

PROVERBS

Chapter 25

More Proverbs of Solomon

These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied. 2 It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. 3 As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable. 4 Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel; 5 take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. 6 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, 7 for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. What your eyes have seen 8 do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame? 9 Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another's secret, 10 lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end. 11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. 12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprovener to a listening ear. 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the soul of his masters. 14 Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give. 15 With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone. 16 If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it. 17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you. 18 A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow. 19 Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips. 20 Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda. 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, 22 for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. 23 The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, angry looks. 24 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife. 25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. 26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked. 27 It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one's own glory. 28 A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

25:1–29:27 Another collection of Solomon's proverbs similar to 10:1–22:16. (CSB)

Chs 25–29 *proverbs of Solomon*. 1Ki 4:32 indicates that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, which were more than likely preserved in royal archives. See "Additions," p 629. Pr 25–29 were "copied" from these sayings some 200 years later by "the men of Hezekiah," probably the king's secretary, Shebna, and his recorder, Joah the son of Asaph (cf 2Ki 18:18, 37). Under King Hezekiah (715–686 BC) and his reforms, a renewed interest in God's Word took place. (TLSB)

25:2–27 Content of this collection of Solomon's proverbs shows that it was intended for instructing kings and their courts. Vv 2–5 introduce the nature of kingship; vv 6–15 provide advice for dealing with kings; vv 16–26 explain the manner in which a king should deal with wicked people; v 27 concludes the section. (TLSB)

According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon "spoke three thousand proverbs." (PBC)

the men of Hezekiah king of Judah. There was a great revival in the reign of Hezekiah (c. 715–686 B.C.), and the king restored the singing of hymns to its proper place (2Ch 29:30). His interest in the words of David corresponds to his support of a compilation of Solomon’s proverbs. Solomon was the last king to rule over all Israel during the united monarchy; Hezekiah was the first king to rule over all Israel (now restricted to the southern kingdom) after the destruction of the divided monarchy’s northern kingdom. (CSB)

Although he was not without his faults, the Bible tells us that for the most part King Hezekiah was a good, God-fearing king. In the next few chapters of Proverbs, we have one of the good results that came from his reign – namely, the collecting of more of Solomon’s proverbs. (PBC)

25:2 *to conceal things.* God gets glory because man cannot understand his universe or the way he rules it. (CSB)

God’s glory is manifested in many ways, e.g., creation, intervention in history, and, specifically, human redemption through His Son. Yet His ways and will are often hidden from human comprehension. (TLSB)

Part of God’s glory comes from the fact that he is mysterious, beyond our understanding. His working in nature and history is often hidden, which only makes Him all the more awesome. St Paul describes this in a magnificent doxology in Romans 11:33-36, “³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (PBC)

to search things out. A king gets glory if he can uncover the truth and administer justice (see 1Ki 3:9; 4:34). (CSB)

The glory and greatness of kings, however, is manifested in their ability to make God’s ways known to those under their rule. Solomon emphasizes wisdom as research. This would eventually lead to what we call science. (TLSB)

As for kings, their glory is to search out and discover. When he became king, Solomon asked God for “a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9) (PBC)

25:3 *is unsearchable.* Cannot be understood; like the four things in 30:18–19. Yet God controls the hearts of kings. (CSB)

A king’s intentions may not always be known. (TLSB)

Who can follow the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of diplomats? We also have here a warning against being taken in by the flattery of kings. It may not be sincere. We ought to be guided by higher motives than that of the outward approval of earthly potentates, whose praise can be quite fickle. Rather than living to please the high and mighty of this world, we live by faith in the King of kings and let His Words direct our lives. (PBC)

25:4 *take away the dross from the silver.* A process compared to the purification of society in general and rulers in particular in Isa 1:22–25; Eze 22:18; Mal 3:2–3. (CSB)

Impurities removed when refining silver. (TLSB)

This refers to impurities that are taken out in the process of refining silver. (PBC)

25:5 *his throne will be established in righteousness.* Luther noted that it was the duty of kings and secular officials to force “those who do not want to be good and righteous ... to become good and righteous in the eyes of the world.” In doing so they carry out God’s will, for “although God will not reward this kind of righteousness with eternal life ... he still wishes peace to be maintained among men” (AE 46:99–100). The peace that results from the removal of wickedness under the jurisdiction of rulers establishes what is called “civil righteousness.” (TLSB)

If wicked people (e.g., self-serving advisors) are not surrounding the king, his will be a precious, righteous governing. (PBC)

25:6 *do not put yourself forward* – Don’t blow your own horn. If we use our God-given talents well, discerning people will notice them. (PBC)

in the king’s presence. Probably at a feast (cf. 23:1). Jesus spoke about the place of honor at a wedding feast (Lk 14:7–11). (CSB)

