

## Proverbs 1-9 As A Solomonic Composition

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### I. Introduction

The book of Proverbs is one of only two OT books that are self-admittedly of composite authorship (the other is Psalms). The book contains notices of authorship at 1:1, 10:1, 22:17, 24:23, 25:1, 30:1, and 31:1. In addition, most scholars consider the acrostic poem that concludes the book (31:10–31) a separate composition whose author is not mentioned. If one takes the book's notices at face value, the book divides into eight sections:

Table 1.

Section	Author
1:1–9:18	Solomon
10:1–22:16	Solomon
22:17–24:22	Wise Men
24:23–34	Wise Men
25:1–29:26	Solomon (as copied by Hezekiah's men)
30:1–33	Agur, son of Jakeh
1:1–9	Lemuel (or his mother)
31:10–31	unknown

Some of these attributions of authorship have been challenged, not only by critical scholars, but even by more conservative, evangelical scholars.<sup>1</sup> The rejection of the book's apparent notices of authorship is especially true of the first section of the book (1–9). It contains lengthy discourses rather than the short sayings that characterize the other two sections attributed to Solomon (10:1–22:16 and 25–29).

Though admitting some conceptual connections between chapters 1–9 and the two other sections attributed to Solomon, critical scholars uniformly

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (TOTC 15; Leicester: Inter-varsity, 1964), especially p. 22. See the discussion in R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 86-87. One example is the latter part of chapter 30 (usually vv. 114). Some view this as written by someone other than Agur. The reason for the division after v. 14 is twofold: unlike vv. 1-14, vv. 15-33 are primarily numerical sayings; in the Septuagint, 30:114 is placed before 24:23-34 and 30:15-33 after this section.

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regard chapters 1–9 as composed later than Solomon’s time (usually in the early Persian period).<sup>2</sup> They believe that these chapters were composed later as an introduction to the book as a whole. Critical scholars often argue that these longer discourses represent a more developed Israelite wisdom with greater theological reflection than the short sayings of the other sections attributed to Solomon. Behind this approach is an evolutionary assumption regarding both wisdom in ancient Israel and Israelite theology: both moved from shorter, less coherent forms to longer, more integrated forms.

Even evangelical scholars, who tend to dispute this evolutionary model of Israelite wisdom and theology, often reject Solomon’s authorship of chapters 1–9. These scholars understand 1:1, “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel,” as a general heading for the entire book and not an indication of the authorship of chapters 1–9.<sup>3</sup> Kidner admits that 1:1 could be read either as indicating the authorship of chapters 1–9 or as a general heading for the entire book. He opts for the latter, contending that the heading at 10:1 should read, “These are *also* the proverbs of Solomon,” if the heading at 1:1 were intended to indicate that 1–9 was authored by Solomon.<sup>4</sup>

The Solomonic authorship of 1–9 does have its defenders among evangelical scholars. Garrett views 1–9 as a Solomonic composition.<sup>5</sup> He bases his analysis on the work of Kitchen, who studied the formal structure of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.<sup>6</sup> Kitchen divided instructional wisdom texts into two types. Type A begins with a title and then

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<sup>2</sup> Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* (WMANT; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1968) 15-18; William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 9-10, 17; Han Heinrich Schmidt, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur* (BZAW 101; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966) 144-168; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 9-10; Patrick Skehan, “A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs,” *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. Harry M. Orlinsky; New York: KTAV, 1976) 329-340 = *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (CBQMS 1, 1971) 15-26; R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1965) 27, 30, 71; James G. Williams, *Those who Ponder Proverbs: Aphoristic Thinking and Biblical Literature* (Sheffield: Almond, 1981) esp. 16; Frederick M. Wilson, “Sacred and Profane? The Yahwistic Redaction of Proverbs Reconsidered,” *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* (JSOTSup 58; ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund *et al.*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987) 313-334; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs,” (*NIB* V; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 20-21; Whybray, *Survey* 62-71, 150-157; Walter Zimmerli, “Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom,” *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. Harry M. Orlinsky; New York: KTAV, 1976) 175-207 = *Zur Struktur der alttestamentlichen Weisheit*, ZAW 51 (1933) 177-204.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs” (*EBC* 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 904.

<sup>4</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* 22. Kidner bases his argument on 24:23, “These are also the sayings of the Wise.”

<sup>5</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville: Broadman, 1993) 33- 44.

<sup>6</sup> K. A. Kitchen, “Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: the Factual History of a Literary Form,” *TynBul* 28 (1977) 69-114; “The Basic Literary Forms and Formulations of Ancient Instructional Writings in Egypt and Western Asia,” *OBO* 28 (1979) 235-282.

moves directly to the subject matter of the text. Type B begins with a title and a prologue and then moves to the text's subject matter. The prologues of Type B texts were

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short or medium length in the third and second millennium BC, but around 1000 BC (about Solomon's time) they tended to become longer. Type B literature also contains what Kitchen labeled *Subtitles* and *Titular interjections*. Subtitles occur within the body of a work and name the author of subsections. Titular interjections are breaks in the narrative in which the author directly addresses the reader. They are less formal than subtitles but still delineate subsections. In addition, Type B works, especially in the third and second millennium, often had epilogues, but these epilogues began to disappear in the first millennium.

