

The New International Commentary  
on the Old Testament



THE BOOK OF  
PROVERBS  
Chapters 15-31

BRUCE K. WALTKE

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## B. COLLECTION IIB: THE LORD AND HIS KING (15:30–16:22)

For structure of Collection II, see I: 14-21.

### 1. Prologue: The Dance between Humanity, the Lord, and His King (15:30–16:15)

- 30 *The light of the eyes<sup>1</sup> makes the heart glad,  
and good news revives the whole person.<sup>2</sup>*  
31 *The ear that listens to life-giving<sup>3</sup> correction  
dwells among the wise.*  
32 *The person who flouts instruction is one who despises his life,<sup>4</sup>  
but the person who hears correction is one who acquires sense.<sup>5</sup>*  
33 *The instruction<sup>6</sup> that gives wisdom<sup>7</sup> is the fear of the LORD,  
and humility [comes] before<sup>8</sup> honor.<sup>9</sup>*  
16:1 *To<sup>10</sup> human beings belong the plans of the heart;  
from the LORD [comes]<sup>11</sup> the right answer of the tongue.<sup>12</sup>*

1. The LXX's reading *theōrōn ophthalmos kala* "the eye that sees well" suggests to D. Winton Thomas ("Textual and Philological Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs," in *WIANE*, pp. 286-87) the reading *mar'ēh-ēnayim*, which he interprets to mean "the pleasure of looking at" (see Eccl. 6:9). Since the parallel "good tidings" requires something seen and enjoyed, not the pleasure of looking at something with pleasure, he reprints the form as a *Hophal* ptc., *mōr'eh*, obtaining the rendering of the whole verse: "A fine sight cheers the mind as good tidings make the bones fat." Thomas, however, neither evaluates the paraphrastic nature of the LXX nor explains from a text-critical viewpoint how the alternative readings arose.

2. Lit. "news makes the bones fat."

3. Lit. "to correction of life," a gen. of effect (*IBHS*, p. 146, P. 9.5.2c).

4. Or "himself."

5. Lit. "acquires heart." The LXX reads *agapa psychēn autou* ("loves himself") to create a suitable antithesis to "hates himself" (see 19:8).

6. The emendation of Perles and Humbert (cited by O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* [BKAT XVII/2-4; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag, 1984], p. 179) and accepted by Fichtner (*BHS*) to read *mūsad* ("foundation") loses the catchword connection with v. 32.

7. Gen. of effect (*IBHS*, p. 146, P. 9.5.2c).

8. The preposition entails a verb of motion (*IBHS*, p. 224, P. 11.4.3d).

9. The LXX *kai archē doxēs apokrithēsetai autē* "and the highest honor will correspond with it" may have pointed 'nwh as 'anūhā (A. J. Baumgartner, *Étude critique sur l'état du texte du Livre des Proverbes d'après les principales traductions anciennes* [Leipzig: Imprimerie Orientale W. Drugulin, 1890], p. 151).

10. The original LXX is lacking the first three verses, probably because of the poor state of its *Vorlage*.

11. Elided verb of motion with preposition of motion (*IBHS*, p. 224, P. 11.4.3d.)

12. Note the broken consonance of *l'dm m'rkylb wmyhwh m'nh lšwn*. The first

- 2 *All the ways of a person [are] pure<sup>13</sup> in his own eyes,  
but the LORD is the one who evaluates motives.<sup>14</sup>*
- 3 *Commit<sup>15</sup> to the LORD your works,  
and your thoughts will be established.*
- 4 *The LORD works everything to its appropriate end,<sup>16</sup>  
even the wicked person for<sup>17</sup> an evil day.<sup>18</sup>*
- 5 *An abomination to the LORD is everyone who is haughty;  
be sure of this,<sup>19</sup> that person will not go unpunished.*
- 6 *Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for,  
and through the fear of the LORD is a departing from evil.<sup>20</sup>*
- 7 *When the LORD takes pleasure in a person's ways,  
he compels even his enemies to surrender to him.*
- 8 *Better a little with righteousness  
than a large income with injustice.*
- 9 *The heart of a human being plans his way,  
but the LORD establishes his step.*
- 10 *An inspired verdict is on the king's lips;  
in giving a judgment his mouth is not unfaithful.*

verset begins with *l* and the second (not counting the conjunction *w*) with the preposition *m*. These initial consonants are followed in the next two words by *m*, followed by initial *l*. Both versets share the same syntax, and each verset ends with initial *l*.

