Verses 1-10. The call to obedience is followed by promise. The promise is like all the promises to an earthly people "for length of days and long life". Here are some blessed exhortations loved and cherished by all His people (verses 5-7). How happier, and more fruitful the children of God would be if they obeyed constantly this instruction: "in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."

Verses 11-20. Verses 11-12 are quoted in Hebrews 12. The man who findeth wisdom, that is, who knows the Lord, is happy. If we look upon wisdom as personified in the Lord Jesus Christ we can read "His ways are pleasantness, and all His paths are peace. He is a tree of life to them that lay hold on Him, and happy is every one that retaineth Him" (17-18).

Verses 21-34. The words of the Lord kept are life to the soul, grace to the neck; they insure safety; they protect and keep by day and by night. Each verse has a blessed meaning. This chapter ends with the promise that the wise shall inherit glory while the promotion of fools will be shame.

CHAPTER 4

1. Solomon's training (4:1-9)
2. Hear, O my son: Receive my sayings (4:10-19)
3. My son, attend to my words. (4:20-27)

Verses 1-9. This passage shows the early training which Solomon received and he passeth on the instructions. It is said that these verses formed a model for many Puritan homes in England and the Scotland of the covenant. He was the beloved one, his father's true son. Note the different exhortation, about wisdom: Forget it not; forsake her not; love her; exalt her. Then the promises: She shall preserve thee; she shall keep thee; she shall promote thee; she gives honor; an ornament of grace for the head and a crown of glory. If we take wisdom and make it the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word, what blessed food for the soul we will enjoy!

Verses 10-19. Here we find instructions for Solomon and all the godly with the corresponding promises. Then there is the warning concerning the path of the wicked and a contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.

But the way of the righteous is as the dawn of light
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

This is a blessed statement. As soon as we accept the true wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ, we enter upon a way which faceth the east, the sunrise. The light of the coming dawn illumines that path, and at some time the perfect day will break when all shadows flee away.

Verses 20-27. Instructions to receive and to obey the words of wisdom are the contents of this address. The eye is never to be taken off from the words of the Lord; they are to be kept in the midst of the heart. How important to listen to such counsel, even for us His children:

Keep thy heart with all diligence;
For out of it are the issues of life.

CHAPTER 5

1. Shun the strange woman and sinful passion (5:1-14)
2. The life of chastity (5:15-23)

Verses 1-14. It is a warning against literal fornication and the accompanying spiritual fornication, turning away from the worship of Jehovah and worshipping idols. The dreadful results of sinful lust are vividly described. How many a young man has found out the truth as given in these words in his licentious life.

And thou mourn at thy latter end
When thy flesh and thy body are consumed.

Solomon received these repeated warnings, yet after great prosperity and honor came to him, and his glory spread in every direction like many a rich and successful man of today, these warnings were not heeded and he had to experience in his own life the truths of these words he had penned by the Spirit of God.

Verses 15-23. Here we have a sweet exhortation and picture of marital fidelity and a picture of true love in family life. How the Christian family should manifest something greater than this is revealed in Ephesians 5.

CHAPTER 6

1. The surety (6:1-5)
2. The sluggard (6:6-11)
3. The naughty, good-for-nothing person (6:12-19)
4. The strange woman (6:20-35)

Verses 1-5. These are instructions concerning contracts, in being surety for a neighbor and the danger connected with it.

Verses 6-11. The sluggard is commanded to go to the ant for a lesson. (See also 30:25.) The ant is a marvellous little creature. That which modern science has found out by close observation of the life of this little insect is here tersely stated by the words of the Lord, the Creator. They swarm in the woods and in the fields; they work day and night; they capture, train and nourish aphides, which they use as a kind of slave. They build vast and symmetrical mounds, which they use as homes and barns, and which are, relatively to the size of the tiny builders, three times larger than the Egyptian pyramids. They march and labor in unison, have their own wars, nourish their sick, and all is done without a chief, an overseer or a ruler. Yet man with a higher intelligence and a higher work to do can be a sluggard.

Verses 12-19. The description of the sluggard is followed by that of a worthless person. It is a son of Belial (the term used in the Hebrew) whose picture is drawn. He is a naughty person, a good-for-nothing, a man of iniquity; he has a lying mouth. A minute description of his way and work is given; everywhere he makes mischief and causeth division. But suddenly there comes the calamity upon him. He shall be broken and that without remedy. Such is the way of the man who despiseth wisdom, follows his old nature and plunges ultimately into the outer darkness. Finally there will yet appear "the man of sin," that wicked one, in whom all these evils will culminate and he shall suddenly be broken without remedy. (See Daniel 11:45.) We do well to read carefully the six things which the Lord hateth (6:16-19).

Verses 20-35. The words of the Lord, the commandment and the law as stated here, are of unspeakably great importance. They are to be in the heart and about the neck.

When thou walkest, it shall lead thee;
When thou sleepest, it shall watch over thee;
And when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.

They are a lamp and a light; they are the way of life. Then follows another description of the evil woman, a warning not to lust after her beauty nor to be taken by her eyelids. These oriental women painted their faces; by plucking their eyebrows they made them almond-shaped. Alas! that in the society of the twentieth century the women and girls of a so-called Christian civilization should do the same thing, and we fear,

for the same purpose as the whorish woman described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

The entire chapter is a continuation of the strange woman and the warning against her. The Word and the law of the Lord will keep the obedient son from her. If Solomon had obeyed the Word of God, not to multiply wives (Deut. 17:17) his end would not have been spent in the degrading fellowship with the harlots of other nations. The description is very graphic. What the word pictures is as prominent in the great centers of Christendom as it was thousands of years ago in Babylon and Egypt. And so it is still true:

She hath cast down many wounded;
Yea, many strong men have been slain by her.
Her house is the way to hell,
Going down to the chambers of death.

But think of Solomon after having received these inspired descriptions and warnings, that he should have been forgetful of them all.

CHAPTER 8

1. The call and appeal of wisdom (8:1-11)
2. What wisdom is and what wisdom gives (8:12-21)
3. Wisdom; the Person, who He is (8:22-31)
4. The renewed appeal (8:32-36)

Verses 1-11. This is one of the most interesting chapters in the entire book. It begins with a call and appeal of wisdom, much like the call and appeal of the first chapter. If wisdom calls, has a voice, then wisdom must also be a person. Who personified wisdom is we learn most blessedly in this chapter. Wisdom calls to the sons of men; wisdom speaks of plain and excellent things; she speaks the truth; her words are the words of righteousness; wisdom is better than rubies.

