EXPOSITION OF PROVERBS

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by

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Canonical Context

All 66 inspired books of the Protestant canon relate to the progressively revealed Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible, but not in the same way. Each book either *carries* the metanarrative,[1] *contributes* to it but does not carry it,[2] or *contemplates* the metanarrative.[3] A book's placement into one of these three categories does not necessarily depend on genre, even though a correlation frequently exists. Rather, a book's categorization depends on its contents and its relationship to other books.[4]

In the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of Scripture, the following compose the major elements of the story:

Table 1: Elements of the Metanarrative of Scripture

Setting:	Heaven and earth	Gen 1–2
Hero:	God the Father	Gen 1–2
Hero's desire:	Image bearers to rule the earth	Gen 1:26–28
Problem:	Image bearers gave their rule to the serpent	Gen 3
Solution (the plot):	Promise seed will strike the serpent and restore rule to image bearers	Gen 3:15–Rev 19
Turning point:	The Cross	Gospels
Climax:	The Great Tribulation	Rev 6–19
Resolution / denouement:	Image bearers again rule the earth	Rev 20–22

[1] The carrier category refers to biblical books that carry the primary plotline of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Many books of historical narrative and certain parts of prophetic books fall into this category because they carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative. Such books describe the outworking of the promise in Genesis 3:15–16.

[2] The contributor category refers to biblical books that contribute to, but do not carry, the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Most prophetic books and certain parts of the NT epistles fall into this category because while they do not carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative, they contribute important (often prophetic) information about that metanarrative. Additionally, certain historical narratives run in parallel to one another (e.g., Kings and Chronicles, the four Gospels). In these cases, 1–2 Kings function as the carrier and 1–2 Chronicles as the contributor. Among the Gospels, Matthew functions as the carrier and the other three as contributors.

[3] The contemplator category refers to biblical books that neither carry nor contribute to the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Rather, these books reflect upon (contemplate) the realities of that narrative. Books of wisdom, poetry, and most NT epistles fall into this category, because in light of the Genesis 3:15 promised seed having come, they address how the people of God should live until he returns to establish his kingdom.

[4] For this reason, certain biblical books fit into more than one of these three categories.

As shown in Table 1, the Bible as a whole presents God as the hero of the story who desires his image bearers to rule the world on his behalf. This metanarrative begins in the book of Genesis and concludes in the book of Revelation. Genesis presents the setting,[5] the characters,[6] the plot problem,[7] and the beginning of the rising action. The problem identified in Genesis 3 did not change God's desire for his image bearers to rule the world. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15–16 indicates a war between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. This battle is the central conflict in the entire biblical narrative; a conflict not resolved until Revelation 20. In this prophecy, God promised the seed of the woman—a man—would defeat the serpent, restore humanity to the garden, and restore rule of the earth to God's image bearers. The anticipation of this promised seed drives the plot of the biblical narrative. The entire plot of the metanarrative thus revolves around how Genesis 3:15–16 comes to fruition. This prophecy reaches the first phase of its fulfillment in Revelation 20 in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, and its final phase of fulfillment in Revelation 21–22 in the new heaven and earth.

Whereas Deuteronomy 16–18 delineates the roles of judges, kings, priests, and prophets, so-called "Deuteronomic history" plays out in Joshua–2 Kings as the judges, kings, priests, and prophets fail to produce covenant faithfulness in the "holy nation" of "royal priests." Just as post-flood humanity had descended into rebellion at the tower of Babylon (Gen 11), the failure of these offices results in the chosen nation's exile east into the new Babylon, echoing the exile east of the garden. As the metanarrative progresses through the story's carriers (Genesis–Kings in the OT), Yahweh elected the nation Israel to be his inheritance (Deut 32:9) and to function as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). The Gentile nations, by contrast, Yahweh gave to the "sons of God" (Deut 32:8), a reference to the fallen angels. The Pentateuch therefore identified the Gentiles as serpent-seed nations—those who rule the earth with the serpent (Gen 4:7). The Mosaic Covenant (i.e., the Law, the Torah) governed the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Accordingly, Israel's obedience would bring covenant blessings, while infidelity would result in covenant curses (see Deut 28; also Lev 26).

