

The Fear of the Lord and Fatherly Discipline

A Rhetorical Analysis of Prov 14:23–15:24

This group of proverbs is the initial subsequence of the central sequence (Prov 14:23–17:20) in the First Solomonic Collection (10:1–22:16)¹ containing seven parts (14:23–27; 14:28–34; 14:35–15:4; 15:5–7; 15:8–12; 15:13–17; 15:18–24) which can be grouped into three passages in the following concentric manner: A B / C D C' / A'B'.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life	14:23–27
Honoring and dishonoring the Creator	14:28–34
A king's delight in a prudent servant	14:35–15:4
Fatherly discipline	15:5–7
The Lord's delight and abomination	15:8–12
Better a little with the fear of the Lord	15:13–17
Bringing joy to the father and despising the mother	15:18–24

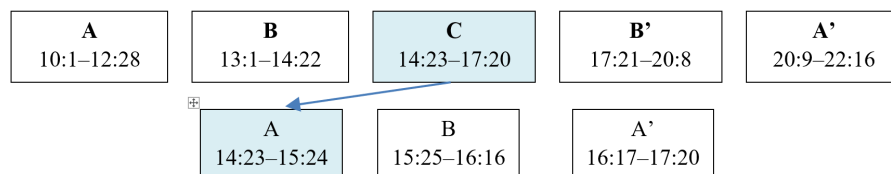
I. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS FOUNTAIN OF LIFE (14:23–27)

1. TEXT

²³ In all pain there is profit,
but the word of the lips only to want.

²⁴ The crown of the wise (is) their riches,²

¹ This is the first of the three subsequences in 14:23–17:20 which is the third and central sequence in the First Solomonic Collection (WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 151–181). The chart below shows the overall composition of the entire First Solomonic Collection with the delimitation into five sequences and the subdivision of the third sequence:



² Reider suggests that the noun 'ošer "riches" would mean here "intelligence" ("Etymological Studies", 125). Some emend 'ošrām "their riches" to 'ormātām "their prudence" (Gemser, 67; Hamp, 41; Hitzig, 141; Oesterley, 113; Plöger, 167) or to yošrām "their virtue" (Scott, 97).

the folly³ of the foolish (is) folly.

²⁵ He who delivers souls (is) a true witness,
but he who breathes lies (is) a deceiver.⁴

²⁶ In the fear of the Lord (is) strong confidence
and to his sons there is a refuge.

²⁷ The fear of the Lord (is) a fountain of life
to turn aside from the snares of death.

2. COMPOSITION

The three pieces in this part (23–24, 25 & 26–27) form a concentric composition. The initial piece (23–24) discusses the respective consequences of positive and negative acting using economic terms: “profit” (23a), “to want” (23b) and “riches” (24a). In the initial members, “pain” which brings “profit” (23a) corresponds to “the crown of the wise” defined as “their riches” (24a). On the other hand, in the final members, “the words of the lips” that results in “want” (23b) correspond to “the folly of the foolish” which causes even a greater “folly” (24b).

Parallelism between proverbs of the final piece (26–27) is even more evident. The same expression, *yir’at yhwh* “the fear of the Lord” (26a & 27a) opens the initial members. The final members begin with the same preposition *le* “to” (26b & 27b). The thematic link in the passage consists of the positive results of the “fear of the Lord” expressed in terms of “salvation/security”: “confidence of strength” (26a), “a refuge” (26b), “a fountain of life” (27a) and “to turn aside from the snares of death” (27b).

As for the extreme pieces (23–24 & 26–27), a common element is the verb *yihyeh* “there is” (23a & 26b).⁵ From a formal point of view, both passages begin with the preposition *be* “in” (23a & 26a) and the final segments (24 & 27) lack *wāw copulativum*. There is a thematic link between the extreme pieces. “Wisdom”

³ In place of the first *’iwwelet* “folly” many propose to read *liwyat* “garland” (BHS; Clifford, 142; Frankenberg, 89; Garrett, 144; Gemser, 67; HAUSMANN, *Studien*, 19; KUHN, *Beiträge zur Erklärung*, 32; Plöger, 167; McKane, 466; Scott, 97; Toy, 302). Others propose that the first *’iwwelet* could derive from *’wl* “be powerful” and here it would have a meaning of “prominence” (J. REIDER, “Etymological Studies”, 125; Stuart, 276). However, the Masoretic Text is preferable, as the tautology would be intended for emphasis (cf. Ginsburg, 258; Heim, 185; Murphy, 102; Van Leeuwen, 143).

⁴ There are proposed two amendments of the noun *mirmā* rendered here as “a deceiver”: *m^erammeh* “deceits” (BHS; GUILLAUME, “Magical Terms”, 120; McKane, 469; Scott, 97) and *m^dammeh* “destroys” (Hitzig, 142; Oesterley, 113; Renard, 105). The word *mirmā* could be considered as *abstractum pro concreto* (BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechten Reden*, 164; Stuart, 276; VAN DER WEIDEN, “‘Abstractum pro concreto’”, 49; Whybray, 221).

⁵ We should take a note of the limited use of the verb *hyh* “to be” in the First Solomonic Collection (Prov 10:1–22:16), where it occurs only 6 times (the other instances are 12:8.24; 13:19; 14:35).

(24a) and prosperity (23a & 24a) are among the fruits of “the fear of the Lord” (26a & 27a), as it will be shown later in the biblical context.

+ ²³ <i>b^ekol</i>	<i>‘eṣeb</i>	<i>yihyeh</i>	<i>môtār</i>
– <i>ûd^ebar</i>	<i>ś^epātayim</i>	<i>‘ak</i>	<i>l^emaḥsôr.</i>
+ ²⁴ <i>‘āṭeret</i>	<i>ḥākāmîm</i>	<i>‘ośrām</i>	
– <i>‘iwwelet</i>	<i>k^esîlîm</i>	<i>‘iwwelet.</i>	
.....			
+ ²⁵ <i>maṣṣîl</i>	<i>n^epāšôt</i>	<i>‘ēd</i>	<i>‘ēmet</i>
– <i>w^eyāpiaḥ</i>	<i>k^ezābîm</i>	<i>mirmâ.</i>	
.....			
+ ²⁶ <i>b^eyîr ‘at</i>	<i>yhwh</i>	<i>mibṭaḥ</i>	<i>‘ōz</i>
+ <i>ûl^ebānāw</i>	<i>yihyeh</i>	<i>maḥseh.</i>	
+ ²⁷ <i>yîr ‘at</i>	<i>yhwh</i>	<i>m^eqôr</i>	<i>ḥayyîm</i>
= <i>lāsûr</i>	<i>mimmōqšê</i>	<i>māwet.</i>	
.....			
+ ²³ In all	pain	there is	profit,
– but <i>the words</i>	<i>of the lips</i>	<i>only</i>	<i>to want.</i>
+ ²⁴ The crown	of the wise	(is) their riches,	
– <i>the folly</i>	<i>of the foolish</i>	(is) <i>folly.</i>	
.....			
+ ²⁵ He who delivers	souls	(is) a witness	of truth,
– but <i>he who breathes</i>	<i>lies</i>	(is) <i>a deceiver.</i>	
.....			
+ ²⁶ In the fear	of the Lord	(is) confidence	of strength,
+ and to his sons	there is	a refuge.	
+ ²⁷ The fear	of the Lord	(is) a fountain	of life,
= to turn aside	from the snares	of death.	

The central piece (25) displays some links with the rest of the part. These links cross in the central piece: the initial member (25a) corresponds to the final piece (26–27) while the final member (25b) corresponds to the initial piece (23–24). The syntagma “delivers souls” (25a), which could also be rendered as “saves lives” (25a) refers to the following expressions: “a refuge” (26b), “a fount of life”

(27a) and “to turn aside from the snares of death” (27b). The verb “breathes” (25b) corresponds to the “words of the lips” (23b).⁶

As for the final proverb of this part (27), it is a synthetic proverb and thus stands out from the other proverbs which are antithetic (23–25) and synonymous (26). We could consider it a closing phenomenon.

From a thematic point of view, the central piece (25) stands apart from the extreme pieces (23–24 & 26–27) which focus on the consequences of the acting, while the central piece (24) defines persons through their acting. The thematic arrangement would be as follows:

<i>Fruits of wise and foolish acting</i>	23–24
<i>Acting defines a person</i>	25
<i>Fruits of the fear of the Lord</i>	26–27

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Being too talkative

The opposition between being industrious or talkative (14:23) is expressed by another proverb as follows, “he who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows vanities is devoid of sense” (12:11 = 28:19). According to Qoheleth, talkativeness is opposed to the fear of the Lord (Eccl 5:1–6). He urges “do not rush with your mouth” (1), “for a dream comes with much business, and a fool’s voice with many words” (2). One who speaks excessively may utter empty words. In the Gospels Jesus states, “on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mat 12:36–37).

The fruits of the “Fear of the Lord”

The insistence on the “fear of the Lord” (Prov 14:26a, 27a) evokes the discourse in the Book of Sirach on this theme (1:11–20). The principal gift of the fear of the Lord is wisdom, for “the beginning of wisdom is to fear the Lord” (14), “a crown of wisdom is the fear of the Lord” (18) and “the root of wisdom is to fear the Lord” (20). Among the other gifts listed are “glory, exultation and gladness” (11), wealth (15) and long life (12, 20). Sirach explains that “those who fear the Lord will have a happy end; on the day of their death, they will be blessed (13). One of the closing proverbs of the First Solomonic Collection lists “riches, and glory, and life” as the fruits of the fear of the Lord (22:4).

⁶ WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 153. For the feature of the crossing at the center see MEYNET, *Treatise*, 414–416.

4. INTERPRETATION

The fear of the Lord transforms people

The two closing proverbs (26 & 27) list the fruits of “the fear of the Lord” as “strong confidence” (26a), “refuge” (26b), “a fountain of life” (27a), and salvation from “from the snares of death” (27b). However, in the corresponding initial proverbs (23 & 24) we can also find mentioned two other conventional fruits of “the fear of the Lord,” namely “wisdom” (24a) and “profit/riches” (23a, 24a). Therefore, reading the initial proverbs from the perspective of the final proverbs we can see “the fear of the Lord” as a driving force transforming people and that becomes visible in their industrious (23a) and wise (24a) acting, for they are able to gain “profit” (23a) and “riches” (24a). The personal transformation through “the fear of the Lord” is expressed in the central proverb (25) in moral terms, for one who fears the Lord (26a, 27a) is a “trustworthy” person who “delivers souls” (25a) and therefore trustworthy persons become a reason for a “strong confidence” (26a) and a “refuge” for others (26b). The central proverb (25) also talks about the implications of one’s acting for others (26b), while in the external proverbs the fruits apply to the subject themselves. However, looking from the perspective of the central proverb, we can also think that the fruits listed in the external proverbs benefit others as well. On the other hand, the final proverbs (26–27) seem to move beyond the earthly and material perspective presented in other proverbs (23–25), shifting toward a spiritual and eternal dimension.

The folly of the foolish

Although the passage does not explicitly mention that the foolish are acting against the “fear of the Lord” (cf. 26a & 27a), however, it can be implied when reading between the lines. Refusal of divine discipline and lack of self-discipline can be seen in their doings (23b & 25b). Rejection of the “fear of the Lord” (cf. 26a & 27a) will inevitably lead to negative consequences, namely, absence of the fruits proper to “the fear of the Lord” and especially lack of wisdom (24b; cf. 1:7). The consequences can also be seen in the inappropriate use of the gift of speech: being too talking instead of performing the duties (14:23b) and “breathing lies” rather than truth (25b). Finally, “the folly of the foolish” that is “folly” (24b) consists in deceiving themselves, for their attitude yields no profit, but only poverty (23b). Reading again between the lines of the final proverbs (26 & 27) from a spiritual perspective, those who reject “the fear of the Lord” will not be saved “from the snares of death,” which equates to eternal punishment (27b).

II. HONORING AND DISHONORING THE CREATOR (14:28–34)

I. TEXT

²⁸ In the multitude of people (is) the splendor of a king,
but in the lack of population the ruin of a prince.

²⁹ A slow to anger (has) much intelligence,
but a short of spirit raises up⁷ folly.

³⁰ The life of the flesh (is) a heart of healing,⁸
and the rottenness of the bones (is) envy.

³¹ He who oppresses⁹ the weak insults his Creator,
but he who has mercy on the needy honors Him.

³² The wicked is driven away in his own evil,
but the righteous seeks refuge in his death.¹⁰

³³ Wisdom abides in the heart of the intelligent,
but in the midst of the foolish it is known.¹¹

³⁴ Righteousness raises up a nation,

⁷ The verb *mērīm* “raises” is read in various ways: “exalts” (for instance: Alonso Schökel, 325; Gozzo, 72) and “displays” (for instance: Bernini, 254; Heim, 187). Instead of *mērīm* “raises,” some suggest reading *marbeh* “increases” (Oesterley, 114; Toy, 302).

