

# **Dr. Kyle Dunham, The Structure and Theology**

## **Proverbs, Session 2**

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This is Dr. Kyle Dunham in his teaching on the Structure and Theology of Proverbs. This is session 2, Advanced Wisdom and Social Application.

We're going to now move into our next part, which is looking at the rest of the book of Proverbs.

We began by seeing how the book of Proverbs, I think, is intentionally arranged in such a way as to move an inexperienced youth toward greater applications of complex wisdom of intellectual rigor. And it begins and is outlined in the preamble of the book. And we saw last time how the first seven verses of the book of Proverbs function as a gateway into its wisdom.

That is to say, it focuses on the virtues of righteousness, justice, and integrity. It frames it as the Proverbs of Solomon and as moving toward the fear of Yahweh. That is to say, the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and correction.

Last time we looked at the prologue, the first nine chapters of the book, I argued that those chapters function as an elementary training regimen for the young person in the domestic setting under the tutelage of the father who's accompanied by lady wisdom and by the implicit voice of the mother to form character in the youth as he is about to embark on the threshold of independent adulthood and to navigate the dangers and demands of the world as he aspires to greater and greater forms of leadership. And now we're moving into the next phase. So, there are seven wisdom collections and we looked at the first wisdom collection, chapters one to nine.

And now we're going to see the next wisdom collection, which is Solomon One. Solomon one, I've outlined as fundamental wisdom. That is, we're moving from elementary wisdom to fundamental wisdom.

What are the key things that are needed? There's a subheading here in Proverbs 10:1 that suggests that this is also a section under the wisdom of Solomon. And this is why it's often called Solomon One. There are also 375 proverbs in this collection equal to the numeric value of the name Solomon in Hebrew.

Several connections point back to the prologue and ahead to the next sections as we work through this. These aphorisms give us the fundamental approaches to wisdom. There are more concrete examples and scenarios here that provide a developing social context for the principles that were expounded in the prologue.

And often this section is divided into two sections. That is two parts comprising antithetical proverbs, which contrast the righteous wise versus the wicked foolish in chapters 10 to 15, and synthetic proverbs, which focus on God's sovereignty and the righteous wise king in chapters 16 through 22. The difference is that antithetical proverbs use contrasting forms in order to inform the wisdom seeker of the right kinds of behavior and the right kinds of people to associate with versus the wrong kinds of behavior and people.

Synthetic proverbs are a little bit more sophisticated in terms of they amplify a certain norm. So, it's to say they provide a base level and then an amplification of that in order to provide a greater understanding of a particular theme. There are parallels here with Egyptian wisdom that suggest that this would have been understood as a section that is a unified collection.

And there are references in the next section, which is the sayings of the wise in 22.17 that echo back the sayings of the wise in 1.6. So, we see some literary connections that inform our understanding of the book. Here, the contrast between ladies wisdom and folly at the end of the prologue anticipates the antithetical proverbs of chapters 10 to 15. That is to say that Solomon 1a chapters 10 to 15 focus on these antithetical or binary categories of wisdom and folly.

Christopher Ansbury has noted that in these aphorisms, there are anthropocentric dimensions. That is to say, there's a concern for human existence and experience that relate to certain categories like the monarchy. How does the young person begin to think about the monarchy? And that will develop and move toward greater complexity in the latter stages of the book.

The community and the family and then there are also theocentric concerns or concerns that focus upon a theological orientation. These involve Yahweh's disposition toward certain types of characters, and the distinction between those whom he favors and those whom he condemns. And so, within that context, we see the character types that are incidentally introduced in the prologue are now developed in greater ways.

The outside woman is no longer a focal point. She'll be reintroduced toward the end of this collection. But we're moving instead toward preparation for greater understanding and navigating the world.