Proverbs neither carries the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative nor contributes prophetic information to it. However, the authors and compiler(s) of the book of Proverbs wrote the entire work *in light of* the Mosaic Law, and especially Deuteronomy. This paper will detail many of the connections between Proverbs and Deuteronomy. Just as Moses exhorted the importance of passing on godly instruction to subsequent generations (e.g., Deut 6:2, 7), the Proverbs were written and compiled for the same purpose of transmitting wisdom, instruction, insight, understanding, and the fear of Yahweh to the next generation of young Israelite men (1:2–7). Proverbs therefore functions entirely as a *contemplator* of the biblical metanarrative. In light of the Mosaic Law and in light of the Israelites' place in the metanarrative, the compiler(s) sought to transfer to the young Israelite men the wisdom, instruction, insight, and understanding of Yahweh so that they would fear Yahweh and live righteously.

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[5] Heaven and earth, Genesis 1–2.

[6] God, the hero of the story; mankind, the object of God's desire; and the antagonist, the serpent.

[7] Despite God's desire for mankind to rule the earth on his behalf, the man and woman gave their rule over to the serpent (Gen 3).

Occasion

Who and When?

The book of Proverbs owes its composition to at least three authors: Solomon the son of David and king of Israel (1:1; 10:1; 25:1), Agur the son of Jakeh (30:1), and "Lemuel, a king" (31:1). Suggestions that דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים "the words of the wise" (22:17) constitutes a group of scholarly scribes and thus a separate authorship group,[8] are perhaps overstated because those words are followed by, "you shall apply your heart to *my* knowledge (italics added)" לְדַעָתִי, where the possessive pronoun is singular. Thus, the section readily becomes admissible as Solomon's words which continue to exhort his son(s) to listen to his knowledge, otherwise known as "the words of the wise." The phrase does not require a separate author or group of authors.

The text also notes that some of Hezekiah's men copied Solomon's proverbs (25:1). Hezekiah ruled ca. 716–687 BC, making this timeframe the earliest possible dating of the book in its final form. If Hezekiah's men didn't compile the final form of the text, then there is no other indication regarding date or source of compilation. King Agur and Lemuel are names otherwise unattested in Scripture, and therefore undatable. Efforts to date the text more precisely are not textually founded.

Thus, Solomon composed the majority of the proverbs. Agur and Lemuel also contributed briefer portions. Perhaps some other unknown authors contributed portions of the text. Some of Hezekiah's men copied proverbs previously written by Solomon ca. 700 BC, and it's unclear if the final composition of the text occurred in Hezekiah's time or thereafter.

To Whom?

The address, בְּנִי, "my son" occurs some 22 times in the text of Proverbs (e.g., 1:8, 10, 15, etc.), as does the vocative בָּנִים, "O sons," four times (4:1; 5:7; 7:24; 8:32). These are especially prevalent in the Solomonic portions of Proverbs, suggesting that Solomon originally wrote many proverbs to teach his son (or sons) wisdom. However, the final form of the text was composed much later than Solomon's lifetime, and aside from young Israelite males, there is no obvious indication of the compiler's intended audience. As some scholars have noted, the apparent social situations envisioned in the Proverbs assumed a fairly elite, although young, male audience. Harrison summarizes:

> That such instruction was intended for a rather restricted section of the adolescent male population seems evident from the contents of Proverbs. The teachings of the book were not intended for the edification of young women, and certainly not for young children if the caution against the adulterous woman is any criterion. The concern of the book is predominantly with the youths of the upper classes, since they alone would be most likely to be able to afford the kind of excesses described in Proverbs.[9]

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[8] See, for example, Tremper Longman III, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 267.

[9] R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 1012.

While not precluding the instructive value of Proverbs for women, and in some cases, for children, this paper does recognize that the compilers probably intended the final form of the book for primarily young Israelite men. This much is apparent from the repeated addresses to a "son" or "sons" of the writer(s), as well as the identification of the simple (פֶּתִי) and the youth (נַעַר) as the intended recipients of the wisdom contained therein (1:4). Of the imperative verbs in Proverbs, 119 are singular and just 20 are plural. All are masculine. The training of a righteous generation of Israelites was apparently intended to occur one young man at a time. Thus, the book of Proverbs was written / compiled for the purpose of transmitting wisdom, instruction, insight, understanding, and the fear of Yahweh to the next generation of young Israelite men (1:2–7).[10] In this way, the book fundamentally aligns with the deuteronomic exhortation to pass on godly instruction to subsequent generations of sons and grandsons (e.g., Deut 6:2, 7).

