



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

**— January 2007 – Part 1 —**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>READING TOPIC</b>	<b>SCRIPTURES</b>
1-5 Jan	Production Break	No assigned readings
6-7 Jan	Major Solomonic collection (cont'd)	Proverbs 21:9-31
8-9 Jan	Major Solomonic collection (cont'd)	Proverbs 22:1-16
10-11 Jan	Words of the Wise	Proverbs 22:17–23:11
12-13 Jan	Words of the Wise (cont'd)	Proverbs 23:12–24:4
14-15 Jan	Words of the Wise (cont'd)	Proverbs 24:5-22
16-17 Jan	Further Words of the Wise	Proverbs 24:23-34

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<b>Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading</b>
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**Production Break (No assigned readings)****January 1-5**

Readings will resume on January 6.

**Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont'd (Proverbs 21:9-31)****January 6-7****44. Final Outcomes and Judgments (21:9-19)**

TYPE: INCLUSIO. “Proverbs about consequences and judgments are collected between the frame of similar proverbs on the ‘quarrelsome wife’” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verses 9-19). Verse 9, repeated in 25:24, mentions dwelling in a corner of a housetop. A roof of that time was flat. The reference is either to sleeping out in the open or in a small makeshift room set up there (see 2 Kings 4:10). Taken together, the frame verses (i.e., Proverbs 21:9, 19) illustrate that it’s better for a man to dwell all alone in discomfort than to live with a contentious wife.

- “*Lessons from the Merciless (21:10-13)*.... These verses concern merciless behavior, and vv. 11-12 describe how one can learn a lesson by observing the punishment that befalls the evil. These four verses thus form a chiasmus [of *a-b-b-a*]” (*NAC*).

- “*Reconciliation and Justice (21:14-15)*.” Verse 14 should not be understood as sanctioning bribery to subvert justice. Some see the verse as merely observing, without moral comment, a practice that works. But what would be the purpose of that here? Others take the verse as counseling the appropriateness of gifts in some cases to appease an offended party (compare Proverbs 17:8). Yet what of the fact that the gift is “in secret”? The idea could perhaps be to allow the offended party to save face and not be embarrassed by the public knowing he is accepting a gift. Some see the meaning as privately settling a litigation issue out of court. It may have been to deter misreading Proverbs 21:14 as condoning bribery undermining the justice system that verse 15 was placed immediately after it—contrasting the end results of justice and lawlessness.

- “*Rewards for Doing Wrong (21:16-18)*.... These three proverbs all follow the theme of the ultimate fate of those who do wrong” (*NAC*)—in contrast to the rewards for doing right in the next section (verses 20-22).

Verse 17 does not mean that it is wrong to enjoy pleasure and luxuries. The point is that those who set their hearts on these things to the point of overindulging and expending resources in pursuit of them will store up no wealth. They will end up with less of what they want. Compare verse 20, which shows that the wise have luxuries, evidently as a result of diligence and restraint, in contrast to fools who squander what they have.

Verse 18 says that the wicked will be a ransom for the righteous. This could simply mean that the lives of the wicked will be given up to destruction in exchange for the peaceful and happy existence of the righteous thereafter. Put another way, the ultimate destruction of the wicked will release the righteous from evil’s tyranny over their lives.

**45. Rewards for Doing Right (21:20-22)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... These verses closely correspond to vv. 16-18” (*NAC*)—contrasting with them.

**46. A Mouth in and out of Control (21:23-24)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC” (*NAC*).

**47. The Sluggard’s Craving (21:25-26)**

“TYPE: CATCHWORD, THEMATIC” (*NAC*). It’s interesting that many who covet things are too lazy to work for those things.

**48. Trying to Fool God (21:27)**

“TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (*NAC*). The first colon here is the same as in 15:8.

**49. The False Witness (21:28-29)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... These two verses should be read together” (*NAC*). The first colon of verse 28 recalls Proverbs 19, verses 5 and 9. The translation of the second colon of 21:28 is disputed. Some see it as giving credence to the false witness earning punishment (compare NIV, although the Hebrew text is altered in this translation). Others understand a person listening well to a false witness so as to counter with cross-examination. Still others read the verse to say that though a false witness perishes, those who

hear his lies will pass them on even long afterward—that is, a liar’s lies persist after he is gone. Yet another way to read the verse is as follows: “A false witness shall perish, / But the man who hears [i.e., heads] *this* [i.e., the law or proverb, not *him*] will speak without end.” Verse 29 seems to parallel this, though a direct parallel is not essential to the thematic relationship between the two verses here. Where the NKJV in verse 29 says the wicked “hardens his face,” the NIV says “puts up a bold front.” This may mark a bald-faced liar giving testimony. He firmly sets his face, but the righteous person who will not give false testimony firmly sets *his way*—which, as the previous verse implies, will last forever.

