

A STUDY OF POVERTY AND PROSPERITY
IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of material poverty and material prosperity provide insight into human behavior. Moral and ethical issues surface in the discussion of these concepts, since man has an instinctive desire to get through life successfully. In presenting the functional sense of wisdom, the writers of Proverbs alert the readers to the whole range of morals and ethics. Fox identifies this emphasis of Proverbs as a presentation of "Ethical-religious wisdom" which is antithetical to folly and evil behavior.¹ Thus when the writers of Proverbs discuss poverty and prosperity they remember that the character and the conduct of people are inextricably woven into these concepts. Poverty is not glamorized neither are the dangers of material prosperity glossed over.

The Need for the Study

Theologies of liberation and demands to actualize the social implications of the gospel challenge evangelicals to discover and to present a biblical perspective on the concepts of poverty and prosperity. Assman, a liberation theologian, advocates "the construction of a different social order" that can remedy the poverty of the poor to the

exclusion of generous relief efforts.² Cone, another liberation theologian, prescribes a political solution when he states, "The doing of theology . . . must involve the politics which takes its stand with the poor and against the rich."³ However, most of the books and articles which this writer has scanned seem to treat these concepts without a sound exegetical and theological basis. The normal treatment of these concepts consists of a moralizing of a few isolated Old Testament passages while the authors formulate their ethics on the basis of today's social activist climate.

The serious student of the Bible will immediately recognize that there is a need for a balanced treatment of these concrete concepts of material poverty and material prosperity. It is strange that the Book of Proverbs in spite of its frank discussion of ethical living, has been so sorely neglected by the spokesmen on these concepts. Payne is absolutely correct when he views the Book of Proverbs as "The greatest block of Biblical material on moral living [personal, economic and social ethics], second only to the Pentateuchal codes"⁴ One's ethics of these concepts must be based upon a solid exegetical and theological foundation.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold. The first purpose is to clear up some of the misconceptions about the

economic extremes by presenting a fairly comprehensive treatment of these concepts as set forth in the Book of Proverbs. This purpose will involve the definition of these concepts and the analysis of the data supplied in Proverbs. The second purpose is to discuss and to present an exegetical and theological basis for the implementation of the ethics of these concepts.

The Procedure of the Study

The second chapter will be devoted to the definition of poverty and prosperity. Word studies will be conducted on the major Hebrew words for each concept with the intention of spelling out the relationship between these concepts. The third chapter will comprise the topical analysis of these concepts and some exegesis of the key passages. Beginning with poverty, the causes, condition and cure of poverty will be presented (6:11; 10:4; 11:24b; 13:18; 21:17; 11:15; 13:23; 14:31; 30:8-9; 28:3, 6; 11:24-28). A discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of prosperity, the acquisition and use of wealth coupled with one's attitude toward prosperity will also be discussed in the third chapter (10:2; 11:4, 18, 24-28; 18:11, 23; 23:4-5). The theological implications of poverty and prosperity as taught in Proverbs will conclude this chapter.

The final chapter will comprise the summary of the content of the entire study. Some applicational principles

on these concepts will also be presented in this chapter.

Notes

¹Michael V. Fox, "Aspects of the Religion of the Book of Proverbs," *HUCA* 39 (1968):55.

²Hugo Assman, *Practical Theology of Liberation*, p. 7.

³James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, p. 65.

⁴J. Barton Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 338.

CHAPTER II

THE DEFINITION OF POVERTY AND PROSPERITY

The writers of the Book of Proverbs have utilized a variety of terms relative to the concepts of poverty and prosperity. The definition of the major terms--**רֵישׁ, דָּל**, **מַחְסוֹר** for poverty and **אוֹצָר, עֲשָׂר, הוֹן** for prosperity will be the focus of this chapter.

Major Terms

Terms for poverty

מַחְסוֹר. This term for poverty occurs eight times in Proverbs (6:11; 11:24; 14:23; 21:5,17; 22:16; 24:34; 28:27). It is one of the nominal forms of the verb **חָסַר**. Hence BDB appropriately cite the dictionary meanings of this term as "need," "thing needed," "poverty."¹ KB prefer the words "want," "lack" for the term.² Both these lexicons endorse the underlying verbal concept of to be lacking or deficient in something. The root meaning of this term can be determined from the verb **חָסַר**.

