



Good News
Bible Reading Program

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

— December 2006 – Part 1 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-3 Dec	Introduction to the compact sayings	No assigned readings
4-5 Dec	Introduction to the compact sayings (cont'd)	No assigned readings
6-7 Dec	Introduction to the compact sayings (cont'd)	No assigned readings
8-9 Dec	Major Solomonic collection	Proverbs 10
10-11 Dec	Major Solomonic collection (cont'd)	Proverbs 11:1-27
12-13 Dec	Major Solomonic collection (cont'd)	Proverbs 11:28–12:28
14-15 Dec	Major Solomonic collection (cont'd)	Proverbs 13

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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

Introduction to the Compact Sayings (No assigned readings)

December 1-3

We will next return to a chapter-by-chapter reading of the book of Proverbs, picking up where we left off—commencing with Solomon's major collection of short sayings beginning in chapter 10. Before getting into them, we here consider the value and characteristics of this literary form, particular patterns of construction in the biblical proverbs, and the arrangement of this part of the book.

First, what is the point of using short sayings? As one commentator points out: "If Solomon had written a lecture on pride, few people would remember it, so he wrote a proverb instead: 'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall' (Prov. 16:18, NIV). There are only seven words in the original Hebrew, and even a child could memorize seven words! Because proverbs are brief and pictorial, they are easy to memorize, recall, and share" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Skillful: An Old Testament Study—Proverbs*, 2004, p. 16).

The pictorial aspect here is just as important as brevity—as are other factors that make people want to hear and remember short maxims. Another commentary explains: "An important aspect of the proverb is that it is easily remembered and readily popularized. For this reason proverbs contain wit, humor, and turns of phrases that are easy to speak or hear.... Among the rhetorical devices that popularize proverbs are repetition, alliteration, assonance, simile, and metaphor. [The English proverb] 'Look before you leap,' for example, contains alliteration (repeated initial consonants), whereas 'A stitch in time saves nine' is memorable for its assonance (repeated vowel sounds).

"The biblical proverbs contain many of the same devices. Assonance is found in the Hebrew of Prov 10:9a; 13:20b; alliteration, in 15:27a, paronomasia (play on words), in 22:24; and even rhyme, in 11:2. Humor and irony occur in such texts as 11:22 and 19:24" (*The New American Commentary*, 1993, introduction to Proverbs, p. 38).

Such devices provide an entertainment aspect to proverbs, helping to propagate them. Commentator Hassell Bullock gives several scriptural examples of humorous proverbs: "The absence of discretion in a woman annuls her beauty, according to the witty expression in 11:22: 'As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.' The seriousness of folly evokes a chuckle in 17:12: 'Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.' The animal world also provides a humorous illustration for the danger of meddling in other people's arguments: 'Like one who takes a dog by the ears is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him' (26:17). The contentious woman somewhat amusingly reminded Solomon (and likely he had had many lessons!) of a constant dripping of water... (19:13). Comically, he would even prefer to live in a corner on the rooftop or in a desert than to live with a contentious woman...(21:9)...(21:19). A bit of humor is involved when the slothful man is described as too lazy to feed himself: 'The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth' (19:24). In another funny analogy, trusting a faithless person is like having a bad toothache or a sprained ankle...(25:19). These examples are enough to illustrate the entertainment element, but obviously it is entertainment that teaches" (*An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 1988, pp. 149-151).

And there are still other rhetorical aspects of proverbs. They frequently turn on some comparison or contrast. "In general proverbs draw lessons by reflecting on the way things are in relation to right values and right conduct. [Commentator Robert] Scott lists seven ways that this is done in the book" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introduction to Proverbs). These **ways of drawing lessons through comparison and contrast in Proverbs** are as follows:

1. *Identity* (equivalence)

Things that appear distinct but are similar: "A man who flatters his neighbor / spreads a net for his feet" (29:5).

2. *Nonidentity* (contrast)

Things that seem the same but are different: "A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, / but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet" (27:7).

3. *Similarity*

Things that are similar (using similes): “As cold water to a weary soul, / so is good news from a far country” (25:25).

4. *Contrariety* (indicative of absurdity):

Things that are absurd or futile: “Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, / when he has no sense?” (17:16, NASB).

5. *Classification* (persons, actions or situations):

Sayings that classify types of people: “The simple believes every word, / but the prudent considers well his steps” (14:15).

6. *Valuation* (priority of one thing):

Sayings that indicate relative values: “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, / loving favor rather than silver and gold” (22:1).

7. *Consequences*

Sayings that set forth resultant outcomes: “The lazy man will not plow because of winter; / he will beg during harvest and have nothing” (20:4).

(*Expositors*, same note; Bullock, pp. 151-152)

Of course, one of the most important factors to proverbial sayings being remembered is not the use of rhetorical devices. Rather, it is the fact that they ring true. “Fundamental to the proverbial form is that it bears a time-tested truth. Fads have no place in proverbial literature, except as their shallow nature may need to be exposed” (Bullock, p. 147).

Much, then, can be communicated in such pithy, witty and thought-provoking remarks—and, again, these are easier to remember than lengthy lectures. Of course, as pointed out in our introduction at the beginning of the book, such short sayings can have the drawback of not giving enough qualification to deal with possible exceptions to the general truths expressed. Yet this potential problem is easily resolved through a broad knowledge of the whole of Scripture and practiced wisdom in applying revealed truth. In any case, the powerful instructive and retention aspects of the short sayings outweigh the lack of comprehensiveness in them. Moreover, they are in themselves quite full of meaning nonetheless—and together provide a panoply of principles for navigating the course of life.