Where?

The text does not indicate the location of composition. We may reasonably (although not conclusively) assume that Solomon wrote from Jerusalem. As Agur and Lemuel are otherwise unattested in the Bible, and no hint of their location is provided in the text, their locations cannot be ascertained. As for the final compilation of the work, the text does not provide any indication of the date, location, or identity of the compilers. However, as with much of OT literature, a location of Jerusalem is not an unreasonable supposition, but cannot be validated with certainty.

Why?

The book of Proverbs exists within the context of Israel's Mosaic Law (the Torah), and not independent of it. Connections between Proverbs and especially Deuteronomy are abundant, as observed by Friedrich and Delitzsch:

> Who does not hear, to mention only one thing, in 1:7–9:18 an echo of the old שׁמע (hear), Deut. 6:4–9, cf. 11:18–21? The whole poetry of this writer savors of the Book of Deuteronomy. The admonitory addresses 1:7–9:18 are to the Book of Proverbs what Deuteronomy is to the Pentateuch. As Deuteronomy seeks to bring home and seal upon the heart of the people the תּוֹרָה of the Mosaic law, so do they the תּוֹרָה of the Solomonic proverbs.[11]

Many of the individual proverbs relate to Deuteronomy in that they promote the righteousness required by the Law by stipulating the same requirements for righteousness. A few brief examples suffice to make this point:

- Just treatment of the poor (14:31; 22:22–23; see Deut 24:17–18).

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[10] In a patriarchal society, the values of a godly man would be passed on to his wife and children. In this way, Proverbs does not devalue or ignore those other roles, but assumes that the wisdom gained by the man is lived out and taught in his family relationships.

[11] Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996; originally published 1866–91), 25.

- False weights and measures are an abomination (11:1; 16:11; 20:23; see Deut 25:13–16).
- Injunctions against moving boundary markers (22:28; 23:10; see Deut 19:14).
- The requirement of having credible and truthful witnesses (14:25; 19:28; see Deut 19:15–20).
- Prohibitions against bribes (15:27; 17:23; see Deut 16:19; 27:25).
- Warnings against adultery (6:25–35; see Deut 5:18, 21).[12]

While not every individual proverb would find a one-to-one mapping back to Deuteronomy or the Torah, the echoes and similarities are quite evident. Deuteronomy 6 also finds numerous clear parallels to Proverbs, as demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Echoes of Deuteronomy 6 in Proverbs[13]

Deuteronomy	**Proverbs**			
And these words that I am **commanding** you today shall be **on your heart** (6:6)	My son, **do not forget** my instruction, and may **your heart guard my commands** (3:1)	My son, may they **not escape** from your sight; may you keep sound wisdom and prudence (3:21)	My son, **keep the commandment** of your father, and **do not disregard** the instruction of your mother (6:20)	My son, **guard** my sayings; **store** my **commandments** with you. **Keep** my **commands** and live, and my teaching like the apple of your eye (7:1–2)
And you shall recite them to your children, and you shall talk about them at the time of your living in your house and at the time of your **walking** on the road and at the time of your lying down and at the time of your rising up. (6:7)	For length of days, years of life, and peace they shall add to you (3:2)	Then you will **walk** in the confidence of your ways, and your foot will not stumble. If you **sit down**, you will not panic, and if you **lie down**, then your sleep shall be sweet (3:23–24)	When you **walk**, she will lead you, When you **lie down**, she will watch over you, and when you awake, she will converse with you. For like a lamp is a commandment, and instruction is light, and the way of life is the reproof of discipline (6:22–23)	

[12] See also Bernd U. Schipper, "'Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!': The Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy," in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes (London: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 21–34.

[13] Table adapted from Gary E. Schnittjer, *Torah Story: An Apprenticeship on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 418. Biblical text based on the Lexham English Bible (LEB).