### **50: Counterwisdom (21:30-31)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC.” The book of Proverbs normally uses the term “wisdom” in a positive sense—as based on the fear of the Lord. “Here, however, it speaks of a kind of human ‘wisdom’ that seeks understanding without first submitting to Yahweh and declares that such efforts are futile. Verse 31 gives a concrete example, from a military setting of what v. 30 describes abstractly” (NAC). Human preparation, for war in this case, is important but carries only so far (compare 20:18). We must not place ultimate trust in such preparation. For the outcome of circumstances is in God’s hands. Note elsewhere God’s cautions against trusting in horses, representing military strength (Psalm 20:7; 33:17; Hosea 1:7).

## **End of Major Solomonic Collection (Proverbs 22:1-16)**

**January 8-9**

### **51. A Good Name (22:1)**

“TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC).

### **52. Wealth, Poverty and a Prudent Life (22:2-5)**

“TYPE: PARALLEL. The structure of this text is as follows:

“A: Rich and poor are equal before Yahweh (v. 2)

“B: Prudence and folly in the face of danger (v. 3)

“A’: Riches come from fear for Yahweh (v. 4)

“B’: Prudence and folly in the face of danger (v. 5)...

“On the surface vv. 3,5 both simply state that the wise see and avoid trouble but the ignorant or headstrong plunge into it. In the context of vv. 2,4, however, this text asserts that the failure to spot danger arises precisely from the arrogance of refusal to submit to God” (NAC).

The point of verse 2 is expressed similarly in 29:13. And 22:3 is repeated in 27:12.

Proverbs 22:4 says that the path to the good life—here expressed as “riches and honor and life” (compare “life, righteousness and honor” in 21:21)—is through the fear of God. True riches, of course, does not primarily mean material wealth in the here and now. For some it may include that, and in any case God does provide for the physical comforts of His servants. Ultimately all of God’s people will be blessed with co-ownership of the entire universe.

### **53. Various Proverbs (22:6-16)**

“TYPE: INCLUSIO.... Verse 6 and 15 (on disciplining children) in parallel with vv. 7 and 16 (on wealth and poverty) form an inclusio for this text of various proverbs.

- “*Discipline for Children (22:6, 15)*” (NAC). The following is from the sidebar titled “Proverbs and Proper Training” in our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*:

“One verse we should consider in dealing with our children is Proverbs 22:6. It appears in the New King James Version as: ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ We can draw an obvious, direct conclusion from this translation—that proper training will pay off in the long run. This is certainly valid.

“It is normal for most children to grow up with, and ultimately adopt, values and standards similar to their parents’—that is, if the parents do a reasonable job of bringing them up. Sometimes, especially when their children are teenagers, parents feel as if they’re not getting through. They may wonder whether all their efforts are wasted. But experience shows that if they stick with a good game plan, they will eventually realize the desired results.

“Some Bible scholars offer an alternate explanation for the intent of this verse—that ‘the way he should go’ refers to each child’s ability and potential. The root word for ‘way,’ they note, also has to do with the inclination of a tree, which can break if one tries to rebend it. They also note that the original Hebrew wording refers to ‘*his way*’—the child’s way—rather than ‘*the way* [he should go].’

“With this in mind some would translate the verse, ‘Train up a child according to his bent, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ In other words, wise parents should recognize the aptitudes and interests of each child and train him to best use his abilities to reach his potential.

“Whether this is the intended meaning, it represents another valid approach. Parents should enable their children to develop their natural talents and abilities. Too often a father or mother will attempt to force children to do the same things they do or to be what they are.

“Sometimes parents want to live vicariously through their children as they push them to achieve what they wanted to do but couldn’t. We need to recognize our children’s distinct God-given abilities, then work to help them fulfill their potential

“Still others understand the latter translation to mean that if we train up a child in his own way—that is, through continually allowing him to do whatever he wants and to always get his own way—that he will be stuck in that wrong way of thinking and living for the rest of his life. The verse would then be a warning to parents against coddling and failing to discipline. This concept, too, is certainly valid” (p. 25).

The latter idea corresponds well to verse 15 (compare 29:15). Yet as explained in our introduction, verses sanctioning the rod of correction do not mean to say that a parent should employ corporal punishment as a primary means of discipline.

- “*Reaping What You Sow (22:8-9)*” (NAC). This important principle, the negative side of which is given in verse 8, is expressed similarly elsewhere in Scripture (Hosea 8:7; Galatians 6:7-8; compare Job 4:8, where this true principle was misapplied to Job). On the positive side, Proverbs 22:9 in this context corresponds to 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

- “*Words and What Comes of Them (22:10-14)*.... Five character types here represent five ways speech can be used. The mocker engenders quarrels (v. 10), the pure impresses even a king (v. 11), the liar [or faithless person speaking contrary to true knowledge] is undone by God (v. 12), the shiftless produces only a stream of improbable excuses (v. 13), and the prostitute [or immoral woman] uses language for seduction and entrapment (v. 14)” (NAC)—the latter harkening back to warnings in the prologue of Proverbs, where an immoral woman also represents folly in a more general sense (compare 2:16; 9:13-18; see also 23:27-28).

