

## The Book of Proverbs

### The Theme of the Heart, Human Being, and Human Becoming

Mako A. Nagasawa

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#### Introduction to Proverbs

- The Book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings attributed mainly to King Solomon, David's son and heir. Solomon reigned from around 970 BC to 931 BC.
- The Book of Proverbs is written like a letter of wisdom from father to son. The Proverbs reflect on the 613 commandments of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). They are clever and witty sayings about the same subjects: marriage vs. adultery, family responsibilities vs. irresponsibility, parenting, passing down God's commands, honoring vs. dishonoring God, working the land vs. idleness, justice vs. injustice, contentment vs. greed, caring for the poor vs. treating them unjustly, etc.
- Reflecting on God's commands makes us 'wise' (Pr.1:1 – 8). Since God created the world and humanity with His own 'wisdom' (Pr.8:22 – 36), God's commands are not arbitrary. Rather, God's commands are appropriate to us as God's creations. They direct us to the fulfillment of our human nature and purpose. God shepherds humanity and creation into more life through His commands and teachings.
- Therefore, internalizing God's wisdom into ourselves, or not, has an impact *on us*. We impact our own development as human beings, as God intended. Below are sections of the Book of Proverbs which describe what happens *in us* when we do that, or do not.

<sup>1:1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup> To know wisdom and instruction,

To discern the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup> To receive instruction in wise behavior,

Righteousness, justice and equity;

<sup>4</sup> To give prudence to the naive,

To the youth knowledge and discretion,

<sup>5</sup> A wise man will hear and increase in learning,

And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

<sup>6</sup> To understand a proverb and a figure,

The words of the wise and their riddles.

<sup>7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;

Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

<sup>8</sup> Hear, my son, your father's instruction

And do not forsake your mother's teaching;

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head

And ornaments about your neck.

<sup>10</sup> My son, if sinners entice you,

Do not consent.

<sup>11</sup> If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood,

Let us ambush the innocent without cause;

<sup>12</sup> Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,

Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;

<sup>13</sup> We will find all kinds of precious wealth,

We will fill our houses with spoil;

<sup>14</sup> Throw in your lot with us,

We shall all have one purse,'

<sup>15</sup> My son, do not walk in the way with them.

Keep your feet from their path,

<sup>16</sup> For their feet run to evil

And they hasten to shed blood.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net

In the sight of any bird;

<sup>18</sup> But they lie in wait for their own blood;  
     They ambush their own lives.  
<sup>19</sup> So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence;  
     It takes away the life of its possessors.  
<sup>20</sup> Wisdom shouts in the street,  
     She lifts her voice in the square;  
<sup>21</sup> At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;  
     At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:  
<sup>22</sup> ‘How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?  
     And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing  
     And fools hate knowledge?’  
<sup>23</sup> **Turn to my reproof,**  
     **Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;**  
     **I will make my words known to you.**  
<sup>24</sup> Because I called and you refused,  
     I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;  
<sup>25</sup> And you neglected all my counsel  
     And did not want my reproof;  
<sup>26</sup> I will also laugh at your calamity;  
     I will mock when your dread comes,  
<sup>27</sup> When your dread comes like a storm  
     And your calamity comes like a whirlwind,  
     When distress and anguish come upon you.  
<sup>28</sup> Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;  
     They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,  
<sup>29</sup> Because they hated knowledge  
     And did not choose the fear of the LORD.  
<sup>30</sup> They would not accept my counsel,  
     They spurned all my reproof.  
<sup>31</sup> So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way  
     And be satiated with their own devices.  
<sup>32</sup> For the waywardness of the naive will kill them,  
     And the complacency of fools will destroy them.  
<sup>33</sup> But he who listens to me shall live securely  
     And will be at ease from the dread of evil.’