Poetic Construction (No assigned readings)

December 4-5

Understanding that the proverbs of Scripture are written in a particular literary or poetic form is important to a full grasp and appreciation of them. As we earlier saw in our reading of Psalms, much of Hebrew poetry was marked by parallelism, the repetition of related thoughts—a “rhyming of thoughts,” as it were. In *How to Read Proverbs*, Tremper Longman gives an example from the book of Proverbs and comments: “We begin with the idea of parallelism...

*“The king is pleased with words from righteous lips;
he loves those who speak honestly. (Prov 16:13)*

“The poetry of the Old Testament is largely constructed of parallel lines. Parallelism refers to the correspondence that occurs between the phrases of a poetic line. Notice in the above proverb the echoing effect that occurs between the two parts, or lines. (Scholars use the term *cola* to refer to two or more such lines and *colon* to refer to a single line....) A rough, literal translation helps make the echo even clearer:

*“A king is pleased with righteous lips;
He loves honest words.*

“The verb ‘loves’ echoes ‘is pleased’; the object ‘righteous lips’ echoes ‘honest words.’ The explicit subject ‘king’ is not repeated, but is understood as the antecedent of the verb in the second colon.

“How are we to read the echo? Our example shows that the relationship between the two cola is not mere repetition. The two cola are not ‘saying the same thing twice’—a common misunderstanding of parallelism. Instead, the second part sharpens and intensifies the thought of the first part. This is a general principle that applies to all parallel lines. As James Kugel, an important writer on parallelism puts it, the relationship between the first two cola (labeled respectively ‘A’ and ‘B’) may be stated as ‘A, what’s more, B.’ B not only continues the thought of A, it also adds something to the message of the colon, frequently by focusing it more narrowly.

“Take a look again at Proverbs 16:13. The first line says the king is pleased with righteous words; the second focuses on one particular type of righteous word, namely honest words. There is a sharpening of the idea in the second colon.... The implication of our understanding of parallelism for reading the poetry of Proverbs and other portions of the Bible is to read slowly and reflectively. As we do so, we should ask, how does the second part of the parallel line contribute to the idea of the first part? If nothing else, such reading will get us to really concentrate on the meaning of the words. We may have a tendency to skim, but this does not work well, especially when we come to that compact language we call poetry” (2002, pp. 39-40).

The two-line (or bicolon) verse pattern is not the only kind of literary construction we find in Proverbs. There is also the single-line (or monocolon) pattern (e.g., Proverbs 24:26)—though this is rare in the book. And there are patterns of three or more lines (which we’ll see further details on shortly). Still, the most common form in Proverbs, by far, is the two-line or bicolon pattern.

Different **types of bicolon parallelism in Proverbs** are recognized. Lists vary slightly, but the following are common:

1. *Synonymous*

The second line says something near in meaning to the first line using a different expression: “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, / and his lips are the snare of his soul” (18:7).

For the designation in this case *The New American Commentary (NAC)* prefers the word *parallelism* by itself, arguing that the term “synonymous” is here misleading since there is usually a slightly different emphasis in the second line.

2. *Antithetical*

The second line contrasts with the first, stating a similar idea in a negative or reversed way: “The plans of the righteous are just, / but the advice of the wicked is deceitful” (12:5, NIV).

The same commentary above objects to the designation “antithetical” because it could imply that the two lines are contradictory. The reality is that both lines, as of the proverb above, actually show two sides of the same coin—so that together they constitute a full picture. The *NAC* refers to this as *proverbial merismus* (merismus being a literary device wherein two parts of something stand for the whole).

3. *Synthetic*

The second line supplements, expands or amplifies the idea of the first in some way: “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, / and his glory is to overlook a transgression” (19:11).

The *NAC* substitutes the term *progression*, noting that “synthetic” could imply that something is wrong or artificial in the structure. Furthermore, some overlap should be noted: “Many proverbs employ a mixture of parallelism [i.e., synonymous parallelism] and progression. That is, the second line partially parallels and partially moves beyond the first line” (p. 35).

4. *Comparative (Emblematic or Analogous)*

One of the parallel units uses figurative illustration: “As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, / so is the lazy man to those who send him” (10:26).

Some use the term “comparative” in the next listed sense instead.

5. *Comparative (“Better Than”)*

One part states a preferred value or course over the other: “Better is a little with righteousness, / than vast revenues without justice” (16:8).

Again, however, some use the term “comparative” only in the sense of the previous listed point. And some class the “Better Than” proverbs with the next type.

6. *Formal (Integral or Climactic)*

The second line simply completes the idea begun in the first line, the two lines being incomplete without each other: “The rich and the poor have this in common, / the LORD is the maker of them all” (22:2).

As *Expositor's* notes: "One part may contain the subject and the second the predicate (15:31); the first line may state a condition and the second its consequences (16:7), its cause (16:12), or its purpose (15:24)." And *Expositor's* classes the "Better Than" proverbs among these.

Of these various types, antithetical parallelism (which contrasts opposites) is the most common form found in the book of Proverbs, especially concentrated in the first part of Solomon's major collection (chapters 10–15). Recalling the lessons of the prologue of the book (chapters 1–9), Longman comments: "Why is antithetical parallelism so prevalent in the book of Proverbs? As we have already seen, the book is intent on presenting its readers with a fundamental choice in life, the choice between wisdom and folly. These antithetical proverbs are fleshing out the differences between the two. Wisdom is constructive, demands fear of the Lord, avoids proud talk, and does not lie. Folly, on the other hand, is destructive, despises the Lord, brags, and lies. Antithetical parallelism supports the worldview and message of Proverbs as a whole" (*How to Read Proverbs*, p. 42).