Verses 12-21. This section may well be looked on as an introduction to the sublime revelation in verses 22-31. Wisdom is a person and what wisdom gives, the power wisdom has, makes it clear that wisdom is a divine person. Kings and princes rule by that person, as well as the nobles and judges of the earth. The powers that be are ordained by this wisdom. And that person says:

I love them that love Me
And those that seek Me early shall find Me.

This wisdom has riches and honor to bestow; has durable riches and righteousness; the fruit of it is better than fine gold; those that love the wisdom will receive an inheritance. In the next place we hear who that person is.

Verses 22-31. The Wisdom is the Son of God. The personification of wisdom is found in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This wonderful passage is a great prelude to the incarnation and the subsequent redemption work of the Son of God. Here Solomon beheld the highest of all; he had a vision of the Messiah of Israel, the Son of David, whose wisdom, peace and kingdom of peace and glory he but faintly foreshadowed.

The critical school must of course deny this application to our Lord. "The passage played a great role in subsequent thought, for it lies at the back of much of the speculation of Philo, and at a subsequent period was greatly employed by Christian theologians in support of their doctrine of the person of Christ through their identification of wisdom in this passage with Logos (the Word) of the fourth Gospel" (New Century Bible).

Wisdom was possessed by the Lord in the beginning of His ways, before His works of old. But that is the beginning without a beginning.

In the beginning was the Word; and because the Word, the Son of God, is God, He like God has no beginning. The word "possessed" has also the meaning of "formed". "This word has been a battleground of controversy since the days of the Arian heresy. But it is well to remember that, all theological questions apart, it is impossible to understand the word, whatever rendering of it we adopt, as indicating that wisdom ever had a beginning, or was ever properly speaking created. Wisdom is inseparable from any worthy conception of Him who is "the only wise God" (1 Tim. 1:17), and therefore is like Him "from everlasting to everlasting" (Perowne). Wisdom, the Son of God, was always with God from everlasting. Before there ever was anything created, before the mountains were settled, or even the earth had been made, He was. And when creation began He was there. He, the Son, was by Him, as one brought up with Him. From the greater revelation in the New Testament we learn that all things were created not only for Him, but also by Him (Colossians 1:16). Wisdom speaks: "And I was continually His delight, rejoicing always before Him." This can only be true of God the Son. And furthermore He says: "Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delight was with the sons of men." His delight was so great, that He laid by His glory, and left His eternal dwelling place to become man and redeem man by the death of the cross.

It is interesting to observe that this glimpse, this adumbration of a great truth, which was only to become fully clear in Christ Jesus our Lord, was advanced a tittle in clearness and completeness by a book which is not considered to be inspired, the so-called Book of Wisdom, in a passage which must be quoted: "For she (i.e., Wisdom) is a breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it."

Verses 32-36. Then follows the renewed appeal. Wisdom says, "Whosoever findeth me findeth life." How true of our Lord; in Him we find and have life. note the two occurrences of "blessed" in this paragraph.

CHAPTER 9

1. The invitation of Wisdom (9:1-12)
2. The contrast with Folly. (9:13-18)

Verses 1-12. The first section of Proverbs closeth with a contrast of Wisdom and Folly, both personified. The one, our Lord, the other under the symbol of a foolish woman. Wisdom sends forth her invitation after her house is built and the feast is spread. It reminds us of the parable of the great supper (Luke 14). Here too is the gracious invitation, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled."

Verses 13-18. Folly too has her house and sitteth in the door on a seat in the high places of the city to call to her victims. She invites to the stolen waters, so sweet to the natural man, to eat bread in secret places, equally pleasant. But what is the end? "The dead are there; ... her guests are in the depths of hell." The foolish woman is the world with its lusts.

II. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON: CHAPTERS 10--19:19

Beginning with the tenth chapter we have the collection of proverbs given by inspiration through Solomon. In this section the personal address, "My son," and the personal exhortations are missing. It will be noticed that each verse in this section contains a proverb, consisting each of two lines, mostly of an antithetic character, except 19:7, which has three lines instead of two (a tristich).

It is impossible to give a detailed analysis of these chapters, nor can we take up each proverb separately for meditation. This must be left to each reader. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, and a prayerful study of these terse sayings, the heavenly wisdom given in these chapters can readily be found. There is no end to practical application. Yet even in these chapters a certain order is maintained. The contrast in each chapter is between the righteous and the wicked, between right and wrong.

CHAPTER 10

The Godly and the Ungodly in Life and Conduct

The opening proverbs are concerning treasures, earthly substance. What an important sentence, "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing!" Throughout these proverbs there are the warnings concerning getting riches, or as it is expressed in a modern phrase "getting rich quick" (28:20), and the dangers connected with it.

These grave warnings of Wisdom are especially needed at the present time in England and America, when the undisguised and the unrestrained pursuit of riches has become more and more recognized as the legitimate end of life, so that few people feel any shame in admitting that this is their aim; and the clear unimpassioned statements of the result, which always follows on the unhallowed passion receive daily confirmation from the occasional revelations of our domestic, our commercial and our criminal life. He that is greedy of gain, we are told, troubleth his own house. An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed. A faithful man shall abound with blessings, but he that maketh haste to be rich (and consequently cannot by any possibility be faithful) shall not be unpunished. He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches, and knoweth not that want shall come upon him. "Weary not thyself," therefore, it is said, "to be rich;" which, though

it may be the dictate of thine own wisdom, is really unmixed folly, burdened with a load of calamity for the unfortunate seeker, for his house, and for all those who are in any way dependent upon him (Expositor's Bible).

There are also warnings against being slack, which maketh poor, while the hand of the diligent, he that is up and doing, maketh rich. We find promises and assurance for the godly like these: "Righteousness delivereth from death ... the Lord will not suffer the righteous, the soul of the righteous to famish ... blessings are upon the head of the just ... the memory of the just is blessed."