One of the things to mention here is the admonition of the father to the son and the wisdom of the father and mother links back to the opening of the speeches where the father likewise admonishes the son to listen to his parents' instruction in chapter one and verse eight. There's also a notable use of wisdom vocabulary here that echoes some of the concerns that are found in the prologue. In the 10 speeches of

the prologue, we find a repetition of words like son, instruction, wisdom, knowledge, craftiness, discretion, teaching, and commands.

And so again, there's a focus on these elements as the young person grows and develops. Solomon 1b chapters 16 through 22 enhance these themes. That is to say, as we move to the second part of Solomon 1, it enhances the themes by providing a more complex and nuanced picture.

Here, the world is seen in more of its challenge and complexity and the novice leader understands better how to navigate the pitfalls that accompany that. The wisdom instruction here develops a more nuanced portrait of themes related to the monarchy as an arbiter of divine power. That is to say, rather than the monarchy in more of a binary world, in the first section here, there's greater complexity.

He's an arbiter of divine power. The community becomes not just a place where the young person lives, but where he must make prudent fiscal decisions. The family moves from simply the realm where he's growing and maturing and developing to a context where he himself is looking for harmony, peace, and justice within the context of a marital relationship.

And this suggests a greater movement of complexity. There are also theocentric concerns here about Yahweh's disposition toward the righteous and the sinners. But there's more of a focus here on justice, divine omniscience, and divine sovereignty.

William Brown has demonstrated, I think convincingly, that the Proverbs in these two sections exhibit a dynamic movement from simple to complex in a number of areas. These go along the following lines from family ties to societal friendships, from concrete character types to abstract character qualities, from cultivated silence, that is to say, knowing when to be silent, to elocution that's characterized by integrity, the right kinds of speech, and from unadorned righteousness to a more complex social justice. That is to say, how are the norms of Torah materialized and acted out in the context of a society where the leader must administer justice in keeping with the character of Yahweh himself?

So, Solomon 1B provides greater sophistication by focusing also on the limits of wisdom, Yahweh as the true source of wisdom, and even the exceptions to wisdom and folly, which can be found initially in the contrasts of Solomon 1A. So, again, just to rehearse here, Solomon 1 is divided into two parts. Part one is antithetical Proverbs contrasting the righteous who are wise versus the wicked who are foolish.

And here, concrete examples and scenarios dominate. This is where the young person learns about the kinds of things that occur in the world to which he aspires. And he's learning concrete examples and scenarios where wisdom is acted out.

And then in moving to part two, we have synthetic Proverbs and these focus with a greater variety on God's sovereignty and the role of the righteous wise king. I sometimes liken it to the fact that when a young person is beginning to experience the world of adults, he or she must first understand the right kinds of people to associate with, the right authority structure, and the way to navigate the world so that you are wisely and successfully growing and maturing and applying wisdom. But as he or she grows in complexity, you begin to attain a more nuanced portrait of the types of leaders that surround you, the types of bosses that you may have as you work in your employment.

And so, there's a greater sophistication to the application of wisdom. It becomes more complex. And so, you begin to see that the human element, is part of what maturity is.

It's beginning to have a more nuanced understanding of the world around us and the types of people that inhabit it. Knowing that a young person often judges the value of a character. Is that person good or bad? But as we grow and mature, we understand that there are shades of nuance and complexities.

And so, navigating that becomes part and parcel of the application of wisdom. So, part two gives this more complex scenario with respect to authority, money, and the family. Knowing how to apply wisdom in these various realms and contexts.

Now, as I've noted along the way here, I think that we find in the seams of these connections, of these collections of wisdom, indications that they've been put together intentionally, both to echo earlier material and to move the reader forward to the next phase. So, the opening and closing seams of these sections focus on intentionally arranged material that are signposts for the learner who's aspiring to lead as he masters this material to inculcate these virtues in his mind and in his character. And so, as we begin chapter 10 verses one to eight, I think we find there that the sage signals a continuation of the educational program of the preamble.