The mocker or scoffer (22:10) creates an uncomfortable environment for everyone around him and is also a bad influence on others. If he will not reform, expulsion from the community—a congregation, club or workplace in a modern context—is the recommended course. This will bring peace to the rest of the group, serve as a warning to others against such behavior, and possibly help the offender himself to realize the magnitude of his problem resulting in repentance.

Verse 11 implies that deception and flattery get one only so far in achieving a position of trust. Eventually such a person will be revealed for what he is. A decent, honest person will be trusted for his record of integrity. Haman and Mordecai in the book of Esther exemplify this well.

Verse 13, similarly expressed in 26:13, gives some comic relief, illustrating, as noted above, how lazy people invent excuses to avoid doing whatever needs to be done.

- “*Creditor and Debtor (22:7, 16)*” (NAC). Verse 7 observes that debt can be a form of slavery. In fact, failure to repay debt in ancient Israel could obligate a person to suffer indentured servitude. This is part of the reason other verses caution against becoming surety for others. Verse 7 may bear on the meaning of verse 16. This last proverb in Solomon’s major collection concerns social justice (as does the first proverb in the next section, verses 22-23), but the exact wording of verse 16 is disputed. Some versions, including the New King James, show an oppressor of the poor for self-enrichment *and* one who gives to the rich *both* coming to poverty. Oppressors will indeed come to poverty in the end (compare verses 22-23). Yet other translations take coming to poverty in verse 16 as referring to only the one giving to the rich.

In the latter vein, some see in verse 16 an abusive creditor-debtor relationship in this paraphrased sense: *The rich oppress the poor* [through such means as entangling them in high-interest loans] *to make themselves even richer, / while the poor who are stuck making loan payments to the rich are made even poorer*. This interpretation offers a sensible explanation of “giving” to the rich, the reason for which otherwise seems unclear. Some have suggested a futile attempt to buy the favor of the rich, but who would do this to the point of impoverishment? “Giving” here makes more sense as a matter of obligation—and this fits debt repayment. Such wisdom is not meant to totally rule out loans. There is an

appropriate context for lending and borrowing if the lending is fair and the borrower is well able to repay, given reasonable consideration of the future. Yet no such arrangement should be entered into lightly.

### **The Words of the Wise: Introduction and**

### **Sayings About Wealth and Station (Proverbs 22:17–23:11)**

**January 10-11**

Proverbs 22:17 marks a clear change in the book. Instead of the one-verse units of the major Solomonic collection, we now have multiple-verse units. With a new section, we would expect a new title or subheading. And verse 17 appears to give us just that in referring to what follows as “the words of the wise”—a general distinction for collected wisdom. This section appears to continue until 24:22, as 24:23 denotes yet another section, possibly an appendix to this section, with the words “These things also belong to the wise.” Furthermore, this section of sayings from the wise (22:17–24:22)—mainly the first part (22:17–23:11)—bears some striking similarity to the Egyptian “Instruction of Amenemope.” Amenemope, sometimes spelled Amen-em-opet, was a superintendent of agriculture and taxation writing to his youngest son on keys to success in life and in profession as a court official.

As noted in our introduction, it is not clear which writing came first, whether this section of Proverbs or the Egyptian work. In any case, one seems to have influenced the other. We will note some similarities along the way. In doing so, we should realize that the Egyptian wisdom text, mired in pagan references, is not inspired literature, as is the book of Proverbs. Nevertheless, the Egyptian text helps to demonstrate the ancient provenance of the biblical book as well as the relationship between Israelite wisdom and that of the wider region, just as the Bible describes of Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:29-34).

The introductory call to attention in Proverbs 22:17-21 “is laid out with the exhortation to learn and pass on the teaching (v. 17), followed by three motivations: (1) there will be a pleasing store of wisdom (v. 18); (2) there will be a deeper trust in the Lord—a distinctively Israelite aspect of wisdom literature (v. 19); and (3) it will build reliability—he will grasp the truth (v. 20) and see himself as a special envoy to keep wisdom in his heart and on his lips (v. 21)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 17-21).

The latter point here is stated in verse 21 this way: “That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you [or ‘to him who sent you,’ NIV].” Likewise the purpose of Amenemope is: “To know how to refute the accusation of [or ‘to return an answer to’] the one who made it, and to send back a reply to the one who wrote [or ‘to the one who sent you’]; to set one straight on the paths of life” (intro., 1:5-7, William Simpson, editor, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*, 1973, p. 242). Within brackets here are alternate translations as footnoted in the cited source. (The complete “Instruction of Amenemope,” same translation but without footnotes, is online at <http://touregypt.net/instructionofamenemope.htm>.)