People in positions of authority (e.g., kings, elders). (TLSB)

25:7b-10 Though lawsuits may be necessary in some cases, it is wise to settle disputes between parties involved instead of seeking out a third party for legal representation before a court of law (cf Mt 5:25; 7:1–5). (TLSB)

25:7 *Come up here.* Cf. “Friend, move up to a better place” (Lk 14:10); contrast Isa 22:15–19. (CSB)

25:8 *do not bring hastily into court.* A warning about the seriousness of disputes (see 17:14) and the need to exercise caution (see 24:28). (CSB)

Don’t be in hurry to get a lawyer, sue, and take someone to court. You may come out a lose. God wants us to try to settle matters in a personal way outside of court. Jesus said, “As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and judge will turn you over to the officer, and the officer will throw you into prison” (Luke 12:58). (PBC)

25:9 *do not reveal another.’* If you do, you are a gossip (see 11:13; 20:19). (CSB)

25:10 *ill repute.* A good name is one of life’s most valuable possessions. (CSB)

Who really wants to be friends with a gossip? (PBC)

25:11 *gold ... silver.* Cf. the fruit of wisdom in 8:19. (CSB)

Metaphor for jewelry. Some botanists believe the fruit was apricots. (TLSB)

When a wise man rebukes someone, he does so in a loving way. (PBC)

25:12 *gold ring*. Comparable to the beautiful wreath and necklace that represent the adornment of wisdom and sound teaching (see 1:9; 3:22; 4:9). (CSB)

wise reprover. Cf. the “life-giving rebuke” of 15:31. (CSB)

The wise man’s rebuke and the receptive ear combine to create a beautiful model of interaction, which Solomon compares to a golden earring or other piece of jewelry. (PBC)

25:13 *cold of snow*. Probably a drink cooled by snow from the mountains; it did not snow at harvest time. See 26:1; contrast 10:26. (CSB)

Probably snow that was brought down from a mountain to cool and refresh workers in the harvest field, for snowfall during harvesttime would not have been a blessing but a curse. (TLSB)

The cool snow in this verse refers to snow from the mountains, used for cooling drinks during the work of harvest. Peasants would store up mountain snow in rock clefts and in the warm months bring it out. (PBC)

faithful messenger. A trusty messenger is refreshing to his masters, to those who send him. He is reliable and uplifts their confidence. (PBC)

25:14 *Like clouds ... without rain*. An image applied to unproductive men in Jude 12. (CSB)

In hot lands such as Palestine, clouds without rain raise expectations and then let people down. So does the person who boasts, makes promises, and in the end doesn’t deliver. (PBC)

25:15 *soft tongue*. Kind and humble speech. (TLSB)

In our day, too, rude, angry behavior is likely to make those in authority become resentful, rather than opening up to your suggests. Be patient. As for a gentle tongue breaking a bone, the idea is that soft speech is more likely to overcome stubborn opposition. (PBC)

25:16 *eat only enough* – Moderation is good in every area of life. In eating, in recreation and working, in study and play – don’t overdo it. (PBC)

vomit it. Overindulgence leads to harm. (TLSB)

25:17 *seldom in your neighbor’s house* – Children who are always at the neighbors’ can get on their nerves. The housewife who is always stopping in for coffee can do the same. Even husbands and wives might need a little space once in a while. It helps them to appreciate each other all the more. Let relationships develop gradually, and then nurture them. (PBC)

25:18 *club ... sword ... arrow*. Cf. Ps 57:4; Jer 9:8. (CSB)

As children we used to say, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me!” That’s not really true. Words can and do hurt. (PBC)

false witness. Especially hurtful are lying words, that drag down one’s reputation. (PBC)

25:19 *bad tooth or a foot that slips ... lame foot*. Relying on Egypt was like leaning on a splintered reed (Isa 36:6). (CSB)

foot that slips. A lame foot. (TLSB)

When everything else seems to be going wrong, the last thing you need is to break a tooth and have to visit the dentist. Nor, when someone needs to run to escape danger, does a bad foot help. Similarly, the last kind of friends you need when you're in trouble are unfaithful ones. (PBC)

25:20 *soda.* Probably sodium carbonate, “natron” (see Jer 2:22). There is a vigorous reaction when vinegar is poured on it. (CSB)

A cold day is not the time to take off your coat. Pouring vinegar on soda causes a fermentation; there are times when you don't want this stir-ed-up reaction. (PBC)

sings songs to a heavy heart. The exiles were reluctant to sing the songs of Zion (Ps 137:3–4). (CSB)

Someone in deep despair. Songs can provoke a fight with such a person. (TLSB)

There are also times when the heart is heavy, and any attempt to cheer it up only makes it more depressed. With God's help, wisdom discerns what is best to do – and when is the best time to do it. (PBC)

vinegar on soda. Pouring vinegar on soda makes it foam up. (TLSB)