⁸ The word *marpē* may not derive from *rp* “to heal” but from *rph* “be calm” (suggested by KB, 568; McKane, 472; cf. *DCH*, V, 491–492). In the First Solomonic Collection, the word *marpē* occurs 5 times and in all other instances (12:18; 13:17; 15:4; 16:24) it is considered as deriving from *rp* “to heal.”

⁹ Emerton suggests the double meaning of the word *ōšēq*: “to oppress” and “to slander” (“Notes on Some Passages”, 203–206).

¹⁰ The expression *bēmōtō* “in his death” could imply belief in immortality. Those who regard this concept as premature prefer to amend *bēmōtō* “in his death” to *betummō* “in his integrity” (for instance: Frankenberg, 90; Gemser, 67; Hitzig, 144; McKane, 475; VAN OORSCHOT, “Der Gerechte”, 228; Whybray, 223). The Masoretic reading is supported by 4Q103 (DE WAARD, “4QProv”, 92). Several scholars advocate for reading some texts of the Old Testament that include this proverb from the perspective of a belief in the reward of the afterlife (BENAMOZEGH, “L’immortalità”, 150; COSSER, “The Meaning of ‘Life’”, 52–53; COTTINI, *La vita futura*, 68–69; HAUSMANN, *Studien*, 56–57, note 153; Kidner, 111; NICCACCI, “Sulla vita futura”, 384–386; VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 112–114; ID., “Prov. XIV 32b”, 339–350). See also MONTAGNINI, “De retributione”, 156–157; VAWTER, “Intimations”, 166–167.

¹¹ Some replace *tiwwādēa* “it is known” with *iwwēlet* “folly” (Oesterley, 114; Toy, 302). D.W. Thomas derives *tiwwādēa* “from the root *wd*” with the meaning of “to be subdued, humiliated.” He makes the same suggestion concerning 10:9 (“The Root *yd*”, 302–303). His suggestion is followed by EMERTON, “A Consideration”, 171; and McKane, 466. Some based on the LXX insert the negation *lo* before *tiwwādēa* (Gemser, 67; Hamp, 42; Plöger, 168; Scott, 99; Renard, 106; Scherer, 143; Whybray, 223). Another solution is to consider the second member as a rhetorical question (Barucq, 130; Fuhs 1, 236; Fuhs 2, 103; Meinhold, I, 242; Murphy, 102). Retaining the Masoretic Text, the verb would express that the foolish immediately make their wisdom known, while the wise reserve it and utter it at the appropriate time. Therefore, this proverb would be similar to 10:14, 19 and 11:3 (cf. Heim 197; Steveson, 198).

but sin (is) a disgrace¹² to populations.

2. COMPOSITION

At first glance, verse 31 stands out due to lack of direct links with other proverbs of the part. Therefore, let us begin with the surrounding proverbs that could form external pieces (28–30 & 32–34).

Initial piece (28–30)

The first three verses (28–30) could form a piece in which the extreme proverbs (28 & 30) are closely related. The initial proverb concerns the condition of the population (28) and the final one concerns the condition of the parts of the human body (30). “The multitude of people” (28a) corresponds to “the life of the flesh” (30a), and “the lack of population” (28b) corresponds to “the rottenness of the bones” (30b). The central proverb (29) distinguishes itself from the other proverbs by using terms of wisdom and foolishness in reference to the contrasting attitudes of being calm (“slow to anger”) and impulsive (“a short of spirit”).

+ ²⁸ <i>b^erob</i>	<i>‘ām</i>	<i>hadrat</i>	<i>melek</i>
– <i>ûb^e’epes</i>	<i>l^e’ôm</i>	<i>m^eḥittat</i>	<i>rāzôn.</i>
+ ²⁹ <i>’erek</i>	<i>’appayim</i>	<i>rab</i>	<i>ʔbânâ</i>
– <i>ûq^ešar</i>	<i>rûaḥ</i>	<i>mērîm</i>	<i>’iwwelet.</i>
+ ³⁰ <i>ḥayyê</i>	<i>b^ešārîm</i>	<i>lêb</i>	<i>marpê’</i>
– <i>ûr^eqab</i>	<i>’ăšāmôt</i>	<i>qin’â.</i>	

+ ²⁸ In the multitude	of people	the splendor	of a king,
– but in the lack	of population	the ruin	of a prince.
+ ²⁹ A slow	to anger	(has) much	intelligence,
– but a short	of spirit	raises up	folly.
+ ³⁰ The life	of the flesh	(is) a heart	of healing,
– and the rottenness	of the bones	(is) envy.	

¹² Many read *hesed* II “reproach, disgrace” which is found in Lev 20:17 and Prov 25:10 (for instance: Barucq, 130; Bertheau, 59; Clifford, 148; Delitzsch, 227; Greenstone, 159; Hitzig, 145; KITCHEN, “Proverbs and Wisdom Books”, 106; Lisowsky, 514; McKane, 475; Meinhold, I, 245–246; Steveson, 198; Stuart, 279). Some based on the LXX, read *heser* in the sense of “to diminish” (Alonso Schökel, 325; BHS; Müller – Kautzsch, 48; Oesterley, 117; Scott, 98). Cf. *DCH*, III, 281. The meaning of “goodness” is held by Ginsburg, 265, who lists various opinions from the Talmud concerning the goodness of nations manifested as a sin.

Final piece (32–34)

In the last three proverbs (32–34), the extreme proverbs (32 & 34) are semantically linked. The most visible link is between *ṣaddīq* “the righteous” (32b) and *ṣēdāqā* “righteousness” (34a). “The wicked” with “his own evil” (32a) corresponds to “a sin” (34b). The central proverb (33) again distinguishes itself from the rest by containing terms of wisdom and foolishness.

– ³² <i>bē^erā ‘ātō</i>	<i>yiddāḥeh</i>	<i>rāšā ‘</i>	
+ <i>wēḥōseh</i>	<i>bēmôtō</i>	<i>ṣaddīq.</i>	
+ ³³ <i>bēlēb</i>	<i>nābôn</i>	<i>tānūaḥ</i>	<i>ḥokmā</i>
– <i>ūbēqereb</i>	<i>kēsīlīm</i>	<i>tiwwādēa ‘.</i>	
+ ³⁴ <i>ṣēdāqā</i>	<i>tērômēm</i>	<i>gōy</i>	
– <i>wēḥesed</i>	<i>le’ummīm</i>	<i>ḥaṭṭā ‘t.</i>	

– ³² In his own evil	is driven away	the wicked,	
+ but seeks refuge	in his death	the righteous.	
+ ³³ In the heart	of the intelligent	abides	wisdom.
– but in the midst	of the foolish	is made known.	
+ ³⁴ Righteousness	raises up	a nation,	
– but a disgrace	to populations	(is) a sin.	

The whole part

The three pieces of this part (28–30, 31, 32–34) form a concentric composition.¹³ The most evident link between the extreme pieces (28–30 & 32–34) is the repetition of the word *le’ōm / le’ummīm* (in singular and plural form) translated as “population” (28b) and “populations” (34b), and the presence of other words of the same semantic field, *‘ām* “people” (28a) and *gōy* “nation” (34a). All these words play a role of extreme terms.¹⁴ The central proverbs of the extreme pieces

¹³ Proposed delimitations: 24–35 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 178); 28–35 (Plöger, 174–175; Meinhold, I, 242–243; WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 102; MEINHOLD, “Das Wortspiel”, 615–616; Garrett, 146–147; Heim, 187–188); 29–33 (Toy, 298; Bernini, 254); 14:26–15:1 (Scherer, 153–158). According to Scoralick v. 28 opens a larger unit: 14:28–15:32 (*Einzelspruch*, 226–227; similarly, Fuhs 1, 234–235; Fuhs 2, 102).

¹⁴ This literary device is known to many as *inclusio*. In my dissertation, because of this *inclusio*, vv. 28 & 34 were considered as separate pieces, and what is currently called the extreme pieces (28–30 & 31–34), was treated at that time as parts, each containing two pieces (28, 29–30 & 31–32 & 34; see WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 157).

(29 & 33) are also related to each other,¹⁵ for both contain terms of the opposing semantic fields of wisdom and foolishness: “intelligence” (29a), “folly” (29b), “the intelligent” and “wisdom” (33a), and “the foolish” (33b). A link between vv. 30 & 32 is less evident; however, the two opposing terms “life” (30a) and “death” (32b) can be seen as median terms at a distance. Thus, the extreme pieces would be in a chiasmic relationship of *abc / c’b’a’* type. We note also two words repeated in both pieces: *lēb* “heart” (30a & 33a) and *rwm* “to raise” (29b & 34a).¹⁶

+ ²⁸ <i>b^erob</i>	<i>‘ām</i>	<i>hadrat</i>	<i>melek</i>
– <i>ûb^e’epes</i>	<i>l^e’ôm</i>	<i>m^ehittat</i>	<i>rāzôn.</i>
+ ²⁹ <i>’erek</i>	<i>’appayim</i>	<i>rab</i>	<i>l^ebûnâ</i>
– <i>ûq^ešar</i>	<i>rûaḥ</i>	<i>mērîm</i>	<i>’iwwelet.</i>
+ ³⁰ <i>ḥayyē</i>	<i>b^ešārîm</i>	<i>lēb</i>	<i>marpē’</i>
– <i>ûr^eqab</i>	<i>’ăšāmôt</i>	<i>qin ’â.</i>	
<hr/>			
– ³¹ <i>’ôšēq</i>	<i>dāl</i>	<i>ḥērēp</i>	<i>’ôšēhû</i>
+ <i>ûm^ekabb^edô</i>	<i>ḥōnēn</i>	<i>’ebyôn.</i>	
<hr/>			
– ³² <i>b^erā’ātô</i>	<i>yiddāḥeh</i>	<i>rāšā’</i>	
+ <i>w^eḥōseh</i>	<i>b^emôtô</i>	<i>šaddîq.</i>	
+ ³³ <i>b^elēb</i>	<i>nābôn</i>	<i>tānûaḥ</i>	<i>ḥokmâ</i>
– <i>ûb^eqereb</i>	<i>k^esîlîm</i>	<i>tiwwādēa’.</i>	
+ ³⁴ <i>š^edāqâ</i>	<i>l^erômēm</i>	<i>gôy</i>	
– <i>w^eḥesed</i>	<i>l^e’ummîm</i>	<i>ḥaṭṭâ ’t.</i>	

Within the central proverb (31), we can notice the following concentric composition:

<i>’ôšēq dāl</i>	He who oppresses the weak
<i>ḥērēp</i>	insults
<i>’ôšēhû</i>	his Creator
<i>ûm^ekabb^edô</i>	but honors Him
<i>ḥōnēn ’ebyôn.</i>	he who has mercy on the needy.

The word *’ôšēhû* “his Creator” (31a), which occupies the central position within this proverb, will also be the focal point of the whole part.

¹⁵ The relation between vv. 29 & 33 was recognized by Whybray, 222.

¹⁶ In the First Solomonic Collection, the verb *rwm* appears only 4 times (other instances are 11:11 & 21:4).

The central proverb (31) may seem to be disconnected from the rest of our part. Nevertheless, we can also establish some links with the extreme proverbs. The verb *kbd* “to honor” (31b) corresponds to *hadrat* “splendor” (28a). “He who has mercy on the needy” (31b) can be linked to *ṣ̣ēdāqâ* “righteousness” (34b), since one of the meanings of this noun is also “almsgiving.” On the other hand, “he who oppresses the weak” (31a) corresponds to the “sin” in the final member (34b). Therefore, the central proverb is well connected with the extreme proverbs of our part.¹⁷

+ ²⁸ In the multitude	of people	the splendor	of a king,
– but in the lack	of population	the ruin	of a prince.
+ ²⁹ A slow	to anger	(has) much	intelligence ,
– but a short	of spirit	raises up	folly .
+ ³⁰ THE LIFE	of the flesh	(is) a heart	of healing,
– and the rottenness	of the bones	(is) envy.	
.....			
– ³¹ He who oppresses	the weak	insults	his CREATOR ,
+ but honors Him	he who has mercy	on the needy.	
.....			
– ³² In his own evil	is driven away	the wicked,	
+ but seeks refuge	in HIS DEATH	the righteous.	
+ ³³ In the heart	of the intelligent	abides	wisdom .
– but in the midst	of the foolish	is made known.	
+ ³⁴ Righteousness	raises up	a nation ,	
– but a disgrace	to populations	(is) a sin.	

Thematically, the relation between the proverbs can be illustrated as follows:

<i>MULTITUDE AND SCARCITY OF PEOPLE</i>	28
<i>Acting with wisdom and foolishness</i>	29
<i>Life and rottenness</i>	30
<i>Insulting and honoring the Creator</i>	31
<i>Refuge and death</i>	32
<i>Acting with wisdom and foolishness</i>	33
<i>RIGHTEOUSNESS AND DISGRACE OF PEOPLE</i>	34

¹⁷ Lund’s third law states that the center often is connected to the extremes of the same unit (see MEYNET, *Treatise*, 46).

