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ON THE  
OLD TESTAMENT

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*General Editors*

R. K. HARRISON  
(1968–1993)

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(1994– )

The Book of  
**PROVERBS**

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*Chapters 1–15*

BRUCE K. WALTKE

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### **Publisher's Note**

This commentary was planned and written as a single volume, but its length dictated the need to publish it in two volumes. The reader should note that the Introduction in the present volume covers the entire book of Proverbs; it is not repeated in the second volume.

For the reader's convenience, each volume has its own table of contents, abbreviation list, and indexes.

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*Dedicated to  
Elaine,  
my competent wife,  
worthy of praise in the gate*

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

Long ago St. Paul wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6, NRSV). He was right: ministry indeed requires a team effort — the collective labors of many skilled hands and minds. Someone digs up the dirt and drops in seed, while others water the ground to nourish seedlings to growth. The same team effort over time has brought this commentary series to its position of prominence today. Professor E. J. Young "planted" it forty years ago, enlisting its first contributors and himself writing its first published volume. Professor R. K. Harrison "watered" it, signing on other scholars and wisely editing everyone's finished products. As General Editor, I now tend their planting, and, true to Paul's words, through four decades God has indeed graciously "[given] the growth."

Today the New International Commentary on the Old Testament enjoys a wide readership of scholars, priests, pastors, rabbis, and other serious Bible students. Thousands of readers across the religious spectrum and in countless countries consult its volumes in their ongoing preaching, teaching, and research. They warmly welcome the publication of each new volume and eagerly await its eventual transformation from an emerging "series" into a complete commentary "set." But as humanity experiences a new century of history, an era commonly called "postmodern," what kind of commentary series is NICOT? What distinguishes it from other similarly well-established series?

Its volumes aim to publish biblical scholarship of the highest quality. Each contributor writes as an expert, both in the biblical text itself and in the relevant scholarly literature, and each commentary conveys the results of wide reading and careful, mature reflection. Ultimately, its spirit is eclectic, each contributor gleaning interpretive insights from any useful source, whatever its religious or philosophical viewpoint, and integrating them into his or her interpretation of a biblical book. The series draws on recent methodological innovations in biblical scholarship, for example, canon criticism, the so-

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

called “new literary criticism,” reader-response theories, and sensitivity to gender-based and ethnic readings. NICOT volumes also aim to be irenic in tone, summarizing and critiquing influential views with fairness while defending their own. Its list of contributors includes male and female scholars from a number of Christian faith-groups. The diversity of contributors and their freedom to draw on all relevant methodologies give the entire series an exciting and enriching variety.

What truly distinguishes this series, however, is that it speaks from within that interpretive tradition known as evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is an informal movement within Protestantism that cuts across traditional denominational lines. Its heart and soul is the conviction that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, written by gifted human writers, through which God calls humanity to enjoy a loving personal relationship with its Creator and Savior. True to that tradition, NICOT volumes do not treat the Old Testament as just an ancient literary artifact on a par with the *Iliad* or *Gilgamesh*. They are not literary autopsies of ancient parchment cadavers but rigorous, reverent wrestlings with wonderfully human writings through which the living God speaks his powerful Word. NICOT delicately balances “criticism” (i.e., the use of standard critical methodologies) with humble respect, admiration, and even affection for the biblical text. As an evangelical commentary, it pays particular attention to the text’s literary features, theological themes, and implications for the life of faith today.

Ultimately, NICOT aims to serve women and men of faith who desire to hear God’s voice afresh through the Old Testament. With gratitude to God for two marvelous gifts — the Scriptures themselves and keen-minded scholars to explain their message — I welcome readers of all kinds to savor the good fruit of this series.

ROBERT L. HUBBARD JR.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In a world bombarded by inane clichés, trivial catchwords, and godless sound bites, the expression of true wisdom is in short supply today. The church stands alone as the receptacle and repository of the inspired traditions that carry a mandate for a holy life from ancient sages, the greatest of whom was Solomon, and from the greater than Solomon, Jesus Christ. As the course and bulk of biblical wisdom, the book of Proverbs remains the model of curriculum for humanity to learn how to live under God and before humankind. As a result, it beckons the church to diligent study and application. To uncommitted youth it serves as a stumbling stone, but to committed youth it is a foundation stone.

But, tragically, the church has practically discarded the book of Proverbs, which was written for young people as a compass by which to steer their ship of life (see 1:2-6). Of its 930 ancient sayings many Christians know three — to fear the LORD (1:7), to trust him (3:5-6), and to “train their children in the way they should go” (22:6) — and possibly something about the “virtuous wife” (31:10-31). However, “to fear the LORD” is misunderstood, “to trust him” (3:5) is a platitude divorced from the book, the promise that the child will not depart from childhood rearing raises more questions than solutions, and the poem about the virtuous wife seems out of date.

For some honest readers, as one student confessed, “Proverbs seems banal or wrong.” Obviously “a truthful witness gives honest testimony” (12:17), “does not deceive” (14:5), and gives the LORD delight (12:22). For sober theologians the book’s heavenly promises of health, wealth, and prosperity are troublesome, and for many saints they seem detached from earth’s harsh realities. Some proverbs seem to contradict each other: “Answer a fool according to his folly” (26:4) is followed by “Don’t answer a fool according to his folly” (26:5). Moreover, whereas Proverbs affirms a righteous order, Job (9:22) and Ecclesiastes (9:2) deny its reality.

For the logical mind the book seems to be a hodgepodge collection,

having no rhyme or reason in its grouping of sayings. They jump from one topic to another like scatterbrains in a living-room conversation. How does one preach and teach such a mishmash?

For the modern mind, the book's cultural setting seems far removed from the twenty-first century. Proverbs puts a high priority on tradition and age, while the modern mind prizes change and youth. Proverbs admonishes parents not to spare the rod, but the state's welfare workers want to jail those who obey it. Its psychology is psychosomatic; modern psychology uses more scientific terms.

Some academics, including evangelicals, have not helped. They are skeptical about the book's claim to Solomonic authorship, substitute trust in man for trust in God, and speak of a world order instead of divine retribution. Instead of accepting its inspired teachings by faith, they call for a curriculum of human rationality and experimentation. Academics have demonstrated that Proverbs is at home in pan-oriental pagan literature but have called into question whether its apparent lack of an Israelite orientation has a home in Israel's covenants and in biblical literature. According to others, compared to Job and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs represents "a single false doctrine."

For Christians, Proverbs seems irrelevant. If Jesus is greater than Solomon, why bother studying and memorizing this ancient book? Besides, "If Solomon was so smart, how come he died such a fool?"

For the translator, Proverbs defies translation. A proverb depends on sound and sense. "A stitch in time saves nine" works because of its alliteration as well as its uncommonly obvious good sense. But the sounds and puns of the biblical proverbs cannot be caught in translation, and so, unlike an English proverb, they are not usually memorable. Moreover, the meaning of what the book calls a proverb is not the commonly accepted English one. In English a proverb expresses a universally accepted truism, but "trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean upon your own understanding" is not a truism that many Americans accept. Americans may claim to trust in God on their coinage, but in fact they teach and preach, "Believe in yourself."

I wrote this historico-grammatical commentary with these issues in mind, hoping to give insight into solutions without necessarily giving "the answer." I addressed some of these problems head-on in the Introduction and had them in mind in the exegesis of individual verses. The solution for honest readers lies in understanding the profound philosophical and theological insights of this ancient book. The logic of the book has escaped modern readers because they have not understood the poetics used in its composition. The modern mind has to be challenged for its pride and prejudice, and academics must come to realize that their interpretations are often dictated by a "fundamentalistic" historical criticism that is just as rigid as theological fundamen-

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talism. Christians should retain the best of the past in relation to the theological advances in Christ.

This commentary is divided into two parts: an Introduction and an exegesis of the text. The Introduction takes up critical issues of text, authorship, date, and unity in addition to theological and philosophical reflections on the larger issues, such as whether the proverbs are promises or statements of general expectations. In addition, it gives word studies of many wisdom terms in connection with these theological reflections. References to the Introduction in the commentary proper often cite just the first page of their referent in the Introduction.

The commentary portion provides translations of poems, mostly in Collection I (chs. 1–9), and of units of proverbs in the other collections. If a unit is particularly long, it gives the translation along with its subunits. No accurate translation can provide a word-for-word rendering of the original text. Because the thought patterns and syntax differ between Hebrew and English, accurate communication of the sage's meaning demands constant regard for the contextual meanings of his words and idioms and modifications in sentence structure. Nevertheless, I strove to stay close to the Hebrew text. Where verse numbers in the Hebrew text differ from those in the English Bible, I placed the Hebrew versification in parentheses.

The exegetical comments should be read with translation in hand. I strive first to determine the structure of the poems or the collections, sections, and units through thematic considerations in conjunction with form and rhetorical criticism. I then give exegetical comments on each verse, half-verse, and individual words. However, it is impossible to analyze the structure of the larger groupings without a prior careful exegesis of each verse. Occasionally, I also offer theological reflections. To help out with the matter of sound, I occasionally supply transliterations of the Hebrew word(s). I discuss the meaning of some theologically laden Hebrew words that occur many times in the Introduction and other Hebrew words full of wisdom at their first occurrence, though I may cite only their English glosses. Thereafter I use “see” with cross references to the same Hebrew word, even though the English versions may differ considerably, and “cf.” for cross references to expressions in the same semantic domain. I apologize that I sometimes give the same cross references in closely connected verses, but proverbs are meant to be studied both collectively and individually, occasioning their study in isolation.

