

4. SECOND LIST OF WISE SAYINGS

PROVERBS 25:1 – 29:27

Introduction to 25:1 - 29:27

These wise sayings claim to have been collected during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (727-687BC). There is a more liberal use of imagery than in the earlier collection (10:1 – 22:16).

¹These are other wise sayings of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied.

²It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. ³Like the heavens for height, like the earth for depth, so the mind of kings is unsearchable. ⁴Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel; ⁵take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. ⁶Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; ⁷for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a nobleman.

What your eyes have seen ⁸do not hastily bring into court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbour shames you? ⁹Argue your case with your neighbour directly, and do not disclose another's secret; ¹⁰or else someone who hears you will bring shame upon you, and your ill repute will have no end.

It was during the reign of Hezekiah that Samaria was captured. Jerusalem welcomed a stream of refugees from the north. The 'officials' (verse 1) probably refers to the scribes attached to the Jerusalem court.

As in 10:1 (see page 34), Solomon is mentioned. He was regarded as the founder and patron of wisdom literature (see page 8). The wisdom expected of a king is a theme found throughout the Book of Proverbs (see 8:15; 14:28-35; 16:10-15; 19:12; 20:2; 22:11, 29; 24:21).

Our response to God is one of awe, for God always transcends anything we know of him. Politics is not about awe and wonder. It is about scrutinising everything, trying to get to the facts and making decisions that are well thought out and based on evidence (verse 2). This does not mean that the king's subjects can fully fathom his thinking (verse 3).

Government is an art. A kingdom is harmed by the dross in the community (verses 4-5). On verse 5 see 8:15-16; 16:12; 20:26.

On verses 6-7 see Luke 14:7-11.

A courtier needs to be prudent in what he reports (verse 8).

Words are powerful. There is no place in a healthy community for gossip. If something needs to be said, say it to the person concerned. People do not respect someone who gossips (verses 9-10).

On verse 11 see 15:23.

You don't get snow at harvest time, but the heat would make you wish for it (verse 13).

Verses 16-17 remind us that you can have too much of a good thing. Don't turn up too often on your neighbours' doorstep or you will become a burden to them and lose their friendship.

An example of verse 20 is the feeling the Jews had when they were asked to sing songs of home while exiled in Babylon (Psalm 137).

¹¹A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

¹²Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.

¹³Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest are faithful messengers to those who send them; they refresh the spirit of their masters.

¹⁴Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of a gift never given.

¹⁵With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break down resistance.

¹⁶If you have found honey, eat only what you need, or else, having too much, you will vomit it up.

¹⁷Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house, otherwise the neighbour will become weary of you and hate you.

¹⁸Like a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow is one who bears false witness against a neighbour.

¹⁹Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is trust in a faithless person in time of trouble.

²⁰Like vinegar on a wound is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. Like a moth in clothing or a worm in wood, sorrow gnaws at the human heart.

Wise Sayings

²¹If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink; ²²for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and YHWH will reward you.

²³The north wind produces rain, and a backbiting tongue angry looks.

²⁴It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than to share a house with a nagging wife.

²⁵Like cold water to a dry throat is good news from a far country.

²⁶Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way before the wicked.

²⁷It is not good to eat an excess of honey, so be sparing with words of praise.

²⁸Like a city breached without walls is one who lacks self-control.

There is some support for verse 21 in 24:17 and 20:22. Paul quotes verses 21-22 in Romans 12:20. The hope is that a loving response will make one's enemies ashamed of their behaviour, and they will desist.

The problem in interpreting verse 23 is that in Palestine the north wind does not produce rain.

On verse 24 see 21:9.

On verse 25 see verse 13. 'Throat' translates *nepeš*.

To lose a righteous person (verse 26) is likened to the loss of drinkable water because the sources are fouled. A community needs the refreshing presence of the righteous.

On verse 27, see verse 16 for the same point as regards honey.

In verse 1 ‘honour’[כְּבוֹד, kābōd] refers both to the intrinsic qualities a person has that give them ‘weight’(importance), and also to the recognition others give them because of their significance.

We should not worry when we are cursed undeservedly. It won’t cause any harm (verse 2).

There is an intended paradox in verse 5 following on after verse 4. Each contains an aspect of the truth, which is found only by holding both statements in tension. Verse 12 is also relevant here.

Verse 6 seems to be making the point that we put ourselves in a helpless situation if we choose a fool to convey an important message.