Garrett views Proverbs 1–24 as a wisdom text typical of the first millennium BC. If Kitchen and Garrett are correct, the prologue (1:2–7) is followed by four main text sections, each preceded by its own title, subtitle or titular interjections. The organization of the first part of Proverbs would be something like this:

**Table 2.**

Section	Text	
Title	1:1	"The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel"
Prologue	1:2–7	
Main Text 1	1:8–9:18	
Subtitle	10:1a	"Proverbs of Solomon"
Main Text 2	10:1b–22:16	
Titular Interjection	2:17	"Open your ears, and hear the words of wise people, and set your heart on my teaching"
Main Text 3	22:18–24:22	
Titular Interjection	24:23a	"These also are from the wise"
Main Text 4	24:23b–34	

This analysis would also answer the objection of Kidner that 10:1 implies that chapters 1–9 are not from Solomon. According to Kitchen's analysis, 10:1 is a typical subtitle and not the titular interjection that Kidner prefers. Either is acceptable in this type of literature, and Solomon used both.

Yet, this analysis implies something else. It implies that Main Texts 3 and 4 were compiled by Solomon from other wise men and were included by him as commendable wisdom.<sup>7</sup> The remainder of the book, the proverbs of

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<sup>7</sup> As is well known, there have been many attempts to link 22:17-24:22 with the *Instruction of Amenemope*. It is possible that a part of this section does owe its origin to Amenemope or other Egyptian wisdom. However, the relationship has been hotly disputed. See Whybray,

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Solomon copied by Hezekiah's men (24–29), the sayings of Agur (30) and of Lemuel (31:1–9) and the acrostic poem (31:10–31), would be later additions.

If this model drawn from the work of Kitchen and Garrett is correct, there should be three types of material in Proverbs:

**Table 3.**

Authored by Solomon	1–9; 10:1–22:16; 25:29
Included and recommended by Solomon, but authored by others	22:17–24:22; 24:23–34
Authored by others	30; 31:1–9; 31:10–31

How are we to choose between these two views of the Solomonic nature of 1–9? I would propose a test that would involve comparing these sections. The Solomonic sections should contain indicators of Solomon's vocabulary, thought, and modes of expression despite the fact that 1–9 differs in its style and intent from the other Solomonic sections. Different works in differing styles and with differing concerns by the same author should not be expected to match each other completely. However, since they come from the same author, the vocabulary, thought, and expressions should be somewhat similar, especially in works included in Proverbs that are all wisdom literature.

The sections included by Solomon but attributed to others should not be as close to Solomon's style, but since he would have included material that he had himself studied, they should have influenced his writing to some degree. Therefore, we should find less correspondence between these sections and 1–9 than with Solomon's writings in 10:1–22:16 and 25–29, but we should find some influence. One example of such correspondence might be 24:34, which is used verbatim at 6:11.

The sections at the end of the book that were not authored by Solomon or included by him should find even less correspondence with 1–9. There should be some correspondence, since these are also wisdom texts, but there also should be some indications that these texts are not as close as the previous two types.

## II. Vocabulary

One test of the common authorship of 1–9, 10–22:16, and 25–29 is vocabulary usage. While this test could be approached by looking at the entire vocabulary of Proverbs, one should not expect to find much correlation in the use of common words of a language. Many of these are used so frequently that, in most cases, it is difficult to determine an author's usage preferences.<sup>8</sup> However, a particular author's preference for less frequently

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*Survey* 6-13. A reasonable suggestion that Solomon did include Egyptian wisdom is provided by John Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the book of Proverbs," *TynBul* 28 (1977) 29-68; repr. pp. 293-331 in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> However, some of these words can be suggestive of an author's usage. For instance, the word תוֹךְ (usually as בתוֹךְ) is used 402 times in the MT and eight times in Proverbs. These eight occurrences are only in 19 (five times), 10:1-22:16 (twice), and 25-29 (once).

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used words is more easily detected. I undertook an examination of words occurring less than fifty times in the MT of the entire OT. Words coming from the same root, but different forms of speech (e.g. noun, verb, adjective) were counted as different lemmas. In one instance a decision had to be made about what to consider a separate lemma. The verb לִּיץ ("mock") is used fourteen times in participial form in Proverbs (לִּיץ, מְלִיצִים; "mock[er[s]"), always as a substantive. It functions as a noun in every instance. It is also used three times as a verb (imperfect tense). While the verb form occurs only in the Solomonic sections (3:34; 14:9; 19:28), the participle is used thirteen times in the Solomonic sections (four times in 1–9; nine times in 10:1–22:16) and once in the non-Solomonic sections (24:9). In this case only, the verb and participle forms were counted as different lemmas.<sup>9</sup> This decision made a negligible difference in the outcome.