And you shall **bind them** as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as an emblem between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorframe of your house and on your gates. (6:8–9)	May loyal love and truth not forsake you; **bind them** around your neck, write them upon your heart (3:3)	They shall be life for your soul and adornment for your neck (3:22)	**Bind them** on your heart continually; tie them upon your neck (6:21)	**Bind them** on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart (7:3)

Thus, four times in Proverbs (3:1–3, 21–24; 6:20–23; 7:1–3) there are conceptual—and not infrequently, lexical—connections to Deuteronomy 6. In the Torah, obedience to the Law was life and blessing while disobedience was cursing and death for the Israelites (e.g., Deut 30:15–20). Grasping hold of wisdom in the Proverbs also leads to life and blessing, while walking in the way of folly leads to death.[14] Thus, like the Torah, Proverbs was intended to provide instruction in wise and righteous living. Also like the Torah, the Proverbs emphasized the transmitting of righteousness from one generation to the next. The section above "To Whom?" identified young Israelite men as the primary intended audience of Proverbs. The compilers of the book of Proverbs thus sought to transfer to them the wisdom, instruction, insight, and understanding of Yahweh so that the young Israelite men would fear Yahweh and live righteously.

Genre

The book of Proverbs is classified as wisdom literature.

Proposed Message Statement

In order to address the need to train each successive generation of young Israelite men in the wisdom and instruction of Yahweh, an anonymous Jewish compiler at an unknown time (earliest ca. 700 BC) and possibly in Jerusalem, compiled a book of proverbial wisdom from at least three previous sources for an audience of young Israelite men in order to transmit to them the wisdom, instruction, insight, and understanding of Yahweh so that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

[14] See especially connections like this: "Keep my commands and live" (Prov 7:2) as compared to, "See, I am setting before you today life and prosperity … what I am commanding you today is to love Yahweh your God by going in his ways and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his regulations, and then you will live" (Deut 30:15–16).

Use of Rhetoric in Proverbs

Classical rhetoric employs three modes and three species of rhetoric. The three modes of rhetoric include *logos*,[15] *pathos*,[16] and *ethos*.[17] The three species include judicial,[18] epideictic,[19] and deliberative[20] rhetoric.[21] The book of Proverbs employs all three modes of rhetoric for an overall deliberative purpose. As the author lays out before his audience the path of wisdom and the path of folly, his description of the advantages and disadvantages of each constitute logical and emotional appeals in an effort to persuade the audience to pursue the path of wisdom. The superior outcomes of the path of wisdom form a logical appeal to pursue it (*logos*), and the fearsome consequences of the path of folly constitute an emotional appeal to avoid it (*pathos*). Ethically, the author appealed to the Solomonic reputation for great wisdom, and also the personification of "Wisdom" preceding creation, being used by God at creation, and being used by kings to rule. Such appeals bolster the credibility of "Wisdom" and increase the receptivity of the book (*ethos*). All three of these elements contribute to the author's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men reading Proverbs would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

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[15] The rhetoric of *logos* employs logical arguments intended to appeal to rational principles found within the author's discourse.

[16] The rhetoric of *pathos* employs arguments intended to arouse an emotional reaction and play upon the audience's feelings.

[17] The rhetoric of *ethos* makes ethical appeals on the basis of credibility: good character or authority.

[18] With judicial rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events that occurred in the past. This judgment often deals with questions of truth or justice, and can be positive (a defense or "apology" of correctness / innocence) or negative (a prosecution, emphasizing guilt).

[19] With epideictic rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade his audience to hold or reaffirm a certain point of view in the present time. The author wants to increase (or decrease / undermine) his audience's asset to a certain value or belief. To this end, epideictic rhetoric will frequently use examples of *praise* and *blame*.

[20] With deliberative rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to take (or not take) some action in the (often near) future. Deliberative rhetoric deals with questions of self-interest and future benefits for the audience, and appears in the form of exhortation (positive) or warning (negative).

[21] For a complete discussion of classical rhetoric in biblical studies, see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Proposed Outline

Because the book of Proverbs is not necessarily organized thematically but rather contains miscellaneous proverbs absent of broad structural or thematic indicators, this outline primarily reflects apparent authorship.