He focuses in the first eight verses of chapter 10 on the character qualities of the righteous and the wise as integral to the successful pursuit of wisdom. So, within the first eight verses of chapter 10, the Proverbs allude to the righteous four times in verses two, three, six, and seven, and to the wise son or heart two times in 10, one, and eight. These latter Proverbs frame the unit by contrasting wisdom and folly with the middle verses two and three and six and seven, providing examples of righteous and wicked character types.

So, I think as we analyze this together, the collocation of these wisdom terms in the opening seam of Solomon 1a represents an incremental escalation of wisdom instruction, moving further along the curriculum from wisdom and correction, which we saw in the preamble to righteousness and the embodied character of the one

who is wise in chapter one verses three and five. This individual wise person, the Hebrew term *hakam*, as well as the pluralized the wise, become notable characters in this section. The singular wise one appears in this section 17 of 30 times in the book.

There are nine appearances of this individual in Solomon 1a and eight appearances in Solomon 1b. Only within this collection, does the wise son figure as a subset of the wise individual. Also appearing is the wise of heart in chapters 10, 11, and 16.

And appearances of the pluralized wise are also most consistent here. There are 10 out of 17 occurrences of the term in the book, concentrated with one exception in Solomon 1a. So, the wise are typically engaged in certain types of behavior, prudent speech, and receptive listening, and this is borne out in the various ways that the wise are presented.

We use the term *collocated* to mean the types of terms that the wise are connected to. And they are connected to things like the tongue in chapters 12 and 15 and the lips in chapters 14 and 15. The wise function as the gatekeepers and the dissemination of wisdom, the sort of companions that the young person is to seek in this liminal stage of growing into independent adulthood.

So, that's the beginning of Solomon 1 and focused on this character type of the wise. It concludes Solomon 1 concludes with a reference to the king in 20 to 11 and to the divine purview of knowledge in 20 to 12. Also, it focuses on the importance of heeding correction in 20 to 15.

These aphorisms function as a closure to this literary section. They remind the aspiring sage to respect authority, which has now moved from the home to the palace. So, rather than the father being front and center, now the king begins to take a more prominent role.

The novice official will master appropriate self-discipline by heeding correction when it is given. This kind of self-mastery will cultivate greater knowledge from Yahweh himself, who oversees the dissemination of wisdom to the favored wisdom seeker in 20 to 12. So, the initial aims of the preamble are repeated, and reiterated here to the beginning sage, the novice sage as he progresses through the stages of wisdom.

Here, the wisdom instruction concretizes sages. They are embodied in material form and they exemplify the kinds and patterns of behavior and decision-making that the emerging youth who seeks to be wise must emulate. And so, as he moves through this, he encounters this binary world that moves toward complexity.

He is to focus on this character type of the wise who are the gatekeepers and disseminators of wisdom. He is to emulate them and to associate with them. And as

he moves to the second section, the focus then becomes on the societal types of relationships.

The king becomes more prominent and the focus again is on the types of authority he will encounter in the wider world and how best to navigate those kinds of leadership and the pitfalls that accompany them. So, I've noted several things along the way here. The wise are the prominent social group.

They're the gatekeepers and the companions of wisdom, the sort of people that the young person is to seek and to emulate. There's a movement outward from the family to various types of social relationships. So, the young person is to learn about these wise and to emulate their behavior as he moves into a more complex and nuanced world to understand the kinds of people that he will encounter.

And then we move to another section after this section that's headed in 22:17 as the sayings of the wise. The text begins by saying, that these also are the sayings of the wise. And there are several reasons that this likely serves as a literary subheading, constituting a new discourse.

First, we have the sayings of the wise, which reaches back to the preamble. We had discussed how the preamble in chapter one in verse six gives one of the categories of wisdom that the young person is to pursue as the sayings of the wise. And now we find this materialized in 22:17 to give a purpose for the book.

That is to say, these sages who are the wise are giving sayings that the young person is to inculcate in his life. And this gives one of the main reasons for the preamble. We also second see that the genre, the type of instruction shifts here to parenetic discourse.