As noted earlier, there are lengthier patterns than the bicolon (two-line) proverbs. There is the three-line proverb or tricolon (also known as a triplet or tristich). "In simplest form, as [scholar Kenneth] Kitchen comments, the tricolon shows 'synonymous or synthetic parallelism in all three lines.... But in instructional wisdom-literature, other and more complex configurations predominate.' These normally take a 2+1 or 1+2 pattern, in which two lines parallel each other in some fashion and the third line is distinct but complementary to the other two. Sometimes a 1/1/1 pattern is found, in which each line functions differently but together they present a single idea" (*NAC*, p. 36).

The four-line proverb (quatrain or tetrastich) can be more complex in structure. "One pattern, for example, is *abab*, in which the *a* lines to some degree parallel one another, as do the *b* lines. Nonparallel lines may also be found" (*NAC*, p. 36). "Examples of the synonymous (e.g., 23:15-16; 24:3-4), synthetic (e.g., 30:5-6), and comparative [i.e., emblematic] (e.g., 25:16-17) may be cited among the four-line proverbs in the book" (Bullock, p. 160).

Five-line proverbs, or pentads, are rare in Scripture. Proverbs 30:15-16 is an example. "The longer, more reflective proverbs sometimes take the six-line form (*hexastich* [or hexad]). Frequently, the first two lines compose a prologue, and the following four lines provide the substance (e.g., 23:19-21). The eight-line (*octastich*) proverb may also be identified (e.g., 23:22-25). The longer proverbs may be called the *marshal ode* [proverb ode], or song. Many of these are incorporated in 1:7–9:18 as well as elsewhere in the book (e.g., 22:17-21; 30:7-9)" (Bullock, p. 160).

Bullock (p. 161) lists the variety of patterns as they occur in the book this way:

POETIC FORMS IN PROVERBS

1:7–9:18	The predominant form is the proverbial ode.
10:1–22:16	All are two-line proverbs, with the greatest number antithetic in form.
22:17–24:22	Most forms occur, although the four-line proverb is preferred.
24:23-34	The two-line as well as the four-line is identifiable, along with one proverbial ode.
25:1–29:27	These are largely two-line proverbs, with the antithetic and comparative forms predominant.
30:1-33	This section contains the two-line, four-line, and numerical proverbs.
31:2-9	The two- and four-line proverbs are identifiable.
31:10-31	This is an alphabetic acrostic poem.

Ordered or Random Assemblage? (No assigned readings)

December 6-7

Aside from groupings into large collections according to attribution, the compact sayings as a whole are typically thought to have no particular organization. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: "In places a few sentences on one theme appear together, but other sentences on that theme often appear elsewhere as well. We might expect all proverbs on poverty to be in one section and all on child-rearing in another, but these and many other topics are interspersed throughout the collection." Yet some have discerned various types of collections within the whole.

The following lengthy quotation from *The New American Commentary* explores this matter:

“Perhaps the most arresting feature of Prov 10:1–24:23 is what seems a complete lack of structure of arrangement in the collection of proverbs. They appear to have been assembled altogether at random. This feature seems odd in light of the Hebrew passion for parallel, chiasmus [i.e., concentric structure], merismus [wherein two parts stand for a whole], and other such modes of structuring the written word. Thus [commentator Norman] Whybray has commented that to claim the proverbs have no context but occur in random order ‘amounts to no more than an admission that modern scholars have so far not been able satisfactorily to discover what such a “context,” whether literary or theological, might be.’ In unraveling this problem, several factors must be taken into account.

“First, each proverb is an independent unit that can stand alone and still have meaning. Textual context is not essential for interpretation. Also the very disorder of a collection of proverbs can serve a didactic [or teaching] purpose; it demonstrates that while reality and truth are not irrational, neither are they fully subject to human attempts at systemization. The proverbs are presented in the seemingly haphazard way we encounter the issues with which they deal.

“Context, however, sometimes qualifies or gives a more precise meaning to a given proverb. Perhaps the best known example of this is Prov 26:4-5, where the reader is advised both against and in favor of answering a fool according to his folly. The two proverbs qualify each other, and the whole indicates that there are times when responding to a fool is appropriate and other times when it is not.

“On close examination, in fact, many proverbs are found to have been grouped into small collections that provide context for the individual maxims. Proverbs 10–24, therefore, are characterized by both order and disorder. Each proverb has its own meaning, but it may also have a more specific meaning in the context of a small collection of proverbs. Individual proverbs, collections of proverbs, and the random repetition of proverbial themes all serve to reinforce the lessons of the book....

“Several **types of collections** (with many variations and combinations of types) may be observed in the biblical Proverbs:

- “1. *Parallel collection*: proverbs grouped in an *A-B-A-B* pattern. The elements of the pattern may be individual cola (two-proverb collection; 11:16-17) or whole proverbs (four-proverb collection; 10:27-30).
- “2. *Chiastic collection*: proverbs grouped in an *A-B-B-A* pattern. Again, the elements of the pattern may be individual cola (two-proverb collection; 18:6-7) or whole proverbs (four-proverb collection; 12:19-22).
- “3. *Catchword collection*: a group of proverbs that contain a common catchword (15:15-17). Some specific word or phrase is repeated that signals that the verses are related to one another.
- “4. *Thematic collection*: a group of proverbs that maintain a common theme (10:31-32). That is, they deal with the same subject matter.
- “5. *Inclusio collection*: a group of proverbs between an inclusio, in which the first and last proverbs are similar or contain common catchwords. For example, 11:23-27 is set off by the catchword ‘good’ as an inclusio in vv. 23,27, and vv. 24-26 within that inclusio deal with the theme of generosity and its rewards. A variation on the inclusio is the *A-B* envelope series, which consists of two juxtaposed collections with similar proverbs at the beginnings and ends (as in 15:1–16:8).

