

2. FIRST LIST OF WISE SAYINGS

PROVERBS 10:1 – 22:16

Introduction to 10:1 – 22:16

Here in this section we come to the ancient core of the scroll. It is a collection of mostly single sentence wise sayings that have their origin in oral tradition. Each saying captures an aspect of life and aims to express an insight into how we can live a productive life in a way that contributes to our own personal happiness and success, and also to the well-being of the community. For the most part the religious dimension is not stated; it is assumed. The focus is on how one lives wisely in the practical circumstances of one's life. Each saying aims to give expression to a value learned from life experience. It aims to get the reader to reflect on his or her life in such a way as to avoid pitfalls and live a reflective and productive life.

It is obvious that there is not a logical sequence in the collected sayings. However there is abundant evidence to demonstrate that the collection is not haphazard (link words, alliteration, assonance, theme etc). In Hebrew consonants have a numerical value. 'Solomon' [שְׁלֹמֹה] adds up to 375 (š = 300; l = 30; m = 40; h = 5). There are 375 sayings in the collection. This is hardly a coincidence!

¹The wise sayings of Solomon.

Those responsible for the final edition of the Book of Proverbs honoured the reference to Solomon here by introducing the whole book as 'The wise sayings of Solomon son of David, king of Israel'(1:1). Two other wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible are linked with the name of Solomon: the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. For the significance of this attribution see pages 6-7.

The opening seven verses set the tone for this section. Each saying expresses an insight that is considered obvious. The aim is to get us to examine our own lives in the light of these snippets of wisdom that have come down through the tradition and are the fruit of reflection.

A wise child makes a glad father, a foolish child is a mother's grief.

Verse 1 takes us to the home, where the education of a child begins. This is the first of a number of sayings that speak of the relationship between a child and parents (see 1:5; 13:1, 24; 15:20; 17:21, 25; 19:26; 20:20).

²Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Verse 2 warns those who lack righteousness (the wicked) against thinking that their wealth will truly profit them. It is the first of many sayings that focus on poverty and wealth (see 10:4, 15, 22; 11:4, 24, 28; 13:8, 11; 14:20; 18:11, 23; 19:1, 4, 722; 20:21; 21:6, 20; 22:27; compare Psalms 37 and 73; Jeremiah 12:1). It promises the righteous that their life will not be cut short.

Verse 3 picks up from the point just made in verse 2. It expresses a conviction that is drawn, not from observation, but from an understanding of God. It offers an assurance that ‘YHWH does not let the righteous go hungry’ (see also 10:29; 11:18, 21, 23, 25, 31; 12:2; 13:21, 22, 25; 14:9, 11, 14; 15:6, 25; 22:4). It goes on to offer an assurance that YHWH ‘thwarts the craving of the wicked’ (see also 10:29; 11:18, 21, 23, 31; 12:2; 13:21, 22, 25; 14:11, 14; 15:6, 10, 25; 19:29). Later wisdom writers (notably Qohelet in Ecclesiastes and Job) recognise the fact that sometimes righteous people do go hungry, and too often the wicked seem to live satisfied lives.

Many of the sayings contrast the righteous and the wicked (see 10:6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16, 21, 25, 27, 30; 12:5, 26; 16:27, 28, 29, 30; 17:4; 21:8, 12, 26, 29; 22:10).

Verse 4 is the first of many sayings that contrast the diligent with the lazy (see 10:26; 12:11, 24, 27; 13:4; 14:23; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 20:4, 13; 21:25; 22:13).

Verse 5 is an example of a proverb. Attention is drawn to a specific situation in farm life, an obvious observation is made, and the reader is expected to apply the lesson to his or her own circumstances.

Verse 7 reflects the notion that we live on by virtue of our reputation (see also 22:1).

Verse 8 is the first of many sayings that contrast the wise and the foolish (see 10:13, 14, 23; 12:1, 8, 15, 23; 13:15, 16; 14:6, 7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 24, 33; 15:7, 14, 21; 17:10, 12, 24). A wise person is open to correction and keen to learn (see 9:8-9). The ‘commands [מִצְוֹת, *mišwōt*] to which verse 8 refers are the directives given by the teacher of wisdom. The wise of heart is the person who heeds the teaching, accepts the discipline that is a necessary component of education, and takes the wisdom to heart.

³YHWH does not let the righteous go hungry, but thwarts the craving of the wicked.

⁴A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

⁵A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.

⁶Blessings on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

⁷The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked rots.

⁸The wise of heart heed commands, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

⁹Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out.

¹⁰Whoever winks the eye causes trouble, but the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.

¹¹The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

¹²Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.

¹³On the lips of one who has understanding wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense.

¹⁴The wise store up knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings imminent ruin.

¹⁵The wealth of the rich is their fortress; the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

¹⁶The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.

¹⁷Whoever heeds instruction is a path to life, but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray.

¹⁸Lying lips conceal hatred, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

¹⁹When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech. ²⁰The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the mind of the wicked is of little worth. ²¹The speech of the righteous nourishes many, but fools die for lack of sense.

Verse 10 is an example of a proverb that is concerned for the social cohesiveness of the community (as distinct from the good of the individual). The winking of the eye may be part of the hostile magical spell associated with the 'evil eye'.

The expression 'fountain of life'(verse 11) speaks of the refreshment and life that wise words offer (see 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Verse 11 and verse 12 focus on the good that the righteous do for the community, and the harm caused by the wicked. Love 'covers'(overlooks) offences. (In the Newer Testament see James 5:20 and 1Peter 4:8).

Verse 14 makes the point that if a pupil is teachable and receptive he will mature into being a good counsellor.

As is clear from verse 15, wisdom teachers looked positively upon wealth (see verse 4) so long as it is possessed by a wise person (see verse 2; see also 18:11).

Paul draws on verse 16 in Romans 6:23. Compare Proverbs 11:18-19.

Living a self-disciplined life (verse 17) is a recurring theme (see 13:13, 14, 18; 16:32). It is 'a path to life' for oneself, but also for others.

Verses 18-21 are linked by a common theme. They speak of the power of words and how important it is for personal and social well-being that words come from a wise heart. On 'slander' see 18:8; 19:5, 9, 28. On the contrast between foolish and temperate speech see 10:31, 32; 11:12,13; 12:6, 13, 14, 18; 13:2, 3; 14:3, 23; 15:1, 2, 4, 23, 28; 16:21, 23, 24; 17:27, 28; 18:4, 6, 7, 13, 20, 21; 20:19; 21:23; 22:11.