I. Solomon's introduction (1:1–7)
II. Solomon's first discourse (1:8–9:18)
III. Solomon's second discourse (10:1–24:34)
IV. Solomon's third discourse, copied by Hezekiah's men (25:1–29:27)
V. Words of Agur (30:1–33)
VI. Words of Lemuel (31:1–31)

Proposed Argument Exposition

Solomon's introduction (1:1–7) established the authorship and purpose of the upcoming sapiential sayings. The identification of Solomon the son of David and the king of Israel (1:1) establishes the credibility of the authorial source (*ethos*), as Solomon was renowned for both his wisdom and his building of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. The introduction also identified the purpose of the proverbs: to impart wisdom (חָכְמָה), insightful instruction (מוּסָר), understanding (בִּינָה), righteousness (צֶדֶק), justice (מִשְׁפָּט), and integrity (מֵישָׁרִים), prudence (עָרְמָה), knowledge (דַּעַת), and discretion (מְזִמָּה) (1:2–4).[22] The intended audience is identified as the "simple" (פֶּתִי) and the young (נַעַר) (1:4). But through the hearing (1:5) and understanding of proverbs and words of wisdom (1:6), the young and simple can increase their learning and gain direction (1:5). Since these things are beneficial, it is logical that one should seek them (*logos*). That the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, wisdom, and instruction (1:7) is central to the book of Proverbs. The "fear of Yahweh" is a term akin to faith / trust / belief in Yahweh. In other words, one who fears Yahweh is a "believer." Since the knowledge, wisdom, and instruction in Proverbs is impossible apart from those who believe, the introduction impels its young male audience to fear Yahweh. The alternative is to be a fool (אֱוִיל) (1:7). The Proverbs will trace out the paths, desires, advantages, and disadvantages of both wisdom and folly. The Proverbs desire to take the young and simple men of Israel and convince them that the wise path should be followed and the foolish path should be avoided.

Thus, the introduction (1:1–7) constitutes two opening appeals to heed the proverbs: (1) Solomon's reputation as a sage (*ethos*), and (2) the benefits of wisdom, insight, knowledge, etc. (*logos*). It also established the fear of Yahweh as the central dividing point between the wise and the foolish, preparing the audience for the upcoming section which will explain the path of wisdom and the path of folly. In these ways, the introduction contributed to the compiler's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

Solomon's first discourse (1:8–9:18) established several realities for which the young male audience must deal. First, the young men would be showered with various voices, all offering suggestions on how to live and all promoting the benefits of a certain way of life. The

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[22] Or: a "plan." *HALOT*, s.v., מְזִמָּה.

author intended the audience to hear and follow the wise voices promoting the path of wisdom and discard the advice of the foolish ones promoting the path of folly. Second, each pathway came with associated advantages and disadvantages. By identifying the consequences / outcomes of each pathway (wisdom and folly), the author sought to persuade the audience toward the path of wisdom. Each pathway had its promoters, and the young men would need wisdom to navigate the voices seeking their attention. Logically, the path of wisdom led to superior outcomes, so they should pursue wisdom and listen to the voices promoting it, instead of folly and the voices promoting that path (*logos*). The negative consequences of the path of folly also constitute an emotional appeal to avoid that path: the terrifying results would elicit a fearful emotional response to the thought of going down that road (*pathos*).

First, the young Israelite male audience would be exposed to various voices. The father (1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1–5, 10–11, 20–21; 5:1, 7; 6:20; 7:1–2, 24), mother (1:8; 6:20), the teachers and instructors (5:13), "wisdom" (1:20–21; 3:21; 4:6–9; 7:4; 8:1–36; 9:1–6), "insight" (7:4), and "understanding" (8:1) constitute the positive voices promoting the path of wisdom.[23] On the other hand, the path of folly was promoted by sinners (1:10), murderers (1:16; 6:17), scoffers (1:22), the violent (3:31), the evildoer (4:14; 5:22; 6:12, 18), the wicked (4:14), stubborn fools (3:35), the proud (6:17), the liar (6:18–19), the foreign woman (2:16; 5:3), the evil woman (6:24), the adulteress (6:24; 7:5, 10–21), the prostitute (6:26), the foolish woman (9:13–17), those with deceitful speech (6:12, 17), those who refuse to fear Yahweh (1:29), forsake the paths of uprightness and walk in darkness (2:13), rejoice and delight in doing evil (2:14), are crooked and devious in their ways (2:15), and those who devise evil and are perverted in their hearts (6:14). Each voice promoted its benefits, and sometimes the voices would sound the same: "Whoever is simple, let him turn here!" is uttered by both Lady Wisdom (9:4) and the foolish woman (9:16).