“In addition, certain sections of Proverbs employ what may be called ‘random repetition’ for didactic [teaching] purposes. Proverbs 17, for example, randomly returns to the theme of avoiding quarrelsome behavior in vv. 1, 9, 14, 19, 27-28. For the reader the unexpected way in which teachings on a particular theme repeatedly appear more emphatically drives home the intended lesson. If related proverbs always stood together in a single cluster, much of the effect would be lost” (pp. 46-48).

While, as we have seen, there is certainly great benefit to a topical reading of Proverbs (with proverbs on the same subjects grouped together), we should consider that some proverbs span multiple subjects—and some may indirectly bear on subjects beyond their immediate scope. So if proverbs were arranged in the book by topic with each appearing only once, a search of a particular subject would miss some relevant proverbs grouped in a different category.

Commentator Wiersbe addresses this issue further: “But why didn’t the Holy Spirit direct the authors to arrange these proverbs in topical fashion, so we could quickly find what we need to know? Derek Kidner [in his *Tyndale* commentary on the book] reminds us that the Book of Proverbs ‘is no anthology, but a course of education in the life of wisdom.’ As we read proverbs chapter by chapter, the Spirit of

God has the freedom to teach us about many subjects, and we never know from day to day which topic we'll need the most. Just as the Bible itself isn't arranged like a systematic theology, neither is Proverbs. What Solomon wrote is more like a kaleidoscope than a stained-glass window: "We never know what the next pattern will be" (p. 16). Moreover, a search through the whole book for counsel on a particular matter will end up giving us many other important things to think about as well.

With all this as background, we proceed next to sequential readings of the compact sayings. As we go, we will present a suggested outline of the proverb clusters or collections and descriptions of these (mainly from *The New American Commentary*, which has done an exceptional job of laying these out). There does seem to be intentional organization, at least in sections. And it is good to be aware of particular clusters, as the sayings in these cases were probably arranged to complement one another. Of course, we will be able to comment only on selective individual proverbs, being prevented by time and space from an exhaustive treatment. And not all need commentary—being succinct and to the point as they are.

First Part of Major Solomonic Collection Mostly Antithetical (Proverbs 10) December 8-9

1. Subheading (10:1a)

The subhead of Solomon's major collection, containing the attribution, is found in Proverbs 10:1. Of this core section of the book (10:1–22:16), the first part (chapters 10–15) is made up mostly of antithetical proverbs, highlighting the choice between the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

2. A Diligent Son and a Lazy Son (10:1b-5)

"TYPE: THEMATIC, INCLUSIO.... Verses 1b-5 form a collection marked off by the inclusio [a section that begins and ends similarly] of 'wise son / foolish son' (v. 1) and 'wise son / disgraceful son' (v. 5). The theme of the collection is that a family will thrive if the children are diligent in their work but collapse if they are lazy or resort to crime" (*NAC*).

It is interesting, after the nine-chapter prologue presented as a father's counsel to his son to choose wisdom over folly, that the first compact saying in Solomon's major collection concerns the impact a son's decisions in this regard has on his parents. Actually, "son" here can be understood as "child," whether son or daughter. "The tense of the verbs suggests that *time after time* a wise child gladdens parents, and *time after time* a foolish child brings distress to parents" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 10:1).

Verse 2 is very similar to 11:4. Righteousness delivering from death should be viewed in light of the whole of scriptural revelation. This is generally applicable to life in the here and now, in that wise choices promote physical longevity (see also 3:2; 10:27; 12:28)—but of course, as noted previously, the verse should not be read as a rule or promise that righteous people won't die or won't die prematurely. God may decide to allow His faithful followers to die at a relatively young age. Jesus Christ, after all, died at 33. Yet in an ultimate sense, the verse, and others like it, can be understood to speak of deliverance from the second death—and thus the inheritance of eternal life.

In Proverbs 10:5, laziness characterized by oversleeping when there is work to be done is shameful (compare 6:9-11; 19:15; 20:13). Our time is our life. We must make good use of it.

3. The Mouth of the Wicked (10:6-11)

"TYPE: INCLUSIO, PARALLEL.... Verses 6 and 11 form an inclusio as indicated by the repetition of the line, 'But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence' [NIV]. Within this inclusio vv. 7-10 are arranged in parallel (*A B A B*); v. 7 and v. 9 parallel each other (the fate of the righteous versus the fate of the wicked), and v. 8 and v. 10 parallel each other (both contain the line 'a chattering fool comes to ruin' [NIV]). The repetition of two lines in this section, both of which concern the mouth of the wicked, points to the major emphasis of the collection" (*NAC*).

Adding to the poetic parallelism, the Hebrew verb for "will fall" (verses 8, 10) or "comes to ruin" (NIV) comes from the same root as the verb translated "will rot" in verse 7 (*Nelson*, note on verse 8).

The one who "winks with the eye" in verse 10 denotes a person acting slyly with a hidden agenda. Thus two wrongs are contrasted here—rather than a right and a wrong as in most proverbs of this section. The silent deceiver is able to succeed in his schemes for a time while a chattering fool will get nowhere. This signals no approval of the deceiver—marking only the fact that he at least knows to choose his words carefully (compare 12:23). Eventually, as other passages show, he will meet judgment as well.

4. Seven-Proverb Collection (10:12-18)

“TYPE: INCLUSIO WITH TWO-PROVERB PAIRS.... Verses 12 and 18 form an inclusio...and vv. 13-14 and 15-16 are proverbial pair; catchwords are also used [“destruction” (“ruin” or “terror”) in verses 14-15 and “to life” in verses 16-17]. Themes include wealth and poverty, wisdom and folly, and contentiousness” (NAC).