In verse 20, “excellent things” in the KJV and NKJV is apparently incorrect. The Hebrew word here, difficult because of the uniqueness of form, is *shlshwm* (consonants only), which some take to be a poetic or plural form of “three” (*shlsh*) or “third” (*shlyshy*). Most scholars, though, emend the text or consider the word another form of “thirty” (*shlshym* or *shlwshym*)—compare “thirty sayings” in the NIV. This is mainly because of the affinity of the text with Amenemope, which consists of an introduction followed by 30 short chapters, coupled with the fact that Proverbs 22:17–24:22 can reasonably be divided into an introduction followed by 30 sayings. It should be noted, though, that it is also possible to divide the text into three sections—the first, resembling Amenemope in content (22:17–23:11), and two other sections marked by the use of “My son.” Some claim that “third” is meant to introduce the third section of the book—following the prologue (Proverbs 1–9) and Solomon’s major collection (10:1–22:16). Still, 30 seems reasonable. Note the following apparent divisions, which should not be considered definitive (others group them slightly differently). Most of the 30 subject titles are from *Expositor’s*:

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**THIRTY SAYINGS OF THE WISE**


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<i>Introduction</i>	22:17-21				
	<b>On Wealth and Station</b>		<b>An Obedient Son</b>		<b>Take a Stand Against Evil</b>
1 Treatment of the poor	22:22-23	11 Attend to learning	23:12	21 Wisdom over strength	24:5-6
2 Dangerous associations	22:24-25	12 Necessity of discipline	23:13-14	22 Fools contribute nothing	24:7
3 Rash vows	22:26-27	13 Wise and joyful speech	23:15-16	23 Disapproval of evil men	24:8-9
4 Respect for property	22:28	14 Fear the Lord	23:17-18	24 Test of adversity	24:10
5 Benefits of skill	22:29	15 Poor associations	23:19-21	25 Preservation of life	24:11-12
6 Caution before rulers	23:1-3	16 Learn and keep truth	23:22-25	26 Good future of wisdom	24:13-14
7 Fleeting wealth	23:4-5	17 Shun the temptress	23:26-28	27 Treatment of righteous	24:15-16
8 Unpleasant hospitality	23:6-8	18 Excessive drinking	23:29-35	28 Misfortune of an enemy	24:17-18
9 Wisdom wasted on a fool	23:9	19 Evil associations	24:1-2	29 Envy the wicked	24:19-20
10 Respect poor's property	23:10-11	20 Reward of wisdom	24:3-4	30 Fear God and the king	24:21-22

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We start, then, with ten sayings about wealth and station (22:22–23:11).

**Saying 1: Treatment of the Poor (22:22-23).** Personal prosperity must not come through the mistreatment of others. This first saying forms an *inclusio* with the 10th saying (23:10-11) in that both warn against plundering the poor with the threat that God will plead their cause, acting as their avenger. Amenemope makes numerous statements against dishonest gain and expresses special divine concern for treatment of the poor and downtrodden, saying, “Beware of stealing from a miserable [i.e., poor] man and of raging against the cripple [or the weak]” (chap. 2, 4:4-5) and “God loves him who cares for the poor, more than him who respects the wealthy” (chap. 28, 26:4-5).

**Saying 2: Dangerous Associations (22:24-25).** Friendship with a hothead is a bad idea. This concept is found throughout the Instruction of Amenemope. Indeed, “the contrast between the intemperate, hot-headed man and the tranquil, truly silent man is one of the main themes in the text” (Simpson, p. 241). Note, for example, “Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man, nor approach him to converse” (chap. 9, 11:13-14).

**Saying 3: Rash Vows (22:26-27).** We mustn’t be too quick to make deals—particularly when it comes to standing surety for others, as we’ve seen in other verses (compare 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16). We could lose everything—one’s bed here meaning his last possession (such as today speaking of “the kitchen sink” or “the shirt off one’s back”). There is no parallel to this in the Egyptian material.

**Saying 4: Respect for Property (22:28).** As *Expositor’s* notes on this verse: “The sage warns against appropriating someone else’s property (see also Amenemope, ch. 6, 7:12-13 [‘Do not displace the surveyor’s marker on the boundaries of arable land, nor alter the position of the measuring line. Do not be greedy for a plot of land’])... (...see Deut 19:14; 27:17...Hos 5:10). The boundaries were sacred because God owned the land and had given it to the fathers as their inheritance; to extend one’s land at another’s expense was a major violation of covenant and oath. Of course, property disputes and wars ancient and modern arise because both sides can point to times when their ancestors owned the land.” A specification of this point is made in the 10th saying (Proverbs 23:10-11).