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Taking care of the poor

The word *’ōšēhū* “his Creator” (31a) is found in another proverb within the same collection which states: “He who mocks the poor shows contempt to his Creator, he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5). The central proverb in our text (14:31) evokes one of Jesus’ parables about the final judgment (Matt 25:31–46) where we hear the following words referred to the good ones: “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (vv. 35–36) and then gives them the reason: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me” (40). To the wicked ones he said: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (45).

Attributes of the king

To keep the Law of the Lord and to act righteously (cf. 32b & 34a) is what the Law requires of a king (Deut 17:18–20). Wisdom, justice, faithfulness and mercy are listed as the attributes of the messianic king (Isa 11:2–5; cf. 16:5). The First Solomonic Collection (Prov 10:1–22:16) lists the same attributes along with positive consequences. For “goodness and faithfulness preserve a king” (20:28) and “the throne is established with righteousness” (16:12).

4. INTERPRETATION

A good king

A king is glorified not because of his position but for his attributes and merits like “wisdom” (29a & 33a), “righteousness” (32b & 34a), and “mercy,” and especially for his proper attitude toward the poor (31b). Being wise (33a) he acts in a calm manner (29a). The two statements, “righteousness raises up a nation” (34a) and “the multitude of people” (28a), describe qualities that associate a good king with “his Creator” (31a); qualifies for governing people with righteousness (34a) and creating an environment favorable for the growth of his population (28a). A literal translations of 30a expresses this idea, for *lēb marpē* “a heart of healing” is *hayyē bēšārīm* “the life of the flesh” and the plural form of the word *bāšār* “flesh, body” can imply that proper acting of a king procures healing for his people.¹⁸ The central proverb illustrates this by describing him as one “who has mercy on the needy” (31b). In this way a king who is caring for the least among

¹⁸ It should be noted that here we have the only plural instance of the word *bāšār* “flesh, body” in the entire Bible, while this word occurs in the Old Testament 270 times.

his people is in fact honoring the “Creator.” For this reason, he can be confident and feel secure even at the hour of his own death, for God is his refuge (32b).

A bad king

In contrast to a good king (28a), a bad ruler is described as one whose population is decreasing (28b). One who lacks the qualities required for a king should not have authority over people; otherwise, such a person may become a bad ruler. The other proverbs in our part illustrate it. In fact, the characteristics of such a king are foolishness and irascibility (29b), because he wants to make his opinion known instantly, which, unfortunately, is not a wise approach (33b). He may accomplish some good deeds; however, doing it with injustice, his goodness turns into disgrace (34b). His foolishness is presented in more pragmatic terms, since it is revealed through his evil actions (32a) and destructive behavior toward his own people (31a). Instead of caring for “the weak” and “the needy” (cf. 31b), and assuring the growth of his population (28a),¹⁹ he senselessly oppresses them (31a) causing scarcity of his people, and thus destroying his kingdom. All this leads to his own ruin (28b).

III. A KING’S DELIGHT IN A PRUDENT SERVANT (14:35–15:4)

1. TEXT

³⁵ The delight of a king (is) toward a servant (who is) prudent,
and his fury is²⁰ (toward)²¹ him who causes shame.

^{15:1} A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a painful word²² raises up anger.

² The tongue of the wise makes knowledge good,²³

¹⁹ In ancient times there was a direct correlation between the number of people and their strength as a group especially concerning physical labor and the army.

²⁰ Some following the LXX suggest reading *tahārōg* “will be killed” instead of *tihyeh* “is” (Gemser, 67; Hamp, 42; Oesterley, 117).

²¹ The preposition *le*, translated in 35a as “toward,” also applies to the complement in the second member (Alonso Schökel, 325), while the verb *tihyeh* “is” (35b) also applies to the first member. It would be a case of double ellipsis (VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 114).

²² Literally “the word of pain.” The same noun *‘eṣeb* is used in 14:23, where it was translated as “pain” to show that we have the same word in both instances. This noun is used in the First Solomonic Collection only three times. The other instance is found in 10:22.

²³ The verb *tēfīb* “makes good” is rendered in various ways: “makes welcome” (NJB), “makes pleasing” (Barucq, 130; Lelièvre – Maillot, I, 169), “adorns” (Heim, 191; McKane, 478; *HOTTP*, III, 498). To improve parallelism, many prefer one of the following amendments: *taṭṭeb* or *taṭeb* “announces” (DRIVER, “Problems in the Hebrew”, 181; BROCKINGTON, *The Hebrew Text*, 162); *taṭṭip* “drips” (Hamp, 42; HULST, *Old Testament*, 124; Gemser, 68; Müller – Kautzsch, 48; Oesterley, 118; Toy, 309). However, the Masoretic reading finds support in 4Q103 (DE WAARD, “4QProv”, 94), and the meaning of the Masoretic Text is quite clear (Clifford, 151; cf. BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechten*

but the mouth of the foolish pours out folly.

³ The eyes of the Lord (are) in every place
watching the evil and the good.

⁴ A healing tongue²⁴ (is) a tree of life,
but perverseness in it (is) a breaking in the spirit.

2. COMPOSITION

This passage contains three pieces (14:35–15:1; 15:2 & 15:3–4) organized concentrically.²⁵ Proverbs in the initial piece (14:35–15:1) are linked through terms of the same semantic field: *‘ebrātō* “his fury” (14:35b), *hēmā* “wrath” (15:1a) and *‘āp* “anger” (1b). There are no direct lexical links between proverbs of the final piece (15:3–4); however, we can notice that they are related thematically. The general statement in v. 3 concerning God who is watching “the evil and the good” (3b), is illustrated in the subsequent proverb (4): “the good” are described as “a healing tongue” (4a) and “the evil” have “perverseness” in their speech (4b).

+ ³⁵ <i>r^ešōn</i>	<i>melek</i>	<i>l^e‘ebed</i>	<i>maškīl</i>
– <i>w^e‘ebrātō</i>	<i>tihyeh</i>	<i>mēbīš.</i>	
+ ^{15,1} <i>ma‘āneh</i>	<i>rak</i>	<i>yāšīb</i>	<i>hēmā</i>
– <i>ūd^ebar</i>	<i>‘ešeb</i>	<i>ya‘āleh</i>	<i>‘āp.</i>
.....			
+ ² <i>l^ešōn</i>	<i>hakāmīm</i>	<i>tēṭīb</i>	<i>dā‘at</i>
– <i>ūpī</i>	<i>k^esīlīm</i>	<i>yabbīa‘</i>	<i>‘iwwelet.</i>
.....			
+ ³ <i>b^ekol</i>	<i>māqōm</i>	<i>‘ēnē</i>	<i>yhwh</i>
+ <i>šōpōt</i>	<i>rā‘īm</i>	<i>w^eṭōbīm.</i>	
+ ⁴ <i>marpē’</i>	<i>lāšōn</i>	<i>‘ēš</i>	<i>hayyīm</i>
– <i>w^eselep</i>	<i>bāh</i>	<i>šeber</i>	<i>b^erūaḥ.</i>

We can notice a parallel relationship between proverbs of the extreme pieces (14:35–15:1 & 15:3–4). In the initial proverbs, “the delight of a king” and “his

Reden, 53; Perowne, 109; Stuart, 280). The verb *yṭb* “to be good” occurs only three times in the First Solomonic Collection and always in *hiphil* (other instances: 15:13; 17:22).

²⁴ Literally “the healing of the tongue.” This proverb states that one tongue heals while another harms (cf. Heim, 192; VATTIONI, “L’albero della vita”, 141).

²⁵ Proposed delimitations: 14:28–15:4 (WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 103); 14:34–15:3 (Whybray, 224); 15:1–4 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 178; Meinhold, I, 247; SÆBØ, *On the Way*, 254; Heim, 192); 15:1–6 (Delitzsch, 228); 15:1–7 (Clifford, 150); 15:2–4 (Scherer, 168–169).

fury” (14:35) correspond to “the eyes of the Lord” that are “watching the good and the evil” (15:3). In the final proverbs there are terms from the semantic field of speech: “a gentle answer” (15:1a) is synonymous to “a healing tongue” (4a) and “a painful word” (1b) corresponds to “perverseness” of the tongue (4b). However, “a tree of life” (4a), if understood as referring to divine recompense, would link with “the delight of a king” (14:35a), and consequently, “a breaking in the spirit” (15:4b) taken as divine punishment, would link with the king’s “fury” (14:35b).

+ ³⁵ The delight	of a king (is)	toward a servant	(who is) prudent,
– and his <i>fury</i>	is (toward)	him who causes shame.	
+ ^{15:1} An answer	gentle	turns away	<i>wrath,</i>
– but a word	painful	raises up	<i>anger.</i>
<hr/>			
+ ² The tongue	of the wise	makes good	knowledge,
– but the mouth	of the foolish	pours out	folly.
<hr/>			
+ ³ In every	place	the eyes	of the Lord
+ watching	the evil	and the good.	
+ ⁴ A healing	tongue (is)	a tree	of life,
– but perverseness	in it (is)	a breaking	in the spirit.

The theme of “speech” links the central proverb (15:2) with the final proverbs of the extreme pieces (1 & 4), which present speech with its positive and negative consequences. The uniqueness of the central proverb (2) consists in the use of terms of wisdom and foolishness to describe speech. A synonymous term to “the wise” (2a) is “a servant (who is) prudent” in the opening proverb (14:35a) and it is a corresponding term to “the good” in 15:3b. Therefore, we can establish a link between all positive (blue color in the panel) and negative (dark red color in the panel) characteristics mentioned in our passage.

Thematically, the flow in the passage is as follows:

<i>King's judgment on the servants</i>	14:35
Speech and its positive and negative consequences	15:1
SPEECH OF THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH	15:2
<i>Lord's judgment on the evil and the good</i>	15:3
Speech and its positive and negative consequences	15:4

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

God scrutinizes hearts of men

“The eyes of the Lord watching the evil and the good” (15:3)—this statement particularly evokes the words of the psalmist in Psalm 139:

O Lord, you examine me, and you know; you know my laying down and my rising up. You understand my thoughts from afar. You observe my walking and my resting, and you are acquainted with all my ways. (Ps 139:1–3)

Nothing can be hidden before God, for “the eyes of the Lord are thousand times brighter than the sun, looking upon all the ways of men and perceiving the hidden places” (Sir 23:19; cf. 16:17–23; Amos 9:2–4). “The eyes of the Lord watching” the people (Prov 15:3) implies divine judgment, and therefore, in the texts in which God scrutinizes people, reward and punishment are also often mentioned:

The eyes of the LORD range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars. (2 Chr 16:9)

The Lord examines the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence, he hates his soul. On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur, and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. (Ps 11:5–6)

Fruits of speech

The positive and negative consequences of speech (Prov 15:1, 4) are already described in the same Solomonic Collection in 12:13–14:

¹³ In **the transgression of the lips the snare of the evil**,
but the righteous escapes from trouble.

¹⁴ From **the fruit of the mouth a man is satisfied with good**,
and the reward of the hands of a man returns to him.

A similar proverb to 12:14 is found in 13:2, which is the central proverb of a piece in which the consequences of speech are also presented:

¹ **A wise son (listens to) a discipline of the father**,
but **a scorner does not listen to rebuke**.

² From **the fruit of the mouth a man eats good**,
but the throat of treacherous—violence.

³ **He who guards his tongue preserves his throat**,
he who opens wide his lips, it is ruin to him.

In this group of proverbs, the positive consequences (2a & 3a) are ascribed to a wise son who is obedient to his father (1a), while the negative consequences (2b & 3b) are linked to a rebellious scorner (1b).

The final proverb of our piece (15:4), containing the metaphor of the “tree of life” (4a), could evoke the story of the original sin (Gen 3) in which the lying tongue of the serpent leads Adam and Eve to sin.

The tree of life

In the Book of Genesis, “the tree of life” is a symbol of eternal life (Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24). In the Book of Proverbs, the syntagma “tree of life” occurs 4 times (3:18; 11:30; 13:12 & 15:4). In Prov 3:18 the first line states that wisdom is “*a tree of life* for those who hold her fast” and the second line adds that “those who hold her fast are happy” (18b).

Another instance of “the tree of life” in Prov 11:30 is within a group of proverbs (11:29–12:2) where it is parallel to 12:2:²⁶

The fruit of the righteous (is) **a tree of life**
and he who wins the souls is wise. (11:30)

A good person obtains **favor of the Lord**,
but a man of evil devices he condemns. (12:2)

The first lines of both proverbs are synonymous. The object of the “fruit of the righteous” is “the tree of life” (11:30) and the object of what “a good person obtains” is “the favor of the Lord” (12:2). Because of the parallelism, “the tree of life” is to be understood as recompense from the Lord. The central proverb of that part speaks rather about the earthly dimension of this recompense: “If the righteous on earth is recompensed, how much more the wicked and the sinner (11:31).