I intend the footnotes mostly for scholars who want to document a point and/or to research it in greater depth. By contrast, I address the text to the pastor, student, and Bible lover. For this reason I cite German works in my translations of them. Hopefully, my treatments of “the wise and speech” and of “the wise and wealth” in the Introduction will model topical preach-

ing. Expositors should not hesitate to translate the literary forms of Proverbs into the homiletic genre. Just as the Hebrew language must be translated into English, so also the genres of Proverbs need to be translated into a homily. However, expositors owe it to the inspired sage to be true to his meaning and intention and to consider the larger context. I hope the Contents will enable them to identify that context readily.

Though I wrote the text for the person who had not had opportunity to study Biblical Hebrew, I found it almost impossible to discuss the meaning of the text without appealing to the original Hebrew text. I hope that those readers who do not know Biblical Hebrew will be willing to look over technical terms such as *Hiphil* that nuance a verb's meaning without feeling that they must understand the term just as they can read articles on medicine with comprehension and profit without necessarily understanding their technical terms.

In writing this commentary I also had to face difficult stylistic decisions. I opted to render the Tetragrammaton (*YHWH*) by LORD, not Yahweh, for philological, historical, and theological reasons. God in his providence has not preserved its vocalization, so that its reconstruction by "Yahweh" is in fact speculative. Furthermore, by using the epithet "Lord," not the personal name, God paved the way for the identification of Jesus with the personal name *YHWH*. Verses such as "everyone who calls upon the name of *YHWH*" (Joel 2:32) could easily be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'" (Rom. 10:9), "for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Rom. 10:13). In short, I opted for its theological rendering rather than its speculative historical pronunciation.

I also had to face the problem of whether to use A.D. (*anno Domini*) and B.C. (Before Christ) or C.E. (Christian Era) and B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era). I opted for the traditional A.D. and B.C., not for the academic C.E. and B.C.E., because I was writing for the average Bible reader, not for the scholarly community (including notable Jewish scholars), though I attempted to appraise the academic community critically for its strengths and weaknesses.

In contemporary English the third person singular pronoun ("he/she," etc.) is a stylistic bramble patch. Although I desired to use inclusive language as much as possible, I opted to continue to use the third person masculine pronoun as the common pronoun for both genders, hoping that those who choose other options will not take offense. The loss of individualization by shifting from singular constructions to plural constructions is too great a loss in sense, and the loss of agreement between singular subjects and plural qualifiers by grammatical disagreement or by shifting between pronouns or by combining them is too great a stylistic loss.

This commentary has been in the making for over a quarter of a cen-

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tury. In the providence of God, after Derek Kidner and Alan Millard translated Proverbs for the New International Version, I was assigned to the three successive committees of the NIV responsible for its reworking. I am indebted to everyone on those committees. In part the commentary was delayed by the new literary criticism, which has had a profound impact on traditional exegesis and which required my rethinking the entire book. This new approach validates that the proverbs are arranged in a sensible way to protect the vulnerable sayings against misinterpretation and/or to enrich their meanings. In A.D. 2000 the Committee on Bible Translation, of which I am a member, commissioned me to generate proposals for the revision of Proverbs. I am most indebted to the following individuals for the encouragement and instruction I received from that committee: Kenneth Barker, Gordon Fee, Dick France, Karen Jones, Alan Millard, Don Madvig, John Stek, Larry Walker, Herb Wolf, and Ronald Youngblood. I also gladly acknowledge my unending dialectic with the academic community, most of whom are cited in the bibliography. It was a particular delight to use my students' papers and theses. Even those scholars with whom I disagree made the heuristic contribution of challenging my thinking and provoking what I hope is a helpful response.

I could not have worked with more gracious librarians and their staffs than Grace Mullen and Jane Petite of Westminster Theological Seminary; Ivan Gaetz, David Stewart, Joan Pries, Audrey Williams, and Matthew Freeman of Regent College; and John Muether, Dan Wright, and Kevin Nelson of Reformed Theological Seminaries. My talented German students Johannes Kuhhorn and Gabriel Braun helped me with the translation of *Die Sprüche* by A. Meinhold. The Eerdmans Publishing Company and Robert Hubbard patiently allowed me to pursue my research and writing over these many years. Eerdmans editor Milton Essenburg meticulously worked on the clarity, consistency, and correctness of the original manuscript. My students at both Regent College and Reformed Theological Seminary assiduously proofread with loving willingness the Scripture cross-references. The team at Regent, which was led by my multigifted computer tutor, Rob Barrett, were Gay Atmajian, Lane Ayo, Matt Ghormley, Abram Kidd, Allison Koenicke, Max Kuecker, Rod McLain, Stephen Ney, Rosie Perera, and Susan Ting. The team at Reformed Theological Seminary, which was led by my very competent teaching assistant, Scott Redd, were: Guillermo Bernáldez, Jason Foster, Rob Genin, Bryan Gregory, Chris Hackett, Brett Hedgepeth, David Kirkendall, Paul May, Omar Ortiz, Jennifer Redd, Ryan Reeves, Jonathan St. Clair, Cary Smith, Ron Thomas, and Keith Welton. Jennifer Redd prepared the subject index to the Introduction.

BRUCE K. WALTKE

## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
acc.	accusative
act.	active
A.D.	<i>anno Domini</i> , in the year of our Lord
AEL	M. Lichtheim, <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings</i> . 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California, 1973, 1976, 1980
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AIR	P. D. Miller Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., <i>Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross</i> . Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AJT	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
Akk.	Akkadian
Amen.	<i>Amenemope</i>
ANEP	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> . 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University, 1969
ANET	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University, 1969
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>

## ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Authorized Version. See KJV
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BARev	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1959
BETL	<i>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium</i>
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHS	K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967-77. <i>Proverbia</i> prepared by J. Fichtner
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibAT	<i>Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984</i>
BibBh	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>
BibLit	Bible and Literature Series
BibOr	<i>Biblica et orientalia</i>
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BK	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BM	<i>Beth Mikra</i>
BMB	<i>Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca orientalis</i>
BOAS	<i>Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BRL	K. Galling, ed., <i>Biblisches Reallexikon</i> . Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1937
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSO(A)S	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i> ; see also TBT
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
ByF	<i>Biblia y Fe</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beiheft zur ZAW
ca.	<i>circa</i> , around

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CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CB	Coniectanea biblica
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	The Communicator's Commentary
cent.	century
CESS	Centre d'études supérieures spécialisée d'histoire des religions
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
CG	<i>Collationes Gandavenses</i>
ch.	chapter
CHS	Commentary on the Holy Scriptures
CICSB	Congrès international Catholique des science bibliques, <i>Sacra pagina: miscellanea biblica</i>
<i>CIS</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum</i>
col.	column
<i>Colloquium</i>	<i>The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review: Colloquium</i>
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament
cons.	construct
CSIC	Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas instituto "Francisco Suárez"
<i>CSR</i>	<i>Christian Scholar's Review</i>
<i>CTA</i>	A. Herdner, ed., <i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabetiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i> . 2 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CUASST	The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>DBSup</i>	L. Pirot, R. A. Cazelles, and A. Feuillet. <i>Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément</i> . Paris, 1928-
<i>DD</i>	<i>Dor le dor</i>
diss.	dissertation
<i>DJD</i>	<i>Discoveries in the Judaean Desert</i>
DSBS	The Daily Study Bible Series
<i>DTT</i>	<i>Dansk teologisk tidsskrift</i>
EB	<i>Étude bibliques</i>
EBC	F. Gaebelein, Expositor's Bible Commentary. 12 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979-88

## ABBREVIATIONS

ed.	editor, edited by
EDSS	L. Schiffman and J. Vanderkam, eds., <i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i> . 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000
EDT	W. Elwell, ed., <i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
EHS.T.	Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 23, Theologie
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
Eng.	English
esp.	especially
EstBíb	Estudios bíblicos
<i>EstTeo</i>	<i>Estudios teológicos</i>
ET	English translation
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and the others
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovaniensis</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
fem.	feminine
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
frag.	fragment
FTS	Freiburger theologische Studien
gen.	genitive
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Ed. E. Kautzsch. Tr. A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
GTT	<i>Gereformeerd theologisch tijdschrift</i>
GUOST	<i>Glasgow University Oriental Society Transactions</i>
HALOT	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, et al., <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Tr. M. E. J. Richardson et al. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-99
<i>hap. leg.</i>	<i>hapax legomenon</i> (lit. "being spoken once" = unique)
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
Heb.	Hebrew
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
Holladay	W. Holladay, <i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs

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<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBH</i>	T. Lambdin, <i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew</i>
<i>IBHS</i>	B. K. Waltke and M. P. O'Connor, <i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990
<i>IB</i>	G. A. Buttrick et al., eds., <i>The Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1952-57
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	G. A. Buttrick et al., eds., <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>IDBSup</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Supplementary Volume</i> . Ed. K. Crim et al., 1976
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
impv.	imperative
inf.	infinitive
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Inter	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>ISBE</i>	G. W. Bromiley et al., eds., <i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . 4 vols. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-88
<i>ISBL</i>	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>IW</i>	J. G. Gammie, W. A. Brueggemann, W. L. Humphreys, and J. M. Ward, eds., <i>Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien</i> . New York: Union Theological Seminary/Scholars Press, 1978
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>Jewish Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>JOTS</i>	<i>Journal of Old Testament Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal of the Society of Old Testament — Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K	Kethib
<i>KAI</i>	H. Donner and W. Röllig, eds., <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962-71
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KBL</i> <sup>2</sup>	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteri Testamenti libros</i> . 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1958
KHCAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
Lat.	Latin
<i>LB</i>	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
<i>Leš</i>	<i>Lešonénu</i>
lit.	literally
<i>LTJ</i>	<i>Lutheran Theological Journal</i>
LUÅ	Lunds universitets årsskrift
LXX	Septuagint (Greek version of the OT)
masc.	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>MDB</i>	<i>Mercer Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ms(s).	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
n.	footnote
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
<i>NBC</i>	<i>The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition</i>
<i>NBD</i>	D. R. W. Wood, ed., <i>New Bible Dictionary</i> . 3rd ed. Leicester and Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
N.F.	Neue Folge, new series
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	W. A. Van Gemeren et al., ed., <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
NIV	New International Version
<i>NJBC</i>	R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy, eds., <i>The</i>