**Saying 5: Benefits of Skill (22:29).** A person skilled in his work will be recognized and rewarded with advancement. Those who are the best at what they do will rise to the top—working even for rulers. Of course, as with other proverbs, this is a general principle. Other factors will bear on actual experience. The Instruction of Amenemope says: “As to a scribe who is experienced [skilled through practice] in his position, he will find himself worthy of being a courtier [i.e., one in attendance at a royal court]” (chap. 30, 27:16-17).

**Saying 6: Caution Before Rulers (23:1-3).** The previous saying spoke of promotion to standing before kings. The current saying gives a caution about being in such a position. Here a courtier at a banquet is told to keep his eyes on what’s in front of him. This may literally mean not staring about the table or at the ruler with a view to feasting—though it could be a metaphor for keeping in mind what’s really going on. “Put a knife to your throat” in this context means “curb your appetite” or “control yourself.” The instruction here was perhaps a point of proper etiquette at court in ancient times, but the reason given goes beyond that. Deceptive food here probably implies more than the fact that too much

rich food can make you ill. A ruler often draws a person in because he has ulterior motives. “The ruler’s food may be ‘deceptive’...it is not what it seems. So the warning is not to indulge in his impressive feast—the ruler wants something from you or is observing you.... The Mishnah (*Aboth* 2:3) quotes Gamaliel as warning that a ruler only draws you into court for his purpose, but in your day of trouble he will not be there” (*Expositor’s*, note on verses 1-3). *The New American Commentary* notes: “The rich do not give away their favors for free. They want something in return, and it is generally much more than what they have invested. One can lose one’s own soul in the exchange.”

As noted in our introduction, there is correspondence here to both the Egyptian Instruction of Ptah-hotep and Amenemope. Quoting from Ptah-hotep in Wilson’s translation: “If you are one of the guests at the table of one who is greater than you, accept what he gives when it is set before you. Look at what is before you and do not pierce him / with much staring, for to annoy him is an abomination of the spirit. Do not speak to him until he calls, for no one knows what may be displeasing” (maxim 7, 6:13–7:3, p. 162). And from Amenemope, as translated by Trevor Longman, *How to Read Proverbs*: “Do not eat in the presence of an official and then set your mouth before (him). If you are sated pretend to chew. Content yourself with your saliva. Look at the bowl that is before you, and let it serve your needs. An official is great in his office, as well as rich in drawings of water” (chap. 23, 23:13-20, p. 75).

The eighth saying (Proverbs 23:6-8) also speaks of avoiding delicacies in certain company.

**Saying 7: *Fleeting Wealth* (23:4-5).** This saying about not striving too hard after wealth, because of its fleeting nature, is the closest in correspondence between the book of Proverbs and the Instruction of Amenemope, and perhaps best illustrates the influence of one work on the other. Note especially the end of this saying in Amenemope: “Do not set your heart on seeking riches.... Do not exert yourself to seek out excess and your wealth will prosper for you [or ‘your own property is good enough for you’]; if riches come to you by theft they will not spend the night with you; as soon as day breaks they will not be in your household; although their places can be seen, they are not there. When the earth opens up its mouth, it levels him [or them] and swallows him [or them] up, and it drowns him [or them] in the deep; they have made for themselves a great hole which suits them [i.e., is as large as they are]. And they have sunk themselves in the tomb; or they have made themselves wings like geese, and they fly up to the sky” (chap. 7, 9:10–10:5). So very true—and thus it’s foolish to be slave to this pursuit (see also Luke 12:20; 1 Timothy 6:7-10).

**Saying 8: *Unpleasant Hospitality* (23:6-8).** These verses show the worthlessness of cultivating friendship with a stingy person. (The word for “miser” here literally means “one who has an evil eye”—in contrast to the generous person, literally “he who has a good eye,” in 22:9). In 23:6 we see repeated the phrase from saying 6 (23:3) that we not desire such a person’s delicacies. A stingy person offering you anything has nothing to do with kindness toward you. He clearly must be using you. Your attempts at friendship are therefore wasted effort. This specific lesson is not related in the Egyptian literature. Some attempt to use the first colon of verse 7 as an example of “you are what you think,” in the context of the power of positive thinking. Yet, as scholars acknowledge, the Hebrew here is difficult and probably should not be translated the way it is written in the King James and New King James Versions. In any case, there is nothing at all positive about the context here, as it concerns the deceitful intentions of the miser.