The last instance of “the tree of life” (before our part) is found in 13:12 which is parallel to v. 14:²⁷

Hope deferred **makes the heart sick**,
but **a desire fulfilled** (is) **a tree of life**. (13:12)

The teaching of the wise (is) **a fountain of life**,
to turn aside from **snare of death**. (13:14)

“A tree of life” (12b) is made parallel to “a fountain of life” (14a), which is a consequence of “the teaching of the wise.” In turn, “the teaching of the wise” also corresponds to “a desire fulfilled” (12b) through parallelism. “A desire fulfilled” implies acceptance of the wise teaching, since the central proverb, which is placed between the two, states: “he who respects the commandment will be rewarded” (13b). Consequently, “a tree of life” (12b) and “a fountain of life” (14a) are divine rewards helping to avoid “snare of death” (14b), which can be

²⁶ WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 73–75.

²⁷ WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 113–114.

understood as an image of eternal punishment and not merely as simple reference to a premature judgment and death. In fact, in the Book of Revelation 2:7, those who are victorious will have the right “to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

4. *INTERPRETATION*

The tongue of the wise

The statement that “the tongue of the wise makes knowledge good” (Prov 15:2a) means that the wise man, when uttering his wisdom, dresses it up in such a manner that it becomes attractive and lovable to the listeners. Positive attributes of wise man’s speech include also prudence in speaking (14:35a), giving a “gentle answer” which appeases the king’s “wrath” (15:1a) and procures his “favor” (14:35). “The tongue of the wise” (15:2a) is identified with “a healing tongue” (4a), which implies its positive effects on others. The speech of the wise man does good to people; it is like medicine that heals. The positive effects of his speech return to him, for they bring him divine reward (3). God, who sees his good works, satisfies him with the fruit from the tree of life (4a).

The mouth of the foolish

The general statement in the central proverb that “the mouth of the foolish pours out folly” (15:2b) is specified in the surrounding proverbs as “a painful word” (1b) and “perverseness” in speech (4b). A foolish person resembles a reckless and shameful servant whose talk is like blows of a sword which wound others and cause pain (1b). Irresponsible answers to his superior (cf. 14:35b) cause his superior’s anger to increase even more (15:1b). In the final piece (3–4), the “pouring out folly” (2b) concerns “perverseness” in speech (4b), which is contrasted with “a healing tongue” (4a). We can understand that the “perverseness” which causes “a breaking in the spirit” is a harmful use of the tongue. A specific case could be deception that destroys a person’s good name (4b).

The eyes of the Lord

The initial proverb of the last piece which states that “the eyes of the Lord are watching the evil and the good” (15:3) affirms divine judgment. This divine judgment is illustrated in the final proverb (4) with two metaphors. In the first one, those who use their tongue for a “good” purpose will be satisfied from the “tree of life” (4a), which can be understood as referring to eternal life. In contrast, those who use it for an “evil” end will realize a “spirit” that will be “broken” (4b), consequently referring to eternal punishment. Divine judgment is also applied on earth by those who represent God; the first proverb (14:35) talks about a king who shows to his servants both favor and fury accordingly to their actions.

IV FATHERLY DISCIPLINE (15:5–7)

1. TEXT

⁵ A fool spurns the discipline of his father,
but he who heeds reproof becomes clever.

⁶ In²⁸ the house of the righteous is great treasure,
but in²⁹ the gain of the wicked there is trouble.

⁷ The lips of the wise spread³⁰ knowledge,
but the heart of the foolish—not so.³¹

2. COMPOSITION

This part, the size of a piece, contains three segments arranged concentrically.³² All these proverbs are antithetical. In the extreme proverbs, the antithesis concerns the wise and the foolish: “a fool” (5a) is contrasted with one who “becomes clever” (5b), and “the wise” (7a) with “the foolish” (7b).

– ⁵ <i>’ēwīl</i>	<i>yīn ’aṣ</i>	<i>mūsar</i>	<i>’ābīw</i>
+ <i>wešōmēr</i>	<i>tōkaḥat</i>	<i>ya’rim.</i>	
+ ⁶ <i>bēt</i>	<i>ṣaddīq</i>	<i>ḥōsen</i>	<i>rāb</i>
– <i>ūbitbū’at</i>	<i>rāšā’</i>	<i>ne’kāret.</i>	
+ ⁷ <i>śiptē</i>	<i>ḥākāmīm</i>	<i>yezārū</i>	<i>dā’at</i>
– <i>welēb</i>	<i>kesīlīm</i>	<i>lō’ kēn.</i>	

²⁸ In the Masoretic Text the proverb starts with *bēt* “the house” without any preposition. Some, following the Targum, propose to read *bēbēt* “in the house” (Barucq, 132; Greenstone, 161). Others consider *bēt* as haplography (Gemser, 69; Renard, 107) or as an accusative of place with the meaning of *bēbēt* “in the house” (Hitzig, 59; Müller – Kautzsch, 48; Stuart, 280). It could also be a case of ellipsis (VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 115).

²⁹ In some Manuscripts, the preposition *bē* “in” in front of *tēbū’ā* “gain” is missing (cf. BHS).

³⁰ Some in place of *yezārū* “spread” suggest reading *yīṣṣerū* “preserve” (Hamp, 43; Oesterley, 119; Whybray, 226).

³¹ The syntagma *lō’ kēn* could mean “not so” (*kēn* I adv. “so”) or “not rightly” (*kēn* II adj. “rightly”). Many render it as “not so,” but some prefer the meaning of “not rightly” (Alonso Schökel, 331; Clifford, 151; Delitzsch, 231; Scherer, 165; Whybray, 226). Others translate *lō’ kēn* as “are perverse/false” (Lelièvre – Maillot, I, 174; McKane, 233; Scott, 100). Following LXX and Syr is rendered as “not stable” (Stuart, 280). Some emend it to *lō’ yabīn* “without intelligence” (Oesterley, 119; Toy, 309).

³² WHYBRAY notices the link between vv. 5 and 7, but he considers v. 6 not well connected with them (“The Composition”, 103). Other proposed delimitations: 2–7 (Fuhs 1, 240–241; Fuhs 2, 104; GOLDINGAY, “The Arrangement”, 81–83); 5–12 (Heim, 194–195; Meinhold, I, 249; Scherer, 170–172).

The central proverb (6) differs from the other two (5 & 7), for the antithesis is expressed not in sapiential but in moral terms contrasting the “righteous” (6a) and the “wicked” (6b). Moreover, the central proverb (6) lists the consequences of moral standing, while the extreme proverbs (5 & 7) describe the respective outcomes. Terms from the semantic field of wealth, “great treasure” (6a) and “gain” (6b), are unique to the central proverb.

– ⁵ A fool	spurns	<i>the discipline</i>	of his father,
+ but he who heeds	reproof	<i>becomes clever.</i>	
+ ⁶ In the house	of <i>the righteous</i>	is treasure	a great one,
– but in the gain	of <i>the wicked</i>	—trouble.	
+ ⁷ The lips	of <i>the wise</i>	spread	<i>knowledge,</i>
– but the heart	of <i>the foolish</i>	—not so.	

Thematically, all these proverbs have a family context. The initial proverb discusses children’s behavior toward fatherly “discipline” (5). The central proverb talks about the moral outcome for the “house” (6), whether “righteous” or “wicked.” The final segment (7) presents behaviors of “the wise” (7a) and “the foolish” (7b) as resulting from their choices mentioned in the opening proverb (5). Thus, a son who accepts his father’s “reproof” (5b), spreads “knowledge” (7a) when he becomes an adult (a father); foolish children, having rejected their father’s teaching (5a), are unable to do so as adults (7b):

<i>Two attitudes toward fatherly discipline</i>	5
<i>Consequences of moral standing</i>	6
<i>Behaviors resulting from the attitude toward fatherly discipline</i>	7

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Attitude toward fatherly discipline

A similar group of proverbs found in 13:1–3 where the initial proverb speaks also about opposing attitudes toward “fatherly discipline”.³³

+ ¹ A wise	son...	<i>the discipline</i>	of a father,
– but a scoffer	hears not	reproof.	
+ ² From the fruit	of the mouth	a man	eats <i>good,</i>
– but <i>the throat</i>	<i>of the treacherous</i>	—violence.	
+ ³ He who guards	his mouth	preserves	his throat,
– He who opens wide his lips		—ruin to him	

³³ See Witek, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 104–105.

The thematic disposition in the remaining proverbs is the same as in our passage. Namely, the last proverb (3) describes behaviors resulting from attitudes toward discipline. The central proverb (2) describes consequences resulting from both, that is attitudes (1) and behaviors (3).

The treasure of the righteous and the gain of the wicked

We can notice a certain affinity between the central proverb in our part (15:6) and the central proverb of the parallel part in 13:1–3 (presented above) where we read, “From the fruit of the mouth a man eats good, but the throat of the wicked—violence” (2). The statement in 15:6 could be understood as a natural consequence of the respective behaviors. However, we could also think of divine retribution already at work in an earthly dimension, as stated in 11:31: “If the righteous on earth is recompensed, how much more the wicked and the sinner.”

4. INTERPRETATION

A fool spurns his father’s discipline

Rejection of fatherly discipline (5a) has tangible consequences. A foolish son, because of such behavior, misses an opportunity to grow in knowledge and understanding, and can be recognized in his speech, for what comes out of his mouth is contrary to wisdom and knowledge (7b). A practical consequence of his actions may regard his economic status. Instead of the “great treasure” of the righteous (6a), his reward is only “trouble” (6b), which can imply a variety of problems concerning his wellbeing resulting from his senseless and undisciplined behavior.

A clever son accepts fatherly discipline

A son who accepts his father’s discipline becomes wise (5b), and his intelligence becomes apparent in his actions, especially in speech, for his words are charged with wisdom and his lips “spread knowledge” (7a). Another consequence of positive behavior toward discipline is “great treasure” (6a). In a literal sense, this refers to material wealth as a visible sign of the positive consequences of his wise behavior, for it protects him so that he can avoid any “trouble” (cf. 6b). However, it can also be understood as a sign of divine blessings.

V. THE LORD’S DELIGHT AND ABOMINATION (15:8–12)

1. TEXT

⁸ The sacrifice of the wicked (is) an abomination to the Lord,
but the prayer of the upright (is) his delight.

⁹ An abomination to the Lord (is) the way of the wicked,

but he loves him who pursues righteousness.

¹⁰ Discipline is evil³⁴ to him who forsakes the path,³⁵
he who hates reproof will die.

¹¹ Sheol and Abaddon³⁶ (are) before the Lord,
surely also the hearts of the sons of men.

¹² A scorner does not love one who reproves him,
to³⁷ the wise he will not go.

2. COMPOSITION

This part contains three pieces (8–9, 10 & 11–12) which form a concentric composition.³⁸ The proverbs of the initial piece (8–9) are linked lexically and thematically. Both proverbs speak of the “abomination of the Lord” (*tô ‘ābat yhw̄h*, 8a & 9a). “He loves” (9b) is a synonymous expression to “his delight” (8b). The objects of the Lord’s abomination and delight are also linked: on one hand, “the sacrifice of the wicked” (8a) and “the way of the wicked” (9a), on the other, “the prayer of the upright” (8b) and “him who pursues righteousness” (9b).³⁹

We do not notice explicit links between the proverbs of the final piece (11–12). However, we could consider them as forming a unit because of their parallelism with the proverbs of the initial piece (8–9). Lexically, the statement “Sheol and Abaddon” that are “before the Lord” (11a) corresponds to the “abomination of the Lord” (8a & 9a). The terms “to love” (9b & 12a), “the way” (9a) and “he will not go” (12b) link the final proverbs.

Thematically, the initial proverbs (8 & 11) speak of the divine judgment over the people: “the Lord” who knows “the hearts of the sons of man” (11) accepts “the prayer of the upright” (8b) but rejects “the sacrifice of the wicked” (8a). In the final proverbs (9 & 12) “the way of the wicked” (9a) is illustrated by the acting

³⁴ Many render the syntagma *mūsār rā’* as “severe discipline” (for instance, Steveson, 204, RSV, NRSV, NET). The literal translation of the adjective *rā’* as “evil” is aimed to show a later relation with v. 15, where we read that “all the days of the afflicted are *evil*” (see p. 24).

³⁵ P. Joūon proposes the following transposition of terms: *‘ōrah rā’ le’ōzēb mūsār* “an evil path to him who forsakes discipline” (“Notes philologiques”, 184–185).

³⁶ The word *‘ābaddōn* is used in the Bible as a synonym for “Sheol” and means “the place of destruction, perdition.” In rabbinic literature, this term means “the place of punishment reserved for the wicked” (GREYER, “Abaddon”, 6).

³⁷ In place of the preposition *‘el* “to toward” the BHS proposes *‘et* “with” (cf. Delitzsch, 232; Hitzig, 149; Toy, 308). We notice the assonance of lamed in this proverb: accompanied with the vowels “o” and “e”: *lō lē lō // el lō ēlē*. The amendment would weaken this assonance (cf. MCCREESH, *Biblical Sound*, 46; SALISBURY, “Hebrew Proverbs”, 444–448). Preposition *‘el* could mean here, not just being in the company of the wise men, but seeking advice from them (cf. Cohen, 97).