That is to say, to warning, command, and instruction rather than simply to the two-line proverbs that characterized chapters 10 through 22. There are 46 commands given in this section and two-thirds of those are prohibitions. And so, the young person is now being instructed beyond the more or less binary aphorisms of Solomon 1 to conform behavior thinking, and attitudes towards certain things.

We might almost see this as now as the young person moves into the next area of complexity where there's more visibility, where there's more public leadership. He first must be instructed in what not to do. And so, we see a focus here on these commands that the young person is to avoid doing.

So, the wisdom tutelage moves from the father to the sages, from the home to the royal court. And it's now tinged with a cosmopolitan flavor, we might say. Another reason that this is, I think, another section is that it has its own introduction.

It opens with its own preamble in 22:17 to 21, including a formal exhortation and motivation followed by a purpose for the instructions and the identification of the addressee. So, if we were to look at this text, it begins by saying, incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, apply your heart to my knowledge for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you if all of them are ready on your lips. And it goes through and says, that your trust may be in the Lord.

I have made them known to you today, even to you. Have I not written for you 30 sayings of counsel and knowledge to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you? So, it has its own structure, which suggests it's a separate section.

And then fourth, the reason this is a new section is the identification of this instructional regimen promises to provide a return to those who sent you in 22.21. This suggests that here we have a subsection of special training for nascent socio-political leaders who require training in the rules and etiquette of the Royal Court. They are to be the ones who are the next up-and-coming generation of leaders. And so, they are to give a report back to the ones who sent them.

Therefore, they are to understand the nature of etiquette and behavior in the Royal Court. We've noticed in other places that this also bears some affinity to some Egyptian writers, such as the instruction of Amenemope. And I think this centers around the fact that the wise here become a very prominent group.

We noted that the wise appear 17 times in the book and they appear frequently in the last section. And now they're important in this section because they head this unit, this collection of wisdom. In 22:17, it's the sayings of the wise.

And in the next section in 24:23, we also see it as a literary heading. And so, they are to seek wisdom as a group. The wise exhibit the appropriate kinds of behavior in Solomon 1. And now they exhibit wisdom more explicitly by providing the training material for the formation of the aspiring sage.

And here their admonitions serve as a corrective to the potential excesses of youthful impulse. They provide a foundation for pious vocational wisdom within the context of official leadership. Specifically, this section focuses on proper attitudes and actions toward the king and the necessary skills to navigate successfully the demands of royal service.

And so again, the focus is on the young person who's ready to live and work in the Royal Court and knows best how to navigate the specific protocol demands and dangers that accompany life in the Royal Court. As you can imagine, it was fraught with potential danger at every turn. And so, the wise person needed to have these

virtues instilled in him as he entered into the Royal Court to know what he ought to do and what he ought not to do.

And so, certain things were to characterize him. And I think we see this as we look at the wisdom within the book. One of the things is the rising leader is to avoid actions that anger, demean, or exploit the common people.

He's not to crush the poor, move boundary stones, or raid the property of the righteous. So, he's to be doing things that exhibit social justice in the context of sociopolitical leadership. He's not to be doing things that crush the poor, the underprivileged, or those who are struggling in society.

He's rather to show them justice, kindness, and he's also to avoid friendships with the wrong kinds of people. Certain types of people are pictured in this section. Those that are short-tempered, stingy, foolish, and indulgent.

And the temptation for the young person will be to associate with people who might seem powerful, who might seem to provide an entry point to getting ahead. And so, the young person is admonished in this section to avoid those character types, which will lead toward destructive consequences. Those who are characterized by anger and folly and self-indulgence, because these types of behavior will destroy the young person.

Just a few other things. He's to fear God and the king. He's to focus specifically on the right type of reverence toward God and the king but also to do what is right, even in the face of hostility, to have the moral courage to do what is right.