The verb **חָסַר** is used mostly in the Qal stem. In the Qal stem the verb sustains the threefold meaning of "to lack," "be lacking" and "decrease." A decrease or lack in one's physical or material condition to the extent of being in want (Ps. 23:1; Prov. 13:25; Neh. 9:21) seems to surface

as the controlling idea of this verb. The causative stems Piel and Hiphil embrace the concept of "cause to be lacking or fail."

The derivatives seem to strengthen the concept of being in a state of want or deprivation. **חָסַר**, a masculine noun means "want," "lack." This same noun is used to describe the famine of Amos 4:6 which will be characterized by a *lack* of bread. The envious individual of Proverbs 28:22 shall come to *want*. The adjective **חָסֵר** further describes one or something that is "needy," "lacking," "in want of." Its main usage in Proverbs refers to one who is "lacking in sense," while a single usage of this adjective (Prov. 12:9) describes one who is in want of physical sustenance. These derivatives thus reinforce the verbal idea that a state of want is entered into when one experiences a decrease or lack within the mental or material realm.

The usage of **מְחִסּוֹר** in the Masoretic Text has a three-fold classification:

--it is used to refer to a *need*

Deuteronomy 15:8--poor man's *need* has to be sufficiently met.

Judges 19:20--an offer is made to meet a traveler's *needs*.

--it is used to refer to *lack, want*.

Judges 18:10--the land of Laish was well supplied with no *lack* of anything.

Judges 14:19--the well-supplied/stocked traveller has no *lack* of anything.

Psalm 34:10--the state of those seeking the Lord is one of not being *in want* of any good thing.

--it used to refer in general to *need, poverty*.

Proverbs 6:11; 24:34--the fruit of sleepiness is *need*.

Proverbs 11:24 - -miserliness produces *want*.

Proverbs 14:23; 21:5 - -talkativeness, indiscipline produce *poverty*.

Proverbs 21:7--the pleasure loving individual will become a man of *poverty*.

Proverbs 22:16--the judgement of the oppressor is a state of *poverty*.

Proverbs 28:27--an absence of *poverty* is promised to the generous helper of the poor.

There seems to be no abstract concept denoted by the MT's usage of the term, because concrete ways have been suggested of how to alleviate the state of poverty. Concretely, the individual's actions have also been listed as causes of this state of want.

The usage of **מְחִסּוֹר** in the A.V. (Young's) is also in general agreement with the MT and the LXX since almost the same verses and words are assigned to this term--lack (1) Proverbs 28:27, need (1) Deuteronomy 15:8, penury (1) Proverbs 14:23, poverty (1) Proverbs 11:24, want (8) Proverbs 6:11; 21:5; 22:16; 24:34, poor (1).

The term **מְחִסּוֹר** thus denotes a state of deprivation or impoverishment within the experience of an individual.

רִישׁ. This masculine noun, a derivative of **רִישׁ**, appears only in Proverbs. In its sevenfold appearance it

parallels *dal*, *yāraš*, *maḥsōr*. Its dictionary meaning is "poverty." The verb form of this term (רִישׁ, רִישׁ) has no cognates since it is related to יָרַשׁ. The accepted meaning of רִישׁ is "be in want," "be poor."³ The participial use of רִישׁ in 1 Samuel 18:23 portrays the inferiority one is subjected to because of his social status as a poverty-stricken individual. The state of poverty can also be self-imposed (Prov. 13:7). The Hithpolel stem of רִישׁ conveys this latter fact.

The basic meaning of יָרַשׁ can be discovered when one accepts the etymology of יָרַשׁ. The dictionary meaning of יָרַשׁ is "to take possession," "to inherit," "to dispossess."⁴ The cognates contribute to this dictionary meaning since the Aramaic and Ethiopic terms sustain the same meaning. The Qal stem portrays the act of taking possession (probably by force) of a land or a people, the act of inheriting because of heirship or dispossessing/supplanting someone else (Gen. 15:3, 4; Prov. 30:23), and finally impoverishment (Judg. 14:15). The Niphal stem conveys the normal nuance of the term as used in Proverbs, i.e. the act of being dispossessed or impoverished. Genesis 45:11 presents a concrete illustration of this concept when Joseph promises to provide for his family in order to avert his famine stricken family from being impoverished. The writers of Proverbs capitalize on this nuance of יָרַשׁ in Proverbs 20:13; 23:21; 30:9 as they discuss the prospect of becoming impoverished when one allows pleasure loving and sleepiness to control his life, when God

afflicts one with poverty.