13. Sing. to agree with collective *kol*.

14. Lit. "spirits." The Targ. and Syr. probably read 'orhôt and interpreted *tkn* to mean "direct," "order," "establish."

15. The Syr., Targ., and Vulg. read *gal* ("reveal/disclose," *Qal* impv. of *glh*), not *göl* (*Qal* impv. of *gll*). But *glh* in the *Qal* never occurs with 'el. Ps. 37:5a repeats 16:3b but uses *scripto plena göl*, supporting the MT.

16. G. R. Driver ("Review of M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology*," *JSS* 10 [1965] 133) argued that *lamma<sup>a</sup>nēhû* is a mixed form consisting of *l<sup>a</sup>ma<sup>a</sup>nēhû* (preposition *l<sup>a</sup>m<sup>a</sup>* + pronominal suffix, "for his own sake") and *lamma<sup>a</sup>neh* (preposition *l* + definite noun *hamma<sup>a</sup>neh*, "for a purpose/answer"). This is unlikely because both forms are otherwise unattested; *köl* calls for a suffix with the notion "for an answer"; and a double determination (an article with a determined gen., including a suffixed pronoun) is unexceptional in West Semitic (M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963], p. 36; *IBHS*, p. 249, P. 13.6b; cf. *GKC*, P. 127i). The article probably protects against the unique reading *l<sup>a</sup>ma<sup>a</sup>nēhû* (cf. Vulg. *propter semet ipsum*, "all for himself" [KJV]). The Targ. and Syr. curiously read: "to those who respond to him," but the LXX rightly paraphrases: "All the works of the Lord are done with justice."

17. Or "to," parallel to "to its counterpart."

18. With this verse the LXX closes its own series of proverbs.

19. The literal "hand to hand" thoroughly perplexed the ancient translators (see 11:21).

20. The LXX may have this verse after 15:27.



- 11 *A just balance and hand scale<sup>21</sup> are the LORD's;  
all the weights in a pouch are his work.<sup>22</sup>*
- 12 *An abomination to kings is doing<sup>23</sup> wickedness,  
because a throne is established through righteousness.*
- 13 *Kings<sup>24</sup> take pleasure in righteous lips,  
and whoever speaks<sup>25</sup> upright things<sup>26</sup> he loves.*
- 14 *The wrath of the king is the messenger<sup>27</sup> of death,  
but a wise person pacifies it.*
- 15 *In the light of the king's face<sup>28</sup> is life,  
and his favor is like a cloud<sup>29</sup> of spring rain.*

The first unit of Section B in Collection II introduces the collection by trumpeting its themes. It consists of its own introduction (15:30-33) and a main body pertaining to the LORD's sovereign rule (16:1-9), the first subunit, through his king (16:10-15), the second subunit. The first deals with the LORD's sovereign and righteous rule encompassing human responsibility and accountability (vv. 1-9), and the second to his mediated rule through his righteous king (vv. 10-15). The two subunits are clearly marked off by the repetition of *YHWH* in vv. 1-9 and of *melek* in vv. 10-15. Meinhold notes the many ways in which these two subunits are bound together: (1) the catchwords "abomination" (vv. 5, 12), "favor" (vv. 7, 13, 15), "wicked"/"wickedness" (vv. 4, 12), and, remarkably, *kpr* in the D stem ("to atone"/"pacifies," vv. 6, 14). (2) Both the second from the end of vv. 1-9 (v. 8) and the second from

21. *Peles ûmô'z'nê mišpāt* is a cons. override construction with two closely related nouns (IBHS, p. 139, P. 9.3b).

22. A similar saying occurs in *Amenemope* (16:22-25): "The Ape sits by the balance, his heart is in the plummet; where is a god as great as Thoth, who invented these things and made them?" (AEL, 2:156-57).