Verse 22 tells us to thank God for prosperity, and not take credit to ourselves. Compare the following:

Unless YHWH builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.
Unless YHWH guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go late
to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved.

– Psalm 127:1-2

Fools laugh off sin, so hardened are they to things of value. The wise delight in acting wisely (see 21:15). Verse 24 echoes Psalm 37:4

Take delight in YHWH, and he will give you
the desires of your heart.

We find echoes of verse 25 in Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus speaks of what happens to houses built on rock and on sand.

What vinegar, smoke and a lazy worker have in common (verse 26) is the irritation they cause. On the topic of laziness see the references under verse 4.

Verse 27 is the first occurrence of the expression ‘fear of YHWH’ in this collection (see the Introduction 1:7). It will recur frequently (14:26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4). This is another saying of traditional ‘wisdom’ that will be challenged. The same could be said of verses 28-30. They are based, not on observation, but on an understanding of God. On verse 30 compare Proverbs 12:3, and the words of the Psalmist:

The righteous will never falter

– Psalm 112:6

The wisdom literature often advises against being envious of the prosperity enjoyed by the wicked. Psalm 112 pictures the wicked as distressed over the good fortune of the righteous. On the theme of inheriting the land (verse 30) see Psalm 37.

Verses 31-32 pick up the theme of verses 18-21 on the importance of words.

²²The blessing of YHWH makes rich, and no toil can add to it.

²³Doing wrong is sport to a fool, but wise conduct to a person of understanding.

²⁴What the wicked dread will come upon them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted.

²⁵When the tempest passes, the wicked are no more, but the righteous are established forever.

²⁶Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employers.

²⁷The fear of YHWH prolongs life, but the years of the wicked are shortened.

²⁸The hope of the righteous ends in gladness, but the expectation of the wicked comes to nothing.

²⁹YHWH is a fortress to one whose conduct is blameless, but he brings destruction to evildoers.

³⁰The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not remain in the land.

³¹The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. ³²The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.

¹A false balance is an abomination to YHWH but an accurate weight is his delight.

²Where there is arrogance disgrace follows; but wisdom is with the humble.

³The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

⁴Riches do not profit on the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

⁵The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight, but the wicked fall by their own wickedness. ⁶The righteousness of the upright saves them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their schemes.

⁷When the wicked die, their hope perishes, and the expectation of the godless comes to nothing.

⁸The righteous are delivered from trouble, and the wicked get into it instead.

⁹With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbours, but rescue is effected by the knowledge of the righteous.

¹⁰When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation.

¹¹By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

In regard to the sayings of chapter 11, McKane writes (page 427):

The sentences in this chapter are aphorisms rather than 'proverbs'. On the whole they are marked by plainness of expression and explicitness of reference, rather than by any desire to exploit the possibilities of language. Although there are figures of speech in vv. 3, 5, 22, 28b, 29a and 30, there are no 'proverbs'.

These sentences are elegantly expressed, definitive statements, but they do not employ imagery whose interpretation is left open and to whose representative potential no limits are set.

Compare the remarks on proverbs on page 4.

Verse 1 repeats the condemnation of deceitful business practice as found in the Torah (see Leviticus 19:35), and repeated by the prophets (see Amos 8:5; Micah 6:11). Though YHWH is not explicitly mentioned in verses 1-11, the idea of divine retribution underlies the 'wisdom' expressed here.

People see through pride (verse 2). A wise person doesn't need to promote himself.

Throughout the wisdom literature wealth is considered a value. However, as stressed in verses 3-9, it is not the most important value for someone who wants to live a productive and peaceful life. Righteousness is what ultimately matters. It is one's integrity and honesty that is respected by society.

In the short run the wicked may appear to prosper, but evil brings consequences in its train, and these affect the person and the community in ways that are destructive. Good brings life. Evil brings death (verse 7).

On the joy experienced when the righteous prosper (verse 10) see Psalm 5:11-12.

People don't trust someone who is putting others down (verse 12).

Verse 13 makes the connection between gossip and disloyalty. You won't receive a confidence if you can't keep it (compare 20:19).

A wise administrator seeks a broad consensus (verse 14; compare 15:22; 24:6).

For verse 15 compare 6:1-5; 17:18; 20:16.

Women should rely on their innate grace. Leave the acquisition of wealth to men with ambition and energy (verse 16).

It matters what we do and the way we do it (verse 17). Actions have consequences.

Verses 18-21 follow from belief in YHWH, not from empirical evidence discerned by the wise.

On verses 18-19 compare 10:16; 11:4.

The expression 'will not go unpunished' recurs in 16:5; 17:5; 19:5,9 (see also 28:20). The implication is that YHWH is involved. Compare the classical text:

YHWH passed before Moses, and proclaimed, "YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

– Exodus 34:7

¹²Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent.

¹³A gossip goes about telling secrets, but one who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence.

¹⁴Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of advisers there is safety.

¹⁵To guarantee loans for a stranger brings trouble, but there is security in refusing to do so.

¹⁶A gracious woman gets honour; obtaining wealth is for an energetic man.

¹⁷Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.

¹⁸The wicked earn no real gain, but those who sow righteousness get a true reward.

¹⁹Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die.

²⁰Crooked minds are an abomination to YHWH, but those of blameless ways are his delight.

²¹Be assured, the wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will escape.

22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense.

23 The desire of the righteous ends only in good; the expectation of the wicked in wrath.

24 Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.

25 A generous person will prosper, and one who refreshes others will be refreshed.

26 The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing on the head of those who sell it.

27 Whoever is intent on good seeks approval, but evil comes to the one who searches for it.

28 Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

29 Those who trouble the household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.

30 The fruit of the righteous, a tree of life; but violence takes lives away.

31 If the righteous are repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

Women wore rings in their nostrils (see Genesis 24:47; Isaiah 3:21). Physical adornment is wasted on a woman who lacks good taste (verse 22; compare 31:30).

Verse 23 echoes 10:24, 28.

As you give, so will you receive (verses 24 and 25).

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

– Luke 6:38

Verse 26 lauds a person who is ready to sell in response to the community's needs, and doesn't hold out for a higher price.

If you want approval seek what is good. If you seek approval you won't get it (verse 27).

Wealth is desirable (see 10:15), but becomes a snare when people put their trust in it rather than in God (verse 28; see 11:4; 28:25; 29:25). In the Newer Testament see 1 Timothy 6:17.