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	New Jerome Biblical Commentary. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990
NJPT	The New Jewish Publication Translation
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology. Ed. D. A. Carson
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OBL</i>	<i>Orientalia et biblica lovaniensia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Old Testament Message
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Old Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTSSWL</i>	W. C. Wyk, ed., <i>Old Testament Studies: Studies in Wisdom Literature</i>
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>OTWSA</i>	<i>Outestamentiese werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika</i>
p.	page
P.	paragraph
par.	parallel
pass.	passive
<i>PEGLMBS</i>	<i>Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PIBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>
<i>PJ</i>	<i>Palästinajahrbuch</i>
pl.	plural
Pl.	Plate
<i>PNCWJS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Division A: The Period of the Bible.</i> Ed. M. H. Goshen-Gottstein. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986
prep.	preposition
<i>Presby.</i>	<i>Presbyterion</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
pt.	part
ptcp.	participle
PTM	Princeton Theological Monographs
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
Q	Qere
<i>Qad</i>	<i>Qadmoniot</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
REB	The Revised English Bible
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
repr.	reprinted

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>RES</i>	<i>Revue des études sémitiques</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RivB</i>	<i>Rivista biblica</i>
<i>RSP</i>	<i>Ras Shamra Parallels</i> . 3 vols. Vols. I–II, ed. L. Fisher; vol. III, ed. S. Rummel. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968-79
RV	Revised Version
<i>Sagesse</i>	M. Gilbert, ed., <i>La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament</i> . BETL 51. Gembloux, Belgique: Leuven University, 1979
<i>SAIW</i>	J. L. Crenshaw, <i>Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom: Selected, with a Prolegomenon</i> . Library of Biblical Studies. New York: Ktav, 1976
SBFA	Studium biblici Franciscani analecta
<i>SBFLA</i>	<i>Studium biblici Franciscani liber annus</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBLBSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Book of Seminar Papers</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SEÅ	Svensk exegetisk årsbok
<i>SIANE</i>	J. G. Gammie and L. G. Purdue, eds., <i>The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East</i> . Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990
sing.	singular
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SPAW</i>	<i>Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i>
<i>SpT</i>	<i>Spirituality Today</i>
StANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
s.v.	under the word
Sym.	Symmachus
Syr.	Syriac Version (Peshitta)
<i>Tar</i>	<i>Tarbiz</i>
Targ.	Targum
<i>TB</i>	<i>Theologische Beiträge</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . 10 vols. Tr. and ed. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76
<i>TDOT</i>	G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological</i>

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- TEV Today's English Version
- THAT E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., *Theologisches Handwörterbuch des Alten Testaments*. 2 vols. Munich: C. Kaiser. Zurich: Theologischer, 1971-76
- Theod. Theodotion
- TLH K. G. Hoglund et al., eds., *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm.* JSOTSup 58. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 3 vols. Ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann. Tr. M. E. Biddle. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997
- TLZ *Theologische Literaturzeitung*
- tr. translated by
- TS *Theological Studies*
- TSJTSA Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America
- TTT M. V. Fox et al., *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995
- TZ *Theologische Zeitschrift*
- TWAT *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer
- TWOT R. L. Harris et al., eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols.
- TynBul *Tyndale Bulletin*
- TZ *Theologisches Zeitschrift*
- UF *Ugarit-Forschungen*
- Ugar. Ugaritic
- UT C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*. AnOr 38. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965
- UUA Uppsala universitetets årsskrift
- v. verse
- VT *Vetus Testamentum*
- VTSup Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum*
- Vulg. Vulgate
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
- WIAI J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995
- WIANE M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, eds., *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Leiden: Brill, 1969

## ABBREVIATIONS

WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Welt des Orients</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
WWis	J. I. Packer and S. Soderlund, eds., <i>Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of B. K. Waltke</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000
x	time(s)
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZKT	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</i>
ZSem	<i>Zeitschrift für Semitisk</i>
ZPEB	M. Tenney et al., eds., <i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> . 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

# INTRODUCTION

To enter the commentator's world before reading the book, please read the Author's Preface.

## I. TITLE

This work is a commentary on what in Hebrew is called *mišlê* “proverbs of” in conformity with the ancient Near Eastern practice of naming a book by its first word. The English title Proverbs was mediated through *Liber Proverbiorum*, “The Book of Proverbs,” the Latin title Jerome gave the book in the Vulgate. Proverbs is found among the “Writings,” the third and final section of the Hebrew Bible, and provided with distinctive accents also accorded to Job and Psalms. English Bibles place it among the poetic books (Job — Song of Solomon)

## II. TEXT AND VERSIONS

The following discussion on texts and ancient versions of Proverbs aims only to elucidate the textual basis of this commentary.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a magisterial introduction to textual criticism see E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

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### A. HEBREW TEXTS

This commentary is based primarily on the Leningrad Codex (L) of Samuel son of Jacob (ca. A.D. 1000), who “copied, vowel-pointed and Masoretically annotated this codex of the sacred Scripture from the correct manuscript that the teacher, Aaron son of Moses Ben-Asher, [prepared] . . . and that constitutes an exceedingly accurate exemplar.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of occasional errors either in L or within the Masoretic tradition (MT), its text is a reliable witness to the original text.<sup>3</sup> However, in 8:16 (n. 29) I followed the Bomberg edition, not L of the *BHS*.

Unfortunately, little use can be made of the Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts of Proverbs from Cave 4 at Qumran. *Proverbs*<sup>a</sup> (4Q102, mid-first century B.C.) and *Proverbs*<sup>b</sup> (4Q103, mid-first century to the turn of the era) are its only two representatives of Proverbs, containing 39 words or portions of words from Prov. 1:27–2:1 and 125 words or portions of words from Prov. 9:16 (possibly 9:4); 13:6–9; 14:6–13; 14:27–28(?); 14:31–15:8, and 15:19–31 respectively. Together the two manuscripts yield six variants from the MT: two are merely orthographic (15:27), one concerns the absence of a copula (1:31), and one appears to have come from transposing two letters of an orthographic variant (15:19). A more significant variant is the omission of *yehgeh* (“meditate,” 15:28), and the most significant variant is *mwškt-mōšʿkot* for *mʿšûbat* (“cord” for “apostasy,” 1:32). This may have come from a combination of transposing two letters and then mistakenly copying a *kaph* for the similar-looking *beth*, or it may have come from the influence of the second verset of Job 38:31.<sup>4</sup>

### B. GREEK VERSIONS (LXX)<sup>5</sup>

Despite these variants, both Qumran manuscripts are more closely related to the Masoretic recension (a distinct text type) than to that of the Septuagint (LXX, ca. 200 B.C.).<sup>6</sup> This relationship corroborates the antiquity of MT’s recensional base. The additions and omissions in the LXX and its recensional *Vorlage* (the Hebrew text lying before the translator) range from individual

2. My translation of the frontispiece of Leningrad Codex B19<sup>a</sup>. This codex is the diplomatic text of *BHS*. J. Fichtner edited the textual notes of Proverbs in *BHS*.

3. See B. Waltke, “The Reliability of the Old Testament Text,” in *NIDOTTE*, 1:51–67.

4. N. Jastram, “Proverbs, Book of,” in *EDSS*, 2:701–2.

5. This commentary accepts as the best available edition of the LXX, A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, II (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935).

6. J. Cook, “The Dating of Septuagint Proverbs,” *ETL* 69 (1993) 383–99.

words to whole verses. Sometimes the translator himself changed the text, for example, by reading the consonants differently from their traditional pronunciations preserved by the Masoretes,<sup>7</sup> and other times he found different readings in his sources, which sometimes omitted versets (half-verses) or whole verses and more frequently added them. These latter kinds of variations are more radical than what one normally expects from a translator. Tov thinks that many of them represent a different recension of the book, without denying that some are the work of the translator,<sup>8</sup> but Cook believes that the translator is responsible for many more of them.<sup>9</sup> The issue cannot be decided beyond reasonable doubt, for the Hebrew *Vorlagen* are missing. We refer to the LXX text without trying to decide the issue. Suffice it to note here that even in cases of recensional differences this commentary assumes with Tov and Childs the priority of the MT as the “original text.”<sup>10</sup> If they are due to the work of the translator, they are obviously secondary.

Baumgartner,<sup>11</sup> Gerleman,<sup>12</sup> Tov,<sup>13</sup> and Cook<sup>14</sup> all agree that the translation contains much evidence of contextual exegesis, in both minor and major details. Tov speaks of scores of translation doublets and argues for the presence of “translational exegesis” even in the addition of versets or whole verses, and Cook nuances this by noting, “It is by no means clear whether a double translation comes from the translator or from a later hand.”<sup>15</sup> The LXX is often said to be free, but in truth it is both free and creative. By a “free translation” one means that the translator represented the general meaning of the Hebrew lines without searching for detailed relations between the individual words and/or syntax of the original and the elements of the translation. But the LXX went beyond this. After translating some elements of the text in a rather “literal” way, it then breaks loose and, says Barr, “completes the sentence with a composition so loosely related to the original that it

7. See *IBHS*, pp. 24-28, P. 1.6.3.

8. E. Tov, “Recensional Differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays by Emanuel Tov* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 419-32, after showing differences between the versions of Proverbs, including differences in sequence and pluses and minuses, draws the conclusion that these differences are recensional.