25:21–22 Quoted in Ro 12:20 as a way to overcome evil with good. (CSB)

25:21 Kindness to one's enemy is encouraged in 20:22; Ex 23:4–5. (CSB)

give him bread... water. At Elisha's request, a trapped Aramean army was given a great feast and then sent home (2Ki 6:21–23; cf. 2Ch 28:15). (CSB)

25:22 *heap burning coals on his head.* Horrible punishment reserved for the wicked (see Ps 140:10). Here, however, it is kindness that will hurt the enemy (cf. the broken bone of v. 15) but perhaps win him over. Alternatively, the expression may reflect an Egyptian expiation ritual, in which a guilty person, as a sign of his repentance, carried a basin of glowing coals on his head. The meaning here, then, would be that in returning good for evil and so being kind to your enemy, you may cause him to repent or change. (CSB)

You will shame him. Augustine: “Interpret the coals of fire as the burning groans of penitence by which a man's pride is cured who bewails that he has been the enemy of one who came to his assistance in distress” (NPNF 1 2:563). As Rm 12:14–21 indicates, treating enemies with kindness overcomes evil with good. (TLSB)

The burning coals represent the enemy's conscience. (PBC)

LORD will reward you. Even if the enemy remains hostile (cf. 11:18; 19:17). (CSB)

The burning is painful, and yet at the same time it helps your enemy to repentance. The reward from God is a clear conscience and, we would pray, the good will of a former enemy. (PBC)

25:23 *north wind.* Perhaps northwest (cf. Lk 12:54). (CSB)

Rain came with the west wind. This might also be that this proverb originated outside of Palestine. (PBC)

brings forth rain. Lit, “writhes with the birth pangs of rain.” The north wind signals the coming of a low-pressure system and the ensuing west wind with its rain. (TLSB)

backbiting tongue. One that spreads slander (cf. 10:18). (CSB)

That of a malicious whisperer or gossiper. (TLSB)

A sly tongue with its gossip and slander is bound to stir up resentment and anger. (PBC)

25:24 *live in a corner of the housetop* – In Israel the roofs are flat and at times are used for sleeping or storage. (PBC)

quarrelsome wife – Fault-finding is easy. It’s especially easy when we know someone well, such as our spouse. This is not just about wives, husbands can do the same to their wives. (PBC)

25:25 *good news from a far countrynt land.* See Ge 45:25–28. (CSB)

We are told that “the spirit of their father Jacob revived” when he received evidence from Egypt that his beloved son Joseph was alive (Genesis 45:27). A letter or card from some old friend now living far away, a long-distance call from a loved one, greetings sent by way of mutual friends – how refreshing it can be, especially when we’ve been feeling down. Is there someone far away whom you could uplift with a bit of cheerful news? (PBC)

25:26 *muddied spring.* Cf. Eze 34:18–19. (CSB)

righteous man who gives way. Perhaps through bribery (cf. 17:8; 29:4; Isa 1:21–23). (CSB)

Succumbs to sinful temptations. (TLSB)

A good person who gives in to the wicked becomes soiled. It can take a long time to clear up pollute source of water. In the meantime, that water can poison and sicken those who drink it. (PBC)

25:27 *to seek one’s own glory.* Seeking one’s own honor is harmful to our spiritual health. (PBC)

25:1–27 Righteous people who compromise their principles disappoint us. Hope remains not in the possibility of renewing their righteousness by trying harder next time but rather in God’s righteousness, which is credited to all who trust in the Lord’s mercy. This righteousness is passive (i.e., it is credited us apart from anything done on our part, solely through Christ’s work on the cross). This passive righteousness frees, strengthens, and moves us to pursue what can be called “active” righteousness by keeping the Law to thank the Lord for His mercy. • Merciful Lord, You hid Your power in the weakness of Your Son that we might seek it wisely by faith. Refresh us this day with the faithful message of Your love that we may search out what is glorious and pleasing to You. Amen. (TLSB)

25:28–27:4 Solomon’s extensive comments on the nature of fools. (TLSB)

25:28 *city broken into...without walls.* Defenseless and disgraced (cf. Ne 1:3). (CSB)

In Bible times, a city with broken down walls was defenseless. When the Assyrians were threatening Jerusalem, King Hezekiah prepared for the city's defense. Among other things, "he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it. He built another wall outside that one and reinforced the supporting terraces" (2 Chronicles 32:5) (PBC)

man without self-control. The man who can't control his impulses is constantly in danger of blindly following them and then paying the price. Those impulses might be anger, lust, drunkenness, ambition, or revenge. Our defense is the Lord who is our strength and, if we fall, our source of forgiveness. (PBC)