The apostle Peter essentially quoted from Proverbs 10:12 in 1 Peter 4:8. Some have taken “love covers all [or a multitude of] sins” to mean that showing love to others covers one’s own sins before God. Yet in context, the clear meaning is that love is shown to others *by* covering *their* sins—that is, burying their past mistakes and not bringing them up, either to them (generating strife) or to others. Proverbs 11:13 speaks of not airing secrets (which include private past mistakes) as an act of faithfulness. Implicit in covering sins is forgiving them, as God does in Psalm 32:1. Of course, in the sense used there, only He can *completely* cover sins.

Proverbs 10:18 has caused some confusion. It is usually understood as synonymous parallel. In that case, however, all the proverbs of this section are in antithetical or contrasting forms except this one. It should be noted that the “and” here could be rendered “but,” so that this proverb would be contrasting as well. In that case, as with 10:10, two negatives would be contrasted. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* takes this view, saying in its note on verse 18: “In this comparison two errors are given, the second being climactic: hypocrisy is bad enough, slander is worse. At least in the first one—the ‘lying lips’—one keeps hatred to himself.”

5. *On the Tongue, Personal Security, and Laziness (10:19-32)*

“This section is a chiasmus [i.e., concentric arrangement] made up of four separate collections with a single proverb standing at the center as a somewhat humorous ‘bridge.’ The structure is:

- “A: On the tongue (vv. 19-21)
- “B: On personal security (vv. 22-25)
- “C: On laziness (v. 26)
- “B’: On personal security (vv. 27-30)
- “A’: On the tongue (vv. 31-32)

- “THREE-PROVERB COLLECTION. *Type: Thematic, with One Proverb Pair (10:19-21)*.... The use of the tongue is the theme of this collection, and each verse is merismatic [or antithetical in form]. Verses 20-21 closely parallel each other and can be regarded as a proverb pair. Verse 19 then is an ironic heading to vv. 20-21: Although the wise person gives sound advice, wisdom is found more in those who are silent than in those who are verbose!...

- “FOUR-PROVERB COLLECTION. *Type: Thematic Parallel (10:22-25)*... Only through righteousness and wisdom can one attain real security in life. The righteous can have wealth without the trouble that often goes with it (sycophants, legal problems), whereas the wicked will ultimately be brought down by the disaster they fear (vv. 22,24). And while the wicked find great amusement in their crimes, they will not withstand a real calamity when it comes (vv. 23,25). Verse 25 may be behind Matt 7:24-27....

- “SINGLE PROVERB. *Type: Tricolon (10:26)*” (NAC). The comparison here involves things that are unpleasant and irritating.

- “FOUR-PROVERB COLLECTION. *Type: Thematic Parallel (10:27-30)*. The four proverbs of this collection all deal with the theme of long life for the righteous and destruction for the wicked. In addition, the proverbs are in an *A-B-A-B* pattern. This pattern is found in vv. 27 and 29, which are parallel with each other linked by the motif of *the Lord*, while vv. 28 and 30 are linked by the motif of *the righteous*. All four verses are linked by the motif of the fate of the *wicked*...and those who do *evil*” (NAC).

As with Proverbs 10:2, verse 27 about righteous living prolonging life and wickedness shortening it should be understood as: (1) a general principle of physical life, all else being equal (recognizing that circumstances in God’s purview sometimes allow the opposite to occur in this world); and (2) in the context of eternal life for the righteous versus eternal death for the wicked, which is the most important context to bear in mind.

Next observe the similarity of language in 10:28 and 11:7 nearby.

- “TWO-PROVERB COLLECTION. *Type: Thematic, Parallel (10:31-32)*.... The theme of this pair is the use of the tongue. The cola are in an *A-B-A-B* pattern, but note the inclusio using ‘mouth’ in v. 31a and v. 32b” (NAC).

6. What the Lord Abhors (11:1-21)

“In 11:1-21 a group of proverb collections are held together by the inclusio formed by ‘the Lord abhors’ and ‘he delights’ in vv. 1,20 [NIV].

- “MORAL INTEGRITY AND GOD’S JUDGMENT. *Type: Chiastic (11:1-4)*.... Verse 1 describes God’s abhorrence of fraud, and v. 4 answers it with the promise that the wrongfully gained wealth of the wicked will do them no good in the day of judgment. Between these verses vv. 2-3 assert that humility and integrity, rather than their opposites, are the best guides in life” (NAC).

In its note on verse 1, *The Bible Reader’s Companion* says: “Leviticus 19:35-36 forbids the use of ‘dishonest standards,’ weighted to favor the merchant rather than the seller [he buys from] or buyer [to whom he sells]. The Jewish Talmud calls for meticulous efforts to keep this command, decreeing that ‘the shopkeeper must wipe his measures twice a week, his weights once a week, and his scales after every weighing,’ to keep any substance from throwing them off. We can’t be too careful trying to be fair with others.”

As previously noted, the language of Proverbs 11:4 is similar to that of 10:2.

- “SALVATION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS. *Type: Thematic, Parallel Proverb Pair (11:5-6)*.... These two proverbs parallel each other and describe the respective fates of the righteous and the wicked...

- “DEATH OF A SINNER. *Type: Inclusio, Proverb Pair (11:7-8)*.... As the text stands, these two proverbs are bound by the inclusio of the word ‘wicked’ in v. 7a and v. 8b.... In addition, these verses assert that God brings utter destruction to the wicked and imply a promise of eternal life to the righteous” (NAC).

As earlier noted, v. 7 contains language similar to that of 10:28.

- “DESTRUCTIVE LIPS. *Type: Chiastic, with an Afterward (11:9-13)*.... Verses 10-11 are an obvious pair in parallel, whereas vv. 9,12 are bound by the theme of the slanderous gossip of the wicked against restrained silence of the righteous.... Verse [13] is an afterword on the subject of the tongue” (NAC).