9. J. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Colouring of the LXX Proverbs* (VTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

10. Waltke, “Reliability,” pp. 62-63.

11. A. J. Baumgartner, *Étude critique sur l'état du texte du Livre des Proverbes d'après les principales traductions anciennes* (Leipzig: W. Drugulin, 1890).

12. G. Gerleman, *Studies in the Septuagint* (LUÅ, N.F., 52, 3; Lund: Gleerup, 1956).

13. Tov, “Recensional Differences in Proverbs,” p. 420.

14. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*.

15. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 15.

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might equally be considered as an original composition rather than a rendering.” Barr draws the conclusion: “Thus the mind of the translator . . . was quick to notice phenomena in the Hebrew text which might provide clues for a rendering; but it was also a mind creative in itself, ready to formulate ideas which would seem right within Hellenistic Jewry.”<sup>16</sup> Cook concurs: “The translator utilized Jewish exegetical religious traditions in order to render this text as clearly as possible unto his Jewish readers.”<sup>17</sup> According to Cook, the translator’s historical milieu occasioned its “conspicuous interpretations.”<sup>18</sup>

The LXX’s startling rearrangement of materials from 24:23 to 31:31 illustrates its creativity. H. C. Washington convincingly argued that the LXX created the fiction of Solomonic authorship of all the sayings in Proverbs by changing the editorial notices to the collections and by rearranging them. Here is the sequence of presentations in the MT and in the LXX:

<b>MT</b>			<b>LXX</b>	
I	1:1–9:18	Prologue		I 1:1–9:18
II	10:1–22:16	Proverbs of Solomon	II	10:1–22:16
III	22:17–24:22	Thirty Sayings of the Wise	III	22:17–24:22
IV	24:23–34	Further Sayings of the Wise	VIA	30:1–14
V	25:1–29:27	Hezekiah’s Collection of Solomon	IV	24:23–34
VIA	30:1–14	Agur’s Oracle	VIB	30:15–33
VIB	30:15–33	Agur’s Numerical Sayings	VIIA	31:1–9
VIIA	31:1–9	Lemuel’s Mother to Her Son	V	25:1–29:27
VIIB	31:10–31	Lemuel’s Mother on the Noble Wife	VIIB	31:10–31

The LXX rearrangement is not arbitrary but part of its Solomonic fiction as seen in its suppressing the authorships of Agur and Lemuel in 30:1 and 31:1 and its strengthening Solomonic authorship of the “sayings of the wise” in 22:17 and 24:23. It retains the attribution of Solomonic authorship in 1:1 and 25:1 but omits the superscript in 10:1. In 31:1, instead of “the sayings of Lemuel, a king . . .,” the LXX reads: “My words have been spoken by God,” and in 24:23, instead of “also these are sayings of the wise,” the LXX reads: “I say these things to you, the wise, that you may understand.”<sup>19</sup> The MT places the oracles of Agur and Lemuel at the end of the book as appendices, but the LXX interlaces them among the sayings of the wise, which it attributes to Solomon, to give the impression of a seamless Solomonic authorship from 1:1 to 31:31. The LXX presents the entire book as two Solomonic sections, the first

16. James Barr, “*B`ry — Molis*: Prov. XI.31, 1 Pet IV.18,” *JSS* 20 (1975) 158–59.

17. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 38.

18. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 292.

19. Or, “These things I say to you that you may understand wise matters.”

identified as the “proverbs of Solomon” (*paroimiai Salōmōntos*, 1:1), the second as “the teachings of Solomon” (*hai paideiai Salōmōntos*) copied in the court of Hezekiah, 25:1.<sup>20</sup> Although Washington wrongly thinks that even in the MT Proverbs belongs to the Jewish pseudepigrapha, he cogently draws the conclusion: “Consistent with the intensified interest in pseudepigraphical tradition during the later Hellenistic period, the LXX editor thus makes the Solomonic attribution of the Proverbs more thoroughgoing than in the Hebrew tradition.” This accounts for the difference between the MT and LXX order and makes clear the priority of the MT sequence.<sup>21</sup> Cook explains other arrangements in the LXX. He notes the royal connection between 31:1 and 25:1: the LXX translator calls Prov. 31:1-9 the oracular answer of a king, and 25:1 and 2 speak of the king’s glory and of the inscrutability of the king’s heart respectively.<sup>22</sup> He also notes that by combining 29:27 with 31:10 the translator achieved a striking contrast between the unrighteous man and the virtuous wife, unlike the disconnect between 29:27 and 30:1 in the MT.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the LXX represents a secondary arrangement. Nevertheless, where the translator, who “paid more attention to the Semitic source language than to the Greek target language,”<sup>24</sup> renders his *Vorlage* in a rather “literal” way, he sometimes preserves an original reading in his *Vorlage* in contrast to the secondary reading preserved in L. This commentator finds original readings in the LXX, not in the MT, in 1:15; 3:3; 8:5 (n. 13), 28 (n. 42); 9:1 (n. 1), 11 (n. 21); 13:15 (n. 29); 18:19 (n. 22); 23:27 (n. 35); 28:23 (n. 24); 31:16 (n. 76); 31:17 (n. 79).

### C. OTHER ANCIENT VERSIONS

There is a unique relationship between the LXX and the Syriac Peshitta (Syr.; questionably ca. A.D. 150) in Proverbs.<sup>25</sup> For example, both the LXX

20. The Greek manuscripts Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus (corrected) read *paroimiai*, not *paideiai*, in an attempt to harmonize 1:1 and 25:1.

21. H. C. Washington, “Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs: A Comparative Case Study in the Social Location and Function of Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992), pp. 194-97. Five years later Cook (*The Septuagint of Proverbs*, pp. 304-5, 307) independently drew a similar conclusion: “To [the LXX translator] all the proverbs were therefore proverbs of Solomon. . . . Only the proverbs of Solomon apparently are acceptable proverbs to him, for Israel.”

22. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 307.

23. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 313.

24. J. Lust et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Part I, A-I (Stuttgart, 1992).

25. For citations from the Peshitta the commentary depends on Alexander A. di

and the Peshitta add the same four verses to 9:18, and the Syr. largely agrees with their Greek rendering. Probably they were based on a Hebrew text that differs from the MT. But Cook argues, especially from their distinctive treatments of the “foreign wife” in the prologue (chs. 1–9), that the Peshitta goes its own way except in a few instances where the Hebrew is difficult and the Peshitta translator, needing help, consulted the LXX.<sup>26</sup>

Though these two versions often agree, they do not agree in detail because each translator has his own translation techniques and/or theological interests due to their different historical milieus. For example, the Greek and Syr. render 9:18a similarly: “but he does not know that mighty men die by her.” But they differ in their renderings of its B verset: “and he falls in with a snare of Hades” (LXX) and “and in the valley of Hades all are invited to her” (Syr.). Cook draws the conclusion: “The Peshitta translator in some instances interpreted uniquely and apparently made use of the Septuagint.”<sup>27</sup> When the Greek and Syr. versions follow a different Hebrew recension, or when the Syr. depends on the LXX, or when the Syr. interprets the text represented in the MT, it logically follows that the MT recension more probably contains “original readings,” not the Peshitta. In spite of the secondary character of the Peshitta text, it, too, occasionally retains an original reading from its *Vorlage*, as judged to be the case in 6:2 (n. 4).

There is also a unique relationship between the Aramaic Targum of Proverbs (of uncertain date) and the Syr.<sup>28</sup> A general consensus has emerged that Targ. Proverbs used Syr in some form due to its similarities to the Syriac language and to the fact that the Targum and the Peshitta are identical in 300 out of 915 verses. Some scholars think that it depended directly on the Peshitta, making Targ. Proverbs late, or that it depended on a common Aramaic and or Syriac source with the Peshitta, allowing the possibility that Targ. Proverbs is earlier than the Peshitta. However, Targ. Proverbs sometimes adheres closely to the MT, disagreeing with the Peshitta. In 85 cases, however, it agrees with the LXX against the MT. It is unclear whether these

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Lella, *Vetus Testamentum Syriace iuxta simplicem syrorum versionum*, Pars. fasciculus v, *Proverbia–Sapientia Salomonis–Ecclesiastes–Canticum Cantorum* (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

26. J. Cook, “The Relationship between the Peshitta and the Septuagint Proverbs,” *Textus* 14 (1994) 117-32.

27. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs*, p. 291.

28. Discussion and citations of Targ. Proverbs are taken mostly from John F. Healey, *The Targum of Proverbs* (The Aramaic Bible: The Targums, 15, Project Director Martin McNamara, Kevin Cathcart, et al., eds.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1991). Following Healey’s counsel, this commentary used Targ. Proverbs in Walton’s Polyglot and the Zamora text of Targ. Proverbs in L. Díez Merino, *Targum de Proverbios: Edición Príncipe del Ms. Villa-Amil no. 5 de Alfonso de Zamora* (Madrid: CSIC, 1984).

reflect a specific knowledge of the LXX, knowledge of variant traditions, or a common Hebrew *Vorlage* different from the MT. In contrast to Targums of other biblical books, Targ. Proverbs shows a remarkable lack of exegetical explanation. Healey explains its few departure from the MT as due to its aim to elucidate the meaning of the text, to make it more credible, to moralize, to avoid objectionable references to God, or to give a “clarificatory” introduction to the divine name.<sup>29</sup> Because of its strong dependence on the Syr. and its other secondary characteristics, this Targum is of little text-critical value and is never cited in this commentary as containing an original reading.

