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**— December 2006 – Part 2 —**

| DATE      | READING TOPIC                       | SCRIPTURES          |
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| 16-18 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 14         |
| 19-20 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 15:1–16:8  |
| 21-22 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 16:9–17:1  |
| 23-24 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 17:2–18:4  |
| 25-26 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 18:5-21    |
| 27-28 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 18:22–20:4 |
| 29-31 Dec | Major Solomonic collection (cont'd) | Proverbs 20:5–21:8  |

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## Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

### First Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont'd (Proverbs 14)

December 16-18

#### 23. *Self-Protective and Self-Destructive Behavior (14:1-3)*

“TYPE: INCLUSIO” (*The New American Commentary*). “Verses 1 and 3 go together as signaled by the repetition of ‘wise’ and ‘fool/foolish’; the difference between the two [types of people] is explained in verse 2” (*The NIV Application Commentary*, note on verses 1-7). Verses 1 and 3 show that the wise will ultimately benefit from their right choices but the foolish ultimately hurt themselves and those close to them. Verse 2 shows that what makes the difference is one’s attitude toward God. It also makes clear that how one lives shows whether one properly reveres God or not.

Verse 1 is paraphrased in the New Century Version (NCV) as: “A wise woman strengthens her family, but a foolish woman destroys hers by what she does.”

In the NIV, verse 3 opens with the words, “A fool’s talk brings a rod to his back....” The NCV has “Fools will be punished for their proud words....” However, the Jewish *Soncino Commentary* points out: “The word [translated ‘rod’] is found again only in Isa. [11:]1, where it signifies a new branch growing from the trunk of a tree. If rod was intended, as a symbol of punishment, another Hebrew word, *shebet*, would have been more appropriate. It is better, therefore, to translate: ‘a branch (producing) pride.’ From the fool’s mouth issues haughty speech which has the effect of getting him into trouble” (note on verse 3). In either case, the implication is that the emergence of pride is ultimately self-destructive—especially given the contrast in the verse in which the wise are preserved by their own carefully chosen words.

#### 24. *A Worthwhile Investment (14:4)*

“TYPE: SINGLE BICOLON PROVERB” (*NAC*). Where the KJV has “crib,” the NIV has “manger” and the NKJV has “trough”—the object here being the feed-trough for oxen. *Soncino* comments: “This animal was employed for ploughing and threshing the corn [i.e., grain] (Deut. [22:]20, [25:]4). The point of the verse is neither the importance of agricultural work...nor the value of work as opposed to slothfulness.... As sometimes happens with a proverb, the abstract thought is presented by means of a concrete example. So here, the ox is used as an illustration. Having no ox is, from one point of view, an advantage because a man is then freed from attending to its care; but as against that there is the great advantage of having an ox for the provision of essential food. Consequently, the disadvantage of having to look after the animal is far outweighed by the benefits which accrue from its employment in the field” (note on verse 4).

*The New American Commentary* takes it a step further: “The point is that one must make an investment (obtain and feed the oxen) to get a large return” (note on verse 4).

#### 25. *Look Who’s Talking (14:5-7)*

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... One should evaluate what a person says on the basis of his or her overall credibility (v. 5). Similarly, one should not expect to get sound advice from a person who shows no respect for the precepts of wisdom (vv. 6-7). In short, the character of the speaker serves as a warning about whether his words are true or wise” (*NAC*).

Verse 5 is similar to verse 25.

The counsel in verse 7 does not mean we must immediately leave a room if a foolish person is in it. The point is that we should not associate with foolish people as much as is reasonable—and certainly not look to them for guidance. “Once again, the proverbs recognize that the company one keeps will have its influence. Taken together [with related proverbs], one can learn better alone than with the help of a fool” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verse 7; compare 13:20).

#### 26. *Appearance and Reality (14:8-15)*

“TYPE: CHIASMUS.... Life is often deceptive, and the text here implicitly exhorts readers not to be taken in by appearances [or how things might seem]... This series of proverbs is a carefully balanced chiasmus [or concentric arrangement]:

“A: The prudent and the fools (v. 8)

“B: Making amends for sin (v. 9)

“C: Secrets of the heart (v. 10)

“D: Destruction of the wicked (v. 11)

“D’: The way to death (v. 12)

“C’: Secrets of the heart (v. 13)

“B’: Being repaid for sin (v. 14)

“A’: The simple and the prudent (v. 15)

“The meaning of ‘the folly of fools is deception’ (v. 8 [NIV]) is not immediately evident, but the parallel in v. 15 implies that the naiveté of fools is in view” (*NAC*). Verse 15 shows that the simple are gullible while the wise proceed cautiously—to borrow from a modern proverb, they look before they leap. On the word in verse 8 translated “deceit” or “deception” (NIV), *Soncino* notes: “The verb from which this noun is derived, means ‘to mislead’” (note on verse 8). The NRSV renders the verse this way: “It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go, but the folly of fools misleads.” The wise know that things are not always as they seem.

“Verses 10, 13 likewise observe that no one knows the inner life of another’s heart and that the appearance of happiness can be deceptive” (*NAC*).

Verse 9 is somewhat difficult to translate and the King James and New King James are probably incorrect here. The NIV has a likelier rendering: “Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.” Thus, “verse 9 states that the wicked believe they can avoid making restitution, but v. 14 [in concentric parallel] gives assurance of divine retribution. In other words, the appearance of getting away with a crime is belied by a justice that is not obvious or quick but is certain.

“In vv. 11-12, at the heart of the chiasmus, the apparent success of the wicked is short-lived.... The message of the whole is to avoid a superficial analysis of the lessons of life” (*NAC*).

Verse 12, repeated in 16:25, is crucial to always keep in mind. People the world over often act according to what they personally think is right—but not according to the way of life God reveals in His Word. Thus they all march headlong down the broad road to destruction (compare Matthew 7:13)—in dire need of true education and God’s salvation. We must be sure to always look at things through the godly lens of Scripture and not mere human reason, living by faith and not by sight (compare Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:7).