Verse 10 may seem odd in light of the unpopularity of God’s servants among the nations of the world. However, despite persecution, it does make sense that others rejoice when the righteous are doing well: “Why should the community rejoice in the prosperity of the righteous? Because both the way a righteous man gains his wealth and the way he uses it benefits society. The righteous businessman employs others, supports schools and government with his taxes and in the O[ld] T[estament] tradition, shares generously” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 10-11). And often people enjoy seeing justice where the good guy wins.

- “NATIONAL AND PERSONAL PRUDENCE. *Type: Parallel (11:14-15)*.... Both proverbs here follow the pattern ‘imprudent action brings disaster / prudent action gives security,’ but the first involves national matters where the second concerns personal business” (NAC).

Verse 14 explains that it’s vital to get counsel from a number of sources than can be weighed together in making important decisions (see also 15:22; 20:18; 24:6).

Proverbs 11:15 should also be read in light of the next listed proverb in verse 16. “These two proverbs balance each other. The first warns against rashly giving surety or a pledge for a stranger. The second praises generosity [as being ‘gracious’ or ‘kindhearted’ (NIV) surely includes]; generosity begets honor” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 15-16). Verse 16, discussed next, should also be read in the context of the next verse, with which it is parallel.

- “KINDNESS AND CRUELTY. *Type: Parallel (11:16-17)*.... The pattern of these two proverbs is ‘kind woman / cruel man // kind man / ruthless man.’ By itself v. 16 could be read cynically (‘A kind woman gets respect, but a cruel man gets rich’...to justify unscrupulous behavior. In conjunction with v. 17, however, the self-destructive nature of the ‘hard-nosed’ approach to life is apparent....

- “THE WAGES OF SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. *Type: Chiasmus (11:18-19)*.... This pair has the chiastic pattern [in this case *a-b-b-a*] ‘wicked man / he who sows righteousness / righteousness / he who pursues evil’.... Note that this pair has links to vv. 16-17. The wealth of the cruel man corresponds to deceptive wages as the honor given a kind woman is genuine. Also the health/self-inflicted pain of v. 17 corresponds to the life and death of v. 19.

- “DIVINE JUDGMENT. *Type: Parallel (11:20-21)*.... God’s attitude toward individuals (disgust / pleasure) in v. 20 corresponds to the outcome of their lives (inescapable trouble / deliverance) in v. 21”—which also impacts their children (NAC).

7. *Beauty Without Discretion (11:22)*

“TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC).

8. *Generosity and Selfishness (11:23-27)*

“TYPE: INCLUSIO.... Verses 23,27 closely parallel each other and form an inclusio around vv. 24-26, all of which center on the theme of generosity and selfishness. The inclusio states the general truth that one receives back according to one’s own behavior while vv. 24-26 deal with the concrete issue of hoarding [and refusing to sell currently at a fair price]” (NAC).

The picture of the one who scatters abroad increasing more—the generous person being made rich—is similar to Ecclesiastes 11:1: “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” The good we do will be returned to us in different ways. Just on a human level, a selfish, stingy person will likely make enemies, a factor that will probably hurt him later—even financially perhaps. The generous person will make friends who will be there to contribute to his prosperity and well-being later. But there is more to the universe than that—as there is a real God who blesses generosity and curses greed and selfishness.

Jesus likewise taught: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

Of course, the passages here are not a promise of material wealth in this lifetime in return for being generous. The greatest riches are spiritual ones—though this does include the promised hope of possessing the entire universe as co-heirs with Christ.

See also Proverbs 13:7.

First Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 11:28–12:28) December 12-13**9. *The Source of Life (11:28–12:4)***

“TYPE: INCLUSIO.... The structure of this collection is complex. Proverbs 11:28 has a close parallel in 12:3; both concern the flourishing of the righteous and failure of the wicked to establish themselves through wealth and cunning. Proverbs 11:29, which concerns a son’s behavior in the family (see 17:2), is answered by 12:4, which deals with the wife’s contribution to the family. Proverbs 11:28-29 and 12:3-4 thus form an inclusio around 11:30–12:2.

“Proverbs 11:28-29 and 12:3-4 teach that a man cannot provide for the security of his family through any means that violate basic principles of right and wrong. Rather than focus his attention on making as much money as possible, a man should give thought to the choice of a good wife and then to the spiritual nurture of his children. Above all else, he must conduct his own life with integrity if he expects the same from his family.

“The two pairs—11:30-31 and 12:1-2—each deal with behavior (11:30; 12:1) and its reward or punishment (11:31; 12:2). The collection is thus structured as follows:

“Aa The true source of life (11:28)

“Ab Family life (11:29)

“Ba Behavior of righteous and wicked (11:30)

“Bb Divine judgment (11:31)

“Ba’ Behavior of righteous and wicked (12:1)

“Bb’ Divine judgment (12:2)

“Aa’ The true source of life (12:3)

“Ab’ Family life (12:4)” (NAC).

The reference to “winning souls” as a wise course of action in 11:30 is to “to capturing (*loqeah* ‘to lay hold of, seize, conquer’) people with ideas or influence (2 Sam 15:6)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Proverbs 11:30).

Verse 31 in the NIV reads: “If the righteous receive their due on earth / how much more the ungodly and the sinner!” *Expositor’s* notes on this verse: “Retribution for sin is certain, for the righteous and especially for the sinner. The proverb uses a ‘how much more’ argument—if this be true, how much more this (argument from the lesser to the greater). The point is that divine justice deals with all sin; and if the righteous suffer for their sins, certainly the wicked will. The LXX [Greek Septuagint translation of the

Hebrew Scriptures] introduces a new idea to the verse: ‘If the righteous be scarcely saved’; this is recorded in 1 Peter 4:18.” We will consider this further when we come to this New Testament verse.