Jerome’s *Liber Proverbiorum* (ca. A.D. 400) depends on the proto-MT, the standardized Hebrew text after A.D. 100, and for this reason it is of little text-critical value.<sup>30</sup> In the very few instances when his *Vorlage* departs from the preserved MT, however, it reflects an early stage of that recension and must be given serious consideration.

Moreover, scribal errors occurred early in the transmission of the text — no scribe can copy a text without error — so that textual emendations are unavoidable, as suggested in 1:11, 18; 2:18; 6:24 (n. 4); 7:9 (n. 11); 7:22 (n. 33); 8:11 (n. 23); 12:12 (2x, text); 14:14 (n. 30); 19:20 (n. 37); 22:20 (n. 112); 23:29 (n. 84).

## D. CONCLUSION

The general evidence and the comparative textual and versional evidence for the reliability of the MT are confirmed by the known conservative transmission of wisdom literature in the ancient Near East. 1 Kings 4:29-31 (Heb. 5:9-11) suggests that sages and their writings were held in high esteem in Solomon’s world. Their own writings confirm this impression. One hieratic papyrus put the value of wisdom literature this way: “Books of instructions became their [the learned scribes’] pyramids. Is there another one like Ptahhotep and Kaires?”<sup>31</sup> A wall of a New Kingdom tomb at Sakkara has representations of mummiform statues of important officials. Among the viziers are Imhotep and Kaires. Their inclusion is certainly partly due to their reputations as sages. Not surprisingly, the works of these sages enjoyed what appears to be canonical status. Merikare (35) reads: “Copy thy fathers and thy

29. Healey, *Targum*, pp. 6-7.

30. The Vulg. is cited from Bonifatio Fischer, O.S.B., et al., eds., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, Tomus II (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969).

31. A. C. Beatty and A. H. Gardiner, *The Library of Chester Beatty: Description of a Hieratic Papyrus with a Mythological Story, Love-Songs and Other Miscellaneous Texts* (London: Privately Printed by J. Johnson; published by Oxford University and S. Walter, 1931).

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ancestors. . . . Behold, their words remain in writing. Open, that thou mayest read and copy (their) wisdom. (Thus) the skilled man becomes *learned*.”<sup>32</sup> The conservative scribes followed this admonition. The Turin tablet contains the portion of the *Instruction of Amenemope* that corresponds to 24:1–25:9 in the complete British Museum papyrus. The tablet attests the same line arrangement, and the extract copied on the tablet begins precisely at the beginning of a page in the complete papyrus.

The colophon to the *Counsel of Wisdom* reads, “Written according to the prototype and collated.”<sup>33</sup> Lambert commented on the bilingual tablet from Ashurbanipal’s library, of which no duplicate or early copy has yet been found:

Either this tablet, or an antecedent copy, on which it is based, was copied from a damaged original, and the scribe very faithfully reproduced this. When he wrote on one line what split between two in his original, the dividing point on the original was marked with the pair of wedges used in commentaries to separate words quoted from the comments on them. . . . Where the original was badly damaged, the scribe copied out exactly what he saw, and left blank spaces marked “broken” where nothing remained.<sup>34</sup>

But the evidence also shows that some changes were made. The comparison between the late bilingual tablets and their old Babylonian, unilingual Sumerian material is proving to be a helpful lesson in literary history. E. I. Gordon turned up 34 individual proverbs common to both the earlier unilingual material and the later bilingual texts. Lambert observed instances where no change occurred. “What is more significant is that whole groups of proverbs in the same sequence are carried over from the unilingual to the late bilinguals.”<sup>35</sup> But he also noted that one tablet of the late period has a proverb not in the earlier collection. This shows that while collections were transmitted conservatively, choice proverbs could still be added to the collection. In the same way, the final editor of Proverbs felt free to bring together material from diverse sources. Moreover, the circulation of variant forms of the same proverb is also well known in the Hebrew collection (cf. Prov. 10:2 with 11:4).

32. *ANET*, p. 415.

33. *ANET*, p. 427.

34. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 239.

35. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, p. 223.

### III. STRUCTURE

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The headings (or superscripts) in Proverbs readily divide the book into seven collections (1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1). Though 22:17 lacks a distinct editorial heading, its reference to “the sayings of the wise,” its distinctive form, and its integrity with 22:17-21, referring among other things to the “thirty sayings” in 22:20 (emended), clearly set these verses apart as the first of the thirty sayings. The editorial superscript to the next collection, “These *also* are sayings of the wise” (24:23), puts the identification of 22:17–24:22 as the third collection in Proverbs beyond reasonable doubt.

Although Proverbs used to be viewed mostly as a haphazard collection of proverbs, as I will argue below, the study of poetics has shown its skillful composition. P. Skehan uses the more questionable method of numerics (i.e., a number code) to verify careful editorial structuring of the book.<sup>1</sup> According to him, the editor laid out the book’s columns in the form of a “wisdom house” modeled on Solomon’s temple,<sup>2</sup> but in this he has not gained a following. One of the problems with his view is that the text must be rearranged in several places to support his theory. The numerical value he places on the names in the headings matching the number of lines in the collections, however, has received some recognition. The numerical value of the three names in 1:1, *šlmh* (Solomon), *dwd* (David), and *yśr’l* (Israel), is 375, 14, and 541, a total of 930, which according to him is the total number of lines in the book. In the received text, however, the total is 934. He achieves 930 by regarding 1:16; 8:11; and 24:23-34 as glosses, weakening his equation. More convincing is the correspondence between the numerical value of *š* (= 300), *l* (= 30), *m* (= 40) and *h* (= 5) in 10:1, a total of 375, matching the number of verses in Solomon I (10:1–22:16), an equation earlier recognized by C. Steuernagel.<sup>3</sup> This match between the numerical value of Solomon’s name and the 375 sentence aphorisms in Solomon I is too striking to be accidental and may point to a late editing of Solomon I. But, Clifford comments, “Though the numerical value of Hebrew consonants is attested only from the second century B.C.E., it could be much

1. P. W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Wisdom* (CBQMS 1; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971), pp. 27-45.

2. P. W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 27-43.

3. P. W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 43-45. According to Skehan, in 25:1 the operative name is Hezekiah, whose numerical value varies according to its spelling, but one option, 140, matches *his* number of lines in Solomon II (25:1–29:27). Moreover, the numerical value of *hkmym* (“wise men”) in the headings of 22:17 and 24:23 is 118, matching his number of lines in 22:17–24:32 and 30:7-33. But his count of lines and his omission of Agur’s biography in 30:1-6 seem arbitrary.

earlier.”<sup>4</sup> Alan Millard, however, has pointed out that there is no evidence at present that the letters of the alphabet were used as numerals in pre-exilic Hebrew.<sup>5</sup> More creditable than numerics is the use of form and rhetorical criticisms to show the integrity of the seven collections according to the editorial headings.

**B. COLLECTION I: TITLE WITH PREAMBLE (1:1-7),  
PROLOGUE (1:8–8:36), AND EPILOGUE (9:1-18)**

The first collection consists of three sections: a main title (1:1) with a preamble (1:2-7), a prologue (1:8–8:36), and an epilogue (9:1-18). The prologue consists of 12 units, making a total of 14 distinct literary pieces comprising Collection I. In the book’s final form, Collection I sets the context for all the collections that follow (10:1–31:31), not just Collection II (= Solomon I, 10:1–22:16) and its two appendixes, the “Thirty Sayings of the Wise” (Collection III; 22:17–24:22) and “Further Sayings of the Wise” (Collection IV; 24:23-34). In contrast to the concise aphorisms of Collection II, the first collection, apart from the prose title, is composed entirely of poems in praise of wisdom. By it the final editor intended to motivate the wise and the gullible to accept the wisdom in all seven collections of his final form of Proverbs.

1. Title with Preamble (1:1-7)

The main title identifies its literary genre (“proverbs”) and author (“Solomon son of David, king of Israel”). Its preamble, grammatically modifying the title, states the book’s purpose, “to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight . . .” (1:2-6), and lays its foundation, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (1:7). In sum, the first section consists of three units stating the book’s title, purpose, and foundational principle.

2. Prologue and Epilogue (1:8–9:18)

*a. Prologue (1:8–8:36)*

The prologue consists of 12 poems: ten lectures put into the mouth of the father and addressed to “my son” (1:8-19; 2:1-22; 3:1-12, 13-35; 4:1-9, 10-19,

4. Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), p. 108.

5. A. Millard, “Strangers from Egypt and Greece: The Signs for Numbers in Early Hebrew,” in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipinski*, ed. K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 65; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), pp. 189-94.

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20-27; 5:1-23; 6:1-19; 6:20-35; 7:1-27) and two interludes, extended addresses by Woman Wisdom, a personification of Solomon's wisdom, to gullible youths (1:20-33; 8:1-36).<sup>6</sup> Like the ten lectures, these two extended poems typically begin with an introduction that names the addressees, admonishes them to listen to the lecture's lesson, and substantiates the admonition with motivating promises. The lesson typically extols the teaching, and/or calls for heartfelt obedience to it, and/or warns against the rival discourses of the greedy man or the loose woman, which represent a worldview foreign to Israel's wisdom. The lesson is typically capped with a summarizing conclusion. The lecture in 3:13-35, however, atypically begins with stanzas in praise of wisdom before the typical introduction and motivation, and concludes with specific ethical instruction.

Both in form and in content the material in 6:1-19 stands apart from the lectures that precede and follow it in 5:1-23 and in 6:20-33. Its form lacks the typical call to listen with motivations and plunges directly into the specific instructions. And its content deals with three inferior types of men (6:1-5, 6-11, 12-19), not with the unfaithful wife, the topic of the surrounding lectures. Since it lacks a direct address, it is best considered an appendix to the preceding lecture with the typical introductory address (5:1-6). In sum, the lectures and addresses of the prologue prepare the youth's heart to accept the proverbs and sayings that follow in the rest of the book.