**Saying 9: *Wisdom Wasted on a Fool* (23:9).** This verse is related to the former saying in the sense of telling a person something being wasted effort. The wording here does not mean we should never say anything in a fool’s presence. It is a caution to be sparing. Why take time for a lengthy explanation when you know the person won’t care what you say? As Jesus told us, we should not cast our pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). In this “there is no specific connection to Egyptian literature, but the general concept was there that a fool rejected discipline and instruction, often scorning the teacher who tried to change him” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 9).

**Saying 10: *Respect the Poor’s Property* (23:10-11).** This is the closing frame of the *inclusio* opened in the first saying (22:22-23), warning against stealing from the lowly with the threat of God acting as their advocate, redeemer and avenger. In this case the mistreatment of the poor (here the fatherless) is perpetrated through removing ancient boundary markers to take possession of their fields. Saying 4 (22:28) explicitly concerns not removing such boundary markers. And regarding it we noted corresponding verses in Amenemope, as we do here again: “Do not displace the surveyor’s marker on the

boundaries of arable land, nor alter the position of the measuring line. Do not be greedy for a plot of land...” (chap. 6, 7:12-13). Moreover, Amenemope continues in the next line, “...nor overturn the boundaries of a widow” (7:14), tying in more closely with this 10th saying in Proverbs.

Continuing in the Egyptian text, consequences for taking over the fields of others are warned of immediately following: “To one who has done this on earth, pay attention, for he is a weak enemy; he is an enemy overturned inside himself; life is taken from his eye; his household is hostile to the community, his storerooms are toppled over, his property taken from his children, and to someone else his possessions given. Take care not to topple over the boundary marks of the arable land, not fearing that you will be brought to court; man propitiates God by the might of the Lord when he sets straight the boundaries of the arable land. Desire, then, to make yourself prosper, and take care for the Lord of All; do not trample on the furrow of someone else, their good order will be profitable for you” (8:1-16).

With the 10th saying of the wise the close correspondence with the Egyptian text ceases.

### **Words of the Wise Cont'd: An Obedient Son (Proverbs 23:12–24:4)**

**January 12-13**

**Saying 11: Attend to Learning (23:12).** Some see this verse as a call to attention to hear the instruction in the next verse or in this section, which is cast as parental instruction. Yet this imperative likely applies to instruction generally throughout one’s whole life.

**Saying 12: Necessity of Discipline (23:13-14).** As with other such verses, this one establishes the need for parental discipline but does not mandate the rod as a first recourse. Yet it does reassure parents that this can be an acceptable means of correction. The point ultimately is to save the child from wrong ways leading to death—the Hebrew word for “hell” in verse 14 being *sheol*, the grave. The Assyrian “Words of Ahiqar,” written around 700 B.C. (in the time of King Hezekiah of Judah) as noted in our introduction, follows with similar instruction: “Spare not your son from the rod; otherwise, can you save him?” (quoted by Longman, p. 69).

**Saying 13: Wise and Joyful Speech (23:15-16).** Parents rejoice in their children’s right words and conduct (see also verses 24-25). And pleasing parents is a good motivator for the young. The four lines in verses 15-16 are arranged in a chiasmic structure—the outer lines parallel and the inner lines parallel (*a-b-b-a*), so that a wise heart equates to speaking right things. As Jesus said, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

**Saying 14: Fear the Lord (23:17-18).** A major concern of parents is their instruction being undermined by wayward peers or bad role models. So parents must, as in this verse, instruct their children in the fear of the Lord, which will keep them in the right way “all the day”—even when the parents aren’t around. If in spite of the obstacles we develop this proper reverence for God, a wonderful future awaits us. Where the KJV has “end,” the NKJV specifies “hereafter”—implying life in God’s Kingdom. Other versions have “future,” the translators arguing that Proverbs speaks of blessed life now, not in the hereafter. Perhaps both ideas are included—a great life in this age and on into the age to come.

**Saying 15: Poor Associations (23:19-21).** Drunkenness and gluttony are both condemned, representing the epitome of a lack of discipline. Wine and other alcoholic beverages in moderation are approved of in Scripture, but drunkenness is a sin—as is gluttony, though the former is certainly worse because of the impact it has on the brain and on others. Drunkards and gluttons are both bad influences and will most likely not cease to bring trouble and grief to associates, even those who disapprove of their behavior. If we are already friends with such people, we should try to help them to overcome their problem. But if they refuse or falsely repent again and again, particularly in the case of drunkards, it would be wiser to sever the friendship.

**Saying 16: Learn and Keep Truth (23:22-25).** Some take verse 22 as an independent verse on listening to parents, but the context here appears to continue until verse 25. Listening to parents corresponds to, in verse 23, striving for truth (including wisdom, instruction and understanding) and holding on to it. “Buy the truth, and do not sell it” is sometimes seen as a prohibition against selling religious books, even Bibles. But this is not the point of the verse. The meaning is that we are to expend all we must to gain true knowledge and, once gained, never sell it *away*—for any price. The New Century Version paraphrases this as “Learn the truth and never reject it.” The Contemporary English Version renders the whole verse this way: “Invest in truth and wisdom, discipline and good sense, and don’t part

with them.” Those who follow this counsel will bring great joy to parents—again given here as a motivator to do what’s right (verses 24-25; compare verses 15-16).