If your behaviour causes your family to be treated as outcasts, you will have nothing to inherit. Rather than being a leader you will find yourself a servant of someone wiser than you (verse 29).

Righteous deeds become a 'tree of life' for others (see 13:14). The translation 'violence' in verse 30 requires a change in the Hebrew from **הַכָּאֵס** [hākās] to **הַמָּאֵס** [hāmās].

In the Newer Testament there is a free rendering of the Septuagint of verse 31:

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?"

– 1 Peter 4:18

Verse 1 is a basic tenet of traditional education. A pupil must accept the discipline of learning if he is to succeed in his career. Love and hate refer to choice, not feeling.

Do not be like a horse or a mule,
without understanding.

– Psalm 32:9

Verse 2 shifts gear to focus directly on religious motivation (see 8:35).

A righteous person has sound roots. His health and growth is assured (verse 3; compare 10:30).

Verse 4 highlights the contribution a good wife makes to her husband's welfare and career (see 11:16, 22; 31:10-31).

The wicked set out to trap others; the wise set out to liberate (verse 6).

Pretending to be who you are not or to have what you don't have will get you nowhere. Don't fight above your weight, or live beyond your means (verse 9).

Verses 13-23 return to the topic of speech (see the texts listed in commentary on 10:19).

We are rewarded (by YHWH) on the basis of our actions (verse 14; see 13:2; 18:20).

¹Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid.

²The good obtain favour from YHWH, but those who devise evil he condemns.

³No one finds security by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved.

⁴A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.

⁵The thoughts of the righteous are just; the advice of the wicked is treacherous.

⁶The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush, but the speech of the upright delivers them.

⁷The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.

⁸One is commended for good sense, but a perverse mind is despised.

⁹A man of small means with one servant, is better than one who makes a show of grandeur, but lacks food.

¹⁰The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the feelings of the wicked are cruel.

¹¹Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense.

¹²The foundations of the wicked are destroyed, but the root of the righteous abides.

¹³The evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips, but the righteous escape from trouble.

¹⁴From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things, and manual labour has its reward.

¹⁵Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice.

¹⁶Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult.

¹⁷Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness speaks deceitfully.

¹⁸Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

¹⁹Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

²⁰Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil, but those who counsel peace have joy.

²¹No harm happens to the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.

²²Lying lips are an abomination to YHWH, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

²³One who is clever conceals knowledge, but the mind of a fool broadcasts folly.

²⁴The hand of the diligent will rule, while the lazy will be put to forced labour.

²⁵Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up.

²⁶The righteous gives good advice to friends, but the way of the wicked leads astray.

²⁷The lazy do not roast their game, but the diligent obtain precious wealth.

²⁸In the path of righteousness there is life, but the way of folly leads to death.

A wise person recognises and follows good advice and does not fancy himself as wise (verse 15; see 3:7; 13:10; 26:12).

Fools react; the wise don't let themselves get caught up in other people's agenda (verse 16).

Verses 17 and 19 contrast the effectiveness of truth as against the short-lived results of falsehood (see 12:19, 22; 13:5; 14:5, 25; 17:7).

A wise person is concerned for social harmony. He doesn't use words to cut people down (verse 18).

The implication behind verse 20 is that those who plan evil don't live happy fulfilled lives.

Verse 21 is not connected to the verses before or after. It is a general statement of an assumption that later wisdom writers challenge.

Like verse 2, verse 22 directs attention to YHWH and the communion with YHWH that is the basis of wisdom for a committed Yahwist. We are to 'do the truth'. (In the Newer Testament see John 3:21; Ephesians 4:25).

Only a fool thinks people are impressed by his bragging about his supposed wisdom (verse 23).

The 'good word' of verse 25 is healing because it is sensitive to the needs of the depressed person.

The pupil is to accept unquestioningly the demands of his teacher (verse 1).

Verse 2 is an interesting example of נֶפֶשׁ (nepeš) used with its basic meaning of 'throat' or 'appetite' (see also verse 4). Because of its connection with hunger and thirst it is often translated 'soul' in the sense of a person's deepest longings.

A wise person keeps a tight rein on his tongue (verse 3).

In verse 6 vice and virtue are personified.

Verse 7 speaks of wealth and poverty. Like a good proverb it encourages a wider application.

If a person is kidnapped, it is good to have wealth to enable a ransom. On the other hand there is an advantage in being poor. One is likely to be left alone (verse 8). Someone who has nothing has nothing to lose.

There is a connection between verse 10 and verse 1. A wise person knows he can always learn from the wisdom of others.

For 'tree of life' see 3:18.

¹A wise child loves discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

²From the fruit of their words good persons eat good things, but the treacherous have an appetite for wrongdoing.

³Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin.

⁴The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing, while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.

⁵The righteous hate falsehood, but the wicked act shamefully and disgracefully.

⁶Righteousness guards one whose way is upright, but sin overthrows the wicked.

⁷Some pretend to be rich, yet have nothing; others pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth.

⁸Wealth is a ransom for a person's life, but the poor get no threats.

⁹The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked goes out.

¹⁰By insolence the heedless make strife, but wisdom is with those who take advice.

¹¹Wealth gained hastily by chance dwindles, but those who acquire wealth gradually will build it up.

¹²Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

13Those who despise the word bring destruction on themselves, but those who respect the command will be rewarded.

14The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death.

15Good sense wins favour, but the way of the faithless is their ruin.

16The clever do all things intelligently, but the fool displays folly.

17A bad messenger brings trouble, but a faithful envoy, healing.

18Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruction, but one who heeds reproof is honoured.

19A desire realized is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.

20Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.

21Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous.

22The good leave an inheritance to their children's children, but the sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.

23The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.

24Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.

25The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite, but the belly of the wicked is empty.

'Word' in verse 13 is the authoritative word of the teacher (not the divine word revealed through the prophet), and 'command' refers to the instructions given by a teacher.

On the 'fountain of life' (verse 14) see 3:18; 10:11; 14:27; 16:22). Compare the 'tree of life' in verse 12.

The clever person sizes up a situation accurately and acts accordingly; not so the fool (verse 16).

Messengers were essential means of communication at the time. A wise envoy does not sow seeds of discord (verse 17).

Verse 18 repeats the lesson of verse 1.

In verse 19 נֶפֶשׁ (nepeš) refers to a person's profound longings ('soul'; compare verse 4). The soul of a fool is trapped by his inability to turn away from evil.