### *b. Epilogue (9:1-18)*

Chapter 9 is also atypical. Like the interludes, it presents a relatively lengthy introduction to Woman Wisdom's address to the gullible (9:1-3). Unlike the interludes, however, her address is a very brief invitation with motivation (9:4-6) and is matched by Woman Folly's rival address (9:13-18); between them instructions on pedagogy are intercalated. Almost all scholars agree that it functions as an epilogue to the prologue. In sum, Collection I consists of 14 sections and units: a preamble and an epilogue, ten lectures, and two interludes.

The father's lectures and Wisdom's addresses complement each other. "Where the father is the authoritative voice in the family," notes C. Newsom, "*ḥokmôt* (personified wisdom) is the corresponding public voice 'in the streets,' 'in the public squares.'" <sup>7</sup> Though Wisdom ostensibly addresses the

6. I have adopted the terminology "lecture" and "interlude" from Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," pp. 613-33 and *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 44. Fox, however, regards 3:21-35 as a lecture and 3:13-20 as an interlude.

7. C. A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 145.

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masses, including the gullible, her encomiums to herself are in fact enconced within addresses to the son (e.g., 8:32-36). M. Fox, although denying that the father's lectures and Wisdom's addresses have a common author, notes their continuity by documenting their notable common motifs. Below, the passages from the "interludes" are placed in brackets:

The obligations to seek wisdom (2:4 [1:28]), to listen to it (2:2; 4:20; 5:1; etc. [1:24; 8:32]), and to call to it (2:3 [1:28; the complementary motif is wisdom's call: 1:21; 8:1]); finding wisdom (4:22 [1:28; 3:13; 8:17, 35]); the evil consequences of hating wisdom and reproof (5:12-14 [1:29-32]). In the lectures, the personification of wisdom is found in incidental or inchoate form, as one metaphor alongside others, in 2:3-4; 4:8-9; 6:22; and 7:4. Lady Folly is abstracted from the features of the Strange Woman of the lectures. Her house must be avoided (5:8; 7:25 [9:13-18]), for the path to it leads to death (2:18-19; 5:5; 7:27 [9:18]).<sup>8</sup>

### *c. Organization of 1:8-9:18*

The prologue (1:8-9:18) can be arranged in the following concentric pattern:

A	Rival invitations of the father and the gang to the son	1:8-19
B	Wisdom's rebuke of the gullible	1:20-33
C	Janus: The father's command to heed teaching as a safeguard against evil men and the unchaste wife	2:1-22
D	The father's commands to heed teaching	3:1-4:27
D'	The father's warnings against the unchaste wife	5:1-6:35
C'	Janus: The father's warnings against Wisdom's rival	7:1-27
B'	Wisdom's invitation to the gullible	8:1-36
A'	Rival invitations of Wisdom and the foolish woman to the gullible	9:1-18

A/A' frame the prologue with two invitations, from the wise parents (1:8-9) over against that from wicked men (1:10-19) and from Woman Wisdom over against that of the foolish woman (9:1-6, 13-18). The movement from the parents' invitations to heed their wisdom (1:8-9) to that of Wisdom's to the gullible (9:1-6) reflects the movement of the lectures as a whole and suggests the equation of Wisdom with the parents' teaching (see 1:20-33). The introductory rival invitation of wicked men to the son (1:10-19) over against the concluding rival invitation of Folly to the gullible constitutes a merism around the prologue, for they are directed to the two addressees

8. Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," p. 618.

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named in the preamble, namely, the gullible (1:4) and the wise (1:5). The wicked men and foolish woman form yet another enveloping merism through the distinctive temptations of the two sexes respectively: easy money in a gang (1:8-19) and easy sex with foolish women (9:13-18).

B/B' uniquely personify Solomon's wisdom as a heavenly being, and both uniquely address the gullible at the city gate.

C/C' function as transitions. On the one hand, ch. 2 looks back to ch. 1, showing distinct verbal links with the preamble (1:2-7) and the first lecture (1:8-19), echoing their themes and motifs (cf. 1:3b and 2:9; 1:7 and 2:5; 1:8 and 2:1; 1:10-19 and 2:12-15). In its immediate context, Wisdom's call and her raising her voice (1:20-21) are answered by the son's call to her and his raising his voice (2:3). On the other hand, its command to accept the parents' teaching (2:1-4) foreshadows the developing commands, such as not to forget it (e.g., 3:1, 21), in chs. 3 and 4. The second lecture's aim to deliver the son from wicked men (2:12-15) and the unchaste wife (2:16-18) foreshadows the warnings against them in chs. 5-6. The unification of themes into one poem shows that, although they will later be distributed among isolated poems, they are in fact inseparable components of wisdom.

On the one hand, ch. 7 continues the warnings against the unfaithful wife in chs. 5-6 and, on the other hand, it concerns itself with the gullible, as do chs. 8 and 9. More importantly, chs. 7 and 8 are hinged together as a diptych. Chapter 7 portrays the unfaithful wife emerging out of the darkening night in the city street and "raping" the gullible with her seductive speech. Connected to it, ch. 8 portrays Woman Wisdom as she raises her voice in broad daylight at the public gate leading to the city's street in order to save them beforehand. Their similar conclusions, resembling those of the ten lectures addressed to "my son" (cf. 7:24-27; 8:32-36), form the second hinge of this diptych.

D/D' combine the father's command to his son to heed his instructions with his warnings against the seduction of wicked men and women. These two sections of nearly equal length and mixed forms display a chiastic pattern. The admonitions to heed the parents' teaching (3:1-26; 4:1-27) circle a pivot of negative commands pertaining to neighbors, especially the violent man (3:27-35). So also the warnings against the adulteress (5:1-23; 6:20-35) circle a pivot of negative commands warning against the three progressively inferior types of men (6:1-19). The unique ethical instructions (3:27-35) at the end of Lecture 4 (3:13-35) suggest that the lectures in ch. 3 constitute a larger unit than do those of ch. 4.

In both the first and last lectures, the words of wicked men (1:11-14) and the wicked woman (7:14-20) are quoted and so form an *inclusio* around the father's lectures.

## C. COLLECTION II: SOLOMON I (10:1–22:16)

## 1. Introduction

The editorial subheading “Proverbs of Solomon” (10:1a), coupled with a marked change in forms, distinguishes the first collection of Solomon’s proverbs (= Solomon I, 10:1–22:16) from the prologue (1:8–9:18) and from the Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17–24:22). The prologue’s extended poems now give way to the short, pithy, one-verse aphorisms composed almost exclusively of bicola (the two verset halves of a verse). Solomon I is set apart from the Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17–24:22) by the reference to the “sayings of the wise” (22:17; cf. 1:6) along with a change in form from aphorisms to more extended, flowing sayings. Many of the 30 sayings span two verses or more and take the form of admonitions with substantiating motivations.

So-called Collection II (or Solomon I) and Collection I (1:1–9:18) are in fact two units of a unified corpus that dovetail together, as the following six arguments show:

1. Egyptian analogies show that 1:1 is a main heading and 10:1 a sub-heading of a unified collection (see pp. 32-36). The customary division of 1:1–22:16 into two collections, which is also followed in this commentary, is pedagogically sound but historically inaccurate.
2. The reference to the proverbs and sayings of the wise in 1:6 matches the references to the proverbs of Solomon I in 10:1 and to the sayings of the wise in 22:17 and 24:23.
3. Collection I, which is drawn to its conclusion by sharply contrasting Wisdom and Folly, foreshadows the antithetical parallels that characterize Proverbs 10–15.
4. The unfaithful wife, whose reference draws the prologue to its conclusion, is not met again until the conclusion of Solomon I (22:14).
5. The first aphorism of Solomon I (10:1b), by referring to the father, mother, and son and implicitly admonishing him to accept their teaching, forms a janus between the aphorism and the father’s lectures, which explicitly admonish the son to heed his father and mother (see 1:8).
6. The rest of Solomon I consists of units of proverbs marked off by using the vocabulary from the introductory admonitions to the father’s lectures (e.g., “son,” “instruction,” “wisdom,” “knowledge,” “shrewdness,” “discretion,” “teaching,” and “commands”; see p. 21).