23. The Syr. reads, "The kings who do wickedness are abominable," and the Zamora text of the Targ. independently interprets it as the king's own wickedness. But the LXX, Targ., and Vulg. read *'ōseh* ("the one who does"), making clear that the wickedness of others, not of the king himself, is in view.

24. Two mss., LXX, Syr., and Targ. read "king," probably to harmonize with the sing. subject of the B verset. The Vulg. rightly retains the pl., which links vv. 12 and 13.

25. The LXX read *d'barim* and Syr. *ûd'bar*. Their facilitating readings conform better with *y'sārīm*, which the LXX understood as an attributive adjective ("right words") and the Syr. as a substantival adjective of person ("upright people"), its normal meaning. The Vulg. reads with the MT.

26. Substantival adjective of thing (8:6; Dan. 11:10; see BDB, p. 449). Four codexes read *mēšārīm*, probably to prevent the normal meaning of "upright people."

27. The form is dual.

28. The LXX read *bēn* (*huios basileōs*).

29. *'Āb* is an alternative cons. form (cf. Isa. 18:44; HALOT, 2:773, s.v. *'āb*).

the beginning of vv. 10-15 (v. 11) lack the keywords of their subunits, namely, *YHWH* and “king.” (3) *YHWH*, however, is found in v. 11, and vv. 8 and 11 both pertain to “justice.” (4) God expects “righteousness” and “justice” of everyone (v. 8), and the king upholds them (v. 12).<sup>30</sup>

*a. Introduction (15:30-33)*

The catchwords *šm'* (*yišmā'*) (“hears”) and *š'mū'ā* (report), the last word of the preceding unit and the first word of 15:30b, assist the transition to the new unit. Its introduction consists of a pair of education quatrains. The first is linked by the catchword *šm'*, more specifically the illuminated good news/report (*š'mū'ā*) (v. 30) that revives the heart and the disciple's ear that hears (*šōma'at*) (v. 31). It features the bodily organs: eyes, heart, and ears. The second quatrain pertains to “instruction” (*mūsār*): flouted or accepted (v. 32) and elaborated on as “the fear of the LORD” to be humbly received (v. 33). It bears repeating: these proverbs are applicable to many situations (e.g., the “good news” of v. 30 may refer to any good report), but together they also function as an introduction to the following unit. “The good news” of v. 30 in this context refers to the wonderful report that God dances with the pure in heart (16:1-9)! The proverbial pairs are linked by the catchwords “hear correction” (*šōmē'a/šōma'at tōkaḥat*, vv. 31, 32).

**30** The first pair pertains to good news that the heart receives. The rare metaphor *the light (m'ôr)*<sup>31</sup> *of the eyes ('ēnayim)* connotes the manifestation of the inward vitality and joy of the one bringing good news, as the parallel clause suggests, and is associated with righteousness (13:9). His eyes speak louder than his words (see 15:13). A close synonym, *'ôr-ēnay*, also functions as a metonymy for “life” (Ps. 38:10[11]), and the related expression *hā'ir-ēnē* (“he gives light to the eyes of”; Ezra 9:8; Ps. 13:3[4]; 19:8; Prov. 29:13) refers to God giving life and joy to human eyes. Proverbs and the rest of Scripture repeatedly associate light with righteousness (13:9; Matt. 6:22-23) and link it with life and good fortune (Job 3:16; 33:28; Prov. 4:18; 6:23; 13:9; 16:15). The New Testament connects light with Christ and his disciples (cf. Matt. 4:16; 5:14-16; John 1:4-5; 12:35-36). Proverbs associates light and life exclusively with the wise, suggesting that illuminated eyes belong to the wise (15:13a). *Makes . . . glad (y'sammaḥ [15:20] the heart* (see I: 90) refers to the disciple's heart, as the parallel clause also suggests. Note the movement from the joy within that beautifies the face (15:13) to the

30. A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche* (ZBK; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), 2:264.

31. *M'ôr* literally means “luminary” (cf. Gen. 1:14-15) and may function as a metonymy for “light” (cf. Exod. 25:6; Ps. 90:8).



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