The Masoretic Text's use of **רַיֵּשׁ**, **רַיֵּשׁ** and **רַאֲשׁ** is limited to Proverbs. Although there is no fundamental difference in the meaning of these words, the writers of Proverbs have reserved 10:15; 13:18; 24:34 for **רַיֵּשׁ** 28:19; 31:7 for **רַיֵּשׁ** and 6:11; 30:8 for **רַאֲשׁ**. Conceivably, these words sustain the same meaning since the LXX uses the word *penia* to translate all these words. In Proverbs 10:15, the term is associated with a life of ruin and bitterness. Concretely, Proverbs 30:8 portrays poverty as the absence of material wealth. The Wisdom writers in 6:11; 13:18; 24:34; 28:19 regard poverty as a merited evil while it also affirms poverty as an unpleasant experience (10:15; 30:8; 31:7).

The translation of the term **רַיֵּשׁ** by the LXX reinforces the Hebrew meaning of the concept. The Greek term *penia* is used in nine passages in Proverbs. The attendant meaning is "poverty," "need." The LXX translation of Job 36:8 uses "poverty" instead of "affliction"--". . . they shall be holden in cords of poverty."

The LXX use of *ptōchos* (Prov. 13:8; 14:20; 17:5; 19:1, 7, 22; 22:2, 7; 28:6, 27) greatly assists one in establishing the concreteness of the concept of poverty. *Ptōchos*--refers to "one who is a beggar," "one who cringes or crouches," generally referring to "one who is poor in a thing."⁵ The term *ptōchos* is synonymous to resigning oneself to a life of having nothing. A beggarly lifestyle is characterized

by this term and its cognates *ptōcheuō*--"to be a beggar" (Prov. 23:21).⁶

לָדָל. This term for poverty occurs fourteen times in Proverbs as an adjective. It commonly occurs in the Wisdom literature and poetry. BDB defines לָדָל as "low," "weak," "poor," "thin." The root meaning of this term is derived from the verb לָלַדָל which has the dictionary meaning of "hang," "be low," "languish."⁷ The cognates of this verb further clarifies the meaning of the term--the Akkadian *dalālu* means "to be weak," "be humble;" the Arabic meaning of "to dangle" also supplies some insight to the meaning of לָלַדָל. The concept of an individual being reduced and downcast to the point of distress is the metaphorical representation of the verb in the Qal stem. Judges 6:6 classically illustrates this concept when Israel is humiliated and reduced by their oppressors--the Midianites. Non-theologically, means weakness in physical strength or leanness in physical appearance (2 Sam. 13:4).

The Masoretic text mainly uses the adjective form of לָלַדָל (10:15; 14:31; 19:4,17; 21:13; 22:9,16,22; 28:3,8,11,15; 29:7,14). The adjective לָדָל denotes the helplessness that accompanies poverty. This concept is paralleled in Leviticus 14:21, Psalm 82:3, Zephaniah 3:12. In Leviticus 14:21 the indigent is described as a man of insufficient means whose worship responsibilities are adjusted according to his material ability. Psalm 82:3's appeal for the vindication of the

weak (עָלַי) is prescribed in the practise of justice to the afflicted (עָנִי) and destitute (שָׁרֵף). Zephaniah 3:12 highlights the concept of dependence that the poor and afflicted remnant will display in taking their refuge in the Lord. The opposite of richness, greatness, independence characterizes the state of the victims of poverty.

The LXX terms graphically present the true state of a person who has been overwhelmed by poverty. The terms *penēs*, *penichros*, and *ptōchos* are utilized to explain the meaning of עָלַי. *Penēs* means "poor in money."⁸ Hauck conceives of *penēs* as denoting one who works for his daily bread in order to support himself. Thus *penēs* is distinguished from a beggar.⁹ The rich person has a tendency of exploiting and oppressing a person who is characterized by *penēs*.

