

THE ARRANGEMENT OF SAYINGS IN PROVERBS 10-15

John Goldingay

St John's College, Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS

In a paper on 'Yahweh-Sayings and their Contexts in Proverbs 10,1-22,16', in *La sagesse de l'Ancien Testament*,¹ R.N. Whybray noted that recent investigation of the sayings in this section of Proverbs has concentrated more on classifying the sayings according to their theme or standpoint than on interpreting them in the light of their literary arrangement. Following studies by Boström, Hermisson and Plöger,² he was concerned to take up the latter approach to them, with particular reference to the Yahweh sayings, which cluster in chs. 15-16. The present paper seeks to make three further points along these lines with regard to chs. 10-15.

I

Whybray noted that Yahweh-sayings cluster in Proverbs 15-16, at the centre of the collection which comprises chs. 10.1-22.16. In contrast, צַדִּיק - and רָשָׁע -sayings cluster at its beginning and end. Forms of the root צַדִּיק appear nineteen times in 10.1-11.13³ (10.3, 6, 7, 11, 16, 20,

1. (ed. M. Gilbert; BETL, 51; Gembloux: Duculot; Louven: Louven University Press, 1979), pp. 153-65.

2. G. Boström, *Paronomasi i den äldre hebreiska Maschallinaturen* (LUÅ, NF I/23 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1928); H.-J. Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* (WMANT, 28; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), pp. 171-83; O. Plöger, 'Zur Auslegung der Sentenzensammlungen des Proverbienbuches', in H.W. Wolff (ed.), *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (FS G. von Rad; Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1971), pp. 402-16.

3. The significance of making a division at 11.13 will appear in section II of the paper.

21, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32; 11.4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10), forms of its antonym רשע eighteen times (10.3, 6, 7, 11, 16, 20, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32; 11.5, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11); other terms from the same semantic field, such as ישר and עקש, also appear. In 11.14–13.25 there are a further fifteen צדק-sayings, and four in ch. 21; there are thirteen רשע-sayings in 11.14–13.25 and eight in ch. 21. Through chs. 14 to 20 צדק then occurs only eleven times, רשע fifteen times.

These moral terms (to beg a question or two) thus appear in dense concentration for a chapter and a half at the beginning of the collection, in moderate concentration for another two and a half chapters and in a chapter at the end, and thinly in the middle seven chapters. Within chs. 15–16 with their cluster of Yahweh-sayings Whybray also noted a particular concentration of such sayings at 15.33–16.9; within 10.1–11.13, 10.20–32 provides a parallel concentration of צדק- and רשע-sayings.

As the concentration of Yahweh-sayings in chs. 15–16 sets theological considerations at the heart of the collection, this concentration of sayings employing moral categories at the beginning of the collection establishes an ethical context for the material on human behaviour in 10.1–22.16 as a whole. The latter's empirical and pragmatic wisdom is set in a framework that takes justice and wickedness into account, as it is given a focus that takes the particular commitment of Israelite religion into account.

II

A further characteristic of 10.1–11.13 which deserves note is the feature that marks off this material from what follows. While every saying is complete in itself, every saying but the first also has links of a verbal, aural, thematic or formal kind with one or more others in the immediate context.⁴

10.2 and 3 both contrast the wicked (רשעים/רשע) and the righteous (צדיק/צדקה); v. 3 expresses a theological conviction left out of account by v. 2.⁵

4. Boström notes the verbal links between individual verses, while Plöger looks for broader thematic connections within ch. 11.

5. Cf. Whybray, 'Yahweh-sayings', p. 160.

10.2-5 all concern wealth, subsistence and poverty.

10.3 and 4 are linked by sound: that of רשעים near the end of 10.3 is taken up by that of חרצים העשיר...ראש עשה in 10.4.⁶

10.4 and 5 both contrast the results of laziness and diligence.

10.6 and 7 both concern the blessing (ברכה/ברכות) of the righteous (צדיק) and the trouble of the wicked (רשעים).

10.6 and 11 have identical second half-lines.

10.6, 11, 12 and 18 all use the verb 'cover' (כסה).

10.8, 9 and 10 all have the same formal structure: a 4-word half-line, each time constructed in the same way, is followed by a 3-word half-line, also each time constructed in the same way.

10.8 and 10 have identical second half-lines.

10.10 and 11 both refer to wrong forms of speech and their consequences.

10.11 and 12, as well as containing the verb כסה (Pi.), precede it by words that rhyme, רשעים and פשעים. It is possibly significant that the relevant half-lines are completed by words that are near-antonyms, 'violence' and 'love'.