The walk and conduct of the two classes are contrasted, especially in relation to the mouth and lips. The walk of the righteous is the sure walk (10:9); the mouth of the righteous is a well of life, it is a fountain for good (10:11). In this proverb we are reminded of John 4:10 and 7:38, the believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit welling forth waters of life. While violence covers the mouth of the wicked and hatred does nothing but stir up strife, love, the true love in the heart of the just covereth all transgressions. (See 1 Peter 4:8 and James 5:20.) Whoever has understanding his lips speak wisdom. In all these proverbs there is something to be learned in a practical way and many blessed lessons are written here for all who desire to walk righteously, godly and soberly in this evil age. Here is a test, for instance, "He is in the way of life that heedeth correction" (10:17, corrected translation). But as soon as one forsaketh reproof he errs. How well it would be if children of God would daily consider verse 19. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise." The fear of the wicked, the fear of the Lord, the hope of the righteous and the expectations of the wicked are furthermore contrasted in this chapter.

CHAPTER 11

The Contrast Continued

The continued contrast in this chapter between the righteous and the wicked contains many precious gems, sweet to faith and wholesome for instruction. In the second verse there is a warning as to pride. Pride and shame are vitally linked together, as is lowliness and wisdom. Lowliness therefore is true wisdom. A Rabbinical comment on this passage says, "Lowly souls are filled with wisdom as the lowly places are filled with water." Again riches are mentioned. They profit nothing in the day of wrath. (See Zephaniah 1.) But righteousness delivered from death (11:4). What wisdom there is in verse 8, "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, but the wicked cometh in his stead." Even so will it be when the Lord comes and gives rest and deliverance to His own and trouble and wrath to the wicked (2 Thess. 1). Verse 19 has been rendered:

He that is steadfast in righteousness is so unto life,
And he that pursueth evil doeth so unto his own death.

The delight of the Lord, declares the next proverb, is in the way of the upright, who remain steadfast in righteousness.

In verse 30 we read that the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, not the righteous is a tree of life, but the fruit of the righteous, which means that he gives forth blessing and life to others,

and that is here expressed in one sentence, "and he that winneth souls is wise." (See Daniel 12:3.)

CHAPTER 12

The Contrast in Relation to Various Conditions

In these proverbs we have the righteous mentioned, his thoughts, his words, his domestic relationship, his attitude toward animal creation (12:10); his diligence; all is contrasted with the wicked in these beautiful antithetic expressions of wisdom. The thoughts of the righteous are right (12:5), because his heart is right; his words bring deliverance (12:6); in speaking truth he showeth forth righteousness (12:17); his tongue is health (12:18); the lip which uttereth truth shall be established for ever (12:19); he knows nothing of lying lips, but dealing truly he is the Lord's delight (12:22). All is summed up in one statement, with which the chapter closeth: "In the way of righteousness there is life; in the pathway thereof there is no death." Happy are we if we know this way, which is Christ Himself, and if we follow Him. Verse 21 speaks of the blessing of the righteous, "There shall no evil happen to the just," that is, all things must work together for good.

CHAPTER 13

The Contrast: Advantage and Disadvantage

The contrast in Proverbs concerning the righteous and the wicked is continued in this chapter, showing mostly the advantage of the righteous, illustrating a statement found in the prophet Isaiah: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings" (Isaiah 3:10). Then the contrast: "Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (verse 11). The righteous eats good by the fruit of his mouth; the transgressor receives violence. There is fatness for the soul of the diligent and nothing for the soul of the sluggard. Righteousness keepeth; wickedness overthroweth. While the light of the righteous rejoiceth, the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. These are some of the contrasts.

In verse 7 is a statement which may be applied to our Lord: "There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." He who has all the riches made Himself poor for our sake.

Then there is warning against pride. In fact the proverbs abound in these warnings. "By pride cometh contention" (verse 10). To the proud who refuseth correction cometh poverty and shame (verse 18).

CHAPTER 14

The Wise and The Foolish: The Rich and The Poor

The contrast now concerns the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor. Let us see some of these contrasts. "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise shall preserve them" (14:3). The foolish shoots forth his foolishness like a branch. Separation from the foolish man is commanded in the seventh verse. The wise cannot have fellowship with the foolish, as the believer is not to be yoked to the unbeliever. Fools make a mock at sin (14:9). The word "sin" in the

original means "trespass offering." That is exactly what the foolish man does, including the religious fool; he denies both sin and the blessed provision God has made to deliver from the guilt and power of sin. But among the righteous, says the next line, there is favor (acceptance). Because the righteous owns himself a sinner, judgeth himself and accepts God's redemption through the one sacrifice.

How true it is "the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger does not intermeddle with its joy" (14:10). We can tell our troubles and sorrows to others, but the bitterness of the heart cannot be revealed, but it is known to One who is touched with our sorrows and the bitterness of life through which we pass, for He Himself passed through it also.

Here is another deep saying, which shows that behind this wisdom uttered by the wise king, there is another who knows all what is going on in human life and in the heart. "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness" (10:13). How often the sorrowful, the downcast covers all with forced laughter and no one suspects that underneath the mirth there is heaviness. This is true of children of the world, the foolish who reject true wisdom and know not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of the poor and the rich we read that the poor is hated; the rich has many friends (14:20). He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoreth Him hath mercy on the poor" (14:31). To deal kindly with the poor and the lowly is God-like. The righteous will manifest his righteousness in a practical way by considering the poor.

Precious are two other proverbs in this chapter.

In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence;
And His children shall have a place of refuge.
The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,
To depart from the snares of death. (14:26-27)

CHAPTER 15

The Better Things

One can read through the proverbs recorded in this chapter and ask the question, What are the better things?

A soft answer which turneth away wrath is better than grievous words (verse 1). The tongue of the righteous which useth knowledge aright is better than the mouth of fools (verse 2). Better is the prayer of the upright than the sacrifice of the wicked (verse 8). Better is he that followeth after righteousness than the way of the wicked, for the one the Lord delights in, the other is an abomination (verse 9). Better is the heart that seeketh knowledge than to feed on foolishness (verse 14). Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith (verse 16). This fits many in our own days. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (verse 17). Better it is to be slow to anger than wrathful (verse 18). Better is the plain way of the righteous than the thorny way of the slothful (verse 19). Better is to hear reproof than to refuse it (verse 32).

Some other deep sayings are found in this chapter. For instance in verse 11.

Sheol and destruction are before the LORD,
How much more then the hearts of the children of men.

(Destruction, or Abaddon, is used in Revelation 9:11.)

All is known to the Lord. The unseen world as well as the future; all eternity is known to Him. All is naked and open before Him. He knoweth the hearts of men, yea even our thoughts afar off, before they ever pass through our finite minds.