When fools try to be smart by mouthing a proverb they get nowhere (verse 7). It is foolish to tie a stone in a sling. It defeats the whole purpose of a sling. It is just as stupid to honour a fool (verse 8).

To see a drunk person brandishing a branch of a thorn bush arouses only laughter. A fool trying to sound wise has the same effect (verse 9).

To employ a fool is as bad as having an archer who has gone berserk and fires at random (verse 10).

Verse 11 is quoted in 2Peter 2:22.

Qohelet is truly wise when she admits that the wisdom she is striving after is beyond her grasp (see Ecclesiastes 7:23-24).

¹Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honour is out of place for a fool.

²Like a darting sparrow, like a swallow in flight, an undeserved curse goes nowhere.

³A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools.

⁴Do not answer fools when they speak nonsense, or you will be a fool yourself. ⁵Answer fools when they speak nonsense, or they will suppose themselves to be wise.

⁶It is like cutting off one’s foot and drinking down violence, to send a message by a fool.

⁷The legs of a disabled person hang limp; so does a proverb in the mouth of a fool.

⁸It is like tying a stone in a sling to give honour to a fool.

⁹Like a thornbush brandished by the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.

¹⁰Like an archer who wounds everybody in sight is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.

¹¹Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly.

¹²Do you see persons wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for fools than for them.

¹³The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" ¹⁴As a door turns on its hinges, so does a lazy person in bed.

¹⁵The lazy person dips a hand into the dish, and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth. ¹⁶The lazy person is wiser in self-esteem than seven who can answer discreetly.

¹⁷Like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears is one who meddles in the quarrel of another.

¹⁸Like someone playing the fool who shoots deadly firebrands and arrows, ¹⁹so is one who tricks a neighbour and says, "I am only joking!"

²⁰For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no slanderer, quarreling ceases. ²¹As charcoal is to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife. ²²The words of a slanderer are like delicious morsels; they go down to one's inmost being.

²³Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are smooth lips with an evil heart. ²⁴An enemy dissembles in speaking while harbouring deceit within; ²⁵when an enemy speaks graciously, do not believe it, for there are seven abominations concealed within; ²⁶though hatred is covered with guile, the enemy's wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

²⁷Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling.

²⁸A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Verses 13-16 make fun of the lazy (see 22:13; 19:24 and the list of references in the commentary on 10:4). On verse 13 see 22:13. On verse 15 see 29:24.

Lazy people build up a dream picture of themselves, a picture untested by life because they are not involved in life (verse 16).

Verses 17-19 look at various aspects of folly.

You have to be especially careful when playing the fool. The other person may not see it as at all funny (verses 18-19).

Verses 20-28 show malice in action. Slanderers feed the flames of dissension.

On verse 22, see 18:8.

Malice can hide under a pleasant exterior. Verses 23-26 speak of hypocrisy.

May YHWH cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, "With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own—who is our master?"

— Psalm 12:3-4

His speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war. His words softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords.

— Psalm 55:21

Verse 27 is an example of a 'proverb' in the strictest sense (compare Psalm 7:26; Ecclesiastes 10:8). The reader is to see how the image applies to his or her life situation.

Human existence is precarious, and we do not control the future (verse 1).

Self-praise gets you nowhere (verse 2; see verse 21). No one is a judge in his own case.

If we don't love someone enough to rebuke them we can't love them very much (verse 5). If speaking the truth in love causes hurt, the hurt is salutary. Effusive kisses can hide betrayal (verse 6).

The proverb in verse 7 is open to many applications.

Compare verse 10 with 17:17. Both points need to be considered.

On verse 11 see 23:15.

On verse 12 see 22:3. The untutored are vulnerable.

On verse 13 see 20:16.

Being friendly is one thing. Announcing your friendship at the crack of dawn is another. Attempts to project oneself as amiable don't achieve the intended goal when they are too keen (verse 14).

¹Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

²Let another praise you, and not your own mouth — a stranger, and not your own lips.

³A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both.

⁴Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who is able to stand before jealousy?

⁵Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

⁶Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

⁷The sated appetite spurns honey, but to a ravenous appetite even the bitter is sweet.

⁸Like a bird that strays from its nest is one who strays from home. ⁹Perfume and incense make the heart glad, but the soul is torn by trouble.

¹⁰Do not forsake your friend or the friend of your parent; do not go to the house of your kindred in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbour who is nearby than family who are far away.