Proverbs 12:1 in the KJV and NKJV appears to state the obvious: “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge...” Yet the word for “instruction” can be translated, as in other versions, as “discipline”—paralleling the “correction” in the latter part of the verse.

The Hebrew words in verse 4 translated “excellent wife,” or by some as “noble woman” or “virtuous woman,” are the same as those used in the well-known ode of Proverbs 31:10-31.

10. Plans and Schemes (12:5-7)

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... The unity of this collection is indicated in the Hebrew structure. These three proverbs follow a logical progression: the righteous make plans that are just, but the wicked scheme with deceitful counsel (v. 5); the wicked attempt to ambush the righteous with their lies, but the righteous are delivered by their integrity (v. 6); the wicked are totally destroyed, but the righteous stand secure (v. 7)” (NAC).

11. Earned Respect (12:8)

“TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB” (NAC).

12. On Providing for One’s Needs (12:9-11)

“TYPE: INCLUSIO.... The well-earned prosperity of the righteous contrasts with the feigned wealth, the acts of exploitation, and the idle plans of the foolish and wicked” (NAC).

The Jewish *Soncino* commentary notes on verse 9: “The interpretation of the verse depends on the way this phrase [‘*and hath a servant*’ (KJV)] is understood. One possible reading is: Better to be held in low social esteem by not living beyond one’s means, and yet possess a slave to do the menial work and so have a comfortable life, than make a pretence of wealth, mixing with the rich and spending what is necessary for food on maintaining a place in such society. This yields a satisfactory meaning and a sensible admonition which many need today. On the other hand, the words *and hath a servant* may signify ‘and is a slave to himself,’ i.e. he does for himself the humble tasks which are usually relegated to a slave, and spends the money on feeding his body well. In either case, the point is the futility of inflicting [de]privations upon oneself to preserve an outward show of affluence which does not correspond with reality.”

Verse 10 shows that the consideration and care of a righteous man extends to not just other people, but to his animals as well. Cruelty to animals—or cruelty in any form, for that matter—is totally contrary to God’s will.

13. On Fruit and Snares (12:12-14)

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... This collection employs two metaphors of gathering food: hunting with snares (symbolizing the wicked) and laboring to raise crops (symbolizing the righteous)” (NAC). The wicked trap themselves, and the righteous, through proper words and acts, receive blessings in return. This is another way of expressing the principle of reaping what one sows (see Galatians 6:7).

14. Able to Take Advice (12:15)

“TYPE: SINGLE BICOLON PROVERB” (NAC).

15. The Use and Abuse of Words (12:16-22)

“TYPE: LINKED PARALLELISM AND CHIASMUS.... These seven verses are made up of four verses arranged in parallel (vv. 16-19) conjoined by a common verse to a four-verse chiasmus [i.e., concentric arrangement] (vv. 19-22). The structure is as follows:

“A: Thoughtless reactions (v. 16)

“B: Honesty and lying (v. 17)

“A’: Reckless words (v. 18)

“B’: Honesty and lying (v. 19)

“C: Plotting evil and promoting peace (v. 20)

“C’: Trouble to the wicked, not the righteous (v. 21)

“B’’: Honesty and lying (v. 22)” (NAC).

16. A Wholesome Life (12:23-28)

“TYPE: PARALLEL.... This text is structured as a six-verse parallel as follows:

“A: Caution and incaution (v. 23).

“B: Diligence and laziness (v. 24)

“C: Anxiety and joy (v. 25)

“A: Caution and incaution (v. 26)

“B: Laziness and diligence (v. 27)

“C’: Life and immortality (v. 28)

“The six proverbs of this section do not have a single theme but describe types of activity that may promote or undermine a wholesome life” (NAC).

Proverbs 12:23 shows the importance of being careful in what one reveals to others and of not making a show of knowledge.

Verse 24 is ironic in that a lazy person, lacking diligence, fails to advance in life and ends up having to do the menial labor he wants to avoid. In verse 27, the lazy man is humorously portrayed not roasting the food he went to the trouble of catching—and thereby letting it go to waste and failing to benefit from it. The idea is that he doesn’t complete tasks—and loses out because of it.

Verse 26 makes it clear that we can choose who our friends are—and that it’s important that we do and that we choose wisely. Compare with 13:20.

In Proverbs 12:28, we again see the future of life for the righteous—and, indeed, of “no death.” According to *Soncino*: “To reproduce the original [Hebrew], the words should be hyphenated ‘no-death.’ This can only be an allusion to immortality which follows the ending of a righteous life upon earth” (note on verse 28). The NIV here has “immortality.”

First Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 13)

December 14-15

17. *The Use of the Mouth (13:1-4)*

“TYPE: CATCHWORD.... A number of words and concepts bind this text together. The ‘mocker’ corresponds to the one who ‘speaks rashly,’ while shutting one’s mouth corresponds to receiving instruction (vv. 1,3). Verses 2-3 refer to the mouth, and the *nepes* [or *nephesh*, referring to one’s physical being] is mentioned in vv. 2-4” (NAC).

Proverbs 13:1, concerning a wise son heeding his father’s instruction, harkens back to the first of the compact sayings (10:1) and the book’s prologue (chapters 1–9).

18. *Action and Reaction (13:5-6)*

“TYPE: PARALLEL, CATCHWORD.... These two proverbs are set in parallel on the basis of ‘righteous’ and ‘wicked’ in v. 5 and ‘righteousness’ and ‘wickedness’ in v. 6” (NAC).