³⁸ Similar delimitations: 5–12 (Meinhold, I, 249; Scherer, 170; Heim, 194–195); 8–9 & 10–12 (Murphy, 112); 8–10 (Van Leeuwen, 149); 8–11 (HERMISSE, *Studien*, 178; WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 103–104; Whybray, 227; Reyburn – Fry, 331); 8–14 (Fuhs 1, 235; Fuhs 2, 104).

³⁹ Cf. HILDEBRANDT, “Proverbial Pairs”, 212–213.

of a scorner who “does not go to the wise” (12) in contrast to “one who pursues righteousness” (9b).

– ⁸ <i>zēbaḥ</i>	<i>rēšā’īm</i>	<i>tô’ābat</i>	YHWH
+ <i>ūtēpillat</i>	<i>yēšārīm</i>	<i>rēšônô.</i>	
– ⁹ <i>tô’ābat</i>	YHWH	<i>derek</i>	<i>rāšā’</i>
+ <i>ûmēraddēp</i>	<i>šēdāqā</i>	<i>ye’ēhāb.</i>	
.....			
– ¹⁰ <i>mūsār</i>	<i>rā’</i>	<i>le’ōzēb</i>	<i>’ôrah</i>
– <i>šônē’</i>	<i>tôkaḥat</i>	<i>yāmût.</i>	
.....			
+ ¹¹ <i>še’ôl</i>	<i>wa’ābaddôn</i>	<i>neged</i>	YHWH
+ <i>’ap kī</i>	<i>libbôt</i>	<i>b’nē</i>	<i>’ādām.</i>
– ¹² <i>lō’ ye’ēhab</i>	<i>lēš</i>	<i>hōkēaḥ</i>	<i>lô</i>
– <i>’el ḥākāmīm</i>	<i>lō’ yēlēk.</i>		
.....			
– ⁸ The sacrifice	of the wicked (is)	<i>an abomination</i>	to the LORD ,
+ but the prayer	of the upright (is)	<i>his defigfit.</i>	
– ⁹ <i>An abomination</i>	to the LORD (are)	<i>the way</i>	of the wicked,
+ but <i>him who pursues</i>	righteousness	<i>he loves.</i>	
.....			
– ¹⁰ <i>A discipline</i>	<i>severe</i>	to him who forsakes	<i>the path,</i>
– <i>he who hates</i>	<i>reproof</i>	<i>will die.</i>	
.....			
– ¹¹ <i>Sheol</i>	and <i>Abaddon</i> (are)	before	the LORD ,
: surely also	the hearts	of the sons	of men.
– ¹² <i>Does not love</i>	a scorner	<i>one who reproves</i>	him,
– to the wise	<i>he will not go.</i>		

The central proverb (9) is talking about punishment—“a severe discipline” (10a) and “will die” (10b)—which can be linked to the “abomination to the Lord” (8a & 9a) mentioned in the initial proverbs. There are also other lexical links between the center and the outer pieces, namely, terms of the same semantic field of “discipline” (10a): “reproof” (10b) and “one who reproves” (12a). “The path” (10a) corresponds to other terms of the same semantic field: “the way” (9a) and

the verbs “to pursue” (9b) and “to go” (12a). “He who hates reproof” (10b) is named “a scorner” who “does not love one who reproves him” (12a).

Thematically, relationships between the proverbs can be expressed as follows:

The abomination and delight of the Lord	8
<i>The Lord abhors the way of the wicked,</i>	
<i>but loves the one who pursues righteousness</i>	9
Consequences of forsaking the right path	10
The Lord knows the human hearts	11
<i>A scorner does not love his reprover</i>	
<i>He does not follow the wise</i>	12

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Sacrifices acceptable to God

The initial proverb (8) echoes prophetic criticism concerning religious practices (cf. Isa 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24; Mich 6:6–8). Through Hosea God says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (6:6). Jesus quotes this phrase in response to the Pharisees’ criticism, “Go and learn what this means, ‘desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Matt 9:13). Later in the same gospel, when they accuse his disciples of breaking the Sabbath rest by picking grain, he says to them: “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent” (12:7). A similar criticism of religious practices is also found in this collection of proverbs. We read that “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, all the more so if it is offered with evil intent” (Prov 21:27). Another proverb states that “to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (21:3).

God knows everything

Concerning God who scrutinizes the hearts of men (11), see the biblical context of the parallel passage in 14:35–15:4.⁴⁰

4. INTERPRETATION

The Lord’s delight for the upright

God in his omnipotence scrutinizes the hearts of men and knows all their thoughts even the unspoken ones; therefore, nothing can escape his gaze (11). God sees not merely external works (8b & 9b) but especially the intention with which those works are performed (11). External works (8b & 9b) are acceptable to God insofar as they express the proper internal disposition, which in the initial piece is defined as uprightness (8b) and righteousness (9b).

⁴⁰ See above, p. 15.

The wicked are an abomination to the Lord

The wicked (8a & 9b) are perhaps trying to atone for their sins making sacrificial offerings, or at least they intend to earn divine favor, by having some good deeds to present to the Lord (8a), with the hope of saving their own lives (cf. 10b). Their offerings though externally appear good, are not pleasing to God (8a, cf. 9a), for he sees and judges them according to their inner disposition (11). Their worship is not acceptable to the Lord (8a), for it is merely an external ritual which does not reflect their inner disposition, for it is not an expression of a desire for atonement and conversion (10 & 12).

Severe punishment for a scorner

“Forsaking the path” (10a) and “hating reproof” (10b) are the behaviors of “a scorner” who “does not love” the person “who reproves him” (12a). This attitude is named “the way of the wicked” which is “an abomination to the Lord” (9a). The Lord who scrutinizes human hearts (11b) does not accept their superficial external religious acts, but punishes them with “a severe discipline” (10a) and death (10b). The statement “will die” (10b) linked in the subsequent proverb to “Sheol and Abaddon” (11a) is to be understood as eternal punishment and not merely physical death.

VI. BETTER A LITTLE WITH THE FEAR OF THE LORD (15:13–17)

1. TEXT

¹³ A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit (is) broken.

¹⁴ The heart of the intelligent seeks knowledge,
but the face⁴¹ of the foolish feeds⁴² on folly.

¹⁵ All the days of the afflicted (are) evil,

⁴¹ Many prefer the *qere ûpî* “but the mouth” (for example: Barucq, 134; BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechten Reden*, 190; Cohen, 98; Delitzsch, 233; Fuhs 1, 237; Gemser, 68; Oesterley, 121; Steveson, 206, note 7; Stuart, 283). It is better to follow the *ketib ûp^{ne}* “but the face” for the following two reasons: 1) *pānîm* “face” is used in the preceding verse (13a); 2) it is not unusual to find a subject in plural accompanied by a verb in singular (Heim, 197; cf. Hitzig, 149). Dahood retains the *ketib* and, based on Ugaritic, attributes the noun *p^{ne}* the meaning of “desire, appetite” (*Proverbs*, 34). The *ketib* is also retained by KUHN, *Beiträge zur Erklärung*, 37.

⁴² There are two roots of *r’h*. Many take the first form of *r’h* meaning “to feed, to pasture” (for instance: Alonso Schökel, 334; Barucq, 134; BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechten Reden*, 190–191; Cohen, 98; Oesterley, 121; Perowne, 111; Scott, 101; Scherer, 165; Vaccari, 48; Whybray, 230). Taking the second root of *r’h* as “to be a companion” would indicate the association of the foolish with folly. (Ginsburg, 274; McKane, 478–479). According to Greenstone, 164, both meanings are possible. Some prefer the meaning of the Aramaic homonymous verb “to like, to desire” (Frankenberg, 92; Stuart, 283).

but of a cheerful heart⁴³ (are) a feast without end.

¹⁶ Better a little with the fear of the Lord
than great wealth and trouble with it.

¹⁷ Better a meal of herbs and love there
than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

2. COMPOSITION

This part contains three pieces, where the extreme pieces, formed of pairs of parallel proverbs (13–14 & 16–17), frame a single proverb at the center.⁴⁴

+ ¹³ <i>lēb</i>	<i>šāmēah</i>	<i>yēṭib</i>	<i>pānīm</i>
– <i>ûb^e‘ašš^ebat</i>	<i>lēb</i>	<i>rūah</i>	<i>n^ekē‘ā.</i>
+ ¹⁴ <i>lēb</i>	<i>nābôn</i>	<i>y^ebaqqeš</i>	<i>dā‘at</i>
– <i>ûp^enē</i>	<i>k^esîlîm</i>	<i>yîr‘eh</i>	<i>‘iwwelet.</i>
.....			
+ ¹⁵ <i>kol</i>	<i>y^emê</i>	<i>‘ānî</i>	<i>rā‘îm</i>
– <i>w^etôb</i>	<i>lēb</i>	<i>mišteh</i>	<i>tāmîd.</i>
.....			
+ ¹⁶ <i>tôb</i>	<i>m^e‘at</i>	<i>b^eyîr‘at</i>	<i>yhwh</i>
– <i>mē‘ôšār</i>	<i>rāb</i>	<i>ûm^ehûmā</i>	<i>bô.</i>
+ ¹⁷ <i>tôb</i>	<i>‘āruḥat yārāq</i>	<i>w^e‘ahābā</i>	<i>šām</i>
– <i>miššôr</i>	<i>‘ābûs</i>	<i>w^ešîn‘ā</i>	<i>bô.</i>

Both proverbs of the initial piece (13–14) begin with the same noun *lēb* “heart” (13a & 14a), qualified positively as “joyful” (13a) and “of the intelligent” (14a), followed by positive outcomes “makes a cheerful face” (13a) and “seeks

⁴³ It is a case of ellipsis, and therefore the expression *kol y^emê* “all the days” would apply to both lines, and the syntagma *tôb lēb* “a cheerful heart” would be its complement, as in the first line it is *‘ānî* “the afflicted” (Hitzig, 150; Meinhold, I, 253–254; VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 115). Therefore, the following amendments do not seem necessary: *tûb lēb* “a joyful heart” (Gemser, 69; KRISPENZ, *Spruchkompositionen*, 71) and *l^etôb lēb* “for a cheerful heart” (BHS; Müller – Kautzsch, 48; Toy, 312). The syntagma *tôb lēb* is rendered in various ways: “a good soul” (Frankenberg, 93), “a happy heart” (Mezzacasa, 50; Hamp, 43; Barucq, 134), “joy in a heart” (Vaccari, 48) and “the optimist” (Lelièvre – Maillot, I, 170).

⁴⁴ Verses 13–17 are recognized as a unit by Plaut, 171; Plöger, 182; Van Leeuwen, 149–150; Clifford, 152. Similar delimitations: 7–17 (Delitzsch, 230); 11–17 (KRISPENZ, *Spruchkompositionen*, 71–72; Fuhs 1, 243; Fuhs 2, 105); 12–15 and 16–17 (Garrett, 153); 12–17 (WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 104–105; Whybray, 229–230); 12–18 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 178); 13–18 (Scherer, 172–173; Heim, 197); 13–19 (Meinhold, I, 253); 15–17 (WHYBRAY, “Yahweh-sayings”, 161).

knowledge” (14a). In the second members, “sorrow of heart” (13b) and “the face of the foolish” (14b) are complementary, as are their outcomes “the spirit (is) broken” (13b) and “feeds on folly” (14b). Following the *ketib* in 14b (*ûp^enê*, “but the face”), we notice a link between the extreme members since 13a ends with *pānîm* “face.”⁴⁵

The final piece (16–17) contains *tôb... min* “better... than” proverbs.⁴⁶ The initial members open with the same adjective *tôb* “better” (16a & 17a), whereas the final members open with the particle *min* “than” (16b & 17b). There are also other formal elements in common: third terms in the second members open with *waw copulativum* “and” (16b & 17b); both proverbs end with the same particle *bô* “with it” (16b & 17b). The parallelism of these two proverbs is well articulated.

+ ¹³ A HEART	joyful	makes cheerful	a FACE ,
– but by sorrow	of HEART	the spirit	(is) broken.
+ ¹⁴ The HEART	of the intelligent	seeks	knowledge,
– but the FACE	of the foolish	feeds	on folly.
.....			
– ¹⁵ All	the days	of the afflicted	(are) evil ,
+ but of a cheerful	HEART	(are) a feast	without end .
.....			
+ ¹⁶ Better	a little	with the fear	of the Lord
– than wealth	a great one	and trouble	with it .
+ ¹⁷ Better	a meal of herbs	and love	there
– than an ox	fattened	and hatred	with it .

Note a stylistic phenomenon of the crossing at the center.⁴⁷ The syntagma *tôb lēb* “a “cheerful heart” in the central proverb (15b) contains terms specific to extreme pieces (13–14 & 16–17) in a reverse order: ⁴⁸ the adjective *tôb* rendered as “cheerful” (15b) links with the subsequent piece where it is translated as “better” (16a.17a),⁴⁹ while the noun *lēb* “heart” (15b) with the preceding piece (13ab, 14a).