Penichros refers to things and persons which are "very poor," "needy," and "wretched."¹⁰ Exodus 22:25 captures this concept when the Israelite is discouraged from exacting any interest rate from his already wretched and poor brother. The victim of *penichros* in Proverbs 28:15 faces insurmountable hardship under an inconsiderate ruler while conversely he can enjoy the loving concern of his righteous brother (29:7).

Strangely enough, the LXX seems to have a preference for *ptōchos* when translating עָלַי in the Proverbs (19:4,17; 22:9, 22; 28:3, 8, 15; 29:14). The concept of being destitute, mendicant is conveyed in this term. In the cited passages in

Proverbs the context of generosity to the poor surfaces in four of the passages (19:17, 22:9, 28:8, 29:14), while exploitation of the already mendicant person is frowned upon (28:3, 15; 19:4). The LXX's preference for translating as *ptōchos* corresponds to the Hebrew concept of being "low, wasted and weak in substance or natural strength."¹¹

As a whole the LXX does not see the victim of poverty as one whose life can be glamorized since leanness and helplessness is the lot of such a person.

The terms **מְחֻסָּר**, **רֵישׁ**, and **דָּל** comprehensively define poverty as a state that exists when a person is destitute of wealth and of material good to the extent of lacking even the necessities of life. Therefore, poverty according to Proverbs can be defined as a want of earthly goods that is related to one's reduced circumstances.

Terms for prosperity

The most helpful words utilized by the Masoretic text to denote prosperity are **הוֹן**, **עֶשֶׂר** and **אוֹצָר**.

אוֹצָר. This masculine noun denotes the idea of supply. BDB assigns to this term the dictionary meaning--"treasure," "store," "treasury," "storehouse." This term is a derivative of the verb **אָצַר**. The latter means to "lay up," "store up."¹² From this concept of storing up the usual association of treasure accompanies this term. Tangible, material merchandise needs storing up and management by a treasurer (Isa.

23:18, Neh. 13:13). The writers of Proverbs clearly sustained the concept of tangible material goods in their utilization of אִצְרָא (8:21; 10:2; 15:16; 21:6,20). KB suggests that Proverbs 27:24 could also be taken as acquired supplies,¹³ while the LXX prefers the idea of strength and power.

In Isaiah 30:6 the material wealth of the inhabitants of Negev was used for commercial purposes. In Isaiah 2:7 the Israelites are castigated for being as avaricious as their foreign neighbours after silver and gold. The silver and the gold in Joshua 6:19, 24 is designated as אִצְרָא. The Hebrew's concept of this term in Proverbs mainly pointed to tangible goods that is storeable and transferable from place to place.

In general the LXX usage consistently translates the term אִצְרָא as *thēsauros*. The meaning of "store," "treasure" is couched in this word.¹⁴ The concept of material wealth is clearly transmitted in the LXX's translation of the Proverbs passages. The origin of material wealth is attributed to wisdom in Proverbs 8:21. In Proverbs 21:6 the acquisition of treasures is evaluated negatively as death is presented as the punishment for accumulating wealth by deceit. Furthermore, in Proverbs 10:2, 15:16 one is warned about how treasures are not to be taken as an end in themselves--the character of the possessor of material wealth is evaluated. The LXX understanding of Proverbs' meaning of *thēsauros* coincides with the Hebrew concept that אִצְרָא means material treasures

which individuals could acquire and store up.

עֶשֶׂר. This term for prosperity appears as a masculine noun nine times in Proverbs (3:16; 8:18; 11:16, 28; 13:8; 14:24; 22:1; 30:8). BDB reserves "riches" as the dictionary meaning of **עֶשֶׂר**, although only two references from Proverbs are cited in the paragraph treating the term.¹⁵ The verb **עָשַׂר**, from which this noun is derived is discussed under two major categories. BDB and KB both agree in discussing this verb in its Hiphil stem so that "make rich" and "gain riches" emanate as the natural subject headings. The idea of abounding in riches or goods is stressed in the Arabic. The Qal stem of this verb brings out the fact of a person becoming wealthy or rich. An individual can become aware of and arrogant about his becoming rich--Hosea 12:9 (M.T.). Job 15:29 affirms that riches can be denied to a wicked person while its endurance cannot be guaranteed to such a person.