### **27. A Patient Spirit (14:16-17)**

“TYPE:...THEMATIC” (*NAC*). As pointed out in verse 15, a wise man thinks before he acts. Contributing to his reasoned patience is, as verse 16 notes, a healthy fear of the consequences of evil. This contrasts with the foolish self-confidence behind rashness and impulsive anger.

### **28. A Crown of Wisdom, An Inheritance of Folly (14:18-24)**

TYPE: INCLUSIO, CHIASMUS, PARALLEL PROVERBS. “This text promises that the righteous will be crowned with wisdom and see fools bow before them. The passage also gives a few specific guidelines for right behavior, including compassion and personal diligence” (*NAC*).

Verses 18 and 24 are tied together through the wise receiving a crown or reward and the foolish inheriting only folly. The NIV captures the sense of verse 24: “The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly.” This is not a promise of wealth for the godly in this age. It merely expresses the principle that wealth is gained and sustained through wisdom and prudence, while the foolishness of fools leads to an outcome of more foolishness. Of course, the godly will be richly rewarded in the ages to come.

“Verses 20-23 fall between these verses and are themselves bound together in a complex manner. Verses 20 and 23 both deal with wealth and poverty, and vv. 21-22 both contrast those who are kind with those who plot evil. Viewed in this manner, vv. 20-23 are in a chiasmic pattern. On the other hand, vv. 20-21 both concern the different ways a ‘neighbor’ is treated, and vv. 22-23 both concern the respective gain or loss that comes to the good/diligent as opposed to the evil/lazy. Viewed in this manner, vv. 20-23 are two sets of parallel proverbs. Both the chiasmus and the parallel pattern may be viewed as follows:

“A1: The crowns [or inheritance] of wisdom and folly (v. 18)

“A2: The evil bow to the wise (v. 19)

“B1: The poor and rich (treatment of a neighbor) (v. 20)

“C1: Scheming and benevolence (treatment of a neighbor) (v. 21)

“C2: Scheming and benevolence (reward for kindness) (v. 22)

“B’2: Wealth and poverty (reward for diligence) (v. 23)

“A’: The crowns [or inheritance] of wisdom and folly (v. 24)

“The full text deals with the recompense that accompanies wisdom or folly. Ethical issues here [that impact the outcome] include concern for the poor, diligence in work, and integrity in dealing with others” (NAC, note on verses 18-24).

Treatment of the poor (verses 20-21) is revisited in verse 31. In verse 20 the many friends of the rich are not true friends that can be counted on. Thus the New Living Translation rendering: “...the rich have many ‘friends.’” These are mostly parasitical, seeking handouts, personal advancement or notoriety through association.

### 29. *An Honest Witness (14:25)*

“TYPE: SINGLE BICOLON PROVERB” (NAC). As earlier noted, this verse is similar to verse 5.

### 30. *The Fear of the Lord (14:26-27)*

“TYPE: THEMATIC” (NAC). These proverbs focus on the fear of the Lord—the proper reverence and awe of God in His holiness and power through which the whole book of Proverbs is to be viewed and comprehended (compare 1:7). This perspective will protect us and our loved ones we influence, preserving us through various trials and keeping us from falling away to ultimate destruction. We will note more about this when we come to Proverbs 19:23.

### 31. *National Security (14:28-35)*

“TYPE: INCLUSIO [POSSIBLE CHIASM].... The health and well-being of a nation depends upon both the ruler and the governed. A ruler must be fair and above all must respect the rights of his people. The people, on the other hand, must have virtue in their lives or they will bring society into chaos. No government can succeed without the people, and no people can thrive if corruption and evil abound. The inclusio here is formed by v. 28, which describes a king’s need for a sizable populace, and v. 35, which obliquely asserts a king’s need for capable servants” (NAC).

In its note on verses 28-35, *The NIV Application Commentary* sees a possible chiasm here, based on the terms used:

- “A v. 28 *King’s glory*
- “B v. 29 *Exalt {root rwm} folly*
- “C v. 30 *Heart at peace gives life*
- “D vv. 31-32 *Sayings on treatment and reward*
- “C’ v. 33 *Heart a home for wisdom*
- “B’ v. 34 *Exalt {root rwm} a nation*
- “A’ v. 35 *King’s delight*”

Verse 29, which contrasts impulsiveness with patience, is followed by verse 30, which contrasts a sound heart or “a heart at peace” (NIV) with envy. Both verses show reasoned calm to be superior to uncontrolled emotion. In the latter verse, this calm is healthful while negative emotion is actually destructive to the body—facts borne out in modern medical science.

Verse 31, similar to verse 21, warns the powerful, such as national rulers, from oppressing the poor. To oppress the poor is to reproach God, since He has commanded that the poor be treated well. Those who honor God will obey Him in proper treatment of those in need. There may even be a hint here of Jesus’ later teaching that as we treat people, so we treat Him (compare Matthew 25:31-46)—a principle more evident in Proverbs 19:17. See also 17:5.

Proverbs 14:32 says that the righteous has a refuge in death. Note again the refuge in the fear of the Lord in verse 26. While the wicked are swept away when calamity comes, the righteous ever have the refuge of God—even in death, showing hope beyond the grave (compare Isaiah 57:1-2). This is true in both an individual and collective sense.

The first colon of Proverbs 14:34 is inscribed above the entrance to a prominent American building—Los Angeles City Hall. That great city, and the nation at large—indeed all the world—would do well to heed this saying on the importance of the citizenry living according to God’s standard of righteousness and not descending into sin. Verses 34 and 35 are both linked by the theme of shame among those governed. “A people may wish for good character qualities in their leaders, but they ought to hold themselves to the same high standards. This may be a jab at the common assumption that honest and forthright character is always a good idea for someone else” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verse 35). Indeed, every person’s character contributes to the character of the whole community, so we should each take this as a personal responsibility.