#### Background

- *God’s Spirit and God’s Words:* The Torah starts this theme, beginning from Genesis. God’s Spirit hovered over the earth, and God spoke His word, ‘Let there be light.’ God organized creation and made it a place where life could flourish and fill it (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). Similarly, God breathed His Spirit into the earthen Adam to give him a living soul (Gen.2:7; Ps.104:29 – 30) and then entrusted him with words. The Torah concludes with Joshua, the inheritor of the words, wisdom, and leadership of Moses, who is described in terms of spirit and wisdom/word: ‘Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom...’ (Dt.34:9).

<sup>2:1</sup> **My son, if you will receive my words**  
     **And treasure my commandments within you,**  
<sup>2</sup> Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
     Incline your heart to understanding;  
<sup>3</sup> For if you cry for discernment,  
     Lift your voice for understanding;  
<sup>4</sup> If you seek her as silver  
     And search for her as for hidden treasures;  
<sup>5</sup> Then you will discern the fear of the LORD  
     And discover the knowledge of God.  
<sup>6</sup> For the LORD gives wisdom;

From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
<sup>7</sup> He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
 He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
<sup>8</sup> Guarding the paths of justice,  
 And He preserves the way of His godly ones.  
<sup>9</sup> Then you will discern righteousness and justice  
 And equity and every good course.  
<sup>10</sup> **For wisdom will enter your heart  
 And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;**  
<sup>11</sup> Discretion will guard you,  
 Understanding will watch over you,  
<sup>12</sup> To deliver you from the way of evil,  
 From the man who speaks perverse things;

#### Background

- *God's Torah:* Unfortunately most English translations of the Bible translate the Hebrew word 'Torah' as 'the Law' through the Latin translation 'lex.' This title tends to emphasize the 'commands' and not the narrative and poetic portions. It is deeply emotionally significant, for example, that the Torah is the world's first happy ending story. Compared to circular stories where good never triumphs over evil, or a fatalistic story where evil and death triumph (e.g. the universe will eventually burn out), the Torah inspires hope.
- *God's Torah in the Human Heart:* Psalm 1 also begins encouraging people to delight in the Torah of the Lord and meditate on it day and night (Ps.1:2). The Psalms celebrate the Torah's role as teacher (Ps.25:4 – 10; 27:11; 32:8; 34:11; 51:13; 78:1 – 8; 86:11). Psalm 119 notably expands on Psalm 1. The Torah is a delight (Ps.119:16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174). The Torah, notably, will enlarge the human heart: 'You will enlarge my heart' (Ps.119:32), for 'I will walk in a wide place' (Ps.119:45). The prayer to God, 'Teach me,' means internalizing word into the heart (Ps.119:10 – 12, 26, 33, 64, 66 – 68, 73, 124, 135, 171).

<sup>3:1</sup> My son, do not forget my teaching,  
 But let your heart keep my commandments;  
<sup>2</sup> For length of days and years of life  
 And peace they will add to you.  
<sup>3</sup> **Do not let kindness and truth leave you;  
 Bind them around your neck,  
 Write them on the tablet of your heart.**  
<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute  
 In the sight of God and man.  
<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
 And do not lean on your own understanding.  
<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
 And He will make your paths straight.  
<sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
 Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.  
<sup>8</sup> **It will be healing to your body  
 And refreshment to your bones.**

<sup>6:16</sup> There are six things which the LORD hates,  
 Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:  
<sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
 And hands that shed innocent blood,  
<sup>18</sup> A heart that devises wicked plans,  
 Feet that run rapidly to evil,  
<sup>19</sup> A false witness who utters lies,  
 And one who spreads strife among brothers.