It is important to choose one's company well (verse 20).

Verses 21 and 22 are based on an understanding of YHWH, not on observation (compare 28:8; Job 27:16-17). The Hebrew translated here as 'sinners' is also used for one who 'misses the mark'.

Verse 23 is an observation drawn from the greed of those who have the power to unjustly take over a poor person's land. It is a topic that often stirs the prophets as well (see Micah 2:2; Isaiah 5:8-9). On the blight of injustice compare 17:15, 23, 26; 18:5, 17, 18; 21:28.

Spare the rod and spoil the child (verse 24; compare 19:18; 23:13-14).

For verse 1 compare 9:1.

Verse 2 embraces wisdom within Yahwism. On 'fear of YHWH' see also verses 26 and 27; and 10:27.

Fools are their own worst enemies. Their words get them into trouble (verse 3).

Verse 4 is a proverb. Oxen are expensive. If you have no oxen you don't have to feed them; but neither do you have grain!

Acynical, arrogant person who lacks humility will never learn wisdom (verse 6).

The pupil is instructed to avoid the company of fools (verse 7; see 13:20; 17:12).

Ultimately we are all alone. Our deepest feelings cannot be shared (verse 10). Only YHWH knows our heart (see 15:11; also Psalm 44:22).

Verse 11 is based on an understanding of YHWH, not on observation of life (see also verses 14, 19, 32 and 34).

Be careful where your steps are leading (verse 12; see 16:25).

Naivety gets a person into trouble. We need to learn to be discerning (verse 15).

If you want to get on watch your temper (verse 17).

¹Wisdom has built her house, but Folly tears hers down with her own hands.

²Those who walk uprightly fear YHWH, but one who is devious in conduct despises him.

³The talk of fools is a rod for their backs, but the lips of the wise preserve them.

⁴Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty; but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

⁵A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.

⁶A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for one who understands.

⁷Leave the presence of a fool, but do not push aside the words of those who know.

⁸It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go, but the folly of fools misleads.

⁹Fools scoff at guilt offering, but the upright discern what is acceptable.

¹⁰The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

¹¹The house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes.

¹²There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

¹³Even in laughter the heart is sad, and the end of joy is grief.

¹⁴The perverse get what their ways deserve, and the good, what their deeds deserve.

¹⁵The simple believe everything, but the clever consider their steps.

¹⁶The wise are cautious and turn away from evil, but the fool throws off restraint and is self-assured.

¹⁷One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly, but a resourceful man is promoted.

- 18**The simple are adorned with folly, but the clever are crowned with knowledge.
- 19**The evil bow down before the good, the wicked at the gates of the righteous.
- 20**The poor are disliked even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.
- 21**Those who despise their neighbours are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.
- 22**Do they not err that plan evil? Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness.
- 23**In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
- 24**The crown of the wise is their wisdom, but folly is the garland of fools.
- 25**A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer.
- 26**In the fear of YHWH one has strong confidence, and one's children will have a refuge.
- 27**The fear of YHWH is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death.
- 28**The glory of a king is a multitude of people; without people a prince is ruined.
- 29**Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
- 30**A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but jealousy makes the bones rot.
- 31**Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him.
- 32**The wicked are overthrown by their evil-doing, but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity.
- 33**Wisdom is at home in the heart of one who has understanding, but it is not known in the heart of fools.
- 34**Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.
- 35**A servant who deals wisely has the king's favour, but his wrath falls on one who bungles his responsibilities.

Like verse 15, verse 18 contrasts the naive with those who have learned discernment.

Verse 19 is a religious affirmation, not a wisdom saying (compare verse 11).

Verse 20 asks us to question what true friendship is. Do the rich love for what they can get?

On kindness to the poor (verse 21) see 14:31; 19:17; 22:9. See also Psalm 112:9.

Like verse 5, verse 25 concerns the courtroom (see also 19:5, 9).

Verses 26-27 speak of the power of religious faith (see 18:10; 19:23). For verse 27 compare 13:14. On 'fear of YHWH see 1:7.

To reign well a king needs the allegiance of his subjects (verse 28).

A wise person does not let his judgment be clouded by passion (verse 29).

Our mental attitude has a lot to do with our health (verse 30).

On verse 31 see 17:5; 22:2.

Verse 34 picks up a theme that we find in many of the prophets. It is an affirmation of faith, not an observation.

Verse 35 looks at the rewards and dangers of being in the king's service

A number of sayings in chapter 15 deal with the use and abuse of speech (see verses 1, 2, 7, 14, 23).

There are a number of references to YHWH in chapter 15 – examples of the integration of wisdom with religion.

On the ‘tree of life’(verse 4) see 3:18 and 11:30. Healing words are a source of life to others.

Verse 5 is the first of a number of sayings in this chapter that have discipline as their theme (see verses 10, 12, 20, 21, 24, 31, 32).

Verse 6 is challenged by later wisdom writers (see Job 9:24; 21:7-26; Ecclesiastes 7:15).

Verses 8 and 9 describe behaviour that YHWH abhors. References to cult are rare in Proverbs (see 3:9). The statement on prayer echoes Amos 5:21-22 and Isaiah 1:12-13.

‘Abaddon’)verse 11) is formed from the word ‘to perish’ and is a synonym for Sheol, the realm of the dead (see Job 26:6).

Verse 13 emphasises the importance of a healthy inner life, as does verse 15 (see also 17:22).

Verse 16 cautions against being too ambitious, especially in regard to the acquiring of wealth (see 16:8; compare Mark 10:25):

Better is a little that the
righteous person has than the
abundance of many wicked.

– Psalm 37:16

Lavish hospitality is not always indicative of goodwill (verse 17).

¹A conciliatory answer makes wrath subside, but a hurtful word stirs up anger.

²The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools spout folly.

³The eyes of YHWH are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

⁴Healing words are a tree of life; perverseness brings spiritual ruin.

⁵A fool despises a parent’s instruction; a prudent person accepts reproof.

⁶In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the revenue of the wicked.

⁷The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the minds of fools.

⁸The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to YHWH, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

⁹The way of the wicked is an abomination to YHWH, but he loves the one who pursues righteousness.

¹⁰There is severe discipline for one who forsakes the way; one who hates a rebuke will die.

¹¹Sheol and Abaddon lie open before YHWH, how much more human hearts!

¹²Scoffers do not like to be rebuked; they will not go to the wise.

¹³A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.

¹⁴The mind of one who is perceptive seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.

¹⁵All the days of the poor are hard, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.