**Saying 17: *Shunning the Temptress (23:26-28)*.** Parental instruction continues here regarding sexual immorality. Compare similar warnings in the prologue of Proverbs (chapters 1–9) and 22:14, where the harlot’s mouth is called a “deep pit.” Some commentators believe the third and last section of the Words of the Wise begins with this saying or the next one—regarding the last section as miscellaneous in content.

**Saying 18: *Excessive Drinking (23:29-35)*.** Saying 15 (verses 19-21) warns against associating with drunkards and gluttons. This saying warns against being a drunkard oneself. *The New American Commentary* says on this unit: “This poem is a small masterpiece; it is surely the most effective combination lampoon and lament over the sorry state of the drunkard.... The text describes with profound accuracy and bite the pathetic physical and emotional decline of those addicted to alcohol. Wine [in excess] (and in modern society, illicit drugs) brings physical pain and debilitation, exhausts one’s resources, takes away mental acuity, and yet leaves one craving for more of the same. ‘Lingering over’ alcohol (vv. 30-31) describes those who derive comfort and security in knowing that a glass of wine is at hand, ready to deaden the senses. In the end, however, it only leaves people more confused and in deeper pain than ever before (vv. 32-35a).”

**Saying 19: *Evil Associations (24:1-2)*.** Whereas saying 14 (23:17-18) invokes the future in discouraging the envy of sinners, this saying just says not to envy them or want to be with them because they are up to no good. The point is to see what they’re really all about—and to not want any part of that. A benefit of moral learning is that one comes to hate and reject evil simply because it is evil.

**Saying 20: *Reward of Wisdom (24:3-4)*.** Verse 3 says that through wisdom a house is built. Some take this as a dwelling place or a household, a family. However, verse 4 says the rooms are filled with riches. While this could be a domestic abode, taken together the verses seem to speak of a treasure house. This may correspond to the conclusion of the first chapter of the Instruction of Amenemope: “If you spend a lifetime with these things in your heart, you will find it good fortune; you will discover my words to be a treasure house of life, and your body will flourish upon earth” (3:17–4:2). In both cases, it is most likely that the treasures are metaphorical for wonderful understanding and rich blessings in life—especially in light of saying 7 about not setting one’s eyes on material wealth (Proverbs 23:4-5). Of course, as in other proverbs, the blessings may include material increase. And ultimately, as noted elsewhere, all of God’s people will jointly possess all things—the whole universe.

### **Words of the Wise Cont’d: Take a Stand Against Evil (Proverbs 24:5-22)     January 14-15**

**Saying 21: *Wisdom Over Strength (24:5-6)*.** True strength lies in wisdom rather than mere brute force. While the verse might seem to apply to rulers only, since only they would be waging war, “the majority of the thirty sayings are clearly addressed to someone who is not in high office. A metaphorical sense that one should engage life with discernment rather than by exercise of force is therefore likely” (*NAC*). Consider the Christian life as one of waging spiritual warfare. Here we have the third proverb advising a “multitude of counselors” (the first two being 11:14 and 15:22).

**Saying 22: *Fools Contribute Nothing (24:7)*.** The NKJV and other versions show the fool here as not speaking up at the city gate, where community decisions were made—wisdom being beyond him (so that he is out of his element). However, other passages show fools having much to say all the time, no matter the setting. Do civil government meetings today proceed with fools keeping silent? *The New American Commentary* offers a slightly different translation of the verse: “Wisdom is too high for a fool; let his mouth stay shut at the gate.” Either way, the point is that fools have nothing worthwhile to contribute. By contrast, the wise, though often reserved in speech, have a responsibility to contribute wisdom in critical situations.

**Saying 23: *Disapproval of Evil Men (24:8-9)*.** Plotters and troublemakers will eventually be discovered and subject to public scorn.

**Saying 24: *Test of Adversity (24:10)*.** The verse uses a play on words: “If you faint in the day of adversity [*sarah*], your strength is small [*sar*].” While trials can expose one’s lack of mettle, the point of the proverb is to encourage people to muster courage to make it through the hard times (compare Jeremiah 12:5). God is ever there to see us through.