Second, the young Israelite male audience needed to know the advantages and disadvantages of each path. The way of wisdom included the following:

Advantages of the path of wisdom:

- Spirit of wisdom may be poured out on one who listens (1:23)
- Will dwell and rest securely from dread and disaster (1:33)
- Understanding of the fear of Yahweh (2:5)
- Knowledge of God (2:5)
- Wisdom of Yahweh (2:6)
- Yahweh stores sound judgment and protection for the upright (2:7)
- Understanding of righteousness, justice, and uprightness (2:9)
- Knowledge and wisdom in the heart (2:10)
- Protection (2:11)
- Deliverance from the path of evil (2:12)
- Will dwell in the land / earth (2:21)
- Length of days / long life (3:2, 16; 4:10; 9:11)
- Life (4:22; 8:35; 9:6)
- Peace (3:2)

[23] "Wisdom," "Insight," and "Understanding" are of course personifications.

- Favor and good understanding with God and men (3:4)
- Straight paths (3:6)
- Healing and refreshment for the body (3:8; 4:22)
- Abundance in barns and vats (3:10)
- Receives the (beneficial) discipline of Yahweh (3:11–12)
- Blessing / happiness (3:13, 16; 8:32, 34)
- Riches (3:16)
- Honor / exaltation (3:16; 4:8–9)
- A confident walk (3:23)
- Lack of panic (3:24)
- Sweet sleep (3:24)
- Yahweh is his confidence against a storm of wickedness (3:25–26)
- Yahweh's blessing on the house of the righteous (3:33)
- Yahweh gives grace (3:34)
- Inherit the honor of the wise (3:35)
- The protection of wisdom (4:6; 6:22)
- A blessed relationship with one's wife (5:18–19)
- Wisdom speaks truth and righteousness (8:7–8)
- Wisdom and knowledge better than riches (8:10–11, 19)
- Fortune, glory, enduring wealth, and righteousness (8:18)
- Wealth and full treasuries (8:21)
- Obtaining Yahweh's favor (8:35)

As noted above, the Proverbs were written to Israelite men and within the context of the Mosaic Law. Promises for long life, health, and material abundance (e.g., 3:2, 8–10; 8:21) are included in the Proverbs because obedience to the Torah resulted in physical and material covenant blessings (e.g., Deut 28). Such promises should not be misunderstood as universal promises of prosperity for (1) non-Israelites, (2) those living outside the land of Israel, and (3) those not under the Mosaic Covenant.[24]

Disadvantages of the path of wisdom:

- Missing out on the sensual pleasures of love (6:13–18)[25]
- Turning down the immediate gratification of the adulteress (6:24–26)
- Abuse for correcting a scoffer (9:7)
- Injury for rebuking the wicked (9:7)
- Hatred for rebuking a scoffer (9:8)

Thus, the path of wisdom had both advantages and disadvantages. On the other hand, the path of folly also had its advantages and disadvantages:

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[24] That is, the promises only pertained to Israelites in the Promised Land under the Mosaic Covenant. During the church age, no one falls into all three of these categories.

[25] Although, these may be enjoyed with the wife of one's youth (5:18–19).

Advantages of the path of folly:

- Wealth and booty (1:11–14)
- Flattery from the strange woman (2:16)
- Smooth sounding words from the strange woman (5:3; 7:5)
- The smooth tongue of the adulteress (6:24)
- The beauty of the adulteress (6:25)
- The allure of the adulteress' eyes (6:25)
- The sensual pleasures of love (6:13–18)

Disadvantages of the path of folly:

- Death (1:18, 32; 2:18, 19; 5:5, 23; 7:22–23, 26–27; 8:36; 9:18)
- Mocked by Wisdom when panic and calamity arrive (1:26–27)
- There is a point of no return where Wisdom is no longer available (1:28)
- Cut off and uprooted from the land / earth (2:22)
- The curse of Yahweh is on the house of the wicked (3:33)
- Yahweh's scorn (3:34)
- Inherit disgrace (3:35)
- Unable to sleep until they commit evil (4:16)
- Wickedness and violence become their food (4:16–17)
- On a path of deep darkness (4:19)
- Stumbling is inevitable (4:19)
- A bitter end (5:4)
- One's honor given to others (5:9)
- One's life given to the merciless (5:9)
- Strangers sap one's strength (5:10)
- One's laborious efforts go to a foreigner (5:10)
- Ensnared in one's iniquities (5:22)
- Captured in the futility of one's sin (5:22)
- Lost in the greatness of his folly (5:23)
- Ensnared by one's own mouth (6:1–2)
- Poverty and lack (6:11)
- Sudden calamity (6:15)
- Hunted by the prostitute (6:26)
- Metaphorical "burning" (6:27–28)
- Destruction (6:32)
- Wounds (6:33; 8:36)
- Unending disgrace (6:33)
- Dishonor (6:33)