10.13 and 14 both contrast the insight possessed by the wise speaker with the trouble incurred by the stupid speaker.

10.14 and 15 both refer to what brings ruin.

10.15 and 16 both contrast the advantages of wealth with the trouble that comes to those who lack the wealth in question; v. 16 looks at the matter within a moral framework left out of account by v. 15. The words עשיר and רישם in v. 15, רשע in v. 16 also provide aural links.⁷

10.16 and 17 both concern what leads to life (לחיים).

10.18, 19 and 21 all concern the lips (שפתיו/שפה).

10.20 and 21 both refer to the righteous (צדיק) and to the mind (לב).

10.20 and 22 both concern things of value.

10.21 and 22 both concern lack and abundance.⁸

10.23 and 24 produce an alliteration between תבונה (insight) and תבונו (overtakes him).

10.24 and 25 both contrast the insecurity of the wicked (רשע) with the destiny of the righteous (צדיק/צדיקים).

10.25 and 26 have the same formal structure: a 4-word half-line introduced by כ, followed by a 3-word half-line.

6. Cf. Hermisson, *Studien*, p. 174.

7. Cf. Boström, *Paronomasi*, p. 124.

8. Cf. Hermisson, *Studien*, p. 174.

10.27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 all contrast the prospects of good and evil people. In this connection 10.27, 28, 30 and 32 all refer to the wicked (רשעים) and 10.28, 30, 31 and 32 to the righteous (צדיקים/צדיק).

10.31 and 32 both contrast the words of the righteous (צדיק) with speech that is perverse (ההפכות).

10.32 and 11.1 both concern what wins favour (רצון/רצון).

11.2 takes up concerns of 10.31-32.

11.3 and 4 both refer to destruction or the day of wrath.⁹

11.3 and 5 both refer to integrity (חמים/חמה).

11.3, 5 and 6 all refer to what is straight or upright (ישר).

11.3 and 6 both refer to the treacherous (בגדים).

11.4, 5 and 6 all refer to righteousness (צדקה/צדקה)—the latter being the first word in both v. 5 and v. 6.

11.4 and 6 both use the verb הציל (deliver).

11.4 and 7 both refer to מוה (death).

11.5, 7, 8, 10 and 11 all refer to the רשע (wicked); vv. 7 and 8 both speak of his fate.

11.7 and 10 both use the verb אבד (perish).

11.8 and 9 both use the verb נחליץ (escape).

11.8, 9 and 10 all refer to the righteous (צדיק[ים]).

11.9 and 11 both have the expression with the mouth (בפ/בפה).

11.10 and 11 both have the word for village (קרה/קריה).

11.11 has the verb הרס (destroy), 11.12 the near-homonym חרש (be silent).

11.12 and 13 both concern the ability to keep silence.

Several literary features of these detailed links may be noted, along with one exegetical and text-critical observation.

Some verbal links are quite precise: for instance, the word צדיק recurs in 10.6 and 7 and again in vv. 20 and 21, while the antonym רשע recurs in vv. 24 and 25. Both vv. 31 and 32 involve a contrast between the צדיק and the ההפכות. The compound term לחיים appears in vv. 16 and 17. Complete half-lines recur in identical form in vv. 6 and 11 and in vv. 8 and 10. The word בגדים recurs in 11.3 and 6.¹⁰

More commonly links are less precise. Prov. 10.2 and 3 both contrast the wicked and the righteous, but they vary in the form of the words they use (רשע and רשעים and צדקה and צדיק). Verses 6 and 7 both

9. Cf. Hermisson, *Studien*, p. 175.

10. Though *BHS* (in contrast to *BHK*) spells בגדים thus *plene*.

concern the blessing of the righteous, but v. 6 has plural ברכוה, v. 7 singular ברכה. The four occurrences of the verb כסה (Pi.) take three forms. The word for 'lips' (vv. 18, 19, and 21) comes twice in the construct, introducing different nouns, and once with a suffix. In vv. 24 and 25 the wicked (רשע both times) is contrasted with both singular and plural righteous. In 10.32 and 11.1 רצין come first in absolute form, then with a suffix. In 11.3-6 forms of חסם, ישר, and הצייל vary; so do forms of other roots in 11.7-11. I have noted in a paper on 'Repetition and variation in the Psalms'¹¹ that Hebrew prosody likes to combine repetition with variation. Thus here it is as pleased with forms of nouns and verbs that are related as with ones that are identical.