Qualifying the respective members as presenting positive (+) or negative (–) concepts we can also notice a crossing at the center, because in the central proverb

⁴⁵ See above, footnote 41.

⁴⁶ Out of 20 *tôb... min* proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, these two belong to the same category (4th) together with 12:9 and 16:8 (WEHRLE, *Sprichwort*, 204).

⁴⁷ See WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 170. A crossing at the center was also observed in 14:23–27, see above, p. 3.

⁴⁸ It was noted also by CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 62.

⁴⁹ However, we do not take into consideration the verb *yētib* “makes cheerful” in 13a, which derives from the same root.

(15) the order is inverted (– / +) with respect to the surrounding proverbs (+ / –). Therefore, the statement in the initial member, “all the days of the afflicted (are) evil” (15a), corresponds to all negative outcomes listed in the second members of the other proverbs (13b, 14b, 16b, 17b). On the other hand, the statement in the second member of the central proverb concerning the days “of the cheerful heart” that are “a feast without end” (15a) corresponds to all positive outcomes listed in the initial members in the framing proverbs (13a, 14a, 16a, 17a).

From a thematic point of view, the central proverb (15) contains more general statements, while the extreme pieces (13–14 & 16–17) describe the inner dispositions and life situations with respective specific outcomes:

<i>Inner dispositions and their respective outcomes</i>	13–14
Evil days for the afflicted A continuous feast for a cheerful heart	15
<i>Specific life situations and their respective outcomes</i>	16–17

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Equilibrium in possessing goods

Accumulated possessions are not so beneficial as some may think; for indeed, they sometimes ruin interpersonal relationships (16b & 17b). Another proverb speaks of this: “Better a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife” (17:1). We are advised that “better a little with righteousness than great gain without justice” (16:8). A similar idea is expressed by the psalmist: “Better a little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked” (Ps 37:16). A further consideration is that wealth can lead a rich person to feel self-sufficient and consequently to think he has no need for God. Agur, to avoid such danger, is asking God: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with my portion of food” (Prov 30:8). His last sentence seems to echo the central invocation of the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11). And Agur provides the following reason for his request: “for being full, I deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’” (Prov 30:9).⁵⁰

Countenance is the mirror of the soul

The initial proverb (13) states that facial expressions reflect inward feelings such as joy and sadness which flow from the heart. Ben Sirah describes it as follows: “A man’s heart changes his countenance, either for good or for evil. The mark of a happy heart is a cheerful face” (Sir 13:25–26a). According to him, true

⁵⁰ Cf. WITEK, “Prayer of Agur (Prov 30:7–9): Composition as Solution of the Textual Problem”, *Africa Tomorrow* 16/1 (2014) 23–32.

happiness belongs to the righteous man with a pure heart: “Happy are those who do not blunder with their lips and need not suffer remorse for sin. Happy are those whose hearts do not condemn them and who have not given up their hope” (14:1–2). This same idea evokes one of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8). Conversely, the fallen countenance of Cain is a sign of his evil thoughts and doings: “The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall it not be lifted up?’” (Gen 4:6–7a).

4. INTERPRETATION

A continual feast of a cheerful heart and the evil days of the afflicted

The Hebrew syntagma *tôb lēb* in the central proverb, rendered as “a cheerful heart” (15b), literally means “a good heart” and can emphasize a moral aspect beyond mere happiness. At the level of the same proverb, it is opposed to *‘ānī* rendered as “the afflicted” (15a). This latter word covers a vast spectrum of affliction and oppression, internal and external, including poverty. In the initial proverb (13) we have a similar syntagma *yēṭīb pānīm* rendered as “makes a cheerful face” (13a) which expresses “joy” flowing from the “heart” in contrast to “sorrow” which causes a “broken spirit” (13b). The initial proverb (13) illustrates the affliction and goodness of heart of the central proverb (15) in terms of feelings and emotions. The second proverb (14) changes the perspective to an intellectual one, and “a cheerful heart” (15b) is identified with “the heart of the intelligent” (14a) while “the afflicted” (15a) is with “the foolish” (14b). The proverbs of the final piece (16–17) switch to an economic perspective. “The afflicted” (15a) is not identified with material poverty, as could be expected, but with rich persons whose wealth brings negative outcomes such as “trouble with it” (16b) and “hatred with it” (17b), reasons being improper relationships with the Lord (16b) and others (17b). On the contrary, the moral goodness of “a cheerful heart” (15b) is illustrated by persons of inferior economic status, or better, by those whose primary focus is not to gain wealth but rather to build up good relationships with God through “the fear of the Lord” (16a) and with others through mutual “love” (17a).

Seeking knowledge and feeding on folly

We can also read the external proverbs (13–14 & 16–17) across starting with the median proverbs (14 & 16), for “the heart of the intelligent” that “seeks knowledge” (14a) can be identified with the suggestion of modesty “better little with fear of the Lord” (16a), since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). Conversely, “the face of the foolish” which “feeds on folly”

(15:14b) links with a “great wealth and trouble with it” (16b).⁵¹ And the final proverb, which stresses moderation in daily life with sharing love toward others, (17a) links to the initial proverb through the statement of “making a cheerful face” (13a). Translating the plural of *pānīm* literally in the syntagma *yēṭib pānīm* yields “makes cheerful faces”; the plural could imply that a joy in the “heart” which illuminates not only the face of the subject but also the faces of others with whom that person shares love (17a). For a “joyful heart” and a “cheerful face” (13a) are fruits of searching for true knowledge (14a) that have their source in “the fear of the Lord” (16a). On the other hand, “the face of the foolish” that “feeds on folly” (14b) results in all the “evil” consequences (15a) listed, like “broken spirit” (13b), “trouble with it” (16b) and “hatred with it” (17b).

VII. BRINGING JOY TO THE FATHER AND DESPISING THE MOTHER (15:18–24)

I. TEXT

- ¹⁸ A man of wrath stirs up strife,
but the slow to anger calms contention.
¹⁹ The way of the sluggard (is) like a hedge of thorns,
but the path of the upright⁵² is made plain.
²⁰ A wise son brings joy to the father,
but a foolish man⁵³ despises his mother.
²¹ Folly (is) joy to one lacking heart,
but a man of intelligence makes upright (his) going.
²² Plans fail where there is no counsel,⁵⁴
but with many advisers they succeed.⁵⁵
²³ Joy to a man in the answer of his mouth⁵⁶

⁵¹ The *ketib* reading with “the face” (14b) as opposed to “the heart of the intelligent” (14a) expresses better the contrast between superficiality and interiority than the *quere* reading with “the mouth” (14b).

⁵² The LXX has *andreiōn* “vigorous” and therefore some suggest reading *hārūṣīm* “diligent” in place of *yēṣārīm* “the upright” (Gemser, 69; McKane, 482; Renard, 109; Toy, 311).

⁵³ Some Hebrew manuscripts, LXX, Syr and Tg read “the son” and such a reading could be influenced by 10:1 (Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 39). However, it does not justify emending the Masoretic Text as suggested by the BHS and Oesterley, 122. Concerning the syntagma *keṣil ’ādām*, it is also found in 21:20 where it means “a foolish man” (cf. GKC, 128l; Heim, 200; NICCACCI, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry”, 83, note 24; Whybray, 233). This syntagma could also be understood as superlative: “a most foolish among men” (DAHOOD, *Psalms I*, 289; VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 116–117).

⁵⁴ The noun *sōd* is rendered as “secrets” in 11:13.

⁵⁵ We are dealing here with a singular feminine verb referring to a subject in plural masculine (cf. GKC, 145k; Heim, 200).

⁵⁶ Some translations add adjectives qualifying positively the noun *ma’ānēh* “answer”: “an apt answer” (RSV, NRSV), “a ready answer” (NJB), “an appropriate answer” (NET). The LXX renders the entire v. 23 in a negative sense: “A bad person will not listen to it, neither will say anything

and a word in its season, how good (it is)!

²⁴ The path of life (is) upward for the prudent
in order to turn aside from Sheol below.⁵⁷

2. COMPOSITION

This part is formed of three pieces (18–19, 20–22 & 23–24) arranged concentrically.⁵⁸ Each external piece (18–19 & 23–24) consists of two proverbs while the central piece (20–22) contains three proverbs.

– 18	'iš	ḥēmā	y ^e gāreh	mādôn
+	w ^e 'erek	'appayim	yašqîṭ	rîb.
– 19	derek	'āṣēl	kimśukat	ḥādeq
+	w ^e 'ōrah	y ^e šārîm	s ^e lulā.	
.....				
+	²⁰ bēn	ḥākām	y ^e šammaḥ	'āb
–	ûk ^e sîl	'ādām	bôzeh	'immô.
– 21	'iwwelet	šimḥā	laḥšasar	lēb
+	w ^e 'iš	t ^e bûnā	y ^e yaššer	lāket.
– 22	hāpēr	maḥšāšābôt	b ^e 'ên	sôd
+	ûb ^e rôb	yô 'āšîm	tāqûm.	
.....				
– 23	šimḥā	lā 'iš	b ^e ma 'ānēh	pîw
+	w ^e dābār	b ^e 'ittô	mah	ṭôb.
+	²⁴ 'ōrah	ḥayyîm	l ^e ma 'lā	l ^e maškil
=	l ^e ma 'an	sûr	mišš ^e 'ôl	māṭṭā.

appropriate or good for the common weal,” linking it with the preceding verse “Those who do not honor councils put off deliberations, but in the hearts of counsellor abides counsel” (v. 22). See the detailed analysis in WITEK, “‘Joy to a man in the answer of his mouth’ (Prov 15:23a).”

⁵⁷ This proverb can be understood as an allusion to heaven and hell (COTTINI, *La vita futura*, 73–74; Delitzsch, 237; Gozzo, 262–263; Ginsburg, 279; Kravitz – Olitzky, 152; Mezzacasa, 50–51; NICCACCI, “Sulla vita futura”, 384–385; Steveson, 209–210; Vaccari, 48; VAN DER WEIDEN, *Le Livre des Proverbes*, 117–118). Many, however, think that the idea of retribution in the afterlife would be premature (for instance: Greenstone, 167; McKane, 479–480; Oesterley, 123; Renard, 110; ROBERT, “Le Yahvisme”, 167; Toy, 314; Whybray, 234).

⁵⁸ KRISPENZ, *Spruchkompositionen*, 74–75, recognizes the same delimitation of the unit. Other proposed delimitations: 19–23 (Heim, 200); 19–24 (Scherer, 176–178); 20–23 (Delitzsch, 235; Clifford, 153); 20–24 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 178–179; Meinhold, I, 256; Goldingay, 598; WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 105; Whybray, 232–233).

The central piece stands out from the rest because in all its proverbs terms from the semantic fields of wisdom and foolishness are contrasted. On one hand we have “a son (who is) wise” (20a), “a man of intelligence” (21b) and “advisers” (22b). On the other hand, a “foolish man” (20b), “folly” of “one lacking heart” (21a), and “where there is no counsel” (22a). The first two proverbs seem to have stronger semantic links, for the verb *y’sammah* “brings joy” (20a) and the noun *śimhâ* “joy” (21a) derive from the same root. However, the context is quite different, as one “brings joy to the father” (20a), while the other finds “joy” in “folly” (21a). There are also two nouns rendered as “man” *ādām* (20b) and *’iš* (21b). Nevertheless, thematically, the internal composition could be seen as concentric: for the external proverbs (20 & 22) describe how the positive and negative actions of the wise and foolish impact others, while the center (21) focuses on the subject of wisdom and foolishness itself.

– 18	A man	of wrath	stirs up	strife,
+	but the slow	to anger	calms	contention.
– 19	The way	of the sluggard	(is) like a hedge	of thorns,
+	but the path	of the upright	is made plain.	
<hr/>				
+	20 A son	(who is) wise	brings joy	to the father,
–	but a foolish	man	despises	his mother.
–	21 Folly	(is) joy	to one lacking	heart,
+	but a man	of intelligence	makes upright	(his) going.
–	22 Fail	plans	where there is no	counsel,
+	but with many	advisers	they succeed.	
<hr/>				
– 23	Joy	to a man	in the answer	of his mouth
+	and a word	in its season,	how	good (it is)!
+	24 The path	of life	(is) upward	for the prudent
=	in order	to turn aside	from Sheol	below.

As for the external pieces (18–19 & 23–24), there are no semantic links between the proverbs within each piece. Nevertheless, we can notice a parallel relationship between the proverbs of the external pieces. In the initial proverbs, the second lines are clearly related, for “the slow to anger” who “calms contention” (18b) is the one who does not react instantly but says a “word in its season” (23b). In the first line of the initial proverb the statement is negative: “A man of wrath stirs up strife” (18a). It can be seen as related to 23a when we understand that “joy to a man in the answer of his mouth” describes someone who is complacent in answering carelessly and instantly, or does it with an evil intent and finds joy in

doing so.⁵⁹ The final proverbs of the extreme pieces contain terms of the same semantic field: *derek* “the way” (19a) and *’ōrah* “path” (19b & 24a). The noun *’ōrah* “path” occurs in statements presenting positive outcomes: “the path of the upright is made plain” (19b) and “the path of life (is) upward for the prudent” (24a). On the other hand, “the way of the sluggard” with its negative outcome described “like a hedge of thorns” (19a) can be linked to “Sheol below” in the final member (24b).