¹¹Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad, so that I may have an answer for whoever reproaches me.

¹²The clever see danger and hide; but the simple go on, and suffer for it. ¹³Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger; seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.

¹⁴Whoever blesses a neighbour with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

Wise Sayings

¹⁵A continual dripping on a rainy day is a nagging wife; ¹⁶to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in the hand.

¹⁷Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.

¹⁸Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and anyone who takes care of a master will be honoured.

¹⁹Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another.

²⁰Sheol and Abaddon are insatiable, and human eyes are never satisfied.

²¹Crucible for silver, and furnace for gold, so a person's reputation is tested.

²²Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, but the folly will not be driven out.

²³Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds; ²⁴for riches do not last forever, nor is wealth inexhaustible.

²⁵When the grass is reaped, and new growth appears, and the herbage of the mountains is gathered, ²⁶the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field; ²⁷there will be enough goats' milk for your food, for the needs of your household and nourishment for your servant girls.

On verse 15 see 19:13 (also 21:9, 19; 25:24).

Verse 19 offers an especially beautiful observation.

On verse 20 see 1:12; 15:11; 30:16.

People test reputation as they test silver and gold (verse 21). There is a link with verse 2.

The most drastic methods can't remove folly from a fool (verse 22). We might borrow a proverb here: 'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'.

The sayings in chapter 28 are in marked contrast to those in the preceding chapters. There is much more emphasis on the role of YHWH. Only the 'righteous' (those who do the will of YHWH) are truly secure (verse 1).

The 'Law' in verse 4 (also verses 7 and 9) refers to God's revealed Torah. YHWH's directives are more significant than the directives of the teacher of wisdom.

Verse 5 is concerned with moral discernment. Its possession hinges on a proper religious attitude.

Taking a commission or demanding interest is forbidden (see Leviticus 25:36). The poor are to be helped, but not for monetary gain (verse 8).

On verse 10 compare 26:27. God looks after those who are morally blameless.

In chapter 28, a 'discerning poor person' (verse 11) is not so much someone who submits to the directives of a teacher as someone who submits to YHWH.

On verse 12 see verse 28. People's behaviour has a profound effect upon the community.

Verse 13 stands out in the book of Proverbs. It is the only reference to confession of sin.

The 'fear' of which verse 14 speaks is the 'fear of YHWH': a profound religious respect for YHWH's will.

¹The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

²When a land rebels it has many rulers; but with an intelligent ruler there is lasting order.

³A person who abuses his authority by oppressing the poor is a beating rain that destroys the crop.

⁴Those who forsake the Law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law struggle against them.

⁵The evil do not understand justice, but those who seek YHWH understand everything.

⁶Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be rich and crooked in one's ways.

⁷Those who keep the Law are wise children, but companions of gluttons shame their parents.

⁸One who augments wealth by exorbitant interest gathers it for another who is kind to the poor.

⁹When you will not listen to the Law, even your prayers are an abomination.

¹⁰Those who mislead the upright into evil ways will fall into pits of their own making, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.

¹¹The rich are wise in their own eyes, but a discerning poor person sees through the pose.

¹²When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked prevail, people go into hiding.

¹³No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

¹⁴Happy is the one who is never without fear, but one who is hard-hearted will fall into calamity.

¹⁵Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. ¹⁶A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor; but one who hates unjust gain will enjoy a long life.

¹⁷If someone is burdened with the blood of another, he is rushing to the Pit. He is not to be stopped.

¹⁸One who walks in integrity will be safe, but whoever follows crooked ways will fall into the Pit.

¹⁹Anyone who tills the land will have plenty of bread, but one who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

²⁰The faithful will abound with blessings, but one who is in a hurry to be rich will not go unpunished.

²¹To show partiality is an evil — yet people do wrong for a piece of bread.

²²The miser is in a hurry to get rich and does not know that loss is sure to come.

²³Whoever rebukes a person will afterward find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue.

²⁴Anyone who robs father or mother and says, "That is no crime," is companion to a thug.

²⁵The greedy person stirs up strife, but whoever trusts in YHWH will be enriched.

²⁶Those who trust in their own wits are fools; but those who walk in wisdom come through safely.

²⁷Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse.

²⁸When the wicked prevail, people go into hiding; but when they perish, the righteous increase.

YHWH my God, in you I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers,
and deliver me,
or like a lion they will tear me apart;
they will drag me away,
with no one to rescue.