**End of First Part of Major Solomonic Collection (Proverbs 15:1–16:8) December 19-20****32. Two Collections (15:1–16:8)**

“TYPE: A-B ENVELOPE SERIES.... This text is, in effect, random repetition...but with recognizable clusters of proverbs. It is composed of two collections, 15:1-17 and 15:18–16:8, which parallel each other not structurally so much as in content. Each major collection begins with a word on patience versus the provocation of wrath (15:1,18), and each ends with ‘better sayings’ on apparent versus real prosperity (15:16-17; 16:8). Between these markers the two collections (here referred to as ‘I’ and ‘II’) contain teachings that correspond to one another in remarkable detail. In the following chart, collection I is set forth in its normal order, while units in collection II are set out in an order that corresponds to those in collection I. This does not imply that verses in collection II need to be transposed; it is done merely to make the comparison clearer.... Similarly, this analysis does not dispute that there are other parallels and ties among these verses other than those mentioned here.

| COLLECTION I   | COLLECTION II   |
|--|---|
| 1. <b>15:1</b> gentle verses harsh answer; calming versus provoking anger          | <b>15:18</b> hot-tempered versus patient man; calming versus provoking anger                    |
| 2. <b>15:2-4</b> chiasmus: use of the tongue (2,4) and divine retribution (3)      | <b>15:24-27</b> chiasmus: life and death (24,27) and divine retribution (25-26)                 |
| 3. <b>15:5</b> foolish son; heeding admonition                                     | <b>15:20-22</b> wise/foolish son; need for advisers   |
| 4. <b>15:6</b> income of righteous/wicked  | <b>15:19</b> way of sluggard/upright  |
| 5. <b>15:7</b> speech of the wise/fools  | <b>15:28</b> speech of the righteous/wicked   |
| 6. <b>15:8-9</b> Lord rejects sacrifice of the wicked                              | <b>15:29</b> Lord rejects prayers of wicked   |
| 7. <b>15:10-11</b> severity of the Lord’s dealing with people                      | <b>15:33–16:7</b> the Lord’s ways of judgments  |
| 8. <b>15:12-15</b> accepting/rejecting correction (12,14); cheerful face and heart | <b>15:30-32</b> cheerful look and heart correction (30); accepting/rejecting correction (31-32) |
| 9. <b>15:16-17</b> better sayings on true prosperity                               | <b>16:8</b> better sayings on true prosperity   |

“Collection II (twenty-four verses) is not only longer than collection I (seventeen verses) but it also contains one verse that has no parallel in collection I (15:23). On the other hand, 15:23 concerns the ability to give an appropriate answer and thus obliquely relates to the lead verses, 15:1,18” (NAC).

Verse 1 concerns not only what we say, but how we say it. It is important to maintain calm in most situations, for peaceful dialogue is usually much more effective in a dispute than screaming. This need not convey weakness for, as Proverbs 25:15 says figuratively, a gentle tongue can break a bone.

Regarding the chiasms (concentric arrangements) of the second section here, *The New American Commentary* states: “In the first series (vv. 2-4) a single proverb on God’s [omniscience serving His perfect] administration of justice (v. 3) falls between two proverbs on the use of the tongue (vv. 2,4). In the second series (vv. 24-27) two proverbs on divine justice (vv. 25-26) fall between two proverbs on behavior that leads either to life and prosperity or to the grave (vv. 24,27). In both sections the middle proverbs reveal that the moral principles that govern the world are not mere abstractions but are actively maintained by God’s intervention” (note on verses 15:2-4, 24-27). In verse 24, “grave” (NIV) rather than “hell,” as it is commonly defined today, is the proper translation of the Hebrew *sheol*.

The verses of section 6 (15:8-9, 29) show the importance of proper attitude and manner of life in the worship of God. He will not accept a mere pretense of piety (see also 21:27). The *Soncino Commentary* notes on Proverbs 15:9: “As a pendant to what precedes [in verse 8], this verse is of the highest importance, because it clearly defines the final test of a man’s religion. The criterion is not his scrupulous performance of rites such as sacrifice and prayer, but the way of life he treads and his ardent (the form of the verb is intensive) pursuit of *righteousness*” (note on verse 9).

In verse 11, “Hell [*sheol*, the grave] and Destruction” represent the fate of all people, the coming of death and what lies beyond being a great mystery in ancient times, as it is to most today. If this inscrutable mystery is “before the LORD”—that is, laid out before Him as within His purview and understanding—how much more is He able to discern the inner heart of human beings, which is not so hidden as the greater mystery.

Verse 20 is similar to the opening proverb of Solomon’s major collection, beginning with an identical first colon (10:1). Proverbs 15:22 recalls 11:14.

In verse 30, where the KJV and NKJV have “the light of the eyes” (which rejoices the heart), the NIV says “a cheerful look” (that is, from someone else). The Contemporary English Version paraphrases this as “a friendly smile.” Compare the “light of the king’s face” in 16:15.

The verses of what is marked above as section 7 of collection II (15:33–16:7), linked by their focus on how the Lord deals with people, bring to a conclusion the first half of Solomon’s core collection. In fact Proverbs 16:4, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out, is “the middle verse of this section of Proverbs (10:1–22:16), aptly summarizing the Lord’s sovereignty over every human thought and action. The verse also occupies the central position in a series of seven verses (1-7) at the beginning of ch. 16—the middle chapter in the book of Proverbs. Each of the seven verses features the name Yahweh [typically represented in English translations as “LORD” but meaning “He Is Who He Is”—the Eternal or Self-Existent One], again stressing his supreme position as Lord over all” (note on verse 4).

While Proverbs 15:28 shows the importance of studying how to answer, 16:1 balances this with the fact that human preparation has its limitations. Having done what we can, we must rely on God to enable us to always say what we need to. And He will help us in what we need to say in critical situations (compare Mark 13:11; Luke 21:12-15).

Proverbs 16:2 shows that human beings are prone to self-deception when it comes to our own motives. “The interaction of the two lines in this proverb suggest that Yahweh is better able to discern our motivations than we are, hence the need for wisdom and instruction in standards outside ourselves” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verse 2).

Verse 4, the central verse noted above, has seemed to some to say that God has created the wicked to destroy them. The point, rather, is that God has made all to fulfill His purposes and that even those who choose wickedness do not thwart His plan but fit within His purposes, in their case meeting the judgment He has already determined. Of course, God did predetermine that some would meet with destruction in this life (see Romans 9:14-24)—but this does not mean they are ultimately lost. (For a full discussion of this matter, see the article “Predestination: Are You Just a Pawn?,” *The Good News*, May-June 2003, pp. 8-9, 26, online at [www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn46/predestination.htm](http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn46/predestination.htm)).