An examination of lemmas that are used less than fifty times in the MT yields the following statistics.<sup>10</sup>

Proverbs uses 3580 lemmas. Their distribution throughout the book is:

**Table 4.**

Section	Number of lemmas	Percentage of all lemmas in Proverbs <sup>11</sup>
1–9	1233	34%
10:1–22:16	1535	43%
22:17–24:22	417	12%
24:23–34	91	3%
25–29	819	23%
30	246	7%
31:1–9	57	2%
31:10–31	135	4%

The MT of Proverbs contains 6915 words, meaning that the average lemma is repeated 1.93 times. This low repeat rate for lemmas is due to the large number of lemmas that occur only once in the book (e.g. the repeat rate in Gen is 11.81; for Ps 9.14 and for Eccl 5.27).

Proverbs 1–9 contains 320 lemmas that are used less than 50 times in the entire OT. These can be classified as follows: 131 lemmas occur only in

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<sup>9</sup> Normally participles were counted as forms of the corresponding verb. An exception was made in this case because of the heavy reliance in Proverbs on this particular participle as a substantive. Had this participle been counted as a form of the verb, the difference would have lowered the total number of lemmas used less than 50 times to 319. The difference in the vocabulary base is only 0.3% (1 out of 320) and does not significantly change any statistic reported in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> The statistics were obtained using *Bible Works 4.0* (version 4.0.34; Big Fork, MT: Hermeneutika Bible Research, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> The percentages total to more than 100% because a lemma may occur in more than one section.

1-9; 104 lemmas occur in the Solomonic proverbs (27 in 10:1-22:16 only; 55 in 25-29 only; 22 in both sections); 16 lemmas are used in the word of the wise (11 in 22:17-24:22; 5 in 24:23-34; none in both sections); 11 lemmas are found in the other non-Solomonic sections in chapters 30-31 (5 in 30; 1 in 31:1-9; 4 in 31:10-31; 1 in both 30 and 31:10-31); 58 lemmas occur in at least one Solomonic section and one non-Solomonic section. A large number of words in this last category include words that one would expect to find in most wisdom literature: אִיִּל ("fool"), אִיד ("distress, calamity"), אָמַר ("word, utterance"), בָּרוּז ("despise"), בִּינָה ("understanding"), הוֹן ("riches, wealth"), חָכָם ("be wise"), חִכְמָה ("wisdom"), לִיץ ("mock"), מְזֻמָּה ("purpose, discretion"), תְּבִינָה ("understand").

When we look at these low-use lemmas that are shared only between 1-9 and the other sections by their type (Solomon, Words of the Wise, 30-31) we find the following percentages of these lemmas used in their own sections:

**Table 5.**

<b>Lemmas</b>		<b>Percent usage</b>
Lemmas used only in 1-9 and the Solomonic sections	104	4.4% of the lemmas in 10:1-22:16 and 25-29
Lemmas used only in 1-9 and the Words of the Wise	16	3.1% of the lemmas in 22:17-24:34
Lemmas used only in 1-9 and 30-31	11	2.5% of the lemmas in 30-31

This is precisely what the model based on the suggestions by Kitchen and Garrett would predict. If Proverbs 1-9 was authored by Solomon, Prov 10:1-22:16 and 25-29 should have the highest percentage of his preferred words. Prov 22:17-24:34 should have a lesser percentage of words he used, since they are not originally his work. However, since he had studied these sayings, they should have a higher percentage than 30-31, which are not his work or part of works that he studied.

Since the Solomonic sections make up 57% of the book of Proverbs by total word count, the Words of the Wise 9% and 30-31 7%, one might argue that the very large Solomonic sections have a greater chance of containing lemmas in common with 1-9. When we look at the number of repeat occurrences of these lemmas in 1-9 and compare it to the total number of words in each section, we find the results illustrated in table 6.

These statistics confirm the model derived from Kitchen and Garrett. The lemmas that are shared only by 1-9 and the other Solomonic sections are repeated more often and make up a proportionately larger share of the total words in 10:1-22:16 and 24-29 than do the non-Solomonic sections. The lemmas shared by 1-9 and the Words of the Wise are situated between those shared by the Solomonic sections and 1-9 and those shared by 30-31 and 1-9. One could argue that the much larger text that makes up the Solomonic sections allows for the greater number of repetitions of words. However, this

**Table 6.**

	<b>Lemmas</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Average number of occurrences</b>	<b>% of words</b>	<b>% change from the % of lemmas</b>
Solomonic	104	247	2.38	6.3% of the words in 10:1–22:16 and 25–29	43.3%
Words of the Wise	16	22	1.38	3.4% of the words in 22:17–24:34	8.0%
30–31	11	12	1.09	2.3% of the words in 30–31	-8.1%

does not account for the fact that the words shared with 1–9 are repeated more frequently than the words that are not shared with 1–9. All things being equal, one would expect that if 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29 came from different authors, it would be a quite different set of words that would be repeated more often. In fact, that is precisely what we find in 30–31. There are 292 total lemmas and 520 words in 30–31, making the average repeat rate 1.78. The repeat rate of the low-usage lemmas shared with 1–9 is 1.09, a decrease of 38.7%! Analyzed this way we find the following:

**Table 7.**

<b>Section Type</b>	<b>Total lemmas</b>	<b>Total words</b>	<b>Repeat rate</b>	<b>Repeat rate of low-usages lemmas in common with 1–9</b>	<b>% Difference in repeat rate</b>
Solomonic (excluding 1–9)	754	1532	2.03	2.38	17%
Words of the Wise	315	648	2.06	1.38	-33%
30–31	292	520	1.78	1.09	-39%

Once again, the pattern holds and even confirms the theory that the Words of the Wise were used by Solomon, since the decrease in the repeat rate for those sections is less than that of 30–31. Yet, it is nevertheless a considerable decrease, indicating different authorship.

Since Proverbs has a high number of words that are used only once, it is interesting to note the number of low-usage words that are repeated. Of the 104 Solomonic lemmas, 44 (42.3%) are used more than once in the Solomonic sections (excluding 1–9). Of the 16 Words of the Wise, lemmas 7 (43.8%) are used more than once in the Words of the Wise. Of the 11 lemmas of 30–31, 4 (36.4%) are used more than once. The likelihood that these less-used

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lemmas might be repeated at least once is nearly identical for all sections.<sup>12</sup> The Solomonic lemmas are repeated more often than the Words of the Wise lemmas and much more often than the 30–31 lemmas.

Of course, these statistics could mean the chapters 1–9 come from some other author than Solomon who was mimicking Solomon's vocabulary. However, these vocabulary differences in low-usage lemmas are extremely subtle. No one, to my knowledge, has ever been aware of them, and it required state-of-the-art personal computer technology to have the means to discover them.<sup>13</sup> It is much more likely that they indicate a common author for 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29, as indicated in the text of Proverbs itself.

### III. Thought

It is not possible to analyze all of the concepts in Proverbs and their use in the various sections of the book in this paper. I would propose that the distribution of one of these concepts will suffice to reinforce the conclusion drawn from the vocabulary analysis above.<sup>14</sup> One of the best-known expressions of Proverbs is *יִרְאֵה יְהוָה*, "the fear of the Lord." What has often been overlooked is the distribution of this phrase throughout the book. It occurs in 1–9 (1:7; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10), in 10:1–22:16 (10:27; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23; 22:4), and only once in a non-Solomonic section at 31:30. This would seem to argue that the concept of the fear of the Lord was not simply picked up by the author of 1–9 to use as his introduction to the rest of the book. It is not a major theme of the entire book but only a theme of the first Solomonic set of proverbs beginning in chapter 10. At the same time, we should note that the concept of fearing God could be expressed in the imperative phrase *יִרְאֵה אֱתָ יְהוָה* "fear the Lord" (3:7; 24:21). This phrase occurs much less frequently and would seem to confirm the notion that occasionally Solomon borrowed his ideas from the Words of the Wise, which he also recommended to others.

But how are we to account for the lack of this phrase in the second set of Solomon's proverbs (25–29)? Perhaps the compilers of the collection that begins in chapter 25 (Hezekiah's men?) had a different concern. They certainly included some proverbs that were from the collection beginning in chapter 10 (21:9=25:24; 18:8=26:22; 22:3=27:12; 20:16=27:13) or that were nearly identical to them (22:13//26:13; 19:24//26:15; 19:1//28:6; 12:11//28:19; 22:2//

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<sup>12</sup> The standard deviation is 3.9%, making the difference between the Solomonic lemmas and the Words of the Wise lemmas statistically irrelevant. The somewhat lower percentage of the 3031 lemmas may be due to the small sample size.

<sup>13</sup> Note that even the extensive computer study by Francis I. Anderson and A. Dean Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1992) would not enable one to discover these differences, since that study only treats the book of Proverbs as a whole. However, Delitzsch did recognize vocabulary affinities between 10:1-22:16 and 25-29. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (VI; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> While space does not permit the analysis of other themes, we should note that there are several that point to common authorship of the Solomonic sections (e.g. *עֵץ חַיִּים* "tree of life" in 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4).

29:13). However, their thematic interests were different than the author of the earlier collection, so they did not include proverbs with the fear of the Lord theme when they copied Solomon's proverbs.