<sup>20</sup> My son, observe the commandment of your father  
And do not forsake the teaching of your mother;  
<sup>21</sup> **Bind them continually on your heart;**  
**Tie them around your neck.**  
<sup>22</sup> When you walk about, they will guide you;  
When you sleep, they will watch over you;  
And when you awake, they will talk to you.  
<sup>23</sup> For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light;  
And reproofs for discipline are the way of life

<sup>7:1</sup> **My son, keep my words**  
**And treasure my commandments within you.**  
<sup>2</sup> Keep my commandments and live,  
And my teaching as the apple of your eye.  
<sup>3</sup> **Bind them on your fingers;**  
**Write them on the tablet of your heart.**  
<sup>4</sup> Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,'  
And call understanding your intimate friend;  
<sup>5</sup> That they may keep you from an adulteress,  
From the foreigner who flatters with her words.

#### Background

- *Binding the Truth on Your Body*: In one of the greatest passages in the Torah, Moses reminded the Israelites:

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Dt.6:4 – 10)

Binding the words of God (on pieces of paper or cloth) onto your body was to help those words go deeper into the heart.

- *The Human Heart is a Tablet*: This comes from the understanding that we were made from earth, originally (Gen.2:7). So the heart is like a clay or stone tablet on which we are to receive the words of God. The act of God writing the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone probably reinforced this sense. The prophet Jeremiah later picked up this motif. Sin is written on the human heart (Jer.17:1 – 10). Therefore, to renew the covenant, God must reinscribe and rewrite His law on the tablets of the human heart (Jer.31:31 – 34).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, the 'theologian of the Trinity' and one of the three 'Cappadocian fathers' of the late fourth century, said:

'But not yet perhaps is there formed upon your soul any writing good or bad; and you want to be written upon today, and formed by us unto perfection. Let us go within the cloud. Give me the tables of your heart; I will be your Moses, though this be a bold thing to say; I will write on them with the finger of God a new Decalogue. I will write on them a shorter method of salvation.'  
(*Oration 40.45*)

- Ephrem the Syrian, poet of the fourth century, wrote:

Moses carried the tables of stone  
Which the Lord wrote,  
And Joseph bare about the pure Tablet  
In whom the Son of the Creator was dwelling.

The tables had ceased,  
Because the world was filled with Your doctrine.

(Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns of the Nativity* 11:16)

- <sup>8:22</sup> The LORD possessed me [wisdom] at the beginning of His way,  
Before His works of old.
- <sup>23</sup> From everlasting I was established,  
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
- <sup>24</sup> When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
When there were no springs abounding with water.
- <sup>25</sup> Before the mountains were settled,  
Before the hills I was brought forth;
- <sup>26</sup> While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,  
Nor the first dust of the world.
- <sup>27</sup> When He established the heavens, I was there,  
When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,
- <sup>28</sup> When He made firm the skies above,  
When the springs of the deep became fixed,
- <sup>29</sup> When He set for the sea its boundary so that the water would not transgress His command,  
When He marked out the foundations of the earth;
- <sup>30</sup> Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;  
And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,
- <sup>31</sup> Rejoicing in the world, His earth,  
And having my delight in the sons of men.
- <sup>32</sup> Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,  
For blessed are they who keep my ways.
- <sup>33</sup> Heed instruction and be wise,  
And do not neglect it.
- <sup>34</sup> Blessed is the man who listens to me,  
Watching daily at my gates,  
Waiting at my doorposts.
- <sup>35</sup> For he who finds me finds life  
And obtains favor from the LORD.
- <sup>36</sup> **But he who sins against me injures himself;  
All those who hate me love death**

#### Background

- *God's Wisdom Unites His Creation and His Commandments*: The Jewish wisdom tradition understood human nature and God's commandments to be perfectly fitted to each other *from creation*: Both flow from God's wisdom (e.g. Prov.8:22 – 23). To suggest otherwise would mean that (1) God commands things that are strangely inappropriate for His creation, or that (2) God made the creation in some way that is disconnected from His commandments and moral character. Either hypothetical case would boggle the Jewish mind.
- *Sin's Effect*: The corruption of sin does not alter the basic categories of creation. However much we now face sinful desires in ourselves that resist God, a situation acknowledged in the Psalms and Proverbs and supremely by Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25, that does not take away from the fact that we are already participating in God's wisdom – and therefore in God Himself, in some sense – by our very creation. If God's commandments cause the heart to rejoice (e.g. Ps.19:8), then the heart cannot be marred by sin beyond recognition. We may struggle to follow the commandments of God. Yet our struggles are framed by a prior assurance of God's love for us as Creator, a teleological hope in God's goodness to heal human nature as part of our destiny (e.g. Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; etc.), along with joy in finding in ourselves a desire to follow those commands in the present, despite the resistance we also feel.