We can also notice some semantic links between the central proverb of the central piece (21) and the proverbs of the external pieces (18–19 & 23–24). The central proverb is linked to the initial proverbs of the extreme pieces through the repetition of the same terms: the noun *’iš* “man” (18a, 21b & 23a) and the noun *šimhâ* “joy” (21a & 23a). The infinitive *lāket* rendered as “going” (21b), links with other terms of the same semantic field found only in the final proverbs of the external pieces: *derek* “the way” (19a) and *’ōrah* “the path” (19b & 24a). The verb *yēyaššer* “makes upright” (21b) corresponds to the adjective *yēšārīm* “upright” (19b), for both terms derive from the same root. Since vv. 20 and 22 do not show any semantic link with the external pieces (18–19 & 23–24), therefore, those links of the central proverb (21) mentioned above highlight its peculiarity as a focal point in the entire composition of the part.⁶⁰

As for the final proverb of our part (24), it is a synthetic proverb, while all other proverbs are antithetic. Therefore, we could consider it as a closing phenomenon.

Thematic relationships between the proverbs of this part can be presented as follows:

<i>Speech and its negative and positive consequences</i>	18
Two ways: negative and positive consequences	19
Wise vs fools and their impact on parents	20
Folly of the senseless vs uprightness of the intelligent	21
Absence or presence of advisers: their impact on others	22
<i>Speech and its negative and positive consequences</i>	23
Two ways: negative and positive consequences	24

⁵⁹ See my discussion on v. 23a showing that attributing a negative meaning to it makes this proverb better fitting in the literal context of the Proverbs and other Wisdom books. Witek, “‘Joy to a man in the answer of his mouth’ (Prov 15:23a).”

⁶⁰ According to Lund’s 3rd law of composition of concentric structures, identical elements can be found at the extremes and at the center of the respective unit (cf. MEYNET, *Treatise*, 46).

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Irascibility

The initial member of our passage (18a) is almost identical to 29:22a, where we read that: “a man of anger stirs up strife”⁶¹ and its second line that is synonymous states: “a man of wrath causes much transgression” (22b). Sirah gives the following advice: “Refrain from strife, and your sins will be fewer; for a hot-tempered man kindles strife” (28:8), and he provides a reason: “A hasty quarrel kindles fire and a hasty strife sheds blood” (v. 11).

A word spoken at the right time

“A word in its season, how good it is!” (23b) could evoke another proverb from the Second Solomonic Collection: “Apples of golds in a setting of silver is a word spoken at the right time” (25:11). It could also remind us of the well-known discourse of Qoheleth on time in which he states that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:7). It is more elaborated by Sirach who says that “there is a reproof that is untimely, but the silent person is the wise one” (Sir 20:1). And he states that there are two kinds of people: “one is silent and is thought wise, another is detested for being too talkative” (5). And he adds: “a wise man remains silent till the right time, but an arrogant and a fool misses the proper time. Whoever uses too many words is detested, and whoever pretends to authority is hated” (7–8).

4. INTERPRETATION

Patience of the wise

The central piece describes the positive outcomes of the acting of the wise (20a, 21b, 22b), while in the external pieces “a wise son” (20a) is presented as a patient and calm person (18a) who does not overreact (18b), and does not respond immediately (23a) looking for an appropriate time (23b). The central proverb could also imply patience, for “making upright his going” (21b) requires much effort and dedication to change one’s own behavior, especially if one is impulsive by nature, and thus must work hard to gain the virtue of patience. “Making upright his going” implies doing what is right, moving in a proper direction, and that is “the path of life” which leads to eternal life (24a). Therefore, wisdom has practical and moral connotations.

⁶¹ In 29:22a, *’ap* “anger” is used instead of *hēmā* “wrath” (15:18a), but *’ap* is used in the second line in the syntagma *ba’al ’ap* “a man of wrath” (29:22b).

Irascibility of the fools

Conversely, a “foolish man” (20b) is identified with a “man of wrath” (18a) who does not have emotional self-control and therefore can be provoked to react instantly to whatever happens. Thus, he answers impulsively without looking for an appropriate time (cf. 23b) and in doing so he “stirs up strife” (18a). A “foolish man” (20b) is also identified with a “sluggard” whose way is “like a hedge of thorns” (19a). This comparison could be understood as an unwillingness to change his own behavior, for the central proverb states that he finds “joy” in doing “folly” (21a). He knows what he is doing, and finds pleasure in hurting others (18a, 20b). An unwillingness to work on eliminating vices, which could be compared to pruning “a hedge of thorns” (19a), ultimately will lead him to “Sheol below” as a place of eternal punishment (24b).

VIII THE WHOLE SUBSEQUENCE (14:23–15:24)

I. COMPOSITION

This subsequence counts 37 proverbs grouped into seven parts. The central part is the shortest and is located at the mathematical center of the subsequence (preceded and followed by 17 proverbs):

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
5	7	5	3	5	5	7
proverbs	proverbs	proverbs	proverbs	proverbs	proverbs	proverbs

We notice that the initial proverbs of parts III and V (14:35 and 15:8-9), which contain synonymous statements, act as initial terms. Therefore, parts III and V, together with part IV, can constitute the central passage (14:35–15:12). And the remaining parts would form the external passages (14:23–34 & 15:13–24). Let us now first examine the internal relationships between parts of the central passage.

Relationships withing the central passage (14:35–15:12)

“The delight of a king” for “a prudent servant” (14:35a) corresponds to the Lord’s “delight” for “the prayer of the upright” (15:8b)⁶² and his “love” for the one “who pursues righteousness” (9b). Similarly, the king’s “fury” for “him who causes shame” (14:35b) corresponds to the “abomination of the Lord” for “the sacrifice of the wicked” (15:8a) and for “the way of the wicked” (9a). “The eyes of the Lord” that “are in every place watching the evil and the good” (15:3) is synonymous with “Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord, surely also the hearts of the sons of men” (15:11). The initial proverbs of the extreme parts (14:35 & 15:8) are related in a chiasmic manner, while the initial proverbs of the final pieces

⁶² These are the only two occurrences of the noun *rāṣôn* “delight, favor” in our subsequence.

of both parts (15:3, 11) are entirely parallel. Thus, “every place” (3a) is specified as “Sheol and Abaddon” (11a).

³⁵ The delight of a KING is toward a prudent servant, ^{15:1} A gentle answer turns away wrath, ² The tongue of the wise makes good knowledge, ³ The eyes of the LORD are in every place ⁴ A healing tongue is a tree of life,	and his fury is toward him who causes shame. but a painful word raises up anger. but the mouth of the foolish pours out folly. watching the evil and the good. but perverseness in it is a breaking in the spirit.
⁵ A fool spurns the discipline of his FATHER, ⁶ In the house of the righteous great treasure, ⁷ The lips of the wise spread knowledge,	but he who heeds reproof becomes clever. but in the gain of the wicked there is trouble. but the heart of the foolish—not so.
⁸ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, ⁹ An abomination to the LORD is the way of the wicked, ¹⁰ Discipline is evil to him who forsakes the path, ¹¹ Sheol and Abaddon are before the LORD, ¹² A scorner does not love one who reproves him,	but the prayer of the upright is his delight. but he loves him who pursues righteousness. he who hates reproof will die. surely also the hearts of the sons of men. to the wise he will not go.

Looking from the central piece, the statement in the initial member that “a fool spurns the discipline of his father” (5a) connects with two proverbs of the subsequent piece in which terms of “discipline” are used (10 & 12, on the panel in orange) and nowhere else in our subsequence. Conversely, the final proverb of the central part (7) concerning the speech links with three proverbs in the preceding piece (1, 2 & 4, corresponding members in dark blue and dark red color), are the only proverbs about the speech in this passage. Thus, we notice a crossing at the center.

Relationships between the external passages (14:23–34 & 15:13–24)

Each passage is formed of two parts with the same number of proverbs (5 + 7). The parts of these passages seem to be parallel to each other (AB/A'B/ pattern). In the first parts we find the same syntagma “the fear of the Lord” (14:26a, 27a & 15:16a).⁶³ The initial proverbs contain terms deriving from the same root: *'ešeb* rendered as “pain” (14:23a) and *'aššebet* “sorrow” (15:13b). There are also words of the same semantic field: “profit” (14:23a), “riches” (24a), “great wealth” (15:16b), and “fattened ox” (17b).⁶⁴

The second parts contain the same syntagma: *'erek 'appayim* “slow to anger” (14:29 & 15:18b)⁶⁵ which are contrasted with two synonymous expressions

⁶³ In the First Solomonic Collection, the syntagma “the fear of the Lord” appears a total of 8 times (other instances: 10:27; 15:33, 16:6; 19:23; 22:4).

⁶⁴ In Part I “pain,” “profit” (14:23a), and “riches” (24a) are found in the first members of the initial proverbs with positive connotations; whole in Part VI “sorrow” (15:13b), “great wealth” (26b), and “fattened ox” (17b) are found in the second member of the final proverbs with negative connotations.

⁶⁵ The adjective *'erek* rendered here as “slow” (literally: “long”) in Proverbs is used only in this syntagma *'erek 'appayim* (another instance in 16:32). A similar syntagma *he'ërik 'appô* “makes him slow to anger” is found in 19:11.

“a short of spirit” (14:29b) and “a man of wrath” (15:18a). Additionally, the syntagma *b^erob* / *b^erōb* “in the multitude” (14:28a; 15:22b)⁶⁶ is contained in two proverbs that entirely are synonymous: “the splendor of a king” that relies on “the multitude of people” (14:28a) corresponds to plans which “succeed” because of the “multitude of advisers” (15:22b). Conversely, “the lack of population” that is “the ruin of a prince” (14:29b) corresponds to “plans” which “fail” because of lack of “counsel” (15:22a).

²³ In all pain there is profit , ²⁴ The crown of the wise is their riches , ²⁵ He who delivers souls is a true witness, ²⁶ In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence ²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life	but the word of the lips only to want. the folly of the foolish is folly. but he who breathes lies is a deceiver. and to his sons there is a refuge. to turn aside from the snares of death.
²⁸ In the multitude of people the splendor of a king , ²⁹ A slow to anger has much intelligence , ³⁰ The life of the flesh is a heart of healing. ³¹ He who oppresses the weak insults his Creator , ³² The wicked is driven away in his own evil, ³³ Wisdom abides in the heart of the intelligent , ³⁴ Righteousness raises up a nation,	but in the lack of population the ruin of a prince . but a short of spirit raises up folly. and the rottenness of the bones is envy. but he who has mercy on the needy honors Him . but the righteous seeks refuge in his death. but in the midst of the foolish it is known. but sin is a disgrace to populations.

[...]

¹³ A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, ¹⁴ The heart of the intelligent seeks knowledge, ¹⁵ All the days of the afflicted are evil, ¹⁶ Better a little with the fear of the LORD ¹⁷ Better a meal of herbs and love there	but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken. but the face of the foolish feeds on folly. but of a cheerful heart are a feast without end. than a great wealth and trouble with it. than a fattened ox and hatred with it.
¹⁸ A man of wrath stirs up strife, ¹⁹ The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, ²⁰ A wise son brings joy to the father , ²¹ Folly is joy to one lacking heart, ²² Plans fail where there is no counsel, ²³ Joy to a man in the answer of his mouth ²⁴ The path of life is upward for the prudent	but the slow to anger calms contention. but the path of the upright is made plain. but a foolish man despises his mother . but a man of intelligence makes upright his going. but in the multitude of advisers they succeed. and a word in its season, how good it is! in order to turn aside from Sheol below.

The two proverbs at the centers of the second parts can also be seen as synonymous because of the relationship between “the Creator” (14:31) and the “father” and “mother” (15:20) who represent Him here on earth and through whom life is transmitted: “He who oppresses the weak insults his Creator” (14:31a) is synonymous with “a foolish man” who “despises his mother” (15:20b); and “he who has mercy on the needy honors” his Creator (14:31b) is “a wise son” who “brings joy to the father” (15:20a).

From a formal point of view, these two corresponding pairs of proverbs create an interesting crossing phenomenon (or chiasmic arrangement): 14:28 and 15:22

⁶⁶ In the First Solomonic Collection, the syntagma *b^erob* / *b^erōb* is found 4 times (other instances are 10:19 & 11:14).

frame 14:31 and 25:20. Additionally, the order of positive and negative statements in the respective members of related proverbs are in a reverse order in the corresponding passages:

positive	negative	(14:28)
negative	positive	(14:31)
positive	negative	(15:20)
negative	positive	(15:22)

There are also other correspondences between the passages. The extreme parts close with synthetic proverbs (14:27 & 15:24),⁶⁷ which contain synonymous syntagmas in the first members, namely “a fount of life” (14:27a) and “the path of life” (15:24a), and the second members begin with very similar syntagmas *lāsûr* “to turn aside” (14:27) and *lʿma ‘an sûr* “in order to turn aside” (15:24) followed by synonymous complements “from the snares of death” (14:27b) and “from Sheol below” (15:24b). There are also repeated words of the same root in the syntagma *lēb nābôn* “the heart of the intelligent” (14:33a & 15:14a linking Parts II & VI) and the noun *lʿbûnâ* “intelligence” (14:29a & 15:21b linking Parts II & VII).