The removal of wealth from an unjust person is credited to God's retributive action. Leah and Rachel recognized the principle when they said "Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children . . ." (Gen. 31:16). Thus they accepted Jacob's possession of the best sheep as a just reward from God for their father's deceitful treatment of Jacob.

In 1 Samuel 17:25, Saul's offer of great riches to the slayers of Israel's Philistine enemy is presented as an opportunity of enriching the would-be slayer of Goliath. In

Jeremiah 9:22 (M.T.) one's boasting in material wealth is discouraged. Riches are associated with a life of moral rectitude--maintaining a good reputation by following God's moral order for the universe (22:1; 14:24; 8:18; 3:16). The possibility of עֶשֶׂר making reference to riches in an abstract sense is further removed because the LXX translates עֶשֶׂר as *ploutos*. This Greek term is associated with the word-group (*ploutizo*, *ploutēo* and *plousios*) which "means initially abundance of earthly possessions of every kind."¹⁶ The material sense of riches surfaces in term's thirty-six fold usage in the Old Testament. Thus *ploutos* is rightly translated as "wealth" or "riches." The LXX also employs the infinitival form of *ploutizo* to refer to the act of "making wealthy," "enriching," or "gaining wealth." Abram's riches consisted in the abundance of livestock, precious stones and servants (Gen. 13:2; 30:43). Saul promised to enrich Goliath's slayer with great riches (1 Sam. 17:25). Solomon's material wealth as a gift from God (1 Kings 3:11,13; 10:23) cannot be readily considered as spiritual wealth. The writers of Proverbs (3:16; 8:18; 11:16, 28; 13:8; 22:1, 4; 30:8) consistently spoke of riches in concrete terms as they reminded their readers of the relative value of riches and the ability of riches to mislead them. Even in everyday life, materially wealthy people are called plutocrats. These plutocrats actually own material possessions which give them recognition and comfort in life. The translators of the LXX maintained the concept

of material wealth wherever they translated עֶשֶׂר. This tendency of the LXX cannot be pushed aside easily in order to present riches as an abstract concept.

הוֹן. This term for prosperity is the most used in the Book of Proverbs. It occurs eighteen times in Proverbs (1:13; 6:31; 8:18; 10:15; 18:11; 3:9; 11:4; 12:27; 13:7,11; 19:4, 14; 24:4; 28:8:22; 29:3--wealth; 30:15, 16--sufficiency). The dictionary definition of הוֹן is "wealth," "sufficiency."¹⁷ The concept of power is also inherent in this term.¹⁸ BDB suggests that this term as a masculine noun is almost wholly found in Wisdom Literature, specifically the Book of Proverbs.¹⁹

The verb form of this term (הוֹן) connotes the concept of "being easy or light." Delitzsch suggests that this meaning could have developed from the idea of convenience which is a byproduct of money or material possessions.²⁰ A strong desire for a life of convenience could have motivated the exploits of the professional criminals in Proverbs 1:12-13. These criminals expressed their confidence in being able to acquire (נִמְצָא) valuables and subsequently being able to fill (נִמְלֵא) their homes with plunder. Fittingly, in Proverbs 1:13 the LXX used the word which has "the general meaning of possessions" (*ktēsis*) to translate הוֹן. In Proverbs 6:31 the substance of the thief is identified as what he has in riches and possessions (*Ta hyparchonta*).²¹

Outside of Proverbs, Ezekiel 27 supplies a concrete

picture of **חֵן** referring to material wealth. In Ezekiel 27:12, 18, 27, 33 reference is made to the abundance of Tyre's wealth which trafficked the commercial world. Tarshish and Damascus are singled out as specific customers of Tyre's wares and wealth (Ezek. 27:12, 18). Tyre's wealth is singled out as not being immune to loss (27:27) while it normally was the subject of enriching its customers (27:33).