Specifically, chapters 25–29 are concerned with what Crenshaw characterized as "the powerful individual (ruler) with whom all subjects had to reckon."<sup>15</sup> These chapters seldom mention wisdom (only at 28:26; 29:3, 15). Moreover, wisdom is not connected with Yahweh, who likewise is seldom mentioned (only at 25:22; 28:5, 25; 29:13, 25, 26). One of the concerns of chapters 1–9 and the Solomonic proverbs beginning at 10:1 is the gaining of wisdom and life and their connection with Yahweh. This concern is nearly absent from chapters 25–29. Instead, when Yahweh is mentioned, it is often in a juridical connection, parallel to the juridical power of the king. For instance, the Lord determines rewards (25:22) and is connected with understanding justice (28:5) and meting out justice (29:26). This accords well with the observations by Bryce and Malchow that these chapters were collected to train courtiers and kings.<sup>16</sup> These chapters are not directly concerned with the more theoretical discussion of gaining wisdom and life but with the more practical concern of governing. Thus, the proverbs chosen and collected by Hezekiah's servants did not include the phrase "the fear of the Lord," because it was not closely connected with proverbs on the themes in which they were interested.

In addition, how can one explain the use of "the fear of the Lord" at 31:30? A number of scholars have concluded that the poem that concludes Proverbs was placed at the end of the book intentionally to mirror the theme of lady wisdom in the book's first part, especially chapter 8.<sup>17</sup> If this is the case, then the author of this poem was specifically drawing upon the concept of the fear of the Lord, most probably at 8:13. The almost complete lack of use of the concept of the fear of the Lord in the non-Solomonic sections of Proverbs and its use in 1–9 and 10:1–22:16 indicates that these two sections are most likely from the same author as the other Solomonic sections of the book.

#### IV. Modes Of Expression

While chapters 1–9 differ greatly in overall style from 10:1–22:16 and 25–29, if these three sections all come from the hand of the same author, there should be some indications of that author's modes of expression in each of them. While there are many modes of expression that could be

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examined, I will analyze only one of them in detail to demonstrate the frequent and quite intricate connections between 1–9 and the other two Solomonic sections.

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<sup>15</sup> J. I. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 75.

<sup>16</sup> G. E. Bryce, "Another Wisdom-Book in Proverbs," *JBL* 91 (1972) 145-157; Bruce V. Malchow, "A Manual for Future Monarchs," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 238-245.

<sup>17</sup> C. V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985) 90-97; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* 246-252; Thomas P. McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31," *RB* 92/1 (1985) 25- 46; repr. pp. 391- 410 in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NIBCOT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999) 154-156; Ross, "Proverbs" 1128-1130; Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs" 257.

One of Solomon's modes of expression may be proverbs using the word טוב, "good." טוב occurs 63 times in Proverbs. These 63 occurrences are fairly evenly distributed throughout the book, as one would expect with such a common word.<sup>18</sup> In the sections attributed to Solomon occurrences are as follows: eight in chapters 1-9 (0.43% of its words), 41 in 10:1-22:16 (1.46%), and nine in 25-29 (0.82%). In the other sections the term is found three times in the saying of the wise (24:13, 23, 25; 0.46%) and twice in 30-31 (31:12, 18; 0.38%).

The proverbs that use טוב often define blessing and its opposite, detriment, through comparisons. These comparisons, whether direct or implied, are intended to lead the readers from the more general concepts of chapters 1-9 to the more specific applications given in later chapters, especially 10:1-22:16 and 25-29.

1. *The direct comparison.* Many of the occurrences of טוב are in formulaic טוב-sayings. The most studied of these are those which use the comparative formula מן ... טוב (better X than Y).<sup>19</sup> Included in this category are 18 proverbs which begin with טוב, טובה, כִּי־טוב or כִּי־טובה (3:14; 8:11, 19; 15:16, 17; 16:8, 19, 32; 17:1; 19:1; 21:9 = 25:24; 21:19; 25:7, 24; 27:5; 28:6) and two whose second line draws such a comparison (19:22; 27:10). In addition, it is possible to draw the same comparison without using the word טוב as part of the comparative formula with מן. The only example in Proverbs is 22:1:<sup>20</sup>

A choice name is [better] than great wealth; good favor than silver or gold.

Bryce has pointed out that these proverbs come in two forms, the simple comparison (A is better than B) and a more sophisticated version which involves a binary comparison (A in view of B is better than A` in view of B` ).<sup>21</sup>

There is an interesting distribution of these two types of proverbs. All but three of the binary opposition comparisons are in 10:1-22:16:

Better to be unimportant and own a slave than to be important and have no food (12:9).

Better a little with the fear of Yahweh than great treasure and turmoil with it (15:16).

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Better a dish of vegetables where there is love than a fatted bull and hate with it (15:17).

Better a little from righteousness than much harvest from injustice (16:8).

Better a humble spirit with the lowly than dividing plunder with the proud (16:19).

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<sup>18</sup> טוב occurs 615 times in the OT.

<sup>19</sup> See Graham S. Ogden, "The 'Better'-Proverb (Tôb-Spruch), Rhetorical Criticism, and Qoheleth," *JBL* 96 (1977) 489-509 for a summary of the history of research into this form. Also see the treatments of Hermisson, *Spruchweisheit* 155156 and G. E. Bryce, "'Better'-Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," *Book of Seminar Papers* (ed. L. C. McGaughey; Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972) 2.343-354 and the summary in Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (FOTL XIII; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 66-67.