That is arguably why Paul can speak of a true 'I myself' in contrast to the alien 'sin that indwells me' (e.g. Rom.7:18) in that convoluted passage and convoluted journey of self-diagnosis.

<sup>10:8</sup> The wise of heart will receive commands,  
But a babbling fool will be ruined.

<sup>12:20</sup> Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,  
But counselors of peace have joy.

<sup>14:32</sup> The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing,  
But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.

<sup>33</sup> Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding,  
But in the hearts of fools it is made known.

<sup>17:3</sup> The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,  
But the LORD tests hearts.

<sup>18:9</sup> He also who is slack in his work [LXX: he that does not heal himself in his own works]  
Is brother to him who destroys. [LXX: is the brother of him that destroys himself]

<sup>20:9</sup> Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart,  
I am pure from my sin'?

#### Background

- *God is a Refining Fire*: At very important moments, God portrayed Himself as a fire to represent His desire to refine, cleanse, and purify people. People participated in God's purification by internalizing His word.
  - The first mention of fire is when God placed a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen.3:24). In Revelation 1, Jesus represents himself as fiery, with a sword coming out of his mouth, representing his word. This connection indicates that God wants to burn or cut (i.e. circumcise; cf.Dt.10:16; 30:6) something away from us in order for us to eat from the tree of life, lest we all immortalize sin and evil within ourselves. This motif of fire (and circumcision as well) represents the effect of us internalizing Jesus' word into ourselves.
  - Then, God appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush at Mount Horeb-Sinai (Ex.3:1 – 6) as a representation of dwelling among His fallen people. God, after leading His people out of Egypt as a pillar of fire (Ex.13:21 – 22; 14:24), came in fire on that same mountain where the burning bush was (Ex.3:12; 19:18; Dt.5:4). Yet the Israelites said, 'This great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, then we will die' (Dt.5:25), and refused to go up the mountain to meet with God when the trumpet called (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5). Instead, they sent Moses, who walked through the fire into the presence of God (Ex.19:20 – 25; 24:9 – 18). Moses met with God and relayed God's word to the Israelites. Significantly, Moses' face shone with light and glory (Ex.34:29 – 35), indicating that he was allowing God to purify him, which would happen in full to Jesus and those who share in the life of Jesus (2 Cor.3:7 – 18; Mt.17:1 – 13).
  - The prophets continued to call out to Israel to be purified by the word of God by using the motif of God being a refining, purifying fire (Ps.11:4 – 5; 18:8 – 13; 66:10; Isa.1:24 – 31; 4:3 – 5; 6:6 – 13; 10:16 – 17; 33:10 – 15; 48:10; Mal.3:1 – 3). God's words are already purified in the fire (Ps.12:6; 18:30), so God desires the truth of His word to be in the innermost place of every person (Ps. 51:6), which is the equivalent of being washed and having a clean heart (Ps. 18:19 – 24; 51:2, 7 – 12, 17).

- Resisting God's word and purification leads to experiencing God as a destroying, tormenting fire. For clinging onto the sinfulness that God desires to burn away leads one to identify with sinfulness. Hence, God's positive goal of purification will feel like a negative experience. Torment is the experience of God eternally demanding that one give up the sin to which s/he has become irrevocably addicted (Ps.11:6; Isa.66:13 – 24; Mal.4:1 – 3; etc.)