Wealth is considered as an instrument of honoring God (Prov. 3:9). The duration of wealth depends on the way it is acquired (13:11; 28:8,22). Wealth is thought of as something that can be wasted (29:3), as something that attracts robbers (1:13) as well as tenuous friends (19:4). The sages treat wealth as actual material possessions which can be owned, used wisely or unwisely or benefited from by discerning people.

Synonyms for prosperity

חֵן. One of the dictionary meanings of this masculine noun is "wealth," "treasure."²² In Proverbs it is used of the wealth and treasure of individuals (15:6; 27:24). Jeremiah 20:5 uses the same term to denote the material wealth of the city and then proceeds to itemize the city's wealth.

חֵן. One of the meanings of this term is "wealth."²³ It is used of material goods that can be confiscated and utilized by the new owner (Num. 31:9; Job 5:5; Isa. 8:4).

This thought is intimated in Proverbs 13:22.

It has been seen without question, that עֶשֶׂר, אֹצֵר and הוֹן primarily refer to tangible material possessions which could be in the form of money, livestock, precious stones. These terms define wealth as the state of abundance in material goods. Their usage in Proverbs consistently sustain this concept.

Summary

This chapter has endeavored to define the major terms for the concepts of poverty and prosperity. It was found that these concepts spoke of the material state or circumstance of anything or anybody. The terms for poverty comprehensively described the reduced state of anything or anybody whose natural strength or substance has decreased. Conversely, it was found that the terms for prosperity denoted the useable, storeable and tangible nature of goods which were in abundant supply and thus in turn were used to satisfy the basic needs of life. Both these concepts involved the concrete experience of the individual within the mental, social and physical realm of his life.

Notes

- ¹*BDB*, s.v. "מחסור," p. 341.
- ²*Ibid.*, s.v. "חסר," p. 341.
- ³*Ibid.*, s.v. "רוש," p. 930.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, s.v. "ירש," p. 439.
- ⁵*LSJGL*, s.v. "ptochos," p. 709.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, s.v. "ptocheuo," p. 709.
- ⁷*BDB*, s.v. "דלל," p. 195.
- ⁸*LSJGL*, s.v. "penes," p. 619.
- ⁹*TDNT*, 6 (1960): 37-40.
- ¹⁰*LSJGL*, s.v. "penichros," p. 619.
- ¹¹*OTWS*, p. 317.
- ¹²*BDB*, s.v. "אוצר," pp. 69-70.
- ¹³*KB*, s.v. "אוצר," p. 21.
- ¹⁴*LSJGL*, s.v. "thesauros," p. 366.
- ¹⁵*BDB.*, s.v. "עשר," p. 799.
- ¹⁶*NIDNTT*, 2 (1975): 840.
- ¹⁷*BDB.*, s.v. "הון," p. 223.
- ¹⁸*KB*, s.v. "הון," p. 228.
- ¹⁹*BDB*, S.V. "הון," p. 223.
- ²⁰Delitzsch, 1: 63.
- ²¹*NIDNTT*, 2 (1975): 845.
- ²²*BDB*, s.v. "חסן," p. 340.
- ²³*Ibid.*, s.v. "חיל," p. 298.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF POVERTY AND PROSPERITY

Now that these concepts have been defined, it is fitting to discuss the principal passages in Proverbs which analyze these concepts. The first part of this chapter will deal with the causes, condition and cure of poverty. The latter part of this chapter will focus on the value, acquisition and use of prosperity.

Poverty

It may seem paradoxical that an extravagantly wealthy monarch like Solomon would have much to say about poverty. Solomon's extensive building programs, which resulted in the overtaxation of oppressed people, would normally disqualify him from speaking on the concept of poverty. However, the man who is inclined towards following God's rules for daily living needs this information about the reality of poverty. Solomon and the other writers in the Book of Proverbs aptly discuss the causes, the condition, and the cure of poverty.

Causes of poverty

Approximately seven identifiable causes of poverty surface in the Book of Proverbs. Four of these causes refer to factors within the individual which can create this

problem. The remaining three causes deal with factors outside of the individual's volition. The internal factors which contribute to poverty are somnolence, indolence, indiscipline and miserliness. The external factors responsible for a state of poverty are injustice, oppression and surety.