Which we'll see as we get toward the end of this section. He's to rescue those who are being taken away to death, and hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, behold, we did not know this, does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And he will not repay man according to his work.

And so, he's to show reverence to the authorities, but he's also to do things that require moral courage within the context of justice and integrity and all of those things. And so, these are all part of the wisdom that he's to have at this stage of his learning. As we've been moving through this, we've been looking at how specifically the seams or the in-between connections between the collections advance this training regimen.

And I think we see this as well in this particular section. The preamble focused on righteousness, justice, and integrity. And those concerns are echoed in the seams at the opening and closing of the sayings of the wise one and two.

So, following the introductory preamble and the sayings of the wise one, this introduction commences with instruction about the just treatment of the poor. How are the poor to be treated? And here the theme of justice is prominent. Advice ranges from the avoidance of security pledges to the avoidance of displacing ancient boundary markers.

These are references to preserving the traditions and rights of those who tended to be exploited, harassed, and mistreated in society. And so, rather the right kind of leader who embodied the norms of Torah was to show justice, righteousness, and integrity, even toward the poor. This section closes with references to the righteous man in 24, 15, and 16 as one who weathers adversity in the position of leadership.

Understanding that social leadership requires a lot of mettle and a lot of perseverance, he's exhorted and encouraged along these lines. The king appears at the close of part one as the one who is to be feared along with Yahweh. And this echoes the close of the prologue in 9.10, the fear of Yahweh.

And it anticipates the close of the book where the fear of Yahweh is again emphasized. The second section, 24:23, the second Sayings of the Wise opens also with references to justice and righteousness. This time by way of negative example, adding a measure of complexity to the admonitions of the first section.

So, as with Solomon 1, the sayings of the wise 2 also conclude with an allusion to the importance of correction in the formation of the sage in 24.32, that correction is a necessary part of his development. Here, the correction emerges from a negative example story centering on a sluggard, a sluggard who exhibits foolish tendencies. And these tendencies must be avoided for the young person who's advancing in wisdom.

And so, again, the sayings of the wise prepare the young person for this function in the royal court. They also set the stage for the next section, Solomon 2, which will focus even more on the person of the king, the kind of behavior that that leader demonstrates, and how the young person is to navigate that. So, as we move to Solomon 2, chapter 25 and verse 1 gives us another clue to this section.

It says, these also are the Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copy. And here we have the second Solomon section and I've entitled this section, Elevated Wisdom, Elevated Wisdom. So, we move from elementary wisdom to fundamental wisdom.

And then we've seen intermediate wisdom with the sayings of the wise, and now we come to elevated wisdom. That is another level of wisdom. And this section offers the most thorough compendium of advice concerning matters of the royal court.

This section bears affinities to Solomon 1 in its literary heading and in its probable arrangement into two sub-units. So, we find two sections in Solomon 2, as we had in Solomon 1. Remember that Solomon 1 is divided into chapters 10 to 15 and 16 to 22. And we see similarly here, in two sections, chapters 25 through 27 and chapters 28 through 29.

And so, the section begins with emblematic Proverbs that outline proper conduct in a royal context and concludes with antithetical Proverbs that focus on justice and Torah in the context of the royal court. This latter section reintroduces a compilation of antithetical Proverbs, bringing the two Solomonic collections full circle and closing the loop on the first collection. In contrast to earlier mentions of the king that we find, for instance, in Solomon 1 chapters 14, 16, and 22, or in the sayings of the wise in chapter 24, this section increasingly presents the king as a flawed person, a flawed leader, who's liable to pervert justice and often lacking in self-restraint.

He often is corrupted by power and his corruption affects his ability to lead. As the implied addressee of Proverbs advances incrementally through these wisdom stages, he now becomes poised to focus his initial leadership role in closer proximity to the monarch and thus stands closer to observe and critique the ruler's shortcomings. In the journal article that I mentioned in the first lecture, this teaching is based on a journal article that came out in the Bulletin for Biblical Research in 2019, volume three.