Twice prayer is mentioned in this chapter, in verses 8 and 29. Not alone does the Lord delight in the prayer of the upright, but He also heareth them. "The LORD is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous."

CHAPTER 16

In the Light of the Lord

The name Jehovah (LORD) appears eleven times in this chapter of Proverbs. The Lord has the final word, for to man belong the preparations (or plans) of the heart; but from the LORD is the answer of the tongue. It is the same thought as in our English proverb--"Man proposes--God disposes." Man loves to justify himself, his ways are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits; He is the judge of ways and motives. Our works are to be committed (literal: rolled upon) unto the LORD, then establishment and blessing will follow. It is strange that these three verses were omitted in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.

The LORD hath made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (verse 4). Much error has been taught in connection with this verse. Some have taught that God made some wicked. It is not said that God makes a man wicked, for "He made man upright" (Eccles. 7:29), but being wicked by his own choice he comes under the irrevocable law which dooms him to "the day of evil," of calamity and punishment. By this, the Apostle teaches us, even in its final and most awful form, is revealed not the arbitrary predestination, but "the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5-11, T.T. Perowne).

The abomination to the Lord is to be proud in heart. Pride, not only pride as it works out in deeds, but pride as nourished in the heart, seen by the eyes of the Lord alone, is equally an abomination to Him. How much there is in these days! The second stanza of this proverb speaks of joining hand in hand, or hand to hand. It is the much praised "team-work," confederation, alliance, etc., to do a big work and make a big name. Much of this attempt of doing "big things" in the day of "small things" has its source in the pride of the natural man.

In the sixth proverb of this chapter we have a Gospel text. The word mercy is literally "grace." The word "purged" is the word translated elsewhere by "covered" or "atoned." In the Lord Jesus Christ and His work

is revealed "grace and truth" and by His work so blessedly finished on the cross our iniquity is covered. Then comes the fear of the Lord which results in departing from evil.

If a man walks in righteousness, in true humility, if he pleaseth the LORD, then his enemies will be silenced and not talk against him. Only too often the charges brought against the children of God by the enemies of truth, are the result of not walking in the truth.

Comforting to faith is the ninth verse. We may devise, plan, and often worry as we make our plans but behind it stands the LORD and in spite of our failures and mistakes "He directeth" the steps of the righteous.

Twice more the name of the LORD is given in this chapter. "And whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he" (verse 20). The only true happiness is to know the Lord, to trust Him and to follow Him. Inasmuch as we may increase in knowledge of Him, in confidence and in practical obedience our happiness is an increasing happiness. In the last verse we read that the disposing of the lot is of the LORD. The lot was used in the Old Testament. It is mentioned rarely in the New Testament, once preceding the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:26).

After the Holy Spirit came to guide and direct no lot is needed any longer. We pass over the many other blessed instructions recorded in this chapter. Private meditation and prayer unlock the many riches deposited in them.

CHAPTER 17

Diverse Proverbs

Of the twenty-eight proverbs found in this chapter we point out but a few. "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold; but the LORD trieth the hearts" (verse 3). Man may try silver and gold, but God only the hearts. And He tries the hearts by the refining process, trials and afflictions, the process which rests in His own hands. (See Psalm 66:10-12; Mal. 3:3-4; 1 Peter 1:7.)

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (verse 9). To cover a transgression does not mean to ignore sin. How he who has sinned and is in transgression is to be dealt with is given to us in Galatians 6:1-5. To act in the spirit of love towards one who has sinned is Christ-like. To repeat the matter, gossip about it, harp on the shortcomings and failure, is Satan-like, for he is the accuser of the brethren.

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (verse 17). This is beautifully illustrated in the case of David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18--20). And the great Friend, the brother born for adversity, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He loveth at all times; His love is limitless and timeless. It is the love which passeth knowledge.

CHAPTER 18

Proverbs of Personal Instruction

There is first a warning against separation produced by desire, that is for gratification and pleasure, and not for a righteous purpose. Such a one becomes an enemy of true wisdom and one who intermeddled with all wisdom. This proverb finds a New Testament illustration in Alexander the coppersmith, as well as Hymenaeus and Philetus, and Diotrephes of whom John writes in his epistle. A fool foams out his own folly. This proverb in verse 2 is illustrated by many of the critics of the Bible. They have no delight in true understanding but their own hearts are laid bare by their mad oppositions to God's Holy Word.

The fool's mouth, his lips, the talebearer (whisperer), and the slothful are the themes of the proverbs in verses 6-9. Then we read "The Name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe" (verse 10). The Name (Ha-Shem, in Hebrew) stands for Jehovah Himself. He is the place of refuge, of shelter, protection and safety for all who in faith turn to Him. In Him is our peace and safety. The Hebrew meaning of "is safe" is "set on high." Even so if we flee to Him and become His, we are exalted in Him, seated in Christ in heavenly places.

Another proverb of solemn meaning is found in verse 12. "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility. Scripture abounds in illustrations of these two lines. The truth stated here is still being manifested in the lives of men and women. The only place of safety for God's people is the place in the dust, the place of humility.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (verse 21). The Epistle of James (chapter 3) speaks in the same manner of the power of the tongue and its misuse. Evil words will bring evil results. But the tongue speaking the words of life and love, as given in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a power for good, the power of life--and oh! what shall the harvest be in that day!

CHAPTER 19:1-19

Further Proverbs on Personal Instruction

One may be poor, but walking in integrity, he is far ahead of him who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. Then we find proverbs about fretting against the Lord; warning against false witness and speaking lies and other matters. We call special attention to verse 12.

The King's wrath is as the roaring of a lion.
But his favour is as dew upon the grass.

It may be applied to Him who is The Lamb of God and also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Some day He will roar in His displeasure and manifest the wrath, so well deserved by the world. But even then His grace will be revealed, for in wrath He will remember mercy, the mercy promised to Israel. "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth its roots as Lebanon" (Hosea 14:5).

We then read of a foolish son, a contentious wife, concerning houses and riches, a prudent wife. There is a warning against slothfulness, and exhortation to keep the commandments and to pity the poor, for giving to the poor means lending to the Lord. The son is to be chastened as long as

there is hope and a warning against sinful wrath. This verse marks the end of this section of proverbs.

III. INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN To SOLOMON

CHAPTER 19:20-29

Beginning with the twentieth verse of chapter 19 the personal address begins again and we read repeatedly the phrase "My son" up to the twenty-fifth chapter. This section corresponds therefore with the first nine chapters, containing the instructions which Solomon received from the Lord and which he records in these chapters.

Once more there is the call, like in the opening chapters, to hear, to give attention. "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." The Lord knew beforehand what "the latter end" of Solomon would be. The wise man who warned against the fool, the backslider, the unjust and the man who forsakes counsel and the Lord, himself illustrates the truths given in these proverbs by turning away from the Lord. Alas! he did not hear counsel, and therefore instead of being wise in his latter days he became a fool. The truth expressed in verse 22 was Solomon's portion as long as the fear of the Lord governed his conduct. He was satisfied, had peace and prosperity; but when he no longer feared the Lord, evil came upon his kingdom and it was divided. "Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou has not kept My covenant and My statutes which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant" (1 Kings 11:11).

CHAPTER 20

Proverbs as to Personal Conduct

Proverbs of warning and instructions as to personal conduct are found mostly in this chapter; a number of them are of special interest if applied to Solomon. The first one is concerning wine and strong drink. As the use of wine among the people of Israel was legitimate the warning is against intemperance (Deut. 14:26). The Bible gives many illustrations of the truth of this proverb-warning. We may think of Noah, Lot, Nabal, Ben-hadad, Belshazzar and others.

From all the good things we select the following. In verse 3 is instruction which makes for peace. It is the fool who meddles and thus produces strife, but it is an honor for man to cease from strife. In verse 13 we find a warning against self-indulgence. In verse 19 the talebearer and flatterer is mentioned. The sin of flattery should be avoided by all the godly for it nourisheth pride and works nothing but evil.

Many great and noble men have been ruined by admiration and popularity, who might have thriven, growing greater and nobler, in the fiercest and most relentless criticism. Donatello, the great Florentine sculptor, went at one time of his life to Padua, where he was received with the utmost enthusiasm, and loaded with approbation and honors. But soon he declared his intention of returning to Florence, on the ground that the sharp assaults and the cutting criticisms which always assailed

him in his native city were much more favorable to his art than the atmosphere of admiration and eulogy. In this way he thought that he would be stimulated to greater efforts, and ultimately attain to a surer reputation.

Verse 22 gives another beautiful instruction. "Say not, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and He shall save thee." To put everything in the hands of the Lord, to trust Him and wait for His own time, that is true wisdom. But it is a lesson hard to learn. The twelfth chapter of Romans gives the same instruction. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Also 1 Thess. 5:15: "See that none render evil for evil;" and 1 Peter 3:9; "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing." How blessed it is to wait on the Lord, to bide His own time, and in waiting to know that He does all things well. Thrice in this chapter the king is mentioned: in verses 2, 26 and 28. These verses may be applied to Him, who is greater than Solomon, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. When He comes again He will deal with the lawless and with His enemies, but His throne is not only a judgment throne, but it is also upheld by mercy.

CHAPTER 21

Personal Instructions as to Life and Conduct

In the proverbs of this chapter the Lord is mentioned five times. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (verse 1). The rivers of water are "water-courses," the irrigation system known to the ancients, opening and shutting sluices directed the flow of the waters. Thus the Lord governs the king's heart as He directs the affairs of men. The Lord pondereth the hearts (verse 2). The same truth is stated in chapter 16:2; self-justification suits the natural man but the Lord testeth all hearts. How well it is to remember in all our conduct, that truth, so comforting to the believer, expressed by Peter, "Thou knoweth all things." More acceptable than sacrifice to the Lord, is to do righteousness and judgment (verse 3). This may be compared with 1 Sam. 15:22, Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8. The words of our Lord in the Gospel of Matthew give the same truth. "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13). At the close of the chapter two additional statements are made concerning the Lord; "There is no wisdom nor understanding, nor counsel against the LORD" (verse 30). No matter how man may plan, how cunning the enemy may be, it will all come to naught, for the Lord is above all. How well Eliphaz the Temanite expressed this truth when he said: "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:12-13). Safety is not by "the horse prepared against the day of battle, nor by might or by power, but safety is of the LORD" (verse 31). How well then to look away from man and look to the Lord and to know in Him is our safety. The other proverbs in this chapter giving direction as to life and conduct, warning against the high look and the proud heart, getting of treasures by a lying tongue, against heartlessness in refusing to hear the cry of the poor, against loving pleasure and luxurious living, against covetousness and other matters do not need further annotations.

CHAPTER 22

Instructions Continued

Better than great riches, better than silver and gold is a name and loving favor. If a person has riches and a bad name and is not well thought of, he is less honorable than the poor man who has a name and good reputation. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon says: "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccles. 7:1). The third verse has a wise message: "The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on, and suffer for it." The Lord has revealed in His Word the evil which is in store for the sinner and the impenitent. He also has prepared a hiding place, an ark of safety, in His Son, our Lord. The prudent believeth the Word and flees to the refuge; the simple, the unbelieving, pass on and suffer for it when the evil comes. Humility and the fear of the Lord has a reward, while thorns and snares are in the way of the froward. sowing and reaping is found in verses 8 and 9. He that soweth iniquity reaps vanity, or calamity; he that has a bountiful eye, who looks upon the poor and needy with kindness and supplies their wants reaps blessing. In verse 11 we read, "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." In such, whose hearts are pure and whose words are gracious, the Lord, the King, delights.

Beginning with verse 18 we find another call to hear, and to apply the heart to His knowledge: "For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee, they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee." This is the personal message to Solomon by the Lord, heeded by him for many years and finally disobeyed.

The proverb of verse 28: "Remove not the ancient landmarks, which thy father has set," is a restatement of Deut. 19:14. It is repeated in chapter 23:10. In Job 24:2 we read "Some remove the landmarks." These landmarks were for Israel sacred things, for their possessions were staked off according to the Lord's will; to meddle with them was a transgression. While Israel, God's earthly people had landmarks, God's heavenly people also has landmarks of the heavenly realm, the blessed doctrines of the Word of God, which constitute the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints. And how man removes these landmarks in our day! How true it is, "Some remove the landmarks," that which our fathers cherished, believed and trusted in. The rationalist, the ritualist and the delusionist do it constantly and thus destroy the foundation upon which everything rests.