Proverbs 16:5 uses some of the same wording as 11:20-21.

Proverbs 16:7, which tells us that God causes the enemies of the righteous to be at peace with them, conveys a general principle. Scripture gives us some examples (see Genesis 20:15; 26:27ff; 33:4; 2 Chronicles 14:6-7; 17:10). A measure of peace allows God’s people to live their lives in service to Him, to their families and to each other. Of course, there are often times when God allows enemies to be actively antagonistic against His people. The proverb must be considered as applying over the long haul of life—and it will find ultimate fulfillment in the age to come.

### **Second Part of Main Collection Mostly Synonymous (Proverbs 16:9–17:1) December 21-22**

Continuing in Solomon’s core collection (10:1–22:16), we may observe that the second part (16:1–22:16) is made up mostly of synonymous proverbs.

#### **33. Three Collections (16:9–17:1)**

“TYPE: A-B ENVELOPE SERIES.... [These] proverbs are in a three-fold A-B envelope series, as follows:

“COLLECTION I

“A: Human plans and divine providence (16:9)

“Nine proverbs (16:10-18)

“B: Better saying on humble circumstances (16:19)

“COLLECTION II

“A’: Prosperity through careful decision making and faith in God (16:20)

“Eleven proverbs (16:21-31)

“B’: Better saying on patience (16:32)

“COLLECTION III

“A’’: Casting lots and divine providence (16:33)

“B’’: Better saying on humble circumstances (17:1)

“The verses marked ‘A’ (16:9,20,33) all concern divine providence over human affairs. The issue in these verses is wisdom in the decision-making process. Whether one makes detailed plans or resorts to casting lots, events and circumstances are all in God’s control. As such the wise are cautious but above all put their faith in God and not in human plans.... The verses marked ‘B’ (16:19,32; 17:1) all imply that a peaceable attitude makes the position that is apparently lower or less aggressive preferable to one of power. All are ‘better’ sayings. Set in context with the ‘A’ sayings, these texts imply that success is not necessarily to be measured by the size of one’s bank account. The intervening verses in texts I and II do not correspond to one another (unlike 15:1–16:8), but several discrete groups...are apparent in these collections. Collection III has no intervening verses at all” (NAC).

Verses 10-15 “concern righteousness in government and are organized as a thematic collection. Also the catchword ‘king’ occurs in every verse except 11, which nevertheless plainly deals with justice in government” (note on verses 10-15).

*Expositor’s* notes on verse 10: “This first one teaches that kings must speak righteously in their official capacities.... The first part states that when the king speaks officially, it is as if it were ‘an oracle’ [NIV]. The word *qesem* is used throughout the Bible in the negative sense of ‘divination’ [as the NKJV renders it here]; here it seems merely to mean his words from an oracular sentence, as if he speaks for God (see Num 22:7; 23:23...). The effect of this is that his mouth ‘should not betray’...justice.”

Regarding Proverbs 16:11, mentioned above as the only proverb in verses 10-15 that doesn’t include the word “king,” *Soncino* notes: “This verse is misunderstood by the modern expositors who hold it to refer to honest weights and measures [as in 11:1]. If so interpreted, it is out of place and has no connection with the group which deals with the subject of a king’s obligations, and preference should be given to the Jewish commentaries which related the verse to the Divine origin of justice. [The phrase] *a just balance and scales* [is] an unlikely translation, since *tsedek* [righteous or fair] would have been used instead of *mishpat* [judgment] if the meaning were *just balance* (cf. Lev. [19:]36). The correct rendering is: ‘the balance and scales of justice are the Lord’s,’ i.e. they are not something arbitrary which each king can manufacture to suit his convenience. They are fixed by God and delivered into the kings keeping to administer fairly.... [Regarding] *weights of the bag*...the weights to be used on the scales, like the scales themselves, are made by God; the king may not provide his own” (note on Proverbs 16:11).

The “latter rain” in verse 15 refers to the spring rain in Israel. “The spring rain was essential for the full development of barley and wheat; it was therefore a sign of good things to come. Cf. the ‘dew’ of 19:12” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on 16:15).

Verse 18 shows that pride and arrogance are short-lived. This should be an encouragement in the face of the apparent prosperity of the proud. But it is also meant as a warning to us against self-exaltation (compare 1 Corinthians 10:12).

Verse 21 says that “sweetness of the lips increases learning.” The sweetness here corresponds to verse 24: “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb...” The point of verse 21 is that the wise will carefully choose appealing language in teaching others so as to promote learning (see also verse 23).

Verse 25 repeats 14:12. We can’t just go by what seems right. We must listen to what God has to say. Here “following the proverbs on teaching, this saying also states our need for an external reference point by which we set our course” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on 16:25).

“Verses 27-30 describe the man who has evil schemes and are another thematic unity. Verses 27-29 concern the evil machinations of the scoundrel, the perverse man, and the violent man, and v. 30 is a conclusion or commentary on those three descriptions. The winking eye and pursed lips of v. 30 may be taken either as signals among conspirators or as a general statement of shiftiness in the facial mannerisms of scheming people” (*New American Commentary*, note on verses 27-30)—or possibly “as friendly but deceptive signs; perhaps they are a form of the enticement mentioned in verse 29” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verse 30).

In verse 32, mastering the self, such as in controlling one’s temper, is a far greater achievement than external conquest.

The “lot” of verse 33 is thought by some to refer to the use of the Urim and Thummim by the high priest. Yet it probably refers to the casting of lots in a more general sense, with appeal made to God to determine the outcome. The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments: “Here the lot may have been several pebbles held in the fold of a garment and then drawn out or shaken to the ground. It was commonly used

to make decisions” (note on verse 33). Jesus’ disciples used the casting of lots to make an important decision prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:26).

## Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 17:2–18:4) December 23-24

### 34. *Remarks on Behavior (17:2-8)*

“TYPE: RANDOM PROVERBS.... Although these verses contain the hint of an inclusio [as ‘wise’ in verse 2 and ‘ prospers’ in verse 8 are both translated from the Hebrew word *skal*, referring to wise perception and dealing leading to success] and repeat certain themes and terms [family matters (verses 2, 6), divine judgment (verses 3, 5), the lips (verses 4, 7)], no specific pattern is apparent” (NAC).

Verse 2 shows that “ability and character can overcome the disadvantages of birth. At the same time, those born to advantage can forfeit their birthright through immorality and incompetence” (note on verse 2). We don’t have to stay where we are in life. Through wisdom we can rise above our circumstances. Conversely, through foolish disgrace, we can lose what we have.

Verse 8 apparently says that a gift given to others is very valuable to the one giving it—as it leads him to success. This is not the same as Christ’s general maxim that “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The point in Proverbs 17:8 is not altruistic giving generally but a strategy of using gifts for gain. This could be a mere observation about the power of bribes (compare NIV), but it need not be so. While bribery to pervert justice is condemned (verse 23), other proverbs note that there is a proper social context for giving gifts to promote good relations and open doors (see 18:16; 19:6; Luke 16:9). It was proper in ancient times to come before kings with gifts—and perhaps more mundane occasions called for this as well. Also recall Jacob’s giving of gifts to Esau to placate him and reconcile with him (Genesis 32:13-21).

### 35. *Four Conjoined Collections (17:9-26)*

“The proverbs of vv. 9-16 have many interconnections, but it is difficult to tell if any specific pattern is intended. It appears, however, that these verses divide into four inclusio or chiasmus collections (vv. 9-13, vv. 14-19, vv. 20-22, and vv. 23-26) on the basis of thematic parallels or catchwords. The connections among the proverbs are as follows:

#### “COLLECTION I

“A: Gracious forgiveness (v. 9)

“B: The irrationality of a fool (v. 10)

“C: Just punishment carried out (v. 11)

“B: The behavior of a fool (v. 12)

“A: Irrational retaliation (v. 13)

#### “COLLECTION II

“A: Quarrels (v. 14)

“C: Perversion of justice (v. 15)

“D: Poor use of money (v. 16)

“D: A friend in adversity (v. 17)

“D: Poor use of money (v. 18)

“A: Quarrels (v. 19)

#### “COLLECTION III

“E: Heart and tongue (v. 20)

“B: Foolish son (v. 21)

“E: Heart and spirit (v. 22)

#### “COLLECTION IV

“C: Perversion of justice (v. 23)

“B: The eyes of a fool (v. 24)

“B: A foolish son (v. 25)

“C: Perversion of justice (v. 26)

● “THE SOCIAL AND ANTISOCIAL. *Type: Chiasmus (17:9-13)*. This section describes those who are or are not sociable and easy to live with. The implied warning is that one should beware of antisocial, incorrigible, or vindictive behavior in oneself or others” (NAC).

Verse 9 on covering a transgression recalls 10:12.

Verse 11, as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes, shows that “those bent on rebellion will surely meet with severe retribution.... That retribution will be sent in the form of a [‘cruel messenger’]...(mal’ak ’akzari). This expression could refer to a pitiless messenger that the king would send; but it also could refer to storms, pestilence, or any misfortune that was God’s messenger of retribution.”

- “QUICK TO QUARREL. *Type: Inclusio (17:14-19)*. The boundaries of this text are set by the inclusio on quarreling in vv. 14,19” (NAC).

Regarding verse 16, *The NIV Application Commentary* states: “The point of this satiric proverb is two-sided: It is folly to think one can buy wisdom since it is a gift of God and must be acquired through study (2:1-6), and even if wisdom could be bought, the fool lacks the sense (lit[erally], ‘heart’) to know what to do with it. The sharp juxtaposition of having money and lacking sense makes it clear that heart, both as ‘desire’ and ‘mind’ (NRSV), is the prerequisite for learning wisdom. Some see a dunce showing up at the door of a teacher with fee in hand, but evidence for this in Israel is lacking. Rather, we see a fool who does not know what to do with good things like money, responsibility, or even a proverb (26:6-9)!” (note on 17:16).

Speaking of both quarrelling and money, we may note that money can lie at the root of tension between friends, as verse 18 warns about. The caution about becoming surety for a friend, such as in cosigning a loan, recalls 6:1-5 (and 11:15 warned against becoming surety as well, there in the case of a stranger as well as generally). The proverb does not mean you should never help out a friend in this way if you are well off and the friend defaulting would not hurt you or the friendship. But you had better know what you’re getting into. And odds are that this is generally an unwise course.

Verse 19 speaks of one who “exalts his gate” seeking or inviting destruction. The *Soncino Commentary* notes on verse 19 that “his gate” is literally “‘his opening’ which the Jewish commentators apply to the mouth (cf. Ps [119:]130), understanding the phrase as ‘talking big, in loud and arrogant language.’ Another explanation is: living in an ostentatious manner which attracts envious attention and can easily be the cause of ruin” (note on Proverbs 17:19).

- “HEART AND FAMILY. *Type: Inclusio (17:20-22)*” (NAC). The foolish and scoffing son of verse 21 is probably one with a deceitful heart and perverse tongue as in verse 20—a source of great sorrow to parents, in line with verse 25 and the opening proverb of Solomon’s core collection (10:1).

Proverbs 17:22 shows, in contrast, that a happy heart is the key to a full and healthy life. We may observe, too, that this proverb indirectly speaks well of the use of medicine. For consider that it does not say that a merry heart does good like a medicine *poisons* you. Rather, it implies that a merry heart does good like a medicine does good. This is not to say that everything labeled medicine is good for you, but clearly the use of some medicines promotes the wellness of the body—as does staying happy.

- “JUSTICE AND FAMILY. *Type: Chiasmus (17:23-26)*.... Verse 25 would appear to have nothing to do with bribery and the miscarriage of justice [making it an exception to the other proverbs in this short section], but with v. 21 it provides a link to the previous text [see again the chart on the four conjoined collections here]. The ‘foolish son grieves his father’ verses in the contexts of vv. 20-22 and vv. 23-26 thus serve a didactic [teaching] purpose; they urge the reader (the implied ‘son’) not to become the evil man described in these verses [of all four conjoined collections] and thus not to grieve either his real father or the implied father behind the Book of Proverbs” (NAC).