The repetition with variation goes beyond grammatical form to trade on ranges of meaning. While it is regrettable that modern English translations do not seek at all to reflect the repetition of roots, their utilization of different words when a root recurs does correspond to the fact that the Hebrew is playing on ranges of meaning within roots. Thus the blessing of 10.6 is something concrete, whereas that of v. 7 is a matter of words. The favour gained in 10.32 is implicitly that of other human beings; that of 11.1 is explicitly Yahweh's. A link is effected between 10.23 and 24 purely by the alliteration between תבונה and תבואנה, and another between 11.11 and 12 by that between הרס and חרש. While surface links of a verbal and aural kind doubtless facilitate the remembering of the material and thus serve a pedagogic function, I suspect they also have a theological implication. Surface links between things are parables of deeper links. They suggest that a collection of proverbs is not merely a compilation of random observations but a synthetic compendium of insights from a coherent world and throwing light on a coherent world.

The precise repetition of the same line in 10.6b and 11b (ופי רשעים) is of particular interest because the words are identical but the meaning is different—or so I believe. After verse 6a the natural way to construe the half-line involves taking it to offer a contrast: 'Blessings are upon the head of the righteous: But violence covereth the mouth of the wicked' (RV). Following v. 11a, however, the natural way to construe it involves taking it to offer a different contrast: 'The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life: But the mouth of the

11. *JQR* 68 (1978), pp. 146-51.

wicked covereth violence' (RV margin). Translations and commentaries assume the repetition of the same phrase implies the same meaning each time, so that the only question is whether they agree with RV text (so NIV) or with RV margin (most others; cf. W. McKane¹²). The tendency of Hebrew prosody would rather to be to vary the meaning of the same words, and this helps to make sense of the two verses in which the clause comes. At v. 6b LXX has πένθος ἄωρον for צמח, and JB's 'premature mourning' for RV's 'violence' follows this, but recognizing that Proverbs rejoices in the repetition of the same words with a different meaning also undercuts the proposition that the repetition is grounds for questioning MT.

In contrast, the clause which occurs in both 10.8b and 10b seems to have the same meaning each time. Within v. 10 the link between the two half-lines is not close—though hardly more obscure than that in many sayings. At v. 10b LXX has ὁ δὲ ἐλέγχων μετὰ παρρησίας εἰρηνοποιεῖ, and RSV among others follows; *BHS* suggests as a possible reading ומוכיח יעשה שלום (again cf. McKane¹³). While this *may* be an earlier Hebrew reading, in itself the mere fact of repetition from v. 8 carries no implication that the text is faulty.

III

In contrast to the verses that follow, the opening saying in 10.1 stands in relative isolation from its context. It contrasts the joy and pain brought to parents by a wise and a foolish son, and thus links thematically with v. 5. But that link is a rather distant one and its uniquely isolated position deserves further consideration. I have argued elsewhere that in an earlier form Proverbs 9 concluded with v. 12; vv. 13-18 (like the additional material that appears here in LXX) are an expansion on v. 12.¹⁴ D. Kidner notes that thematically 10.1 offers a contrast with 9.12, qualifying the latter's individualistic note.¹⁵ It is possible that at some stage 10.1 thus directly followed 9.12, though one must hesitate to build hypothesis on hypothesis in this way.

Comparison with chs. 1-9 rather draws attention to the fact that the

12. *Proverbs* (OTL; London: SCM; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 225.

13. *Proverbs*, pp. 225, 418.

14. 'Proverbs v and ix', *RB* 84 (1977), pp. 80-93.

15. *Proverbs* (London: Tyndale, 1964), p. 84.

homilies in those chapters commonly begin with an allusion to the parent–son relationship between teacher and pupil. The introduction to Proverbs 1–9 as a whole, indeed, closes with a contrast between wisdom and folly (1.7) and then opens its first homily with an allusion to father and mother and to the possibility of their teaching being heeded or spurned (1.8).

The opening saying in Proverbs 10.1–22.16 resumes these introductory themes. The heading ‘The proverbs of Solomon’ forms a prologue to 10.1–22.16, and a statement such as that in the rest of 10.1 might have continued this introduction to the collection as a whole. It transpires, however, that several subcollections of sayings in chs. 10–15 are introduced by an implicit exhortation to attentiveness of this kind, usually accompanied (as this one is) by sample sayings of other types. The saying in 10.1 thus relates more directly to the first subcollection in 10.1–22.16.

The verse’s implicit exhortation to attend to wisdom is followed by an observation on the theme of righteousness and wickedness (v. 2), then by an observation about Yahweh’s involvement in people’s lives in the cause of righteousness (v. 3), then by an observation about poverty and wealth which is overtly more neutral theologically and morally (v. 4). Since poverty and wealth is also the specific theme of vv. 2–3, where principles of righteousness and of religion are applied to it, it may be that those two sayings are designed to provide an anticipatory context for its empiricism.