– Psalm 7:1-2

The second part of verse 16, like other 'religious' statements in Proverbs, is based on faith, not on observation.

A murderer may run from human justice, but not from God's (verse 17).

On verse 19 see 12:11.

Wealth is a good thing when it is an instrument of social responsibility (verse 20).

People are willing to perjure themselves, even for a small bribe (verse 21; see 24:23).

On verse 23 see 27:5 and 27:14. What matters is to speak the truth in love.

'Greedy' in verse 25 includes inordinate ambition in whatever form it takes.

Important as is the training of intelligence, only a fool relies on his own wits (verse 26).

'Turns a blind eye' in verse 27 is in reference to need.

Verse 2 speaks of the benefit to society of those who are righteous (compare 28:12, 28).

Having sexual intercourse with prostitutes (verse 3) was a recurring topic in Chapters 1-9.

Stability in the realm depends on justice (verse 4).

Verse 5 speaks against listening to flattery.

Righteousness brings its own reward (verse 6).

On verse 7 see Jeremiah 22:15-16.

What is needed is a cool head and decisions that are well thought out (verse 8).

A wise person has to weigh whether going to court will achieve the right outcome. The process is not likely to be a peaceful one (verse 9).

Losing one's temper is a sign of folly. A wise man has self-mastery and composure (verse 11; see 14:17).

On verse 12 see 20:26.

Everyone, from the oppressor to the one oppressed, comes under the umbrella of divine providence (verse 13; see 22:2).

Verse 14 goes to the heart of Yahwism. Compare 8:15-16; 16:12.

¹One who is often reproved, yet remains stubborn, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

²When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.

³A child who loves wisdom makes a parent glad, but to keep company with prostitutes is to squander one's substance.

⁴By justice a king gives stability to the land, but one who makes heavy exactions ruins it.

⁵Whoever flatters a neighbour is spreading a net for the neighbour's feet.

⁶In the transgression of the evil there is a snare, but the righteous sing and rejoice.

⁷The righteous know the rights of the poor; the wicked have no such understanding.

⁸Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath.

⁹If the wise go to law with fools, there is ranting and ridicule without relief.

¹⁰The bloodthirsty hate the blameless, and they seek the life of the upright.

¹¹A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.

¹²If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.

¹³The poor and the oppressor have this in common: YHWH gives light to the eyes of both.

¹⁴If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever.

¹⁵The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child.

¹⁶When the wicked are in authority, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall.

¹⁷Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart.

¹⁸Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.

¹⁹By mere words servants are not disciplined, for though they understand, they will not give heed.

²⁰Do you see someone who is hasty in speech? There is more hope for a fool than for someone like that.

²¹A slave pampered from childhood will come to a bad end.

²²One given to anger stirs up strife, and the hothead causes much transgression.

²³A person's pride will bring humiliation, but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honour.

²⁴To be a partner of a thief is to hate one's own life; one hears the victim's curse, but says nothing.

²⁵The fear of others lays a snare, but one who trusts in YHWH is secure.

²⁶Many seek the favour of a ruler, but it is from YHWH that one gets justice.

²⁷The unjust are an abomination to the righteous, but the upright are an abomination to the wicked.

Verses 15 and 17 focus on the importance of discipline.

Verse 16 expresses a faith conviction. It is not based on observation (compare 28:12, 28; 29:2).

On parental satisfaction see 10:1.

Failure of prophetic vision (the only time this is mentioned in Proverbs) is not the end of the world. The nation may flounder. Each person must focus on doing God's will (verse 18). See the opening words of the psalter:

Happy are those ... whose delight is in the law of YHWH. On his law they meditate day and night.

– Psalm 1:1-2

Verse 19 shows no confidence in servants changing their ways as a result of words. They need physical discipline. Verse 21 is also concerned with managing servants.

We should think before we speak (verse 20).

Verse 22 warns against ungovernable anger (see 15:18; 28:25).

Only in verse 23 and in Psalm 131 do we find 'lowly in spirit' (ταπεινόφρων) in the Septuagint.

Verse 24 appears to be based on Leviticus 5:1. If an accomplice does not come forward he exposes himself to the curse voiced against the one guilty of the crime (see Leviticus 5:1-5).

Verse 25 calls for trust in YHWH (see 18:10; 28:25).

If we want justice we should not look to those in charge for favours. Rather we should put our trust in God (verse 26).