### **36. Appropriate Use of Words (17:27–18:4)**

“TYPE: INCLUSIO AND PARALLEL.... Sometimes the Book of Proverbs seems to value nothing so much as appropriate words. This is because it views words as the index to the soul. By paying attention to what a person says (and indeed to how much he or she says), one can determine whether a person is wise or a fool. Words are the fruit that show the quality of the heart. A parallel structure (17:28–18:3) is imbedded in an inclusio (17:27; 18:4). The structure of the whole is as follows:

“A: The wise person’s restrained use of words (17:27)

“B: A silent fool appears wise (17:28)

“C: A schismatic person is irrational (18:1)

“B’: A fool cannot remain silent (18:2)

“C’: A base person is shameful (18:3)

“A’: The wise person’s words are profound (18:4)” (NAC).

The value of being reserved in speech (17:27) is bolstered by the fact that “even an imbecile can appear intelligent if he can avoid putting his foot in his mouth, but this is all but impossible for a fool (17:28:18:2 [compare 15:2])” (note on 17:27–18:4).

In 18:1, the person who “isolates” or, literally, “separates” himself is not here a quiet recluse or hermit. Rather, the latter part of the verse makes clear that this individual is one who “rages” at other people. The NIV translates the Hebrew term here as merely “defies,” but the literal sense is “breaks out,” the word also being used in 17:14 and 20:3 in the sense of engaging in quarreling. The person identified in 18:1 is therefore contrary and schismatic, one who is divisive, setting himself against others and bringing strife. The proverb thus fits well with the next one in verse 2.

## **Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 18:5-21) December 25-26**

### **37. Further Comments on Listening to Evil Talk (18:5-8)**

“TYPE: CHIASTIC.... The chiasmus in vv. 6-7 is obvious (lips, mouth, mouth, lips). Somewhat less conspicuously, v. 5 refers to heeding evil talk at the gate [where judicial decisions were made], and v. 8 describes the pleasures that malicious slander can give. This section appears to be a further commentary on 17:27–18:4. In official proceedings, whether they be court cases or community decisions, one obviously should not take the side of an evil person (v. 5). The odds of such happening are reduced by the fact that caustic and selfish people expose themselves by their words (vv. 6-7). On the other hand, many have a perverse attraction to malicious gossip (v. 8). This points to the need to be a judicious and thoughtful listener” (NAC). Verse 8 is repeated in 26:22.

### **38. Security (18:9-12)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC.... Several proverbs on personal security stand here together” (NAC).

### **39. Two Proverbs (18:13-14)**

TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERBS. “These two proverbs have no direct relationship to each other. Interestingly, however, v. 13 looks back to 17:27–18:4 while v. 14 repeats the sentiment of 17:22” (NAC). Proverbs 18:13 shows the importance of not being hasty or prejudiced in coming to conclusions—to wait until one has all the facts before making a judgment (see also verse 17).

“Verse 14 points out that one’s attitude, for good or ill, is the single most important factor in confronting adversity” (note on verses 13-14).

### **40. Just Problem Resolution (18:15-19)**

TYPE: THEMATIC.

Verse 16 shows that gifts open doors (compare 17:8; 19:6). This could be a model of propriety, yet it may also be something for jurists considering a dispute to be on guard against (compare 17:23).

Proverbs 18:17 adds to the wisdom of verse 13 in making the point that we must give all sides in a dispute a fair hearing.

In verse 18, disputes were sometimes settled through casting lots. In seemingly irresolvable disputes today people sometimes decide to “flip for it”—tossing a coin to determine an outcome through chance. Yet in ancient times, the casting of lots was often seen as an appeal not to blind chance but to divine judgment (16:33). Thus it was looked on as turning the matter over to God.

Proverbs 18:19 points out that reconciling with an offended brother, a close companion, is no easy matter—perhaps because of the level of perceived betrayal. Of course we should, if at all possible, avoid offense in the first place. But where offense has already occurred, we must be prepared for some great effort in restoring a positive relationship. This may also be a warning to jurists about the intractability of such disputes.

### **41. The Power of Words (18:20-21)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC, CATCHWORD” (NAC).

Verse 20 refers to productive speech benefiting its user. On the other hand, verse 21 warns that those who love to use the tongue will bear the result, whether good or ill. The key, then, is to speak carefully, as so many other proverbs show.

## **Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 18:22–20:4) December 27-28**

### **42. Diverse Teachings (18:22–20:4)**

“TYPE: THEMATIC, RANDOM REPETITION, INCLUSIO SERIES.... The verses of this text do not readily organize into small, discrete units. At the same time, this is not simply a jumbled collection of unrelated

proverbs. Within this section are many parallel or similar verses, and some of these serve as structural markers. Also, a number of proverbs are collected into groups that follow distinct themes, although the borders of these groups may not be clearly marked.

“First, 18:22 and 19:13-14, describing family life and repeating the assertion that a good wife is from the Lord, are an inclusio that marks off a section of verses. This does not mean that all intervening verses concern wife and family, but the opening and closing assertions that a good wife is a gift of Yahweh are significant.... Second, proverbs on laziness (19:15,24; 20:4) demarcate two further sections. Once again, this does not mean that the intervening proverbs concern laziness. In addition, two pairs of similar proverbs in chiasmic order [when taken together] on forbearance and a king’s wrath (19:11-12; 20:2-3) close off the major sections.

“Three sections that for the most part adhere to common themes occur within these three divisions. There are (1) the inequities and abandonment suffered by the poor (18:23–19:10), (2) the disciplined life (19:16-23), and (3) the mocker (19:25–20:1). Thus the structure of the whole is illustrated below.