Relationships between the central passage (14:35–15:12) and the rest of the subsequence

Beginning from the center of the subsequence, the initial proverb of the central piece of the central passage (15:5), which describes two opposite attitudes toward fatherly discipline, can be linked with v. 20 (the initial proverb of the central piece of the final part of the final passage), which describes two opposite attitudes toward parents. Thus, “a fool” who “spurns the disciple of his father” (5a) is identified with “a foolish man” who “despises his mother” (20b), and “he who heeds reproof becomes clever” (5b) is “a wise son” who “brings joy to the father” (20a). We can also link the central proverb in the second part of the initial passage (14:31) to its previously noted 15:20 parallel, for the relationship with parents corresponds to the relationship with the “Creator” (14:31). Starting again from 15:5, which talks about fatherly “discipline” we find a link not only within the central passage (with 10 & 12, as discussed above) but also with the initial parts of the external passages where “the fear of the Lord” is mentioned (14:26a, 27a and 15:16a), for “the fear of the Lord” serves as a discipline imparting a deep reverence for God.

The final proverb of the central part of the central passage (7), which associates speech with wisdom and foolishness by stating that “the lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the heart of the foolish—not so,” can be linked with many proverbs in the entire subsequence. To illustrate these links, the rewriting uses

⁶⁷ Both proverbs were considered as closing phenomena in their respective parts (14:23–27 & 15:18–14); see above, pp. 4 and 32.

blue and dark red colors to mark the respective positive and negative statements which link with v. 7 (14:23b, 25, 29; 15:1, 2, 4, 14, 18, 21, 23).

<p>²³ In all pain there is profit,</p> <p>²⁴ The crown of the wise is their riches,</p> <p>²⁵ He who delivers souls is a true witness,</p> <p>²⁶ In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence</p> <p>²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life</p>	<p>but the word of the lips only to want.</p> <p>the folly of the foolish is folly.</p> <p>but he who breathes lies is a deceiver.</p> <p>and to his sons there is a refuge.</p> <p>to turn aside from the snares of death.</p>
<p>²⁸ In the multitude of people the splendor of a KING,</p> <p>²⁹ A slow to anger has much intelligence,</p> <p>³⁰ The life of the flesh is a heart of healing,</p> <p>³¹ He who oppresses the weak insults his CREATOR,</p> <p>³² The wicked is driven away in his own evil,</p> <p>³³ Wisdom abides in the heart of the intelligent,</p> <p>³⁴ Righteousness raises up a nation,</p>	<p>but in the lack of population the ruin of a PRINCE.</p> <p>but a short of spirit raises up folly.</p> <p>and the rottenness of the bones is envy.</p> <p>but he who has mercy on the needy honors Him.</p> <p>but the righteous seeks refuge in his death.</p> <p>but in the midst of the foolish it is known.</p> <p>but sin is a disgrace to populations.</p>
<p>³⁵ The delight of a KING is toward a prudent servant,</p> <p>^{15:1} A gentle answer turns away wrath,</p> <p>² The tongue of the wise makes good knowledge,</p> <p>³ The eyes of the LORD are in every place</p> <p>⁴ A healing tongue is a tree of life,</p>	<p>and his fury is toward him who causes shame.</p> <p>but a painful word raises up anger.</p> <p>but the mouth of the foolish pours out folly.</p> <p>watching the evil and the good.</p> <p>but perverseness in it is a breaking in the spirit.</p>
<p>⁵ A fool spurns the discipline of his FATHER,</p> <p>⁶ In the house of the righteous great treasure,</p> <p>⁷ The lips of the wise spread knowledge,</p>	<p>but he who heeds reproof becomes clever.</p> <p>but in the gain of the wicked there is trouble.</p> <p>but the heart of the foolish—not so.</p>
<p>⁸ The sacrifice of the wicked an abomination to the LORD,</p> <p>⁹ An abomination to the LORD is the way of the wicked,</p> <p>¹⁰ Discipline is evil to him who forsakes the path,</p> <p>¹¹ Sheol and Abaddon are before the LORD,</p> <p>¹² A scorner does not love one who reproves him,</p>	<p>but the prayer of the upright is his delight.</p> <p>but he loves him who pursues righteousness.</p> <p>he who hates reproof will die.</p> <p>surely also the hearts of the sons of men.</p> <p>to the wise he will not go.</p>
<p>¹³ A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,</p> <p>¹⁴ The heart of the intelligent seeks knowledge,</p> <p>¹⁵ All the days of the afflicted are evil,</p> <p>¹⁶ Better a little with the fear of the LORD</p> <p>¹⁷ Better a meal of herbs and love there</p>	<p>but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.</p> <p>but the face of the foolish feeds on folly.</p> <p>but of a cheerful heart are a feast without end.</p> <p>than a great wealth and trouble with it.</p> <p>than a fattened ox and hatred with it.</p>
<p>¹⁸ A man of wrath stirs up strife,</p> <p>¹⁹ The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns,</p> <p>²⁰ A wise son brings joy to the FATHER,</p> <p>²¹ Folly is joy to one lacking heart,</p> <p>²² Plans fail where there is no counsel,</p> <p>²³ Joy to a man in the answer of his mouth</p> <p>²⁴ The path of life is upward for the prudent</p>	<p>but the slow to anger calms contention.</p> <p>but the path of the upright is made plain.</p> <p>but a foolish man despises his MOTHER.</p> <p>but a man of intelligence makes upright his going.</p> <p>but in the multitude of advisers they succeed.</p> <p>and a word in its season, how good it is!</p> <p>in order to turn aside from Sheol below.</p>

There are also three syntagmas containing the word *ḥayyîm* “life”; two found as final terms of the extreme parts of the subsequence, “a fountain of life” (14:24a) and “the path of life” (15:24a), and one in the initial part of the central passage “a tree of life” in 15:4). “Death” and “Sheol,” which oppose “life” in the extreme passages (14:27a & 15:24b), are found in the final part of the central passage: “will die” (10b) and “Sheol” accompanied by “Abaddon” (11a).

The central proverb of the entire subsequence (15:6), which talks about “great treasure” (6a) and “the gain” (6b), connects with the initial parts of the extreme passages using words of the same semantic field: “profit” (14:23a), “riches” (24a), “great wealth” (16b) contrasted with “a little” (16a), and “a fattened ox” (17b) contrasted with “a meal of herbs” (17a).

The same word *maskil* “prudent” is found in the first member of the central passage (14:35a) and in the last proverb of the final passage (15:24a)

In all parts there are personages of authority mentioned: “the Lord” (14:26a, 27a; 15:3a, 8a, 9a, 11a, 16a), a “king” (14:28a, 35a), “a prince” (28b), the “Creator” (31a), a “father” (15:5a, 20a) and a “mother” (15:20b).

Taking into account these personages, the thematic disposition can be presented as follows:

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life	14:23–27
Honoring and dishonoring the Creator	14:28–34
A king’s delight in a prudent servant	14:35–15:4
Fatherly discipline	15:5–7
The Lord’s delight and abomination	15:8–12
Better a little with the fear of the Lord	15:13–17
Bringing joy to the father and despising the mother	15:18–24

2. INTERPRETATION

A great treasure of the house of the wise son

One of the characteristics of a wise person mentioned in our subsequence is “moderation” toward wealth (15:16–17), which might seem to be contradicted by the statement in the central proverb that a “great treasure” is “in the house of the righteous” (6a). However, such contradiction is illusory, for a wise person is content with what may be obtained in a just manner, even if it is only a little, such as “a meal of herbs” (16–17). He gains his “profit” in “pain” by working hard (14:23a). Accepting the fatherly discipline (15:5b) he also learns to “fear the Lord” (14:26–27 & 15:5b) by avoiding all sinful actions (14:34b) especially against “the weak,” for such action would also “insult his Creator” (31a). On the contrary, showing “mercy” to “the needy” (31b) reveals his other quality described as a “cheerful heart” which translated literally means a “good heart” (15:15b). Thus, his goodness of heart emerges from his works, for he does it with “love” (17a). Therefore, his “great treasure” mentioned in the central proverb (6a) cannot be limited to material goods. Rather, it includes spiritual and eternal goods that can be linked to the “delight of a king” (35a) and “the delight of the Lord” (15:8b). The wise man’s “profit” (14:23a) is eternal life and eternal happiness (14:27; 15:15b, 24).

Punishment for a foolish son

The wrongdoings of a foolish son who “spurns the disciple of his father” (15:5a) and who “despises his mother (20b) are described in other proverbs, especially in the use of speech. He “feeds on folly” (14b) and therefore “he pours out folly” (2b), for the object of his “joy” is in “folly” (21a). Indeed, he finds “joy in “the answer of his mouth,” which read in a negative sense as previously discussed,⁶⁸ means that he finds joy in harming others through his speech, for he is full of perverseness (4b). Therefore, he is “a deceiver” for “breathing lies” (14:25b), and acts in a short-tempered manner “raising up folly” (29b) and “stirring up strife” (15:18a), for his speech causes pain and anger (15:1b).

His foolishness is a result of refusing fatherly discipline (5a), for he hates to be corrected (12a). Therefore, he breaks the divine commandment by “oppressing the weak” and through his action “insulting his Creator” (14:31a). In doing injustice, he can accumulate “great wealth” (15:16b, 17b), but unjust “gain” (6b) does not bring him true profit (cf. 14:23a). Rather, it brings him only “trouble” (15:6b, 16b) and “hatred” (17b), which can imply negative consequence in the human dimension. “Hatred,” like “a rottenness of the bones” (14:30b), destroys a community from within, and if a king causes it, his kingdom will not last (28b & 15:22a). The negative consequences go beyond the earthly dimension. The Lord who sees everything (3) will not accept “the sacrifice of the wicked” (8a) if there is no conversion, no repentance (9a). Whoever remains obstinate in doing evil “will die” (10b), and “the snares of death” (14:27b) and “Sheol below” (15:24b) should be understood not simply as a reference to physical death, but rather to eternal punishment. “The gain of the wicked” (6b) does not save them from it.

CONCLUSION

This new analysis of Prov 14:23–15:24 proves the coherence of this subsequence as a whole and at the level of its subunits. The composition is even more articulated than previously noticed. In the initial study, the feature of the crossing at the center was noticed in two parts (14:23–27 & 15:13–17).⁶⁹ In this current analysis, the crossing at the center is identifiable at the level of passage (14:35–15:12).⁷⁰ Another crossing phenomenon (chiastic arrangement) was identified between the pairs of proverbs in 14:25, 32 and 15:20, 22.⁷¹ A new feature identified in this research is a closing phenomenon which was observed in two parts (14:23–27 and 15:18–14).⁷²

⁶⁸ See above, p. 31.

⁶⁹ See above, pp. 3 and 26; cf. WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 153, 170.

⁷⁰ See above, p. 35.

⁷¹ See above, pp. 36–37.

⁷² See above, pp. 4 and 32.

3535 Commerce Road
Orchard Lake, MI 48324 (USA)
E-mail: bernardwitek@yahoo.com

Bernard WITEK

ABSTRACT

The analysis of this group of proverbs (14:23–15:24) following the rules of Biblical and Semitic Rhetoric confirms its coherence on various levels of composition. This group is initial subsequence of the central sequence (Prov 14:23–17:20) in the First Solomonic Collection (10:1–22:16). It contains seven parts (14:23–27; 14:28–34; 14:35–15:4; 15:5–7; 15:8–12; 15:13–17; 15:18–24) which are grouped into three passages in the following concentric manner: A B / C D C' / A'B'. The title “The fear of the Lord and Fatherly Disciple” features the main themes that emerge from the entire composition. The earthly dimension of human discipline converges with the fear of the Lord as an expression of divine discipline, which, when accepted and practiced, leads to eternal life.

Keywords: Proverbs, fear of the Lord, discipline, father, mother.

ABBREVIATIONS

BHK ³	R. Kittel, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> , Stuttgart 1957 ³ .
BHS	K. ELLIGER – W. RUDOLPH, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , Stuttgart 1968.
cf.	confer (compare)
ed.	editor, edited
Fs.	Festschrift
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzsch; tr. A.E. Cowley, Oxford 1910 ² .
HOTTP	<i>Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project</i> , III, <i>Poetical Books</i> = <i>Compte rendu préliminaire et provisoire sur le travail d'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu</i> , III, <i>Livres poétiques</i> , New York 1979.
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NET	New English Translation
NJB	The New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	The Old Testament Library
p. / pp.	page / pages
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNK	JPS (Jewish Publication Society) Tanakh
v. / vv.	verse / verses

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