¹⁶Better a little with the fear of YHWH than great treasure and trouble with it.

¹⁷Better a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox with hatred.

18Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are slow to anger calm contention.

19The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.

20A wise child makes a glad father, but the foolish despise their mothers.

21Folly is a joy to one who has no sense, but a person of understanding keeps a straight course.

22Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.

23To make an apt answer is a joy to anyone, and a well-timed word, how good it is!

24For the wise the path of life leads upward, in order to avoid Sheol below.

25YHWH tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries.

26Evil plans are an abomination to YHWH, but gracious words are pure.

27Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live.

28The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked spouts evil.

29YHWH is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

30The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body.

31The ear that heeds wholesome admonition means life; it lodges among the wise.

32Those who ignore instruction despise their life, but those who heed admonition gain understanding.

33The fear of YHWH is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honour.

On verse 18 see 20:3.

The theme of laziness (verse 19) recurs in Proverbs (see 6:6-9; and references in the commentary on 10:4).

On verse 20 see 10:1.

On verse 21 see 26:18-19.

On verse 22 see 11:14 and 13:10.

In ancient Israel there was no belief in life after death (see pages 96-98). Verse 24 contrasts a path leading up (to life) and one leading down (to death).

Verse 25 joins the many sayings that are faith statements, but not observations based on empirical evidence.

Excessive attachment to wealth creates the environment for bribes (verse 27).

Verse 30 seems to be referring to eyes that sparkle with goodwill.

Many wisdom sayings point to discipline in learning. In verse 33 the focus is on religious obedience.

Scholars commonly see chapters 16-22 as a separate block from chapters 10-15. There is more stress on God's sovereign action.

Verses 1-9 are an excellent example of wisdom at its best. For our part we must make every effort to be reasonable. If an action is contrary to reason it is unwise to do it. To be wise we need to listen and learn and be honest in our appreciation of the lessons that life teaches.

However, reason cannot comprehend reality, so we must be ready to go beyond reason (not contrary to it), because ultimately reality is an expression of God and God is ultimately incomprehensible. We must trust, and remain humble before the mystery of life.

On God testing the heart (verse 2) compare 17:3; 20:27; 21:2; 24:12. Also Jeremiah 11:21; 17:10; 20:12. The Psalmist prays:

If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me.

– Psalm 17:3

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

– Psalm 139:23

On verse 8 see 15:16.

On verse 9 see 20:24. The Psalmist writes:

YHWH makes our steps secure. It is he who holds us in his heart, as we journey through life.

– Psalm 3:23

Verses 10-15 focus on the principles of good government (compare 8:14-16).

¹The plans of the heart belong to us humans, but the answer of the tongue is from YHWH. ²All one's ways may be pure in one's own eyes, but YHWH weighs the spirit. ³Commit your work to YHWH, and your plans will be established. ⁴YHWH has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. ⁵All those who are arrogant are an abomination to YHWH; be assured, they will not go unpunished. ⁶By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of YHWH one avoids evil. ⁷When the ways of people please YHWH, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them. ⁸Better a little with righteousness than large income with injustice. ⁹The human mind plans the way, but YHWH directs the steps.

¹⁰Inspired decisions on the lips of a king; his mouth does not fail in judgment.

¹¹Honest balances and scales are YHWH's; all the weights in the bag are his work.

¹²It is an abomination for kings to do evil, for a throne is established by righteousness.

¹³Righteous lips are the delight of a king; he loves those who speak what is right.

¹⁴A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but whoever is wise can pacify it.

¹⁵In the light of a king's face there is life; his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.

¹⁶How much better to get wisdom than gold! Understanding is to be chosen above silver.

¹⁷The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their way preserve their lives.

¹⁸Pride goes before a fall, and a haughty spirit before a stumble.

¹⁹Better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.

The king's rule is a realisation of divine order (verse 12). Speaking of YHWH, the Psalmist proclaims:

Justice and right judgment are the foundation of your throne; kindness and faithfulness go before you.

– Psalm 89:14

It is justice that secures his throne (see 8:15-16; 20:28; 25:5; 29:14). This is the central theme of Psalm 72:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice ... May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy ... He delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

– Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14

Every official in Israel was a servant of the king. If they are going to hold on to their office they have to learn to appease the king (verse 14-15). For the image used in verse 14 see 19:12. Compare:

May he [the king] be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

– Psalm 72:6

Gold and silver are important, but not as important as wisdom (verse 16; see 3:14-15; 8:10-11).

Verse 17 is the central verse of the book. It is perhaps by design that it speaks of 'the way' (see 4:9-19).

Pride never leads to an integrated wholeness (verse 18; see 11:2; 15:33; 18:12; 29:23). The Psalmist writes:

In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor. Let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

– Psalm 10:2

By contrast compare Psalm 131:1, and the final humility of Job (Job 42:3).

On trust in YHWH (verse 20) see 28:25; 29:25. The Psalmist writes:

Happy is everyone who trusts
in you.

– Psalm 84:12

Pleasant speech is important. To be perceptive, words need to issue from a wise heart (verse 21; compare verse 23).

On the ‘fountain of life’ (verse 22) see 3:18; 10:11; 13:14; 14:27.

nepeš in verse 24 may be better translated ‘throat’ (instead of ‘soul’). Compare 15:26.

On verse 25, compare 14:12.

As a proverb, verse 26 has applications beyond that of manual labour (compare Ecclesiastes 6:7).

Verses 27-30 focus on anti-social behaviour. ‘Scoundrels’ (verse 27) translates ‘Men of Belial’. Belial is used in the Newer Testament (2 Corinthians 6:15) as a name for the devil.

On seduction (verse 29) see 1:10-16.

We need to acquire the skill of reading a person’s intent from his body language (verse 30).

Verse 33 expresses an assumption found throughout the Older Testament: the assumption that God controls everything that happens in this world (compare verses 1 and 9). On this issue see pages 95-96.

20Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper, but happy are those who trust in YHWH.

21The wise of heart is called perceptive, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.

22Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it, but folly is the punishment of fools.

23The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious, and adds persuasiveness to their lips.

24Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

25There is a way that seems to be right, but in the end it is the way to death.

26The appetite of workers works for them; their hunger urges them on.

27Scoundrels concoct evil; their speech is like a scorching fire.

28A perverse person spreads strife; a slanderer divides friends.

29The violent entice their neighbours, and lead them in a way that is not good.

30One who winks the eye plans perverse things; one who purses the lips brings evil to pass.