Four types of saying thus appear in the first four verses of ch. 10. The standard wisdom observation of v. 1 is immediately set in a moral context by v. 2, before the moral concern is set in a theological context in v. 3. Verses 4 and 5 resume the pragmatic wisdom, linking to each other in theme and also linking concretely to v. 1 via the theme of the wise son and his relationship with his father.

The occurrence of sayings of the four types at the beginning of ch. 10 might be judged a coincidence were it not for the fact that four further such collocations of sayings appear subsequently in chs. 10–15: at 10.23–27, 12.1–4, 14.1–4 and 15.2–7. In each case these short sequences of sayings seem to mark the beginning of a new subcollection. In each case, first among these is an observation about wisdom which constitutes the actual introduction, an implicit exhortation to attentiveness parallel to those which open the homilies in chs. 1–9. In each case, examples of three other types of sayings then follow.

It will be observed that in chs. 10, 12 and 14 the medieval chapter divisions printed in modern Hebrew and English Bibles are made at these points. The exceptions (11.1, 13.1 and 15.1) test and refine the rule I am proposing. First, the chapter division at 11.1 in any case looks strange because of the verbal link between 10.32 and 11.1, noted above, while the fact that 10.23 marks a transition to a new section of sayings that focus on righteousness and wickedness in a more concentrated way (which 10.23-27 introduces) provides separate evidence that a move to a new subcollection comes at 10.23 rather than at 11.1. Hermisson, indeed, independently suggests that 10.22 closes off a group of sayings.¹⁶ Secondly, in a parallel way 15.1 links back with 14.35 through the theme of wrath (עברה in 14.35, חמה and אף in 15.1), while 15.2-7 introduces a section in which sayings about Yahweh's involvement in human life is especially prominent. Thirdly, 13.1 does begin with a similar wisdom opening to chs. 10, 12 and 14, but fails to go on to instance the rest of the pattern. Now as we move through chs. 10-15 righteousness and wickedness are decreasing in prominence, while here in ch. 13 reference to Yahweh quite disappears, to become increasingly prominent in chapters that follow. The focus here in ch. 13 is on wisdom itself (see especially vv. 13-20), and the distinctive introduction prepares for that.

Chapters 10-15 thus comprise six subcollections, beginning at 10.1, 10.23, 12.1, 13.1, 14.1 and 15.2. Each is introduced by an implicit exhortation to pay attention to wisdom, which is generally then followed by instances of three other categories of saying. The introductory groups of sayings that begin the subcollections illustrate both how the sayings are by their very nature concerned with life itself and with a wise approach to life, and also how understanding life and seeking wisdom are never to be separated from morality and religion. These concerns are the ones of the introduction to the book itself in 1.1-7. The introductory groups of sayings do not appear after ch. 15 and I am not clear where the subcollection begun at 15.2 should be reckoned to end.

The four categories of saying provide one grid for classifying the material in the collection as a whole. The groups overlap, as the examples just listed illustrate, but the broad categorization is useful. The order in which I have listed the types has also been taken as a

16. See *Studien*, p. 174.

guide to their age, the first proverbs being observations about life and the use of proverbs being later extended to refer to wisdom, then morals, then theology. This may be so, though all four subjects are ancient topics for human reflection.

Further, within the framework just noted, it is commonly reckoned that 'later' perspectives, particularly the theological one, pass judgment on the earlier, and I have looked at them from this perspective above. But Proverbs itself offers no indication that the moral and theological perspectives are unequivocally superior to those of empirical wisdom. In the arrangement of the sayings in Proverbs, the relationship between different types is at least as plausibly to be understood dialectically. While the moral and theological material forbids people to take empirical wisdom too pragmatically, it is also the case that the latter forbids people to take the moral and theological sayings too pietistically. In the coherent universe that Proverbs inhabits, insight, effectiveness, rightness and God belong together.

ABSTRACT

As Yahweh-sayings cluster in Prov. 15–16, צדק- and רשע-sayings cluster in Prov. 10–15, particularly in 10.1–11.13, establishing an ethical context for 10.1–22.16 as a whole. 10.1–11.13 is also distinctive in that every saying but the first has links of a verbal, aural, thematic or formal kind with one or more others in the immediate context. Prov. 10.1-4; 10.23-27; 12.1-4; 14.1-4; and 15.2-7 all comprise parallel sequences of educational, ethical, theological and pragmatic sayings (suggesting perspectives to be understood dialectically?) which introduce the sections that follow; 13.1 proves the rule.



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