19. *The Ambiguity of Riches (13:7-11)*

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... The acquisition, possession, and use of money dominate vv. 7-8, 11. Verses 9-10 do not refer to money, but the overall context throws new meaning on these proverbs as well” (NAC).

Proverbs 13:7 is often interpreted to refer to a poor person pretending to be rich and a rich person pretending to be poor. But that is not what is meant here. *The New American Commentary* rightly states: “There is more to v. 7 than that some people deceitfully pretend to be rich or poor. More profoundly, things are not always what they seem. One person may appear rich (and may or may not have money) and yet on a more fundamental level have nothing, and the reverse is true as well. This is illustrated in v. 8, in which the point is made that although the rich have some protection from their money, the poor have little need for such protection since they have nothing worth stealing [—and they ‘hear no threat’ (NIV)]. Wealth is thus a prison, and the one who appears rich has nothing enviable. Similarly, if one has not acquired wealth properly, that wealth will soon disappear (v. 11). The apparent wealth of those who acquired money without learning the lessons of financial prudence is fleeting” (note on verses 7-8). Also compare verse 7 with 11:24-25.

Pride has been called “the mother of all sins.” It certainly leads to contention, as verse 10 tells us.

20. *A Hope Fulfilled (13:12-19)*

“TYPE: INCLUSIO.... The Bible goes beyond the secular wisdom of relating success to hard work [and trustworthiness] and more fundamentally ties it to the development of a mature, virtuous soul by submission to wise teachers.... This text has a general inclusio pattern, but there are many cross-connections.

“A: ‘Hope deferred’ (v. 12)

“B: ‘He who scorns instruction’ (v. 13)

“C: ‘Teaching of the wise’ (v. 14)

“C’: ‘Good understanding’ (v. 15)

“D: ‘Prudent man / fool’ (v. 16)

“D’: ‘Wicked messenger / trustworthy envoy’ (v. 17)

“B’: ‘He who ignores discipline’ (v. 18)

“A’: ‘Longing fulfilled’ (v. 19)

“Other cross connections include ‘tree of life’ (v. 12) and ‘fountain of life’ (v. 14) as well as ‘healing’ (v. 15). Also ‘rewarded’ (v. 13), ‘wins favor’ (v. 15), and ‘honored’ (v. 18) indicate that the concrete benefits of wisdom are in view. The peculiar bicolon of v. 19 is also significant. By itself v. 19b has nothing to do with v. 19a, but in the context of vv. 13,18 it summarizes the attitude of the obstinate. Surrounding the whole text is the idea of having one’s desires fulfilled (vv. 12,19); the point is that the deepest longings of the soul are filled only by integrity and wisdom, not by treachery.

“The structure of the text produces a coherent message. Verse 12 gives the premise that everyone rejoices to see their hopes and aspirations fulfilled. This sentiment is restated in the companion verse, v. 19a; but the second colon, v. 19b, asserts that fools will not turn from evil. The implication is that fools will not see their desires fulfilled. The intervening verses develop the thesis that life and happiness can only be obtained by wisdom.... The whole text [verses 12-19]...teaches that by learning from the wise, one can enjoy a life of fulfilled aspirations” (NAC).

21. Choice Companions (13:20-21)

“TYPE: CHIASTIC.... Note...the chiasmic structure [—in this case *a-b-b-a*—] of ‘wise’ (v. 20a), ‘fools’ (v. 20b), ‘sinner’ (v. 21a), and ‘righteous’ (v. 21b)” (NAC).

Proverbs 13:20 highlights the importance of picking the right friends—as they influence the way you think and act and, therefore, the outcome of your life (compare 12:26; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

22. Provision for the Family (13:22-25)

“TYPE: PARALLEL.... This text deals with providing for the needs of one’s family and is structured as a parallel text.

“A: A material inheritance (v. 22)

“B: Hunger because of injustice (v. 23)

“A’: A moral heritage (v. 24)

“B’: Hunger because of divine displeasure (v. 25)” (NAC).

The inheritance left to children and grandchildren involves much more than material wealth and possessions. As *The New American Commentary* states: “All people desire to leave a good heritage for their children, and vv. 22, 24 speak, respectively, of providing for the material and moral needs of one’s descendants. Proverbs regularly keeps these two in balance. It emphasizes the need for moral training without deprecating the physical needs of family life.

“Verse 23 and v. 25 describe two reasons a family may be impoverished and hungry. On the one hand, it may be injustice in society (i.e., it is not the family’s fault, and their hunger points to a need for changes in the system). On the other hand, poverty may be a result of sin in the family. Addiction to alcohol, indolence, and financial irresponsibility are all potential causes of poverty, although the terms ‘righteous’ and ‘wicked’ imply divine favor or disfavor as well. Proverbs takes a balanced position: it neither dehumanizes the poor on the grounds that they are to blame for all their troubles nor absolves the individual of personal responsibility” (note on vv. 22-25).

The NIV Application Commentary makes these poignant comments in its concluding summary of chapter 13: “The proverbs of this chapter make clear that we are not called to leave an inheritance of wealth but a legacy that includes so much more, a way of life: ‘The righteous eat to their hearts’ content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry’ (13:25). But there is a caution: As we read, we may take the many contrasts of the chapter too lightly, putting ourselves on the path with the righteous too readily. These polarities are a teaching device, exaggeration to make a point, but we will miss the point if we fail to appreciate the various repetitions that we too are ‘prone to wander’ and can be tempted to take little shortcuts in order to preserve our accounts or our reputations. To the sages, outright rebellion is not the enemy so much as compromise. The fact that wisdom writers worked so hard to make these contrasts stark and clear shows that human nature often loses sight of their clarity and makes fuzzy choices.”

This is important to bear in mind as we read all the chapters of the book of Proverbs.