<sup>20</sup> Bryce, "'Better'-Proverbs" 352 notes this omission of the formula occurs in Sir 30:14-17. Ogden, "The 'Better'-Proverb" 492-493 notes the same occurs in Ecclesiastes.

<sup>21</sup> Bryce, "'Better'-Proverb" 349.

Better a dry morsel and peace with it than a family feast filled with strife (17:1).

Better a poor person who lives innocently than a person of twisted speech who is a fool (19:1).

Better to live on the corner of a roof [and alone?] than [live] with a quarreling woman and share a house (21:9 = 25:24).

Better to live in a desert [in peace?] than with a quarreling woman and anger (21:19).

The other binary comparisons are in chapters 25–29. One of them is 25:24, which is identical to 21:9. The others are:

Better [a neighbor] who dwells nearby than a brother who is far away (27:10b).

Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than crooked ways and be a rich man (28:6:9).

What do the binary comparisons of these proverbs teach? They teach that blessing does not always come in the most obvious ways. What appears at first to be a blessing can be a detriment. For example, 15:16 says that a situation that seems to be an obvious blessing from God (riches) can be anything but a blessing if it brings turmoil. On the other hand, a situation that many would readily judge to be a curse from God (relative poverty) can be a blessing. Thus, these proverbs serve to define what the wise know about blessing and detriment—they often depend on the attendant circumstances of a particular situation and not the situation itself.

Only three **טֹרֵב**-proverbs in 10:1–22:16 are direct comparisons:<sup>22</sup>

Better to anger slowly than to be a mighty man and [better to be] even-tempered than to capture a city (16:32).

Faithfulness is desirable in a person; that is, it is better to be a poor man than a liar (19:22).

A choice name is [better] than great wealth; good favor than silver or gold (22:1).

19:22b is probably an explanation of the circumstances under which faithfulness (**חֶסֶד**) is desirable. Therefore, it is probably to be grouped with the binary **טֹרֵב**-proverbs. The two other direct comparisons do not show the

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circumstances under which the first element is made into a blessing while the second becomes a detriment. The implication is that these situations are inherently better. They need no attendant circumstances to make them better.

The **מִן** ... **טֹרֵב** proverbs of chapters 1–9 are the direct comparison type:

For her [wisdom's] profit is better than the profit from silver and [better] than gold's harvest (3:14).

Take my [wisdom's] discipline and not silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, because better is wisdom than corals and all that you desire will never equal it (8:10–11).

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<sup>22</sup> Bryce contends that 16:32 and 22:1 are actually binary comparisons with the middle elements implied. However, Murphy is probably correct in discounting this possibility. Bryce, "Better'-Proverbs" 349; Murphy, *Wisdom Literature* 67.

Better is my [wisdom's] fruit than gold or fine gold and my harvest is [better] than choice silver (8:19).

When the readers of Proverbs carefully compare these טוב-proverbs with the ones from 10:1–22:16 they are led to the following conclusions:

1. Unlike most of the blessings described in 10:1–22:16, wisdom is an inherently good thing that always brings blessing.
2. Wisdom is always compared favorably to silver and gold. So is a good reputation (22:1). Therefore, wisdom will lead to a reputation worth having—that of being wise. This conclusion is highlighted by the fact that 22:1 is the only טוב-proverb without טוב in its comparative formula.
3. The more general blessing of wisdom described in 1–9 will lead to the ability to distinguish blessing from detriment in more concrete situations, such as those of the binary comparisons in the טוב-proverbs of 10:1–22:16 (and also 25–29).

2. *Indirect comparisons.* a. "Not Good!" and "How Good!" However, מן ... טוב is not the only formula using the word טוב. Another common formula is the "not good" (לא-טוב) proverb.<sup>23</sup> There are seven "not good" proverbs, five in 10:1–22:16 (16:29; 17:26; 18:5; 19:2; 20:23), two in 25–29 (25:27; 28:21).<sup>24</sup> A parallel expression uses the term "abomination" (הועבת). All of these occur in the sections attributed to Solomon (1–9: 3:32; 6:16; 10:1–22:16: 11:1, 20; 12:22; 15:8, 9; 16:5, 12; 17:15; 20:10, 23; 25–29: 29:27 [twice]). Once הועבת is used in parallel with "not good":

Dishonest weights are an abomination to Yahweh and dishonest scales are not good (20:23).

While there are no לא-טוב proverbs in 1–9, there are two which use the phrase "an abomination to Yahweh": 3:2 and 6:16–19. These are closely parallel to two proverbs from 10:1–22:16: 11:20 and 12:22. The first tie between these sections involves the semantic overlap of the words נלוז ("devious") and עקש ("twisted", cf. 2:15 where this pair occurs in parallel) and the roots

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המם ("blameless, innocent") and ישר ("upright"; cf. 2:7, 21; 11:5 where this pair occurs in parallel and 11:3; 28:10; 29:10 where they occur together).

For the *devious* person is an *abomination to Yahweh*, but his counsel is with the *upright* (3:32).