31Gray hair is a crown of glory; gained in a righteous life.

32One who is slow to anger is better than a mighty warrior, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.

33The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is YHWH’s alone.

¹Better a dry morsel with concord than a house full of feasting with strife.

²A slave who deals wisely will rule over a child who acts shamefully, and will inherit along with the heirs.

³The crucible for silver, and the furnace for gold, but YHWH tests the heart.

⁴An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.

⁵Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

⁶Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their parents.

⁷Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a ruler.

⁸A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it; wherever they turn they prosper.

⁹One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.

¹⁰A rebuke makes a deeper impression on a discerning person than a hundred blows on a fool.

¹¹Evil people seek only rebellion, but a cruel messenger will be sent to them.

¹²Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a fool immersed in folly.

¹³Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good.

¹⁴The beginning of strife is like letting out water; so stop before the quarrel breaks out.

On verse 1 compare 15:17. There appears to be a reference to the communion sacrifices that were part of the cult.

Wisdom can advance the position even of a slave (verse 2).

You can't fool God (verse 3). He knows the human heart (compare Jeremiah 17:9-10).

On verse 5 see 22:2; 29:13.

Verse 8 seems to be saying that if a bribe smooths the way it is wise to use it. However, see verse 23.

A fool is incapable of accepting the discipline needed to become wise (verse 10; compare verses 16 and 24).

The 'cruel messenger' of verse 11 is the judgment passed on the rebel by the community.

A fool is a danger to others as well as being his own worst enemy (verse 12).

Nip a dispute in the bud (verse 14).

Money can't buy wisdom (verse 16).

Blood is thicker than water (verse 17).

On verse 18 see 6:1-5.

A person with a twisted mind and tongue cannot avoid the consequences of his behaviour (verse 20).

On verse 21 see 10:1; 15:20; 19:13.

On verse 22 see 14:13, 30.

On verse 23 compare 15:27. See, however, verse 8.

A wise person shows restraint and doesn't let his feelings get in the way of making a cool appraisal (verse 27).

¹⁵One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to YHWH.

¹⁶Why should fools have payment in hand to buy wisdom, when they have no mind to learn?

¹⁷A friend is always good company, but kinsfolk are born to share adversity.

¹⁸It is senseless to contract a pledge, to become surety for a neighbour.

¹⁹One who likes to give offence loves strife; one who raises the bar invites broken bones.

²⁰One whose mind is devious does not see good, and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity.

²¹The one who begets a fool gets trouble; the parent of a fool has no joy.

²²A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

²³The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice.

²⁴The discerning person looks to wisdom, but the eyes of a fool to the ends of the earth.

²⁵Foolish children are a grief to their father and bitterness to her who bore them.

²⁶To impose a fine on the innocent is bad, and to strike the noble is not right.

²⁷One who spares words is knowledgeable; one who keeps a cool temper has understanding.

²⁸Even fools who keep silent are considered wise; when they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent.

¹The one who lives alone is self-indulgent, showing contempt for all who have sound judgment.

²A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

³When wickedness comes, contempt comes also; and with dishonour comes disgrace.

⁴The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.

⁵It is not right to be partial to the guilty, or to subvert the innocent in judgment.

⁶A fool's lips bring strife, and a fool's mouth invites a flogging.

⁷The mouths of fools are their ruin, and their lips a snare to themselves.

⁸The words of a slanderer are like delicious morsels; they go down into one's inmost being.

⁹One who is slack in work is close kin to a vandal.

¹⁰The name of YHWH is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.

¹¹The wealth of the rich is their strong city; in their imagination it is like a high wall.

¹²Before a crash one's heart is haughty, but humility goes before honour.

A person who is unsociable is focused on his own needs. He has no interest in policies that affect the wider community (verse 1).

Verse 2 is the first of a number of sayings in chapter 18 that speak of the importance of speech and the good or harm it can cause (see verses 4, 6, 7, 13, 20, 21).

Verse 4 is especially attractive. On the 'fountain of life' see 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22.

Verse 5 refers to judicial proceedings (also verse 17). On partiality see 17:15.

People love gossip, especially when it puts someone else down (verse 8; see 26:22).

Laziness (verse 9) is a recurring theme in Proverbs (see texts in commentary on 10:4).

Verse 10 is a faith-statement that righteousness brings security (compare 10:2, 9, 24, 25, 29, 30; 11:4, 6, 8, 21; 12:3, 7, 12; 13:6).

The Psalmist prays:

May YHWH answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!

– Psalm 20:1

You are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

– Psalm 61:3

On verse 11 compare 10:15.

Pride comes before a fall (verse 12; see 11:2; 16:18; 29:23; also 15:33).

Verse 13 goes to the heart of good communication (compare verse 2).

On the influence of one's inner dispositions on one's health (verse 14) compare 14:30, 15:13 and 17:22.

Verse 16, like 17:8 appears to take a pragmatic attitude to bribery. It may be the only way to get things done.

Casting lots (verse 18) was considered a way of by-passing human decision and being open to God's revealing his will (compare 16:33).

Sometimes reconciliation between erst-while friends who have had a falling out is as hard as breaking through the defences of a fortified city (verse 19).

Verse 20 appears to be underlining the effect of well-chosen words on one's livelihood. More generally it is stressing the point that words should be judged by their consequences. The idea is continued in verse 21.

A 'good wife' (verse 22 is described later, see 30:10-30; see also 19:14).

The poor have no choice but to plead. The rich get tired of being asked for help (verse 23).

¹³If someone makes a reply before attempting to listen, it is folly and a disgrace.

¹⁴The human spirit will endure sickness; but a broken spirit – who can bear it?

¹⁵An intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

¹⁶A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.

¹⁷The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines.

¹⁸Casting the lot puts an end to disputes and decides between powerful contenders.

¹⁹An ally offended is stronger than a city; such quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

²⁰From the fruit of the mouth one's stomach is satisfied; the yield of the lips brings satisfaction.

²¹Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

²²He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from YHWH.

²³The poor use entreaties, but the rich give a brusque reply.

²⁴Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.

¹Better the poor walking in integrity than one perverse of speech who is a fool.

²Determination without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way.

³One's own folly leads to ruin, yet the heart rages against YHWH.

⁴Wealth brings many friends, but the poor are left friendless.

⁵A false witness will not go unpunished, and a perjurer will not escape justice.

⁶Many seek the favour of the generous, and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts.