22:17 Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise;  
Apply your heart to what I teach,

**18 For it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart  
And have all of them ready on your lips.**

19 So that your trust may be in the LORD,  
I teach you today, even you.

23:12 Apply your heart to instruction  
And your ears to words of knowledge.

13 Do not withhold discipline from a child;  
If you punish him with the rod, he will not die.

14 Punish him with the rod  
And save his soul from death.

15 My son, if your heart is wise,  
Then my heart will be glad;

16 My inmost being will rejoice  
When your lips speak what is right.

17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
But always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.

18 There is surely a future hope for you,  
And your hope will not be cut off.

**19 Listen, my son, and be wise,  
And keep your heart on the right path.**

26:21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire,  
So is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;  
They go down to a man's inmost parts.

23 Like a coating of glaze over earthenware  
Are fervent lips with an evil heart.

**24 A malicious man disguises himself with his lips,  
But in his heart he harbors deceit.**

**25 Though his speech is charming, do not believe him,  
For seven abominations fill his heart.**

26 His malice may be concealed by deception,  
But his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

27 If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it;  
If a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.

28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts,  
And a flattering mouth works ruin.

**27:19 As water reflects a face,  
So a man's heart reflects the man.**

20 Death and Destruction are never satisfied,  
And neither are the eyes of man.

21 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold,

- But man is tested by the praise he receives.
- <sup>22</sup> Though you grind a fool in a mortar,  
Grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.
- <sup>28:4</sup> Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,  
But those who keep the law resist them.
- <sup>5</sup> Evil men do not understand justice,  
But those who seek the LORD understand it fully.
- <sup>6</sup> Better a poor man whose walk is blameless  
Than a rich man whose ways are perverse.
- <sup>7</sup> He who keeps the law is a discerning son,  
But a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.
- <sup>8</sup> He who increases his wealth by exorbitant interest  
Amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor.
- <sup>9</sup> If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law,  
Even his prayers are detestable.
- <sup>10</sup> He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap,  
But the blameless will receive a good inheritance.
- <sup>11</sup> A rich man may be wise in his own eyes,  
But a poor man who has discernment sees through him.
- <sup>12</sup> When the righteous triumph, there is great elation;  
But when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding.
- <sup>13</sup> He who conceals his sins does not prosper,  
But whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.
- <sup>14</sup> **Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD,  
But he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.**

#### Comments and Conclusions

- *The Sinai Covenant:* The biblical and theological implication of this study regards our perception of the Sinai covenant, and why God gave it to Israel. God did not give the Sinai covenant simply to condemn *Israel*. God gave it, rather, to develop Israel, and help Israel condemn *sin*, even the *sin within themselves*. In relation to sinfulness, God called the Israelites to internalize God's commands so deeply that they circumcise their hearts (Dt.10:16), that is, to perform a spiritual surgery within themselves. But in relation to our nature as human beings, God gave His commands to help each Israelite to develop her or his own *human nature*.
- *Human Being, Human Becoming:* This study of Proverbs helps us look backward and forward in the biblical story *at what happens to human nature when we make choices*.
  - *Looking backward:* We can see human nature as a gift from God entrusted to us, which we must develop with His partnership (Gen.2:4 – 25). We can also see human nature as corrupted by the fall (Gen.3), and even more corruptible from there (Gen.4). Cain corrupted himself further by killing Abel, making his human nature incompatible with bringing forth fruit from the land (Gen.4:11). He enclosed himself in a city of his own making, implicitly forcing his son and descendants to defend, guard, feed, and justify him (Gen.4:16 – 24). Then, the people of Noah's generation were so violent, following in the trajectory of the violence of Cain's family, that God diagnosed their hearts as being completely corrupt (Gen.6:5 – 6). This is also described as 'hardness of heart' in the Torah and here in Proverbs.
  - *Looking forward:* Jesus and his apostles would later say that Israel did not, and could not, be perfectly faithful to God within the Sinai covenant, because of an internal problem they inherited from the fall, alternatively called 'evil in the heart' (e.g. Mt.15:18 – 20; Mk.7:21 – 23), or 'the flesh' (e.g. Rom.7:14 – 25), or 'the old self' (e.g. Rom.6:6; Eph.4:17 – 19). Therefore, Jesus had to do what Israel could not: receive a fallen human nature (Jn.1:14), fully develop his own human nature and simultaneously condemn sin within it, by never sinning (e.g. Rom.8:3; Heb.5:7 – 9), thus circumcising his own heart (Dt.30:6; Rom.2:28 – 29) because he fulfilled the Sinai covenant on Israel's behalf (Mt.5:17; Rom.10:4). He produced in himself 'a new humanity' to share with us (Rom.8:4; 1 Cor.15:17; Eph.2:15).