Those with *twisted* hearts are an *abomination to Yahweh*, but his delight is with those whose ways are *innocent* (11:20).

In both of these proverbs, the comparison is between the reprobation of God against deviousness and the delight of God with godliness.

The second tie involves the abomination of lying:

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<sup>23</sup> A less severe form of this formula uses the phrase לא נארה ("[it is] not fitting"; 17:7; 19:10; 26:1). For a general discussion of these types of proverbs, cf. Hermisson, *Spruchweisheit* 154-155 and Murphy, *Wisdom Literature* 66.

<sup>24</sup> On the anomalous בל-טוב proverbs in the sayings of the wise (24:23) see the discussion below.

Six things Yahweh hates, even seven are an *abomination* to him: arrogant eyes, a *lying* tongue ... (6:16–17b).

*Lying* lips are an *abomination* to Yahweh (12:22).

In both of these proverbs, the comparison between God's attitude toward honesty and his attitude toward lying is implicit. Thus, the "not good" and related proverbs are another tie between 1–9 and 10:1–22:16 involving a common mode of expression. The tie does not directly involve the uses of the word טוֹב, but rather its antonym תועבה. Here the concept of detriment as the opposite of blessing is brought to the fore. The proverbs that use לֹא־טוֹב do not explicitly state why the things described as "not good" are not good. However, of the fourteen proverbs that state that something is an abomination, twelve state that they are abominations to Yahweh (cf. 16:12 and 29:27 for the exceptions). The implication is clear—people who do abominable acts will not receive blessing from Yahweh.

The "not good" proverbs are complimented by two "how good" (מִהֵטוֹב) proverbs (15:23, 16:16) and one "only good" proverb (אֵין־טוֹב; 11:23). One of these shows a direct connection with the "better" proverbs concerning wisdom in 1–9:

To gain wisdom—how much better than gold, and to gain understanding [how much better] than choice silver! (16:16).

Just as the "not good" proverbs have a corresponding form in proverbs using the concept of abomination, the "how good" proverbs have a corresponding form in proverbs that use the word רִצוֹן (favor).<sup>25</sup> All fourteen of these occur in 1–9 or 10–22.<sup>26</sup> Four of these use "favor" in antithetical parallelism to "abomination" (11:1, 20; 12:22; 15:8). In addition, three others use "good" with "favor" (11:27; 12:2; 18:22). Prov 11:27 equates eagerness for good with searching for favor.

רִצוֹן also provides a link between 1–9 and 10:1–22:16:

For whoever finds me [wisdom] finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh (8:35).

Whoever finds a wife finds good and obtains favor from Yahweh (18:22).

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These proverbs define blessing as Yahweh's favor. The parallel between 8:35 and 18:22 helps the readers understand the blessing of Yahweh. The more abstract concept "wisdom" is later replaced by the more concrete "wife." To find either is to find blessing in the form of God's favor. In fact, seven of these proverbs (50%) are concerned with Yahweh's favor (8:35; 11:1, 20; 12:2, 22; 15:8; 18:22).

b. Good People. Another use of טוֹב in Proverbs to tie 1–9 to 10:1–22:16 is its use as a substantive to denote "good people." טוֹב is only used this way in these sections of Proverbs. In three proverbs it is used in the plural, in two in the singular:

Therefore, walk in the way taken by good people and keep on the paths of the righteous (2:20).

Evil people will bow in front of good people, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous (14:19).

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. W. Zimmerli, "Ort und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der alttestamentlichen Theologie," *Gottes Offenbarung* (TBü 19; Munich, 1963) 309; Hermission, *Spruchweisheit* 155.

<sup>26</sup> The fourteen occurrences are 8:35; 10:32; 11:1; 11:20, 27; 12:2, 22; 14:9, 35; 15:8; 16:13, 15; 18:22; 19:12.

The eyes of Yahweh are in every place watching evil and good people (15:3).

A good person obtains favor from Yahweh, but the scheming person [Yahweh] condemns (12:2).

A good person leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren, but the wealth of the sinner is a treasure for the righteous (13:22).

The distinction between the plural "good people" and the singular "good person" is an important one. The use of the plural is for more general, theoretical concepts—generic advice, the outcome of righteous behavior or the omniscience of God. The singular is used for more concrete situations—the act of scheming or of leaving an inheritance. It is significant that the only time טוב is used in this sense in 1–9 it is in the plural. The general relationship of theoretical principles preceding more practical advice is apparent when comparing 1–9 with 10:1–22:16. While the theoretical can be found in 10:1–22:16 and the practical in 1–9, progression from theoretical to practical predominates.

c. Good Reputation, Good Sense. A final binding motif in the טוב-proverbs is the phrase שכל-טוב. This phrase occurs only four times in the OT. 2 Chr 30:22 uses it in the sense of "good skill." In Ps 111:10 it is used in a wisdom setting that is very similar to Proverbs:

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. [It is] good sense to all who do it.