## 2. Sections of Collection II

Udo Skladny, by analyzing the form, content, and style and employing statistics to quantify his findings, delineated Solomon I into A (chs. 10–15) and B (16:1–22:16) and Solomon II (25:1–29:27) into C and D. Skladny cites the following evidence. The bicola of Solomon IA are mostly antithetic, while those of Solomon IB shift to mostly synonymous and synthetic parallels. (In truth, however, the evidence of this change appears at 15:30, for from then on antithetic parallels are relatively uncommon.) The antithetic parallels in Collection A often contrast the benefits of the righteous with the misfortunes of the wicked without clearly defining these terms. Collection A aims to qualify “wisdom” as an ethical, not an intellectual term. The righteous are the wise. Moreover, Collection A does not postulate a “deed-consequence connection” (*Tat-Ergehen Zusammenhang*) but an unqualified “character-fate connection” (*Haltung-Schicksal Zusammenhang*). Moreover, in Collection A the LORD is the guarantor of the connection, but the collection makes no attempt to uncover his nature. In B, however, there is a sharp decline in contrasts between the righteous and the wicked and a much greater concern for future functionaries at the royal court. In addition, Collection B emphasizes the unbridgeable gulf between human and divine righteousness; indeed, no one is fully pure before his Creator. Furthermore, the LORD is more than a guarantor of the moral order. He intervenes between a person’s thoughts and schemes and their enactment so that he emerges as the one who directs and implements a person’s life. In Collection B the role of the king is elevated so that he is almost divine. B speaks of the wise and fools, of the righteous and the wicked, in concrete terms so that one can list their specific actions. Since B concentrates on specific acts and their consequences, one must now speak of a “Deed-Outcome Unity” (*Tat-Folge Einheit*). Moreover, the ethical sense of wisdom has declined in favor of wit and cunning. However, the absolute invariability of the “Character-Destiny Connection” is more qualified (Skladny speaks of a growing skepticism).<sup>9</sup> By his systematic analysis of the four sections of Solomon I and II, Skladny aims to trace the historical development of wisdom in Israel. Although he thinks that all four collections go back to the period of the Hebrew monarchy and are among the oldest wisdom material in Israel, he arranges Collections A, D, B, and C in their historical sequence.<sup>10</sup>

B. W. Kovacs found Collection B, which for him begins at 15:28, to be the embodiment of a consistent worldview. But because he did not rigorously compare Collections A and B, he does not advance the argument for

9. U. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 7-46.

10. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel*, pp. 76-82.

the existence of their subdivisions within Solomon I.<sup>11</sup> Goldingay notes that Solomon I opens with the standard wisdom observation to attend to wisdom (10:1). It is “followed by an observation on righteousness and wickedness (v. 2), then by an observation about the LORD’s involvement in people’s lives (v. 3) in the cause of righteousness (v. 4).” He finds the same sequence of these four types of sayings (standard wisdom observation, v. 1, set in a moral context, v. 2, set in a theological context, v. 3, followed by pragmatic wisdom, vv. 4-5) in 10:23-27, 12:1-14, 14:1-4, and 15:2-7 but not again after ch. 15.<sup>12</sup>

The repetition of the same proverb in 14:12 and 16:25 may point to originally distinct collections incorporating the same proverb (cf. 6:10-11 and 24:33-34). But because the two collections contain within themselves partially synoptic proverbs, it may point to other collections than Skladny’s A and B.<sup>13</sup> The LXX also evidences a seam through a series of omissions and a different sequence of verses from 15:27 to 16:10.<sup>14</sup> Its variations from the MT may reflect an editing of Solomon I later in the textual tradition or the translator’s *creative* method of translating and editing the book, not an alternative textual tradition (see pp. 3-4). Nevertheless, the LXX offers a significant alternative reading at about the same place that Skladny noticed a seam in Solomon I.

The unit 15:30–16:15 so strikingly illustrates Skladny’s differences between Sections A and B that it is best considered to be an introduction to Section B. After a prologue in 15:30-33 to Collection B and/or the unit, the pericope focuses on the dance between God’s sovereignty, and human responsibility and accountability.<sup>15</sup> In 16:8 the moral order is qualified by a “better-than” proverb in which the righteous have little and the unjust have great gain. In 16:10-15 the king stands in God’s stead, upholding his moral order on earth through the courts.

11. B. Kovacs, “Sociological-Structural Constraints upon Wisdom: The Spatial and Temporal Matrix of Proverbs 15:28–22:16” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1978), pp. 307-516.

12. J. Goldingay, “The Arrangement of Sayings in Proverbs 10–15,” *JSOT* 61 (1994) 75-83.

13. For example, 10:1 = 15:20; 16:2 = 21:2; 19:5 = 19:9; 20:10 = 20:23; 21:9 = 21:19. For the most comprehensive catalogue of variant repetitions see Daniel C. Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993).

14. In the LXX, 16:6 appears as 15:27a; 16:7, as 15:28a; 16:8 and 9, as 15:29a-b. 15:30 is omitted entirely, along with 16:1-3. A few LXX mss. give 16:1, followed by Sir. 3:18, generally with a star and an obelus. The LXX then gives a saying not found in the MT, then 16:5, then two more unique sayings, 16:4 followed by 16:10ff.

15. See B. K. Waltke, “The Dance between God and Humanity,” in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer*, ed. D. L. Lewis and A. McGrath (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), pp. 87-104.

While Skladny has gained a following in his systematic analysis of the divisions, we should note that the differences are often quantitative, not qualitative. For example, “the treasures of wickedness” (10:2) implies that the wicked amass a fortune at the expense of the innocent, and 14:27-28 link the LORD and the king. Skladny, however, has not gained a following in his views of their historical sequence. For example, it seems more plausible to suppose an evolution of ideas from a “deed-outcome effect” to a “character-fate connection” and from the understanding of wisdom as a more cunning term to a more ethical term than the other way around. Moreover, the arrangement probably reflects a pedagogic intention, not a historical development. Van Leeuwen understands the change from an unqualified act/consequence connection to a more qualified one as pedagogic, not as a growing skepticism. “[Proverbs 10–15] is the ABC of wisdom, the basic rules the young need to live well. Starting with chap. 16, the exceptions to the basic rules of life will appear much more frequently.”<sup>16</sup> Whybray argues that in its edited form the collection’s initial “righteous-wicked contrast” establishes the ethical context for Solomon I, and the Yahweh sayings that cluster in the middle (chs. 15–16, especially 15:33–16:9) set theological considerations at the heart of the collection.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Units of Collection II

In 1928 Gustav Boström investigated the possibility that some of the proverbs in Solomon I were consciously arranged by their common features and discerned sequential sayings by their common aural links, such as consonance, assonance, and alliteration.<sup>18</sup> But the arrangement of proverbs to create meaningfully rich contexts did not interest him. Since Skladny’s study of 1962 that discerned collections by thematic material, other scholars have discerned other groupings and collections of materials within Solomon I and Solomon II. In 1968 Hermisson carried both Boström’s work on paronomasia and Skladny’s analysis of sense a giant step forward by tentatively identifying a number of fairly small groupings consisting of two or more verses through thematic and poetic criteria. On the analogy of Sirach and the Egyptian “instructions,” he suggested that an author-editor skillfully combined them and drew the conclusion that the individual saying first must be interpreted independently and then in a further step in context.<sup>19</sup>

16. R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs* (NIB 5; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), p. 105.

17. R. N. Whybray, “Yahweh-Sayings and Their Contexts,” in *Sagesse*, pp. 153-65.

18. G. Boström, *Paronomasi i den äldre hebreiska Maschallitteraturen* (LUÅ, N.F., Avd. 1, Bd. 23, Nr. 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1928).

19. H.-J. Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* (WMANT 28; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968), pp. 172-83.

In 1972 G. E. Bryce, by using certain methods of French structuralism, showed that Prov. 25:2-27 constitutes a literary unit and was thus the first to postulate an independent work not identified as such by the final editor.<sup>20</sup> In 1979 R. N. Whybray argued that an editor deliberately chose the place of the Yahweh sayings in 10:1–22:16, but he argued that they served to *reinterpret* their immediate context. Saebø independently came to the similar conclusion that the Yahweh sayings provide a context for the surrounding sayings that shapes their meaning theologically.<sup>21</sup> In 1984 R. C. Van Leeuwen, by structuralism, poetics, and semantics, convincingly demonstrated that the proverbs in Collection C are arranged into larger literary compositions.<sup>22</sup> In 1985 B. V. Malchow proposed that Collection D is an intricately arranged collection serving as a “A Manual for Future Leaders.”<sup>23</sup> In 1987 S. C. Perry confirmed Boström’s work through a computer-based study of paronomasia, but he denied that these sound plays between the successive proverbs provided a context that enriched the interpretation.<sup>24</sup> In 1988 Ted Hildebrandt found in Prov. 10:1–22:16 62 proverb pairs, “two proverbial sentences that are bonded together (whether by means of phonetics, semantics, syntax, rhetorical device, pragmatic situation or theme) into a higher architectonic unit.” According to him, these units were “editorially intended” and reflect the “theological tendenz” and “literary sensitivity” of the collectors.<sup>25</sup> In 1989 Jutta Krispenz hoped to identify groups in Solomon I and Solomon II on the basis of the repetition of phonemes as in paronomasia, catchword connections, and alliterations that in her understanding refer to the repetition. She tended to neglect other structuring devices, but she recognized groupings based on semantic context.<sup>26</sup> In 1990 Hildebrandt moved beyond proverb parts to larger compositional units in Proverbs 10.<sup>27</sup> The commentaries by

20. G. E. Bryce, “Another Wisdom ‘Book’ in Proverbs,” *JBL* 91 (1972) 145-57.

21. M. Saebø, “From Collections to Book: A New Approach to the History of Tradition and Redaction of the Book of Proverbs,” in *PNWCJS: Division A: The Period of the Bible*, ed. M. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), pp. 99-106.

22. R. C. Van Leeuwen, “Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25–27” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 1984).

23. B. V. Malchow, “A Manual for Future Monarchs,” *CBQ* 47 (1985) 238-45.

24. S. C. Perry, “Structural Patterns in Proverbs 10:1–22:1: A Study in Biblical Hebrew Stylistics” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1987).

25. T. Hildebrandt, “Proverbial Pairs: Compositional Units in Proverbs 10–29,” *JBL* 107 (1988) 207-24.

26. J. Krispenz, *Spruchkompositionen im Buch Proverbia* (EHS.T, 349; Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Verlag Peter Lang), cited by Knut Martin Heim, “Structure and Context in Proverbs 10:1–22:16” (Ph.D. diss., University of Liverpool, 1996), p. 18.