**Saying 25: Preservation of Life (24:11-12).** This saying makes clear the responsibility before God to do what we can to rescue those in mortal peril. On one level, as we have opportunity we must work to prevent murder in all its forms, including genocide and abortion. As Christians we do not take up arms in such causes—nor can we individually crusade around the earth to stop all unjust killing in this age. But, as God empowers us, we are to proclaim and teach His will in these matters and do what we can to stop such things from happening. If we lived in Nazi Germany during the Holocaust and knew what was going on, it would be our responsibility to hide and deliver neighboring Jews slated for the gas ovens. The passage also applies to helping those who are jeopardizing their own physical lives through vice or imprudence. On another level, the saying concerns those in spiritual peril, stumbling toward destruction. We are to warn this world of its fatal path (like watchmen, as in Ezekiel 33:1-11) and proclaim the way of salvation—and we must especially help spiritual brethren who are neglecting their salvation (compare Galatians 6:1-2).

**Saying 26: Good Future of Wisdom (24:13-14).** Honey is sweet and enjoyable, and so is wisdom and the life to which it leads. This way leads to a wonderful, profitable outcome with hope not cut off—wording also used in saying 14 (23:17-18).

**Saying 27: Treatment of the Righteous (24:15-16).** As *Expositor's* notes on this verse: “It would be futile and self-defeating to mistreat God’s people, for they survive—the wicked do not! The warning is against attacking the righteous; to attack them is to attack God and his program, and that will fail (see Matt 16:18). The consequence, and thus the motivation, is that if the righteous suffer misfortune any number of times (= ‘seven times,’ v. 16), they will rise again [seven being symbolic of completeness]; for virtue triumphs in the end.... Conversely, the wicked will not survive—without God they have no power to rise from misfortune. The point then is that ultimately the righteous will triumph and those who oppose them will stumble over their evil” (note on verses 15-16).

**Saying 28: Misfortune of an Enemy (24:17-18).** This proverb warns against gloating over an enemy’s downfall, with the threat that God will be unhappy with us and cease to afflict the enemy. We should not take this to mean that we should avoid gloating just to make sure God keeps afflicting the enemy—for that amounts to silently cheering on the affliction. The implied threat in God relenting from afflicting the enemy is that the enemy will return to troubling us. In the meantime, instead of gloating we should just be thankful for God’s protection and leave all to His judgment—praying that God will use any affliction He brings on our enemies to lead them to change for the better.

**Saying 29: Envy of the Wicked (24:19-20).** The words of verse 19 are nearly the same as King David’s in Psalm 37:1. We must not fret over the wicked, or being envious of them (compare 3:31; 23:17-18; 24:1-2), because they are doomed if they will not reform.

**Saying 30: Fear God and the King (24:21-22).** In this last of the 30 sayings of the wise we are told to fear God and the king, a phrase the apostle Peter likely quoted from in 1 Peter 2:17. In the same proverb we are instructed to not associate with “those given to change.” The latter phrase probably means more than merely the fickle. Given the context, it is taken by some to mean revolutionists or “the rebellious” (NIV)—those who subvert society. They will be brought to ruin by both God and king.

### **More Words of the Wise: On the Courts and Laziness (Proverbs 24:23-34) January 16-17**

TYPE: PARALLEL. Following the 30 Words of the Wise (22:16–24:22), Proverbs 24:23a marks a new section with a new title or subheading: “These things also belong to the wise.” Some paraphrase this as Further Words of the Wise. “The structure of this text is as follows:

“A: On the law courts (vv. 23-26)

“B: On economic priorities (v. 27)

“A’: On the law courts (vv. 28-29)

“B’: On laziness (vv. 30-34)

“There is no intrinsic link between these two concepts; the parallel structure exists simply for organizational purposes” (NAC).

The wording of verse 26 perhaps sounds odd to us today: “He who gives a right answer kisses the lips.” *The NIV Application Commentary* says: “The kiss in the ancient world communicated loyalty as well as affection. The honest answer comes from one who (lit[erally]) ‘returns words that are right’ (cf. 22:21). Interpreters debate whether the legal context of 24:23-25 determines the meaning. The main

comparison is that of doing good for another with one's lips, a strong contrast to the deceitful lips of 24:28. *The New American Commentary*, however, argues that the phrase translated "kisses the lips" should actually be "seals the lips" and renders the verse as: "He who gives a proper verdict silences {hostile} lips" (note and footnotes on 24:23-26).

Verse 27 "does not address laziness in the direct terms that vv. 30-34 do, but it relates the principle that one should not provide for personal comfort until a means of income is established here. As such, it emphasizes a practical rule of producing before consuming, a rule the slothful do not accept. It is possible that 'building a house' refers not just to the building in which one lives but to the establishment of a family. If so, the guideline is even more appropriate: one should be able to provide for a family before starting one" (*NAC*). As *Expositor's* notes on this point, "Before entering marriage one should have a well-ordered life."

In verses 30-31, a short anecdote shows that lazy people are not properly attentive to their personal concerns. It causes one to recognize the truth of the proverbial maxim expressed here (verses 32-34; compare 6:9-11).

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