שכל-טוב is used in contrasting ways in 1–9 and 10:1–22:16:

... and you will find favor and a "good reputation" (?) in the eyes of God and humans (3:4).

"Good sense" brings favor, but the way of the treacherous is constant (13:15).

While the phrase is used differently, in both cases it is connected with receiving favor (חן). Again, this appears, when combined with the previous types of טוב-proverbs, to be an authorial device, not the work of a later author who most likely would not have created such a subtle connection between the two sections. Such attention to fine detail in using the word טוב to bind these two sections of Proverbs is more likely to be the careful, systematic work of a single author for both sections.

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3. "Good" in the sayings of the wise. What is the explanation for the occurrences of טוב outside 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29? When the occurrences of טוב in the Words of the Wise (24:23b; 24:13–14; 24:25) are carefully examined, one can see that these proverbs are not Solomon's, but they are Solomon-like. Several of them are similar to proverbs in 1:1–22:16.<sup>27</sup> This is also true of the טוב-proverbs in the Words of the Wise. One of these is 24:23b:

To show partiality in judgment is not good.

This "not good" proverb differs from the ones in 10:1–22:16 in that it uses the negative בל instead of לא. While בל does occur at 10:30, 12:3, and 19:23, it is most heavily

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<sup>27</sup> Compare 23:9 with 9:7; 23:12 with 2:2; 23:20-21 with 21:17; 23:26-28 with 5:1-6 and 22:14; 24:12 with 3:31-32, etc.

concentrated in the Words of the Wise (22:29; 23:7; 23:35; 24:23). This proverb is Solomon-like, but clearly different from the other "not good" proverbs.

Another טוֹב-proverb in the Words of the Wise is 24:13–14:

Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey that flows from the comb tastes sweet; thus is the knowledge of wisdom for your soul: if you find it there will be a future and your hope will not be cut off.

This proverb not only uses טוֹב, but also speaks of finding wisdom, a definite Solomon-like statement. Thus, the occurrences of טוֹב-proverbs in the Words of the Wise are one indication as to why they were included in the book: they are similar to Solomon's wisdom and can be commended for study.<sup>28</sup>

4. "Good" as applied to the ideal wife. The other two occurrences of טוֹב in Proverbs are in the acrostic poem about the ideal wife (31:10–31). This poem begins with a rhetorical question that recalls the "better ... than" proverb at 8:11 and the "finding good" proverb at 18:22:

A good wife—who can find? She is worth far more than corals.

The two uses of טוֹב at 31:12 and 18, while not conforming to any of the formulaic uses of טוֹב in Proverbs, were probably designed to draw a connection with the Solomonic portions of the book. This may be especially true in the case of 31:18, which comes at the end of the first major section of this acrostic poem.<sup>29</sup> The placement of this acrostic poem with its connections to the Solomonic sections via the טוֹב-proverbs serves several purposes:

1. It makes the non-Solomonic appendix to Proverbs (30–31) Solomon-like, justifying its incorporation in the book.

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2. Its first verse (31:10) extends the binding motif of the טוֹב-proverbs from 1–9 through 10:1–22:16 to the end of the book.
3. It ends the book on an explicit blessing/detriment contrast (cf. 31:10, 12, 28).

It should be noted that none of the uses of טוֹב in this section shares any of the formulaic features of the Solomonic sections. This is what a section written by an author other than the Solomon of 10:1–22:16 and 25–29 who wanted to use Solomon's thought produced. It stands in sharp contrast to 1–9 which shows every sign of a close relationship to the other Solomonic sections that is most easily explained as having come from the pen of a single author.

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<sup>28</sup> טוֹב also occurs at 24:25 in a simple adjectival use. It is impossible to determine whether this is an imitation of the material in 1-9 and 10:1-22:16 or simply the use of a common adjective.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Murray H. Lichtenstein, "Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31," *CBQ* 44 (1982) 202-211, who demonstrates that this poem is structured as a nine-verse unit (31:10-18), a two-verse chiasm (31:19-20), a second nine-verse unit (31:21-29), and a closing two-verse coda (31:30-31). Also see McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife."

## V. Conclusion

On every level examined in this study—vocabulary, thought, and mode of expression—Proverbs 1–9 indicates that it comes from the same author as 10:1–22:16 and 25–29, exactly as the book itself indicates. While the “fear of the Lord” motif is obvious to readers, the **יִרְאָה**-proverb would require an extremely sensitive reading of 10:1–22:16 (and 25–29) by a different writer to produce such a closely aligned text as 1–9. The probabilities of 1–9 coming from someone other than Solomon, therefore, are extremely low. Moreover, the vocabulary usage shared by 1–9, 10:1–22:16, and 25–29 argues for a common author, because it would have been unthinkable for a different author to have produced such a similar pattern of word usage.

At the same time, the inclusion (but not authorship) of the Words of the Wise most probably should also be attributed to Solomon. These are somewhat like his writings, and may have influenced him to some extent. On the other hand, he may have recognized in them thoughts similar to his own, and included them for that reason.

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