In that, I have a table included that shows a number of Proverbs in this section that present the king as flawed, liable to corruption, and liable to a miscarriage of justice. And so, the king is to be understood in a more complex and nuanced way as yes, a leader who reflects divine power and supremacy, but also one who must be feared in the right kinds of ways and understood so that one can navigate successfully in his presence. And so, in this second section, these emphases on righteousness, justice, and integrity also come to the fore.

So, I've mentioned as we've moved along how the seams of these sections advance this educational program. We see that as well in this section in Solomon 2. In Solomon 2, the educational program of the preamble progresses toward its concluding stages. So, I had mentioned in the preamble that we have a movement from wisdom and correction, simple kinds of binary wisdom terms, to greater complexity as we move through the chain of wisdom words.

As we move along, we see words like the sayings of the wise, and Proverbs, and that's again mentioned in chapter one in verse six. And so, we again see here a return to aphorisms or Proverbs. The focus on the king is prominent.

The term king is mentioned five times in the title and in the opening Proverbs of 25, 1 to 3, and 5 to 6. In other places in this section, we see other terms used for the

officials who govern the nation. These include terms like ruler in 28, 15, 29, 2, 12, and 16, prince in 28, 16, and commander in 28, 2. So again, a focus on leadership. The preamble's convergence of righteousness, justice, and integrity is noteworthy here in the seams of Solomon 2, especially in its connection to the royal court.

Righteousness in particular is a quality that establishes the king's throne at the beginning of this section in 25, 5, which says, take away the wicked from the presence of the king and his throne will be established in righteousness. So these character qualities are obviously a focus. At the close of the section, the qualities of righteousness, justice, and integrity are again arranged in close succession.

So, we see this in 29, 26, where the legal justice that a man anticipates proceeds ultimately from Yahweh rather than from the ruler. So justice comes from the Lord. This theme is given more universally in 29, 7, where a man characterized by injustice is an abomination to the righteous, while a man characterized by integrity is an abomination to the wicked.

And again, we see, as we saw in earlier sections, the need for correction that appears toward the end of this. We've already seen how the focus on correction comes at the end of several of the earlier stages. Here again, there's a focus on the correction that functions analogously to how it functioned at the close of Solomon 1 in 22, 15 and to the sayings of the wise two in 24, 32.

In each usage, it underscores the continued need for the developing young sage to cultivate self-discipline and restraint, to be corrected by heeding that correction when it is tendered. These function this way in the concluding literary boundaries of these sections and suggest again, there's an intentional arrangement and focus as this linear movement goes along. Then we finally reach the last two sections of the book, the sayings of Agur and Lemuel.

In the sayings of Agur, we have what I've entitled enigmatic wisdom. And then as we'll see in the sayings, the wisdom of Lemuel, we have royal wisdom. So, these are chapters 30 and 31.

The final two sections move from the earlier anonymous sages, that is the wise, that become a character, a group of people that the young person is to follow in Solomon 1. And then they, in fact, head the wisdom and give the wisdom of the sayings of the wise. Now there's a movement that those wise who are unidentified are now identified in these foreign sages, Agur and Lemuel. There's an increasing outward movement.

I picture this sometimes as concentric circles that move toward the peripheries of the pious wisdom movement beyond Israel, characterizing these sages, I believe as

Masai, likely non-Israelite. And we first encounter Agur, the pursuit of wisdom has proved exhausting for these sages, but not despairing. They're likely non-Israelite.

They focus on certain types of wisdom. Let me read the first entree into this in the words of Agur. He says the man declares, I am weary, O God, I am weary, O God, and worn out.

So, the wisdom pursuit has been exhausting, but not despairing. And so, these final two wisdom sections constitute a fitting end to the program outlined in the preamble. They do this by focusing on the virtues of humility, truth, order, self-discipline, and justice.