Many of the disadvantages of the path of folly are opposite to the advantages of the path of wisdom (e.g., life vs. death, honor vs. dishonor, poverty vs. wealth, protection vs. calamity, etc.). The author intended the young men of Israel to see the obvious differences in outcomes between the path of wisdom and the path of folly. Based on the superior outcomes and benefits of the path of wisdom, the author presented a logical case for that path (*logos*). The disadvantages of the

path of wisdom presented a fearsome picture of the results of that path, thus generating a fearful emotional response for the consequences of that path (*pathos*). Furthermore, kings ruled by wisdom (8:15–16), wisdom preceded creation (8:22–29), and by wisdom Yahweh created the world (8:30–31). This effectively constitutes an ethical argument on behalf of personified "Wisdom" in order to establish its credibility (*ethos*), and thus a reason why the young men should heed wisdom.

Thus, the first discourse (1:8–9:18) established the foundation of the book of Proverbs. The (likely adolescent) men of Israel to whom the book was written were young (1:4; 7:7) and simple (1:4, 22, 32; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 16). During the course of their lives, they would hear appeals from various voices. Some voices promoted the path of wisdom, and others, the path of folly. The path of wisdom led to life, blessing, and honor (among other benefits), while the path of folly led to death, destruction, and disgrace. But the simple young men would need to fear Yahweh (1:7; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10) as the foundation of wisdom in order to rightly discern and heed the voices, for the voices of each path promoted the advantages of that path. The simple could easily be led astray to their own destruction, as per the story of the simpleton and the adulteress (7:7–23). To grow in wisdom, understanding, and insight, the simple young men would need to heed the proper voices and act justly in various aspects of life, and especially in the realm of their intimate interactions with women. Logically, the superior outcomes lay with the path of wisdom, so they should pursue that path (*logos*). Emotionally, the fearful negative consequences of the path of folly provided an incentive to avoid the path of folly (*pathos*). Ethically, "Wisdom" constitutes all that is just, right, and beautiful, and is used by kings and by God himself (*ethos*). In these ways, the first discourse contributed to the compiler's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

Unlike the first discourse which has a fairly structured flow, **Solomon's second discourse (10:1–24:34)** contains proverbs which seemingly lack arrangement or structure. "The differences between Prov 1–9 and 10–29 have attracted much attention. The former is a presentation of lengthy, well-crafted discourses, whereas the latter is a collection of pithy sayings seemingly without editorial arrangement."[26] Much like life itself, the proverbs of this section appear in a haphazard order, and each proverb may be rightly interpreted independently, although some discernable units do contain linked proverbs. At least five kinds of proverb collections have been identified and defined: parallel collections (A-B-A-B) (e.g., 11:16–17), chiastic collections (A-B-B-A) (e.g., 18:6–7), catchword collections (e.g., 15:15–17), thematic collections (e.g., 10:31–32), and inclusio collections (e.g., 11:23–27).[27] Furthermore, the somewhat random structure actually serves a didactic purpose. As the reader proceeds through these proverbs, similarly themed proverbs appear multiple times amidst other topics. This mental stimulus results in a greater reflection upon them than if all similarly-themed proverbs were grouped together.[28] Additionally, the author of Proverbs employed literary and rhetorical devices

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[26] Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 39.

[27] For detailed definitions of these kinds of collections, see Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 46–48.

[28] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 48.

such as alliteration, paronomasia, assonance, simile, rhyme, metaphor, humor, irony, comparison, contrast, paradox, unexpected reversal, and a play on the absurd.[29] All of these devices function to make the proverbs memorable and impactful.

Commentaries frequently create a new division in Proverbs at 22:17. Suggestions that דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים "the words of the wise" (22:17) constitutes a group of scholarly scribes and thus a separate authorship group,[30] are perhaps overstated. Those words are immediately followed by, "You shall apply your heart to *my* knowledge (italics added)" לְדַעָתִי, where the possessive pronoun is singular. Thus, the section readily becomes admissible as Solomon's words which continue to exhort his son(s) to listen to his knowledge, otherwise known as "the words of the wise." The phrase does not therefore require a separate author or group of authors. For this reason, this paper considers 10:1–24:34 as one unit of text with originally Solomonic authorship. in this paper.