Somnolence. Although the writers of Proverbs do not distinguish between somnolence and indolence, somnolence the symptom of indolence is still a cause of poverty. Three passages identify too much sleep as a cause of poverty (Prov. 6:9-11; 20:13; 24:34). A graphic description is given of one who has become the victim of somnolence. The synthetic parallelism of 6:9-10 reinforces the trapped position of the sluggard. *BDB* observes that the feminine noun שְׁנָת which means "sleep" speaks about the sluggardly man.¹ The kind of sleep referred to in this passage has a desensitizing effect on the individual's intelligence. McKane confirms this effect when he states, "Because he is so sleepy-headed he has no defences against the onset of poverty and privation . . . (to the extent of having) his intelligence drugged by somnolence."² The synonymous noun נִיָּקָה (slumber), is also figuratively used for indolence. This noun has the verb נָקַח as its derivative with the lexical meaning of "be drowsy, slumber."³ The verb also has the figurative connotation of inactivity and indolence. This connotation is illustrated by the inactivity which characterized the sleepy leadership of Assyria

(Nah. 3:18). The overall topic of 6:9-11 is the warning against indolence. The obvious symptom of indolence is somnolence. One is strongly discouraged from falling in love with drowsiness (20:13). McKane considers drowsiness as “the natural ally of sloth.”⁴

Indolence. Proverbial wisdom acknowledges the inseparable relationship of somnolence to indolence by stating that “Slothfulness does cast me into a deep sleep” (19:15). Furthermore Proverbial wisdom recognizes that failure to work is grounded in these two causes of poverty. Nothing constructive can come out of a lifestyle that is characterized by עֲצִלָּה (sluggishness) or רַמְיָה (slackness). Ecclesiastes 10:18 concretely presents the fruit of laziness that is “sagging rafters and a leaking roof.” *BDB* suggests that a negligent and idle person is characterized by a laxness and slackness as taught in Proverbs 10:4.⁵ Listlessness inevitably produces poverty, because “a negligent hand” (listlessness) guarantees poverty (Prov. 10:4).

The sages recognized this self-defeating behavior, and thus they resorted to the description of a personal experience in order to jolt the sluggard out of his laziness (24:30-34). The owner of the unkempt vineyard is identified as one “who lacks sense” (24:30). This identification of the sluggard is encouraged to wise up and learn from the ant.

The self-discipline and systematic industry of the ant ought to encourage the sluggard to rise above the industry of the ant (6:6-11). Wolff identifies the other characteristics of laziness by affirming that goading is unnecessary for the wise man when "feeble evasions and excuses 26:13, excessive sleep 26:14, indolence, even in eating 26:15 and an unduly high opinion of oneself 26:16" are recognized as characteristics of laziness.⁶ No matter which way one looks at this problem, it is a human reality which inevitably leads to a life of beggary and want (20:4).

Indiscipline. Closely related to laziness is the concept of indiscipline. McKane in commenting upon 24:34 recognizes this relationship by stating, ". . . indiscipline in the form of laziness is disastrous."⁷ Laziness seems to eat away at a person's restraint to the extent that the victim of indiscipline refuses to heed (פֹּרַעַ) the moral instruction and the verbal corrections (מוֹסֵר) that are given by the sages (Prov. 13:18). Shame and poverty are the guaranteed results of such a lifestyle. Indiscipline further manifests itself in a lifestyle of indulgence and drunkenness (21:17; 23:21). The ultimate consequence of disinheritance and destitution seem so distant to this individual. The pleasure of the moment seems to control this individual to the extent that he ignores the destitute end of his behavior. The goal of a successful and harmonious life is absent in the

individual who indulges in the "typical manifestations of un wisdom as found in gluttony and drunkenness."⁸

The Niphal of **שׁוֹרֵץ** in 23:21 affirms the certainty of one's poverty when drunkenness and gluttony control one's life. Even the pleasure-seeker in 21:17 has a guaranteed end of poverty. Kidner comments "that more than pleasure is at stake."⁹ Conceivably, moral wanderlust has gained an upper-hand in the life of the undisciplined person (21:16). This victim wanders off into a life of greed which produces in him an excessive indulgent approach towards material things "as he hastens after riches" (28:22).