These traits that have been idealized as the norms of Torah being concretized and materialized in the aspiring sages now are fleshed out and embodied in an ideal sage and an ideal king who exhibits this wisdom and focus on these traits. These traits are vital for the influential sage, Agur, as well as for the king, Lemuel, to function in their respective spheres. So, the ideal reader has come full circle, if you will.

A sophisticated sage and a self-restrained king now embody the aim of the rising young wisdom seeker. Agur specifically goes in a certain direction and he affirms that God is the source of wisdom and that wisdom attains principally through divine disclosure. He actualizes the wisdom of the earlier stages in his role as a chastened, eminent sage who recognizes the limitations of his own pursuit of knowledge.

He is a lowly yet eloquent orator. He embodies humility, wonder, and openness to instruction as virtues requisite to those on the threshold of power in 31, as we see with Lemuel. The aphorisms from previous sections are now supplanted with interpretive epigrams and riddles.

Remember that the preamble moves from elementary sayings to Proverbs and the sayings of the wise, and then to interpretive epigrams and riddles. I want to suggest that those represent an increasing form of complexity as the young person applies the intellectual rigor he's already mastered into the understanding of the deeper and more profound truths existent in the universe that need to be uncovered and discovered as he uses that intellectual rigor in a sophisticated way. And so, Agur embodies that by focusing on interpretive epigrams and riddles.

Just a note about Agur, he does not claim the definitive word on wisdom. He says rather he's too brutish to admit ultimate understanding and he confesses that he lacks wisdom and knowledge. There's a refreshing element to my mind about Agur because wisdom has not produced hubris, it's produced humility.

He recognizes that as you gain wisdom, you actually understand more about your own frailty, limitations, and lack of knowledge. And if you've lived for many years,

you can probably experience or identify, resonate with that idea. I know that I have as I learn more and more things, I begin to realize all the things that I don't know.

And so, there's a humbling aspect to the pursuit of wisdom and Agur embodies this in a memorable way. The end of his wisdom collection, as we'll see, focuses on a renewed focus on matters of kingship. He has there three mentions on the prestige and transcendence of the king in chapter 30 verses 27, 28, and 31.

And as a counterpoint to the humility that Agur lauds in the opening speech. So, he lauds humility as he begins and then he focuses on the king as he gets farther into his wisdom and focuses specifically on what kind of role the king is to have. He includes also within this a minatory tone in specifying certain things.

And we'll see that as we go along. And then we reach Lemuel, the sayings of Lemuel, royal wisdom in chapter 31. Lemuel presents a concluding royal context to the book.

His discourse presents elevated prose and extolled devotion distinguished by the fear of Yahweh. The fear of Yahweh is prominent at the beginning. It becomes prominent again at the end of this section.

And we have specifically here the voice of Lemuel's mother at the opening of the final section. And this balances the implicit voice of the mother in the prologue. And it foreshadows the implicit voice of the woman of noble character at the conclusion of the book.

This therefore provides a closure to the elementary counsel of the prologue. The ideal wise son has now become king and he is heeding the voice of his somewhat exasperated mother while seeking out a wife of unusual virtue. And in doing so, Lemuel furnishes for the book, as one has said, the perfect culmination for the book of Proverbs as it ends on a note of piety and exaltation.

So, his discourse opens with several references to the king and society, his role in society in chapter 31 verses one, three, and four. Yet he also includes a note of warning, a minatory tone in specifying that the discourse is one in which his mother corrected him. So again, we have this idea of correction, which has framed a lot of the sections as we've moved through the training regimen of the seven collections.

It seems that at several stages along the way, the conclusion focuses again on correction and how wisdom necessarily corrects the aspiring sage. Here, this implied chastisement recalls the emphasis on the correction that we saw earlier in these other stages of the book, including the closing of Solomon 1 in 22:15, the sayings of the wise in 24, and also the conclusion of Solomon 2 in chapter 29 verses 17 and 19. The preambles focus on righteousness and justice.