“Section A (18:22–19:14)

“A good wife (18:22)

“1. The poor (18:23–19:10)

“(Patience and royal anger {19:11-12}) [a-b]

“A bad family/a good wife (19:13-14)

“Section B (19:15–20:4)

“Laziness (19:15)

“2. Personal discipline (19:16-23)

“Laziness (19:24)

“3. The mocker (19:25–20:1)

“(Royal anger and patience {20:2-3}) [b-a]

“Laziness (20:4)

“In addition, many verses closely parallel each other either within or between the sections. Close parallels include 19:1 and 19:22; 19:4 and 19:7a,b; 19:5 and 19:9; 19:8 and 19:16. Also 19:17, on kindness to the poor, appears to be a response to 18:23–19:10. These interrelationships among the verses have two functions. First, they help to tie the whole text together; and second, by randomly repeating certain points, they reinforce the lessons in the reader’s mind” (NAC).

Most scholars agree that the first colon of Proverbs 18:24 is mistranslated in the King James and New King James Versions. While it is true that a key to friendship is being friendly, this is evidently not what the proverb says. Indeed, how would this contrast with the loyalty of a true friend in the second colon? On the phrase “must himself be friendly,” the NKJV gives the following marginal note: “Masoretic Text reads *may come to ruin*.” Several modern translations render the verse accordingly. The New American Bible has “Some friends bring ruin upon us.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes on the phrase: “The Hebrew *lehith ro ‘ea* ‘ is difficult. It means ‘for being crushed’ or ‘to be shattered’ but not ‘to show oneself friendly’ (cf. KJV). The idea may be that there are friends to one’s undoing.... If a person has friends who are unreliable, he may still come to ruin, especially if these nominal friends use him. The second line is clearer: ‘there is a friend {’*oheb*} who sticks closer than a brother.’ This indeed is a rare treasure!” Indeed, Proverbs 19:4 highlights the fickle nature of fair-weather friends. And verse 7 shows that even brothers may abandon a person in adversity. Thus the need for a true, loyal friend who is closer than a brother. The epitome of such a friend is Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 19:2 says that uninformed rashness leads to error or sin.

Verses 5 and 9 about judgment on a false witness share the same first colon, while the second cola are similar (see also 21:28).

Verses 16-23 of Proverbs 19 “all revolve around the theme of the disciplined and prudent life” (NAC, note on verses 16-23). “This section has been structured as follows:

“A: Adherence to God’s way is life (19:16)

“B: Give to the poor (19:17)

“C: Discipline your son (19:18...)

“C’: Allow the intemperate to pay the price (19:19...)

“D: Submit to instruction (19:20...)

“D’: Acknowledge providence (19:21...)

“B’: Better poor but honest (19:22)

“A’: Fear of Yahweh (19:23)” (footnote on verses 16-23)

As noted earlier in regard to Proverbs 14:31, 19:17 says that how we treat others in need is essentially how we treat God (again, compare Matthew 25:31-46). And He will reward our kindness.

Proverbs 19:23 expresses the value of the “fear of the LORD,” on which all other instruction is to be based (1:7; 9:10). *The Nelson Study Bible* says the following about the word “fear” here: “(Heb[rew] *yir’ah*) (9:10; 16:6; 19:23) Strong’s #3374: This Hebrew word signifies awe in regarding what is unknown or potentially dangerous. Sometimes it refers to fear or terror inspired by danger or one’s enemies (Ps. 56:4). More often, it means ‘reverence,’ particularly for God (19:23). The use of this word does not imply that one needs to be afraid of God, but it does demand the appropriate recognition and respect for God’s fearsome qualities, such as His righteous wrath (see Ps 5:4-7). The fear of God—that is, the proper respect of God—compels us to abandon our evil ways (16:6) and teaches us wisdom (9:10). Perhaps somewhat ironically, fear of God leads to confidence in this life, for if we have submitted to the Almighty we do not have to fear any other power in this world...because the Almighty is our Protector (see 14:26, 27; Heb. 13:6)” (“WordFocus: Fear,” sidebar on Proverbs 19:23).

The verse here says that the person who fears God “will not be visited with evil.” Of course, Job feared God and was visited with evil, as Satan directly attacked him. So what are we to make of this? We should understand the proverb as a general principle over the course of life. Things generally go well for the people of God, but He at times allows major trials to come on them. Yet even in these circumstances, God only allows things to go so far with the intent of shaping and molding His people for an eternal place in His Kingdom. He never ceases to exercise care and protection. Moreover, visitation with evil or calamity here could imply being overthrown by catastrophic circumstances. And no matter what calamity befalls those who fear God, they will not be overcome by it but will persevere with God’s aid. He will cause it to work out for good in the long run (Romans 8:28).

As noted in our introduction to the book of Proverbs, chapter 20 contains some principles also found in the Egyptian “Instructions of Anii”—such as avoiding drunkenness and the company of brawlers. In its note on Proverbs 20:1, the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says that “those who overindulge become mockers and brawlers (see Hos 7:5...). Proverbs associates drunkenness with poverty (see 23:20-21...), strife (23:29-30) and injustice (31:4-5).”

## **Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 20:5–21:8) December 29-31**

### **43. Various Proverbs (20:5–21:8)**

“The proverbs of this section for the most part focus on the theme of discriminating between people of good character and people of evil character.... Verses 20:5 and 21:8 can be read as an envelope. The former articulates the importance of discernment in dealing with people.... The latter gives the simplest, most basic guideline in character discernment: the evil are twisted, but the good are upright. By itself 21:8 seems like a pointless tautology [i.e., a needless repetition]; but when read as the conclusion to the series of proverbs begun in 20:5, it is an apt closure to the whole. Like Jesus’ teaching that a tree is judged by its fruit, this text ends by saying that people can be evaluated by their conduct (Matt 7:17-19; 12:33; Luke 6:43-44). Several smaller collections are found in this larger unit....”

- “DISCERNMENT AND INTEGRITY. *Type: A-B Envelope, Thematic (20:5-12)*. This section begins by telling how difficult it is to discern a person’s inner [thoughts and] motives and ends by asserting that the ears and eyes, the means of discernment, are made by God. Thus God alone has perfect insight into human character, and he cannot be deceived” (*NAC*).

Verse 8 in the NKJV says that a king sitting as judge “scatters all evil with his eyes.” The NIV better renders this “winnows out all evil with his eyes.” Compare the first colon of verse 26: “A wise king sifts [or ‘winnows,’ NIV] out the wicked.” The New Living Translation paraphrases verse 8 this way: “When a king judges, he carefully weighs all the evidence, distinguishing the bad from the good.”