27. T. Hildebrandt, “Proverbial Strings: Cohesion in Proverbs 10,” *GTJ* 11 (1990) 171-85.

Plöger (1984),<sup>28</sup> Alonso-Schökel (1984),<sup>29</sup> Meinhold (1991),<sup>30</sup> and Garrett (1993)<sup>31</sup> interpret individual proverbs both independently and within larger literary units. Plöger is tentative about groupings beyond the proverb pair, and Meinhold succeeds best in this enterprise, postulating the development of collections through stages from pairs and triads to larger groups to sections or paragraphs to subcollections, and finally to the main collections noted by the editor. He noted that the Yahweh sayings were placed in their present contexts during the process of compilation, being placed mostly at the beginnings and ends of chapters and paragraphs and indicating their limits.

In 1993 McCreesh refined our understanding of sound patterns poets employ and of their sense.<sup>32</sup> In 1994 Whybray tended to depreciate these earlier efforts, but he did so without critical evaluation. However, he grouped some proverbs into larger contexts and explained how the context of a given saying shapes its meaning and significance.<sup>33</sup> In his monograph *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, published in the same year but written after his commentary, he argued for the recognition of groupings in the book of Proverbs. He sought to document that other known proverb collections from the ancient Near East sometimes display a specific arrangement. He also reasoned that since a single proverb cannot reflect the complexity of life, the natural way to overcome this shortcoming is to combine proverbs into larger groups. According to him, the combination of sound (i.e., paronomasia, including verbal repetition) and sense constitutes a particularly strong case for group identification. Whybray constructed beginnings and endings by using formalized material such as imperative instructions or educational sayings in the educational language of Proverbs 1–9. In this way the originally isolated proverbs became part of Israel's instruction literature (p. 14). Yahweh sayings can complement single proverbs or comment on or sum up larger groups. In contrast to his 1979 study, however, in

28. O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* (BKAT XVII/2-4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984).

29. L. Alonso-Schökel and J. Vilchez, *Proverbios* (Madrid, 1984).

30. A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche, Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1–15* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer, 1991); A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche, Teil 2: Sprüche Kapitel 16–31* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer, 1991).

31. D. A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville: Broadman, 1993).

32. T. P. McCreesh, O.P., *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10–29* (JSOTSup 128; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

33. R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

this one he concluded that this is not a matter of “reinterpretation” but of explication and focus.<sup>34</sup>

Also in 1994, Goldingay held that the four types of sayings noted above in 10:1-5, 23-27; 12:1-4; 14:1-4, and 15:27 in each case “seem to mark the beginning of a new sub-collection” in chs. 10–15. He also noted, as has this commentator independently, “First among these is the observation about wisdom which constitutes the actual introduction, an implicit exhortation to attentiveness parallel to those which open the homilies in chs. 1-9.”<sup>35</sup> In 1995 Ruth Scoralick, especially by noting repetitions of sayings but also by using parts of sayings, words, and chiasms, grouped chs. 10–15 into the following text segments: 10:1–11:7; 12:8-13; 12:14–13:13; 13:14–14:27; 14:28–15:32. But she made no attempt to show the unity of the material within this broad framework.<sup>36</sup>

In 1996 Knut Heim, following the outline of the survey by Scoralick, gave a comprehensive history of the study of the arrangement of the sayings in Proverbs; he critically appraised each of the contributors cited above but curiously ignored Skladny’s study apart from a consideration of his theory of a school setting. He advanced the study by arguing that appellations belonging to different semantic fields (e.g., “righteous/wicked” versus “wise/fools”), though not synonyms, are co-references to the same class of persons; for example, as Cotterell and Turner note, “The Leader of a Party” and “Prime Minister” have the same referent but not the same meaning.<sup>37</sup> Heim attempted to prove his thesis by analyzing the sayings in their context “according to their groupings by syntactical, stylistic or other means.” His broad groupings of Solomon I are ch. 10; 11:1–13:25; 14:1–16:33; 17:1–20:4; 20:5–22:16. Surprisingly, he does not spell out his method of delimitation, nor does he defend these broad groupings. Within them, however, he attempts to delimit carefully both larger and smaller arrangements in relation to earlier studies.<sup>38</sup> In 1996 I attempted to show the structure and coherence of 15:30–16:15;<sup>39</sup> in 1998, of 10:1-

34. R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), esp. pp. 82-83.

35. Goldingay, “The Arrangement of Sayings in Proverbs 10–15,” pp. 75-83.

36. R. Scoralick, *Enzelspruch und Sammlung* (BZAW 232; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995).

37. See P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 160-61; cf. also J. Lyon, *Semantics* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979), pp. 660-61.

38. Heim, “Structure and Context.”

39. B. K. Waltke, “The Fear of the LORD,” in *Alive to God: Studies in Spirituality Presented to James Houston*, ed. J. I. Packer and Loren Wilkinson (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) pp. 17-33.

15<sup>40</sup> and of 26:1-12;<sup>41</sup> and in 1999, of 31:10-31.<sup>42</sup> Although Whybray anticipated that “future commentaries will be obliged to take this aspect of the material seriously,” Van Leeuwen (1997) and Clifford (1999) mostly neglect it.<sup>43</sup>

Using the mostly single-line rearing (or educative) proverbs, not instructional pairs (e.g., 10:6-7, 8-9; 19:27-28), as a heuristic guide, this commentary identifies the beginnings of units. The rearing proverbs that signal the beginning of a unit may be thought of as *refrains* that organize the material. This educative “refrain” may explain the medieval chapter divisions at 10:1; 12:1; 13:1. Collection B is uniquely marked off by four verses closely linked by their sounds and sense (15:30-33). Its relatively lengthy extent suggests that it functions as a prologue to Collection IIB. By the now well-accredited method of poetics (see pp. 45-50), test the validity of these delimited groupings and further analyze the unit into its hierarchical sub-units down to the proverb pair, if it exists.<sup>44</sup> Construing Solomon’s memorable aphorisms as originally intended to stand on their own two feet and secondarily to be collected as literature giving them contexts, I interpret them both ways.

Whybray’s wise cautions about his two criteria of sound and sense need to be borne in mind. With regard to sound, the possibility of coincidence is enormous, and with the regard to sense, moderns may be ignorant of ancient logic. As a result, the commentator must apply the criteria with common sense. All aspects of exegesis and interpretation involve both an objective science and a subjective art that cannot be proved.

#### D. COLLECTION III: THE THIRTY SAYINGS OF THE WISE (22:17–24:22)

Although lacking an editor’s prose heading, the educational saying of 22:17 introduces a new collection. The style now reverts to the pointedly direct dis-

40. B. K. Waltke, “Proverbs 10:1-15: A Coherent Collection?” in *Reading and Hearing the Word from Text to Sermon: Essays in Honor of John H. Stek*, ed. A. E. Leder (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1998), pp. 161-80.

41. B. K. Waltke, “Old Testament Interpretation Issues for Big Idea Preaching: Problematic Sources, Poetics, and Preaching the Old Testament, An Exposition of Proverbs 26:1-12,” in *The Big Idea of Preaching*, ed. K. Willhite and S. M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 41-52.

42. B. K. Waltke, “The Role of the ‘Valiant Wife’ in the Market Place,” *Crux* 35 (1999) 23-34.

43. Clifford, *Proverbs*.

44. The commentary seeks to delimit empirically the groupings and to reflect cogently on their meaning, not to speculate on their historical development.

course of Collection I, with the father's imperatives addressed to the son (22:17; 23:15, 19, 22, 26; 24:13, 21). The short, sententious aphorisms of Collection II give way to flowing, extended admonitions followed by motive clauses. Unlike Collection II, the Thirty Sayings of the Wise are pointedly addressed to the son with imperatives. Syntactic markers and poetics show that 22:17 is part of the unified first saying (22:17-21), which names the collection as "sayings of the wise" (22:17) and which enumerates their number as 30 (22:20). The editorial heading to the next collection in 24:23 marks the end of this third collection. The external evidence of the 30 sayings of the strikingly similar Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* (ca. 1186-1069 B.C.) confirms the internal evidence that the Thirty Sayings of the Wise is a distinct anthology of wisdom sayings.

The Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:22) consists broadly of the introductory rearing saying (22:17-21) followed by three sections also marked off by introductory rearing sayings (23:12; 24:3; 24:13) and by their distinctive structures and themes. The first saying introduces the first section, a decalogue of sayings (22:17-23:11), as well as the whole. Unlike the grouping of the four educational sayings that introduce Collection IIB (15:30-33), this five-verse introduction is in the "I-you" form of address and connected by logical particles. The topic of the second section (23:12-24:3) is the obedient son, almost another prologue to the last two units. The third section pertains to wisdom's competence in distress (24:3-12), and the final section to prohibitions with respect to the wicked.<sup>45</sup> The *inclusio* "to trust in the LORD" (22:19) and "to fear the LORD" (24:22) frames the whole collection.

But scholars have not agreed on the identification of the 30 sayings. Most problematic has been whether to count 24:10-12 as one or two sayings. Although the exegesis of these verses favors taking them as a unity, some interpreters divide them into 24:10 and 24:11-12, presumably to retain the number 30. Their mistake is counting 22:17-21 as a prologue, not as the first saying. Yet *Amenemope* (3:8-10) counts the comparable material in 22:17-19 as its first chapter after its preamble (*Amen.* 1:2-6), and its prologue (*Amen.* 1:13-3:7) matches the material in, not the form of, the title of Prov. 1:1. Its first "chapter" (or saying) begins:

He says: Chapter 1  
Give your ears, hear the sayings,

45. D. Römheld (*Wege der Weisheit: Die Lehren Amenemopes und Proverbien 22:17-24:22* [BZAW 184; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989], p. 59) neatly groups the sayings into three decalogues, but his grouping of 24:3-5 with the preceding nine sayings (23:12-24:2) and his lumping together of 24:3-12 and 24:13-22 are indefensible. Moreover, his not counting the prologue as the first saying and his separating of 24:10 from 24:11-12 are questionable.