In any case, the miscellaneous arrangements of proverbs in this second discourse continue to portray and contrast the path of wisdom and the path of folly. Much like the first discourse, the proverbs reveal the benefits of walking on the path of wisdom and the terrifying consequences of following the path of folly. Also like the first discourse, these elements function to drive the young Israelite male audience toward the path of wisdom and righteous living through both logical and emotional appeals (*logos* and *pathos*). In these ways, the second discourse contributed to the compiler's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

Solomon's third discourse, copied by Hezekiah's men (25:1–29:27), continues the Solomonic proverbs begun in ch. 1 but notes that they were copied (עתק) by Hezekiah's men (25:1). The fact that Hezekiah's men copied Solomon's proverbs some three centuries after his life shows the enduring quality and value of the ancient wisdom contained therein. This itself constitutes an ethical appeal for why the audience should heed these proverbs (*ethos*). The characteristics of this third discourse are much like the second, and one may refer to the notes of that discourse for an articulation of the techniques used. In summary, however, the proverbs of Solomon continue to display for the audience the differences between the path of wisdom and the path of folly. As always, the intention was to drive the young Israelite men toward the path of wisdom by showing its superior outcomes (*logos*) and by showing the damaging consequences of the path of folly (*pathos*). In these ways, the second discourse contributed to the compiler's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

The **words of Agur (30:1–33)** continue to uphold the virtues of the path of wisdom and the vices of the path of folly. While it is not apparent in the text itself, perhaps the words of Agur (ch. 30) and Lemuel (ch. 31) were added to the Solomonic corpus of proverbs not only for their wisdom content, but also for variety of authorship. Lest someone doubt the validity of Solomon's proverbs on the basis of his authorship due to his corrupt lifestyle—no shortage of which happens even today—two other voices aligning with Solomon's are included in the final composition of the text. Again, this is less of a textual conclusion and more of a rational and

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[29] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 38–39.

[30] See, for example, Tremper Longman III, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 267.

reasonable one. It is purely a matter of speculation whether the original audience knew who Agur or Lemuel were. In any case, if correct, the inclusion of Agur's words in the book of Proverbs at least partially constitutes an ethical argument (*ethos*) for why the audience should heed the book as a whole. Agur's proverbs align with Solomon's in that they promote the humility before God required to walk on path of wisdom (e.g., 30:2–9), and they point to the necessity of listening to the right (wise) voices rather than trusting in themselves (30:11–12). Using fundamentally the same rhetorical methods as Solomon's proverbs, Agur pointed to the advantages of the path of wisdom (*logos*) and the dire fate of those on the path of folly (*pathos*). Thus, the application of ethical, logical, and emotional appeals in Agur's words contribute to the author's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

The **words of Lemuel (31:1–31)** conclude the book of Proverbs. As with Agur, the biblical and historical record of Lemuel remains silent. Where and when he reigned remains a mystery. His words contribute to discernment regarding the path of wisdom and the path of folly. Among rulers, wine and women (of the wrong type) lead to folly (31:2–9). On the other hand, while a worthy wife (אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל) is difficult to find (31:10), her value to a husband is vast (31:11–31). Like the beginning of wisdom (1:7), the worthy woman will fear Yahweh (31:30). The Proverbs had already provided sufficient warning to its young male audience regarding the foreign woman (2:16; 5:3), the evil woman (6:24), the adulteress (6:24; 7:5, 10–21), the prostitute (6:26), and the foolish woman (9:13–17). But the corpus of the Proverbs also concluded with kind of woman the young men should seek—one who fears Yahweh because she will bring blessing to her husband and household. The author hoped that between the early chapters of Proverbs where the allure of the beautiful and sensual adulteress captured the simple youth and led him to the slaughter (7:7–23), the young male audience would have absorbed sufficient wisdom, knowledge, insight, and understanding to recognize that the true value of a wife was not her charm and beauty (31:30), but her godly character (31:10–31). The positive allure of the worthy wife is based on both logical and emotional appeals (*logos* and *pathos*), and the seeking of a worthy wife constituted a major element for young Israelite men on the path of wisdom. In this way, the words of Lemuel contributed to the author's overall deliberative purpose that the young Israelite men would walk on the path of wisdom by fearing Yahweh and living righteously.

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