Verse 9 is a reminder that none of us are perfect, that we have all sinned and that, since we cannot cleanse our own hearts, all of us need mercy. This perspective will keep us humble in regard to our own character and is important to remember in making judgments about others.

As in 11:1, Proverbs 20:10 and verse 23 both show God's loathing of crooked weights and measures for the purpose of cheating others. There may also be a further figurative meaning here in that God hates any kind of self-serving false pretense.

- “VARIOUS PROVERBS [ON MORAL CHARACTER]. *Type: Individual Proverbs (20:13-21)*. Individual proverbs are various moral proverbs that of themselves do not tie to any particular topic. In this context, however, they may describe aspects of character for which one should be on the alert.... to determine where someone's character, be it his own or someone else's, will lead” (NAC).

Verse 13 does not mean that we should derive no enjoyment from taking a needed nap or getting a good night's sleep. Rather, loving sleep here refers to excess—sleeping too much as part of habitual laziness (compare 6:6-11). Avoiding the personal productivity necessary to making a living and properly managing one's affairs can lead to poverty. On a higher level, avoidance of spiritual responsibilities because of laziness and sleeping the day away will lead to spiritual impoverishment—and even ultimate destruction if not turned around.

Regarding Proverbs 20:16, the Israelites were not to hold overnight as collateral the outer garment of a debtor who might need it to keep warm (Exodus 22:25-27)—the law prohibiting creditor's from depriving poor debtors of their belongings needed for survival. In the ironic tone of this proverb, a situation is described in which a lender had better go ahead and hold a debtor's garment—where someone has foolishly “fallen into financial trouble by putting up security for a stranger—especially if he did it for an alluring woman. The message is that one should be wary of dealing with people who lack sound judgment” (*New American Commentary*, note on Proverbs 20:16). This proverb does not contravene the intent with which the law was given, as the law was not meant to protect foolish, impulsive venturers or schemers that might take advantage of lenders. Also the proverb says nothing about the predicament in which the loss of collateral would place the debtor in this case. All factors must be weighed in such dealings.

Verse 17 speaks of deceitful gain as initially sweet but afterward rather unpleasant and hard to swallow. “The Scriptures do not say that there is no pleasure in sinning, only that the reward doesn't last (9:17, 18)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 20:17). Hebrews 11:25 mentions the “passing pleasures of sin.” On the other hand, choosing God's way may sometimes be difficult and perhaps even unpleasant for the moment, but it yields lasting happiness in the end.

- “DEALING WITH THE KING AND WITH THE LORD. *Type: Thematic (20:22–21:3)*. These verses concern dealings with the two arbiters of justice, namely, the king and Yahweh. Proverbs 20:22-25,27 and 21:2-3 concern Yahweh, while 20:26,28,30 concerns the king. Proverbs 21:1 draws the two together and asserts the superior power of Yahweh over the king; only 20:29 does not clearly fit in this context” (NAC).

Verse 22 says that it is not our place to get even or dole out vigilante justice. *The Nelson Study Bible* comments: “Because of our limited understanding and imperfection, we are not qualified to *recompense evil*. Instead we must commit our cause to God, whose vengeance is certain and perfectly just. God says, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay’ (see Matt. 5:38, 39; Rom. 12:17, 19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9)” (note on Proverbs 20:22).

Verse 24 (like 16:9) shows that God is ultimately in control of directing what happens in a person's life. The second colon asks, “How then can a man understand his own way?” In an overall sense he can't—so he must rely on God and God's instructions for wisdom and direction. “The juxtaposition of human plans and intentions with God's sovereign action in human affairs is not meant to discourage planning or activity but rather to guide it. The wise do well to seek counsel about this plan (20:18), listening instead of making rash or hurtful statements (20:19-20)” (*NIV Application Commentary*, note on verse 24). Of course, in our planning we must make allowance for God unexpectedly redirecting circumstances (see James 4:13-16).

Proverbs 20:25 warns against rash vows, calling to mind the costly mistake of Jephthah (see Judges 11:30-40). If we do make a vow to God, even a rash one—that is, a legitimate vow that does not contradict His law in other respects—then we are duty-bound to follow through (compare also Ecclesiastes 5:1-7).

Proverbs 20:27 in the New King James Version says, “The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, / searching all the inner depths of his heart.” The ending phrase here, as the NKJV margin notes, is

“literally *the rooms of the belly*”—as either the figurative seat of human emotion or representing the inner, hidden person. The NIV here has “inmost being.” The same phrase is used in verse 30. On the opening colon of verse 27, the NIV rearranges the translation to another that is possible: “The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a man.” If this is correct, the Lord’s lamp here would connote “perhaps his eyes (cf. 5:21; 15:3...) or word (see 6:23 [Psalm 119:105]...cf. Heb 4:12-13)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Proverbs 20:27). On the other hand, *The Bible Reader’s Companion* says that the NKJV translation, as footnoted in the NIV, is the preferred rendering, so that the human spirit is God’s lamp: “The rabbis understood this to mean that God’s image so shines in the human spirit that man is set apart from the animals. It’s this reflection of God which endows us with human abilities and witnesses to His existence through each of our unique capacities” (note on verse 27). Or perhaps the meaning is simply that God is able to look into the human spirit which, though dark and mysterious to human beings, is as bright as a lamp to God—revealing everything about the person.

Proverbs 21:1 shows God’s sovereignty even over rulers. The river illustration is not entirely clear. Some suggest the following meaning: that just as people sometimes redirect rivers through dams and irrigation canals, so can God redirect the thoughts and actions of kings to accomplish His purposes. Of course the latter is not so difficult for God as the former is for human beings. Another possible meaning is that just as God had the power to lay out the courses of all the world’s rivers, so He is easily able to direct the course of a king.

- “THE DEVICES AND THE DECLINE OF THE WICKED. *Type: Thematic (21:4-8)*. These five verses focus upon the losses incurred by those who live wrongfully” (*NAC*).

The Jewish *Soncino Commentary* regards the plowing of the wicked in verse 4 metaphorically as their schemings.

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