⁷If the poor are hated even by their kin, how much more are they shunned by their friends! When they call after them, they are not there.

⁸To get wisdom is to show love for oneself; to treasure understanding is to prosper.

⁹A false witness will not go unpunished, and a perjurer will perish.

¹⁰It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to rule over princes.

¹¹Those with good sense are slow to anger, and it is an honour to overlook an offense.

¹²A king's anger is like the growling of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass.

¹³A stupid child is ruin to a father, and a wife's nagging is incessantly dripping eaves.

¹⁴House and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from YHWH.

¹⁵Laziness brings on deep sleep; an idle person will suffer hunger.

In verse 2 'determination' translates *nepeš*. On acting in haste see 21:5; 29:20.

The fool blames God rather than his own folly (verse 3).

Verse 5 is echoed in verse 9 (see also 12:17; 14:5, 25; 21:28).

If you are generous it is hard to pick your real friends from those who are friends of your gifts (verse 6).

'Hate' in verse 7 means 'overlooked'. One's family do not choose to care for a poor relative.

If you truly have regard for yourself, pursue wisdom (verse 8).

Verse 10 witnesses to a strong sense of class distinction (though see 17:2).

A wise person keeps cool even under provocation (verse 11). YHWH is 'slow to anger' (Exodus 34:6).

In government or administration it is good to keep on side with the king (verse 12; see 16:14-15; 20:2).

On the first part of verse 13 see 10:1; 17:21, 25. On the nagging wife see 21:9, 19; 25:24.

Verse 14, compare 18:22; 31:10-31.

On laziness (verse 15) see also verse 24. Compare 6:9-11; 10:4; 12:27.

Verse 16 is one of many sayings that focus on the need for discipline (see verses 18, 20, 25, 27, 29). It is not clear whether the 'his' in verse 16 refers to the teacher or to YHWH.

God will repay the loan given to the poor, with interest (verse 17; see 14:21, 31; 17:5).

Verse 18 encourages parents to keep up discipline even when it does not seem to be bearing fruit (see 13:24; 23:13-14).

There is no point in continually rescuing someone who refuses to learn his lesson (verse 19).

According to verse 21 it is ultimately God's will that determines what happens (see 16:1, 9). The Psalmist writes:

Unless YHWH builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless YHWH guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.

– Psalm 127:1

In verse 22 'loyalty' translates *hesed*.

On 'fear of YHWH'(verse 23) see page 9.

On verse 24 see 26:15.

Disciplining a scoffer (see 13:1; 15:12) won't do him any good but it will help the simple to pay attention and learn (verse 25).

On this dreadful treatment of parents (verse 26) see Deuteronomy 5:15; Proverbs 20:20; 28:24; 30:11.

Like verses 5 and 9, verse 28 is concerned with justice in the courtroom.

¹⁶Those who keep the commands will live; those who are heedless of his ways will die.

¹⁷Whoever is kind to the poor lends to YHWH, and will be repaid in full.

¹⁸Discipline your children while there is hope; do not give them away as a lost cause.

¹⁹A violent tempered person should pay the penalty; if you get him out of trouble, you will have to do it again and again.

²⁰Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future.

²¹The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of YHWH that will be established.

²²What is desirable in a person is loyalty, and it is better to be poor than a liar.

²³The fear of YHWH is life indeed; filled with it one rests secure and suffers no harm.

²⁴The lazy person dips a hand into the dish, and will not even bring it back to the mouth.

²⁵Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove the intelligent, and they will gain knowledge.

²⁶Those who do violence to their father and evict their mother are children who cause shame and bring reproach.

²⁷Cease, my child, from attending to words of knowledge, and you will stray from the path of instruction.

²⁸A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.

²⁹Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and blows for the backs of fools.

¹Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, no one under its influence behaves wisely.

²The dreaded anger of a king is like the growling of a lion; anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself.

³It is honourable to refrain from strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

⁴The lazy person does not plough in season; harvest time comes, and there is nothing to be found.

⁵The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent draw it up.

⁶Many proclaim themselves loyal, but who can find one worthy of trust?

⁷The righteous walk in integrity; happy are the children who follow them!

⁸A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes.

⁹Who can say, "I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin"?

¹⁰Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to YHWH.

¹¹Young people reveal who they are by their actions, whether their conduct will be pure and right.

¹²An attentive ear and an observant eye – YHWH has made them both.

¹³Do not be too fond of sleep, or you will come to poverty; wake up early and you will have plenty of bread.

¹⁴"A bad, bad bargain," says the buyer, then goes away and boasts.

¹⁵There is gold, and abundance of costly stones; but the lips informed by knowledge are a rare treasure.

Proverbs is in favour of wine (see 9:5), but intoxication turns a person into a fool (see 21:17; 23:19-21, 29-35; 31:4-5).

On verse 3 compare 17:14 and 18:1. A good administrator avoids contributing to a quarrel.

Laziness is a favourite theme in Proverbs (verse 4; see verse 13 below; and a list of references in the commentary on 10:4).

A wise person has the art of drawing out another person's deepest thought, like drawing up water from a deep well (verse 5).

On verse 6 compare:

There is no longer anyone who respects the covenant; sincerity has disappeared from the human race.

– Psalm 12:1

On verse 8 compare verse 26. On verse 9 see Psalm 51:7. Compare:

No one living is righteous before you.

– Psalm 143:2

How can a mortal be just before God?

– Job 9:2

On verse 10 see verse 23 (also 11:1; 16:11).

Compare verse 11 with Jesus' words: 'You will know them by their fruits' (Matthew 7:20).

On the association of laziness and sleep (verse 13) see 19:15.

Wealth is valued (verse 15; see 3:14-15; 8:10-11; 16:16), but not as much as wisdom.

A wise person protects himself against risky commercial dealings (verse 16; see 6:1-2; 11:15; 17:18; 27:13).

War needs careful planning (verse 18; see 24:6).

On not confiding in gossips (verse 19) see 11:13.

Cursing of parents (verse 20) was punishable by death (see Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9; Proverbs 30:11)

On verse 24 see 16:9; 19:21 (also Jeremiah 10:23). The Psalmist writes:

YHWH makes our steps secure.
It is he who holds us in his heart
as we journey through life.
We might stumble, but we will not
fall, for YHWH holds us by the
hand.

– Psalm 37:23-24

A person with good judgment avoids impetuosity (verse 25).

16Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger; secure yourself against him if he is liable to foreigners.

17Bread gained by deceit is sweet, but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel.