Those virtues also find an echo in the instruction that Lemuel's mother provides him. He is to refrain from strong drink so that he can think clearly in upholding the rights of the poor. And so, he is to exert self-restraint.

That's an important part of that correction. And Lemuel concludes his discourse with an allusion to wisdom and to the fear of the Lord. And this provides a fitting finale to the wisdom program.

The book begins with the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, and it ends with extolling the woman of unusual virtue who embodies this fear of the Lord. It says this, "...charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised, give her of the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates." So again, we've come full circle from the implicit voice of the mother, the exasperated voice of Lemuel's mother, to now the implicit voice of the woman who fears the Lord. And so, the wisdom has come full circle.

I have a chart that is also included in the article and it may be difficult to see given the size of the font, but this is an overview of how I think the movement of the wisdom helps us to see its linear progression and development. It begins in the prologue in the home setting. The father is the principal sage.

Lady wisdom is prominent and there's a movement from inexperience to prudent decision-making concerning proper companions. And there's a fear of the Lord theme that embodies that section of the book. And then we move to Solomon 1. Solomon 1 is a transitional setting.

The father king is the principal sage. The wise person and the wise are prominent. And there's a movement from simple to complex character types and from home to society. So again, an outward movement.

And then we come to the sayings of the wise. Sayings of the Wise 1, Sayings of the Wise 2. Here we have a royal court setting and a group or cadre of the wise who are the principal sages. They're the ones giving the wisdom. They do so through imperatives, through commands. There are various sordid social character types that are prominent. There's a movement from beginning stages of social engagement to a growing awareness and discernment. And again, the fear of the Lord becomes prominent in this section.

Then we go to Solomon 2. Solomon 2 is again a royal court setting focusing on the king and other rulers. Righteous rulers are the principal sages. The royal court officials are prominent. There's a movement from entrance at the royal court to an increasing awareness of the king's shortcomings and need for righteousness and justice.

So again, those virtues of righteousness, justice, and integrity that are to be embodied in the sage are not always embodied in the king. And so, the wise person is to learn how to navigate a world in which that is the reality. And then we conclude with the sayings of Agur and Lemuel.

Here we have a foreign royal court setting and we have a royal advisor in the person of Agur and a righteous king in the person of Lemuel as the principal sages. Here we have a litany of riddles. Various exemplars from nature and society are prominent.

A focus on animals and things of the natural world becomes part of the focus. There's a movement from the limitations of wisdom, which we find in Agur, to the coronation of the wise, that is the righteous king and queen who now embody the right kinds of application of the social norms of Torah and righteousness, justice, and integrity. And again, the fear of the Lord is the theme that's echoed from the preamble.

So, to summarize what I've argued, I've suggested that the preamble of Proverbs, the first seven verses, outline an educational program. This educational program aims at moving the implied reader, who is an inexperienced youth, toward the virtues of righteousness, justice, and integrity, specifically for the purpose of exercising sociopolitical leadership. This curricular pattern was viewed from how the opening and closing seams of the seven wisdom collections advance this idea of growing wisdom.

A structural canonical reading, that is to say, that looks at the final form of the book and its literary structure, that focuses on these literary seams between these seven wisdom collections, provides clues that there's an intentional arrangement. There's a dynamic movement that is characteristic of a conscious and intentional training regimen. Moving through the seven courses of leadership training, the immature Kalo appointee matures and matriculates as he is prepared ultimately to navigate successfully the pressures and pitfalls of societal and royal leadership.

The callow youth incrementally exemplifies these virtues of righteousness, justice, and integrity grounded in the reverential fear of Yahweh so that he himself may become an eminent sage and leader who upholds these virtues in society, who is the embodiment of Torah and the epitome of true wisdom. And I hope and pray that our study of Proverbs helps us as well in that pursuit to gain the true wisdom that comes from knowing and walking with the Lord.

This is Dr. Kyle Dunham in his teaching on the Structure and Theology of Proverbs. This is session 2, Advanced Wisdom and Social Application.