CHAPTER 23

Instructions Continued

The opening proverbs of this chapter treat of self-restraint in curbing the appetite and give manners to be observed in the presence of a superior. Warnings against riches and their uncertainty are contained in verses 4 and 5. How well it would be if the great mass of professing Christians, and some true believers also, would consider this instruction: "Labor not to be rich." But this exhortation as well as the exhortation in 1 Timothy 6:1-10 is overlooked, and many who profess to have their riches in Christ, in the heavenly places and never ending glory, weary themselves with earthly gain, and aim to become wealthy. But

riches have wings; they can fly away swiftly as does the eagle when he mounts heavenward. This too is mentioned in the epistle to Timothy, in which those who are rich are charged not to be highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but to be rich in good works. The evil eye mentioned in verse 6 has nothing to do with the superstitious belief that some person with an evil eye can cast a spell to harm others. It means a dishonest, insincere person, one who is pharisaical. While he urges to eat and drink, puts on a friendly front, in his heart he entertains other thoughts.

Not to envy sinners is commanded in verse 17; one who walks in fear of the Lord all the day long looks to their end, though they may prosper now, their prosperity will end, but the expectation of him who fears the Lord will not be cut off.

Beginning with verse 22 is another call to hearken. Parents are to be obeyed. The truth is to be bought and never to be sold, as well as wisdom, instruction and understanding. There is a price often to be paid for the possession of the truth. Some have suffered even unto death to possess the truth, and in its defense. Then in verse 26 is the familiar exhortation, "My Son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes delight in my ways." This word is often misused when applied to sinners, the unsaved. It is addressed to a son. The gospel does not come to the sinner with the exhortation "give"; the sinner has nothing to give. The gospel comes with an offer and if the offer of free grace is accepted, the believing sinner becomes a child of God, a son of God and an heir. Such a one is to yield his whole heart to the Lord, and his eyes are to delight in His ways. Thus Jehovah spoke to Solomon. The chapter ends with proverbs relating to self-indulgence, the sin of intemperance and all that goes with it.

CHAPTER 24

Instructions Continued

In the final instructions of this chapter we find first a description of the evil men. Their heart studieth destruction; their lips talk mischief. This theme is repeatedly referred to in this chapter. In verse 15 the evil man is addressed not to lay wait for the righteous and not to spoil his resting place. The Lord takes care of the righteous; he may be overcome by misfortunes seven times, yet will he rise again. Different it is with the wicked when he falls into mischief. Yet there must be no rejoicing over the fall of the enemy, nor gladness when he stumbled. This displeaseth the Lord. Still higher is the command of the New Testament, "Love your enemies; ... recompense no man evil for evil; ... overcome evil with good." There is to be no fretting because of evil men nor envy (verses 1 and 19). Why should the righteous be envious at the wicked in their prosperity? The Thirty-seventh Psalm enters more fully into this; but here the same answer is given in a terse way. The wicked have no reward; their candle will be put out. Their calamity riseth suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both? which means that the Lord and the king, will deal with the wicked. Another proverb of this chapter we mention: "If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small" (verse 10). The hour of trial is the hour which brings the test. When adversity brings despondency, and even worse, murmuring, it is an evidence that the heart does not fully trust the Lord.

The last section of this chapter is introduced by the statement, "These things also belong to the wise," or as it may be rendered, "These also are sayings of the wise." The chapter ends with a vivid description of the slothful. His field and vineyard bear witness to his character. They are grown over with thorns and covered with nettles and the stone wall is broken down. And why all this? "Yet a little Sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in sleep." An illustration of this sluggard can be found a thousand times over again in our own land.

IV. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON COLLECTED BY THE MEN OF HEZEKIAH

CHAPTER 25

Here begin the proverbs which the good king Hezekiah, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, added to this book. "This title is interesting as affording a proof that a revival of literary activity accompanied the revival of religion and of national prosperity which marked the reign of Hezekiah. The men of Hezekiah were doubtless a body of scribes engaged under the direction of the king in literary labors."

Very fittingly the opening verses of this collected portion of proverbs relate to the king. While it is the glory of God to conceal a thing, the glory of kings is to search out a matter. God has many things concealed as to Himself, the great universe, creation and His ways in providence; but kings should inquire diligently into the matters brought before them and search them out in their administration of justice. Some day the great King who is coming, the King of Kings, who knows all the secrets of God as well as the hearts of men, will search out all things and bring the hidden things to light. When that day comes the fifth verse will see its accomplishment.

Take away the wicked from before the king--
And His throne shall be established in righteousness.

When He comes to establish His throne of righteousness, to rule as the true Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness and of Peace, the wicked and evildoers will be taken away in judgment. Only then can there be a righteous government. Verses 6 and 7 remind us of the parable of the great supper spoken by our Lord in Luke 14.

Verses 21 and 22 are quoted by the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Romans (12:20). And that is followed by another saying as to the conduct of the righteous man. "The north wind driveth away rain; so does an angry countenance, a backbiting tongue." The backbiter does the work of Satan and the Lord hates the slandering tongue as He hates the flattering tongue. The believer can show an angry countenance, without sinning, and cut short the pernicious work of the backbiter (Ephesians 4:26). Verse 28 gives a good definition of true self-control, the rule over one's own spirit.

CHAPTER 26

Concerning the Fool and the Sluggard

Eleven times we meet the word fool in this chapter. Three different

words are used in the Hebrew for fool. The first is "avil" which signifies weakness. The second word "kesil" occurs nearly fifty times, means fat or dense. The third word is the Hebrew "nabal," which is derived from the verb to fade, or to wither; it means a vulgar, bad man who has given himself over to wickedness. The natural man in his condition, his darkened mind, his sinfulness answers to much that is said about the fool in this book. As snow in summer and rain at harvest time are quite impossible in Palestine, so is honor for a fool. A fool may utter a curse, as they often do, and wish something evil, but being causeless, it will not be fulfilled. The fool needs correction, the stripes for his back, he deserves no answer, and if he is answered it must be according to his folly. The foolish questions mentioned in the New Testament may well be considered here (Titus 3:9). The tenth verse is doubtful in its translation. A better suggested rendering is the following:

A master workman formeth all himself aright,
But he that hireth a fool hireth a transgressor--

That is, a master does everything right; a fool spoils everything. The eleventh verse is quoted in 2 Peter 2:22. The Apostle applies it to the outward professor of Christianity who turns back to the world after a period of profession and reformation. The true child of God is never described as a dog, nor could the other sentence in Peter's Epistle mean a true believer. "The sow that was washed turned to her own wallowing in the mire." A hog may be washed, yet in spite of the washing he is still a hog. So a sinner may profess salvation yet may never have been born again, and after a brief period of profession turn again to his old sins and habits.