18Plans are established by taking advice; wage war by following wise guidance.

19A gossip reveals secrets; do not associate with a babblers.

20If you curse father or mother, your lamp will go out in pitch darkness.

21An estate quickly acquired in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.

22Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for YHWH, and he will help you.

23Differing weights are an abomination to YHWH, and false scales are an evil.

24All our steps are ordered by YHWH; how then can we understand our own ways?

25It is a snare for one to make rash vows, and only afterwards begin to reflect on what you have promised.

Wise Sayings

²⁶A wise king winnows the wicked, and drives the wheel over them.

²⁷The human spirit is the lamp of YHWH, searching every innermost part.

²⁸Loyalty and faithfulness preserve the king; his throne is upheld by righteousness.

²⁹The boast of youths is their strength, but the glory of the aged is their gray hair.

³⁰Blows that wound cleanse away evil; beatings make clean the inmost being.

What is expected of the king is a recurrent theme in Proverbs (see 8:15-16; 25:5; 29:12). Psalms 72 and 101 can be prayed in this context.

A threshing cart had wheels (verse 26).

God's spirit in us assures us of enlightenment in the deepest part of our being (verse 27; see 16:2; 21:2).

The king is sustained by God's 'loyalty and faithfulness' (verse 28; see 16:12; 2Samuel 7:15-16), and the king is to have these same qualities towards his people.

Justice and right judgment are the foundation of your throne; kindness and faithfulness go before you.

– Psalm 89:14

I will sing of loyalty and of justice; to you, YHWH, I will sing.

– Psalm 101:1

There is an obvious approval of corporal punishment as a help to education, even to having a positive effect on a pupil's deepest self (verse 30).

Verse 1 is another example of the belief that God controls whatever happens (see verses 30 and 31).

On verse 2 compare 16:2; 20:27.

Verse 3 echoes the prophetic critique, as does verse 27.

‘Sin’ in verse 4 means losing one’s way. It may also be intended to refer to one’s relationship with God.

We should think carefully about what we intend to do, and not be too hasty (verse 5).

Ill-gotten wealth is fleeting and does not bring life. Rather, it propels one to the snares of death (verse 6).

Verse 7 see Habakkuk 1:15. The sinner snares himself (compare 12:13; 13:14; 14:27).

Verses 9 and 19 speak of a nagging wife (see also 19:13).

On verse 11 compare 19:25.

Verse 13 warns that we will be treated (by others and by God) the way we treat others.

There is a place for bribes (verse 14; compare 17:8 and 18:16; a contrary view is found in 15:27 and 17:23).

¹The king’s heart, a stream of water in the hand of YHWH; he turns it wherever he wills.

²All deeds are right in the sight of the doer, but YHWH weighs the heart.

³To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to YHWH than sacrifice.

⁴Haughty eyes and a proud heart – the lamp of the wicked – are sin.

⁵The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.

⁶The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour and a snare of death.

⁷The violence of the wicked nets them, because they refuse to do what is just.

⁸The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is right.

⁹It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than to share a house with a nagging wife.

¹⁰The souls of the wicked desire evil; their neighbours find no mercy in their eyes.

¹¹When a scoffer is punished, the simple become wiser; when the wise are instructed, they increase in knowledge.

¹²The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; he casts the wicked down to ruin.

¹³If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard.

¹⁴A gift in secret averts anger; and a concealed bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.

¹⁵When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but dismay to evildoers.

¹⁶Whoever wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.

¹⁷Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want; whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich.

¹⁸The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the faithless for the upright.

¹⁹It is better to live in a desert than to be vexed by a nagging wife.

²⁰Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it.

²¹Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honour.

²²A wise person scales the city of warriors and brings down the stronghold in which they trusted.

²³Watch over mouth and tongue is keeping out of trouble.

²⁴The proud, haughty person, named “scoffer,” acts with arrogant pride.

²⁵The craving of the lazy person is fatal, for lazy hands refuse to work.

²⁶All day long the wicked are consumed with desire, but the righteous give and do not hold back.

²⁷The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when brought with evil intent.

²⁸A false witness will perish, but a good listener will have the last word.

²⁹The wicked are brazen, but the upright give thought to their ways.

³⁰No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against YHWH.

³¹The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to YHWH.

The wicked and faithless act as a warning to the righteous and upright and so help keep them out of danger (verse 18).

On verse 19, compare verse 9.

A wise person treasures and preserves what he has. Wealth runs through the fingers of a fool (verse 20).

On verse 22 compare 16:32 and 24:5-6.

On verse 23 compare 13:3, 15:23 and 18:13. The Psalmist prays:

I said, “I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.”

– Psalm 39:1

The lazy person is living in a dream world. He won’t do what is needed to achieve his dreams (verse 25).

On verse 28 compare 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9.

The Psalmist writes:

You are the one who gives victory to kings, who rescues his servant David.

– Psalm 144:10

Verses 30 and 31 are based on the assumption that God controls everything that happens (see pages 95-96).

On verse 1 compare 8:10, 19; 16:16; 20:15). Wisdom, and what it leads to, are even more desirable than wealth.

The simple can be naive and credulous. The task of education is to train them to be discerning and wary (verse 3; see 27:12; 14:15, 18).

On verse 5 see 15:19.

Verse 6 goes to the heart of education.

Verse 8, like a number of statements in this chapter (see verses 4, 12 and 16), is based on faith in God rather than observation of life.

On verse 9 see 14:21.

Verse 11 describes the qualities a king looks for in those who are involved in government or administration.

Verse 13 is another humorous depiction of the extent that a lazy person will go to avoid work (compare 19:24).

Young people need discipline if they are ever to acquire wisdom (verse 15).

¹A good name is to be chosen before great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold.

²The rich and the poor have this in common: YHWH is the maker of them all.

³The clever see danger and hide; but the simple go on, and suffer for it.

⁴The reward for humility and fear of YHWH is riches and honour and life.

⁵Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; the cautious will keep far from them.

⁶Train young people in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

⁷The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

⁸Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his excess strikes him.

⁹Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

¹⁰Drive out a scoffer, and strife goes out; quarreling and abuse cease.

¹¹Those who have a pure heart and are gracious in speech will have the king as a friend.

¹²The eyes of YHWH keep watch over knowledge, but he overthrows the words of the faithless.

¹³The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!"

¹⁴The mouth of a loose woman is a deep pit; he with whom YHWH is angry falls into it.

¹⁵Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline drives it far away.

¹⁶Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss.