- *Salvation*: In the Old Testament, *salvation* is defined as God and each human person working together in partnership to purify and fulfill/complete – and therefore *save* – that person's *human nature* via right relationship with God. This is why God's mighty act of salvation after Israel's exile is described as 'circumcision of the heart' (Dt.30:6). God, with human willingness and partnership, cuts something away from us which ought never to have been there. Salvation is not described as God exhausting divine retributive wrath which He stored up under the Sinai covenant elsewhere.

## Appendix A: The Jewish Wisdom Tradition in the Organization of the Bible

Moses (Torah)	Prophets (Nevi'im)	Writings (Ketuvim)
Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)	Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Treisar (the Twelve Prophets)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Megillot (Ruth, Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles
Beginning: Garden & Command  ‘The LORD God <b>commanded</b> the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the <b>garden</b> you may eat, but from the <b>tree of knowledge of good and evil</b> you shall not eat...’ (Gen.2:16 – 17)	Beginning: Garden & Command  ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the <b>land</b> which I swore to their fathers to give them... This book of <b>the law</b> shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall <b>meditate on it day and night...</b> ’ (Josh.1:8)	Beginning: Garden & Command  ‘But his delight is in <b>the law</b> of the LORD, and in <b>His law he meditates</b> day and night. He will be like <b>a tree firmly planted by streams of water</b> , which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither...’ (Ps.1:2 – 3)

We can see a pattern here in the canonical shape of the Old Testament literature. (1) At the start of the Torah, or ‘the Teaching,’<sup>1</sup> in the Garden of Eden, God gave a wise command for humanity to remember and honor. (2) Then, in the first book of the Nevi'im, or ‘the Prophets,’ the character Joshua read the Torah and meditated on it constantly (Josh.1:8). As a result of this deep study of the Torah, Joshua is portrayed as the great wise man: He reflects on what God gave before. (3) In the third section of the Old Testament, the Ketuvim, or ‘the Writings,’ we find Psalm 1, which praises the person who meditates on God’s Torah constantly. That person is wise. We always reflect on what was given before. John Sailhamer calls these ‘compositional seams’ linking and holding together books of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> In effect, it is a way to see the inspiration of the Scriptures as relating to the *organization and placement* of the books, not just the *writing* of the books.

God gave Adam words to internalize. God gave Adam the task of meditating on those words and living them out, in particular with his wife Eve and then their children. The picture of humanity in paradise is to be given a word from God to meditate on, to obey, and to pass on. That word then becomes something called ‘wisdom.’ God’s people need God’s wisdom to live in His blessing. Joshua, who begins the second section of the Bible, is portrayed as a ‘wise one,’ who reflects on the teaching he was given. The Psalmist, who begins the third section of the Bible, is also portrayed as a ‘wise one,’ who reflects on what he was given.

<sup>1</sup> Also unfortunately called ‘the Law’ through the Latin translation ‘lex,’ although this title tends to emphasize the ‘commands’ and not the narrative and poetic portions.

<sup>2</sup> John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Zondervan, 1995)