The slothful man, the man that deceiveth his neighbor, the talebearer, the contentious man, the lying tongue and the flattering mouth, furnish other proverbs. How true it is "A flattering mouth worketh ruin." Every godly man and woman should hate and avoid flattery.

V. INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO SOLOMON

In the three chapters which follow 27-29 we find the change we have noticed before. These proverbs are addressed to a person and the phrases "My son" and the personal address, "thou," "thy" and "thyself," are again used in these chapters. Like the previous sections, so here we find instructions which were given to Solomon.

CHAPTER 27

Instructions and Warnings

The opening proverb warns against procrastination. No one can be sure of what the next day may bring forth. True wisdom is not to trust the future day, for it may never come, nor are we to dwell in the past. While it is today we must live and act and leave nothing undone which can be done today. How true this is of salvation which is offered for today--now is the day of salvation. How many have been lost forever by procrastination, by thinking a more convenient time would come. Well has one said, "The thief which cheats us of our days and beggars us of our wealth is the specious thought that tomorrow belongs to us." The illusion

is as old as the world, but is today as fresh and powerful as ever. James 4:13-14 gives the same lesson. In the second verse we find a warning as to self-praise. Self-praise is one of the worst forms of pride, that pride which another proverb states (16:18-19) "goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

"Open rebuke is better than secret love" and "faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (verses 5-6). A wise man welcomes open criticism and rebuke, though such rebuke may wound, yet being given by the faithfulness of a friend, it is far better than the deceitful kisses of a flattering enemy. The 14th verse may be linked with these statements. "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse unto him." Insincerity lurks behind such loud, pharisaical protestations of friendship.

A great truth is given in verse 19: "As in water face answereth face, so the heart of man to man." The still pool of water was man's first mirror. Gazing in it the face is reflected. As truly as the face seen in the pool is like the face which the water reflects, so truly does one man's heart reflect the other's. Though there may be culture, education and a certain refinement, underneath each human being there is the same corrupt, fallen human nature.

CHAPTER 28

Warnings and Instructions Continued

The wicked is a coward; the righteous man, because he trusteth in the Lord and knows the Lord is on his side, is as bold as a lion. It is the conscience which makes a coward of the wicked man.

This chapter has many sharp contrasts and important warnings and exhortations. We point out a few. Those who forsake the law, turn their backs upon the revelation of God, refuse obedience to Him, praise the wicked, they make common cause with them. Those who keep the law, obey God's Word, are contenders for the faith (verse 4). Evil men are blind, but with seeking the Lord comes understanding, the blind eyes are opened (verse 5). A wise son is he who keepeth the law; such was Solomon till he plunged into apostasy and darkness (verse 7). Then in the ninth verse is another pithy saying. He "that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." It is the same truth as stated in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

An important message is contained in verse 13. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Every attempt to cover up sin is a failure. How much of this is done today, not merely the covering of individual sins, but the denial of sin itself. The modern theology useth much ingenious argumentation which tries to make out of sin something else; speaks of it as a mere defect, as if it were some kind of a taint in the blood, a hereditary and therefore unavoidable weakness, something for which man is not responsible. All these inventions, which sweep aside the declarations of the infallible Word of God, are "covering up." No mercy can there be for those who deny sin and sins. The fig leaves must be torn away with which man still tries to cover his nakedness. There must be confession, repentance, self-judgment and then of course trust in Him who died for

the ungodly.

The next proverb (verse 14) contains a beatitude. "Happy--or blessed--is the man that feareth always." He who has found forgiveness is sheltered by the precious blood, walks in newness of life and in godly fear all the day long.

We mention verses 25 and 26: "Trust in the LORD brings blessing; and he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

CHAPTER 29

The Final Instructions

These final instructions given in proverbs cover the similar ground as those in the previous chapters. Wisdom shines out in each, and the contents of every proverb shows that the author is not Solomon but He who is perfect in knowledge. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Scripture abounds with examples of cases of hardening the neck and the heart, like Pharaoh, Ahab and others. This proverb will be finally proven to be the truth when an ungodly age will end with judgment for those who were often reprov'd and continue in sin.

Once more the sin of flattery is mentioned. "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet" (verse 5). Flattery is akin to lying and can never be right, but is always a mistake, which results in the gravest consequences. More servants of the Lord have been spoiled by flattery than in any other manner. It is literally, as this proverb says, "spreading a net for his feet."

In verse 23 we read, "A man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit." It should be connected with the proverb in chapter 26:12, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceits? There is more hope of a fool than of him." Pride always brings low; humility always brings up. The highest place is the lowest place. "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (verse 25). The fear of man is born of unbelief. The Christian who fears man shows clearly that he is not looking to the Lord, but to man. The fear of man surely bringeth a snare, it leads to men-pleasing and men-praising. And because one seeks the honor which comes from man and not the honor which cometh from God only, man, his approval or disapproval, is feared. The fear of man is as dangerous, as subtle and as un-christianlike as flattery, talebearing, backbiting, whispering and the other evil things mentioned in these proverbs.

This chapter concludes the proverbs of Solomon. As we have seen, the instructions which he received, first from the Lord, and the instructions which were given such which were for his conduct and life, for guidance and direction, and the proverbs which were revealed to him to give to others. We express once more the belief that every true Christian should devote more attention to these God-given instructions. How much there is in all of them for all classes of believers!

CHAPTER 30

Some hold that Agur is another name for Solomon. This opinion is also upheld by the Talmud, which speaks of six names which belonged to the King: Solomon, Jedidiah, Koheleth, Son of Jakeh, Agur and Lemuel. But this opinion cannot be verified, nor do we know who Agur the son of Jakeh was. The Septuagint and the Vulgate have translated the Hebrew words and formed a sentence out of them. "Agur" means "assembler" and Jakeh has the meaning of "pious," so that some think that Agur means an unknown godly man who gathered these sayings and they were embodied in this book. We leave the name as it is, and believe that Agur, the son of Jakeh, is the name of the author of this chapter. "Whoever Agur was, he had a certain marked individuality; he combines meditation on lofty questions of theology with a sound theory of practical life. He was able to give valuable admonitions about conduct. But his characteristic delight was "to group together in quatrains visible illustrations of selected qualities or ideas" (R.F. Horton). The opening verse also tells us that he spoke to Ithiel (God with me) and Ucal (I shall be able). The Revised Version has a marginal reading instead of the two names Ithiel and Ucal: "I have wearied myself, O God. I have wearied myself O God, and am consumed." We do not adopt this.

The structure of the chapter itself is different from the other chapters in this book. It begins with a prologue, containing his confession, in which he shows a spirit of deep abasement and acknowledgment of his own ignorance (verses 2-3).

This is followed by five questions concerning creation and the Creator and His Son (verse 4).

The questions are answered by God's revelation. This is indicated in the next two verses (5 and 6).

Next comes a prayer by Agur the son of Jakeh (verses 7-9).

One proverb follows next in the tenth verse. After that come the so-called "quatrains," six groups of proverbs each consisting of four things. Between the second and third group a single proverb is inserted (verse 17) and at the close of the chapter stands another proverb.

In the prologue he takes the low place, and in his confession manifests the deepest humility, with no taint of pride, thus illustrating the true humility enjoined in the proverbs of Solomon. Because he confessed that he had no understanding nor knowledge of the holy, the Lord gave him all what he lacked.

The questions he asks are concerning the Creator. "Who is He that hath ascended up into heaven and descended? Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is His Name, and what is His Son's Name, if thou canst tell?" He knows there is a Creator. He cannot question the eternal power and Godhead, which alone can account for this ordered universe. He has not, like many thinkers, ancient and modern, dropped a plummet down the broad deep universe, and cried, No God. He knows there is a God; there must be an intelligence able to conceive, coupled with power able to release this mighty mechanism. But Who is it?

What is His Name or His Son's Name? Here are the footsteps of the Creator; but where is the Creator Himself? (Expositor's Bible) By searching God cannot be found out; the fullest answer is given in the New Testament. We are reminded of John 3:13. We know Him who has ascended, because He descended from heaven; Who is the Lord and Creator of all, now in God's presence as the glorified man, and some day He who ascended into heaven will descend again.

That in the next place the Word of God is mentioned, that is the written revelation of God, is not without meaning. Man needs this revelation to know the Lord, and have the question answered which human speculation and scientific research can never answer. On account of the statement "add thou not unto His words" critics have surmised that the canon of the Old Testament must have been completed when this chapter was written. They have put the date long after the exile. But such a conclusion is unwarranted. God had commanded long before that nothing should be added to His words (Deut. 4:2). The prayer of Agur in verses 7-9 is closely linked with the foregoing verses. He prays for deliverance from vanity and lies, that he may have a true and honest heart, so necessary for the reception of the truth of God; then he prays to have neither poverty nor riches. Poverty might induce to steal and take the name of God in vain, then His Word would be rejected by him; and riches would mean the same, as it might lead him to say, Who is the Lord?

The proverb in the form of a command in verse 10 is isolated from the trend of thought in this chapter. The first quatrain comes next in verses 11-14. Four times the word generation is used, describing the classes of people frequently mentioned in the preceding chapters of proverbs. Then follow four things which are insatiable. The climax is reached gradually. The horseleach (or vampire) has two daughters by name of "Give." Even so is the poor heart of man; and there are three and four things of the same character; the unseen regions into which disembodied spirits are going day after day, year after year; the barren womb; the earth upon which rain descends yet is never filled with water, and the fourth thing, the fire, which never saith, it is enough, which consumes till nothing is left. These unsatiable things mentioned are symbolical of the condition of the natural man, always taking in yet always, restless and never satisfied.

Then there are four things inscrutable: The way of the eagle in the air; the way of the serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the ocean; and the way of a man with a maid (verses 18-20).

Four disquieting things are given in verses 21-23. In verses 24-28 the four little things, yet wise, are pictured. They are the ants, the conies, the locusts and the lizard (not spider as in the A.V.). Here are lessons for man: the sluggard, the fool, the evil man, and other characters touched upon in proverbs are put to shame by the sagacity of these little things. Four graceful things conclude these sayings: A lion, a greyhound, an he-goat and a king, against whom there is no rising up. So may the righteous man act. Bold as a lion, swift as the greyhound to carry out the Lord's will in the Lord's service, climbing the steeps like the he-goat, and always victorious like a king undefeated. We see that these statements of Agur have a definite bearing upon the entire book of Proverbs inasmuch as they restate and illustrate the different characters, such as the ungodly, the unwise, the fool, the sluggard, the proud, the righteous, the godly, the humble, etc., mentioned in the book. Agur's message ends with a word of counsel to exercise self-restraint.

VII. THE WORDS OF KING LEMUEL TAUGHT HIM BY HIS MOTHER

CHAPTER 31

The Virtuous Woman

"The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him"; this is the superscription of this chapter. Who is King Lemuel? No king by that name is known. We do not hesitate in saying that it is Solomon. It means

"unto God" one who is devoted to the Lord. In all probability Solomon's mother called her boy by this name, and here is the record therefore of the instruction given by Solomon's mother. The warning is once more, and that very earnestly (shown by the thrice asked "what?" What shall I say unto you?) against licentiousness, against wine and strong drink. The brief words of the mother's exhortation end with a request to act righteously as king, to stand up for those who are appointed to destruction, to plead the cause of the poor and needy.

The final portion of the book of Proverbs is a description of the virtuous woman. This section is quite different from the rest of the book, like many Psalms and the Lamentations it is alphabetically arranged. The virtuous woman, who is far more valuable than rubies, is described in her home as a faithful wife, a painstaking mother and the competent mistress of her household. There is no need to allegorize this description and apply it to the Church, as some have done. But this virtuous woman stands out in prominent and bright relief--a relief against the descriptions of "the strange woman," the adulteress so repeatedly mentioned in Proverbs (2:16-20; 5:1-23; 22:14; 23:27, etc.). One of the proverbs is expanded in this beautiful picture drawn by the Spirit of God: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor from the LORD." But how few of the modern women reach this ideal! How few among Christian women measure up to it!

Thus ends the book of Proverbs, the book filled with practical instructions, warnings; food for thought and meditation; filled with wholesome counsel, with direction and guidance, the wisdom which is from above.

[Return to Top](#)