Miserliness. In 23:6 this person comes across as a niggardly and miserly being. Indiscipline capitalizes on motivating a person "who is actuated by ill-will toward others" to becoming an avaricious and grasping individual. McKane rightly concludes that "The **רַע עַיִן** is unfit for the responsibility of wealth and want will overtake him."¹⁰ Although Kidner captions Proverbs 28:22 as the miser's miscalculation, he unfortunately concludes that the miser will only experience inner poverty.¹¹ Humanly speaking, this might be an attractive view, but the plain sense of guaranteed material want appeals to this writer. An avaricious and greedy disposition contributes to this lifestyle. The Qal Participle **חָשַׁךְ** depicts this disposition because this individual "withholds for himself" more than what is necessary

(11:24b). This lifestyle has a "distorted sense of thrift," which further is identified as "a myopic selfishness." McKane boldly classifies miserliness as a manifestation of anti-social behavior.¹² In Proverbs 11:24-26, the miser is cast in stark contrast with the philanthropist who does not inhumanly retain wealth and thus involve himself in excessive hoarding of his wealth. The contrastive adverb **וְאִי** in 11:24b highlights the ironic end of the miser, namely an end of want.

These internal factors which cause poverty weaken the argument of the liberation theologians that all poverty is caused by factors which are beyond the individual's control or personal responsibility. The second person suffix to the nouns of action (sleep, gluttony, drunkenness) also strengthens the case for one's personal responsibility towards poverty.

In a general sense one's own unrighteousness or foolishness produce poverty. The sages graphically illustrate this fact in employing the Piel Imperfect of **קָלַע** (to swallow up), because this verb figuratively denotes how the extravagance and squandering of the foolish man literally destroys his possessions--"a foolish man swallows it up" 21:20.¹³ It is also stated that "the wicked earns deceitful wages" in contrast to the abiding value of the reward that accrues to the righteous person (11:18). At best according to 11:18, the wicked can count on the worthlessness and temporary value

of his earnings. Proverbs 13:21 intimates that calamity or misfortune is the deserved end of unrighteousness, while good fortune shall reward the righteous.¹⁴ The writers of Proverbs present a balanced view of the issue. They do recognize that there are external factors which bring about the state of poverty. It is up to the individual to remedy the preceding internal factors after he has accepted full and personal responsibility for these abortive and self-defeating attitudes and actions.

Injustice. Several commentators have tried to play down or even deny the fact that the poor are the victims of injustice in 13:23. Kidner plays down the obvious point of this verse by stating that, "The point of this very terse proverb seems to be that the size of your resources matters less than the judgment with which you handle them."¹⁵ McKane denies that the poor's tillage is referred to in 13:23 by suggesting that the term **רַב־עֲשָׂרִים**; refers to the "grandees." He supports this view by remarking that "Plenty which is raised on a foundation of injustice will not be consolidated into enduring wealth."¹⁶ The LXX translation of this verse--"The righteous shall spend many years in wealth, but the unrighteous shall perish suddenly," is another example of confusing the identity of the victims of injustice. Conceivably, the context of 13:21 where the righteous are being rewarded with prosperity while the sinners are being pursued by adversity

could have influenced the translators of the LXX. The poor were also automatically equated with the righteous. Richardson traces this concept to the Psalms where "the expression 'the poor' has acquired a sort of religious significance, and may often almost be equated with 'the godly'."¹⁷

It is not necessary to change the normal meanings of the terms רַב, אָכַל, רְאִשִּׁים; and מִשְׁפָּט in order to clarify Proverbs 13:23. The phrase רַב-אָכַל (much food) has been changed into a statement form to read "litigation consumes." The adjectival use of רַב and its relationship to אָכַל (food) has been replaced by a somewhat novel translation which translates נִיר (tillage) as "produce" in order to read "Litigation consumes the produce of the poor." The identity of רְאִשִּׁים, a Qal active plural participle of רָאשׁ (to be poor) has also been mistaken to be the plural masculine of רֹאשׁ (head, chief). Extremists have proposed the term (wicked--רָשָׁע) in order to justify the snatching away of the individual's resources. It is not correct to capriciously change the participial form of רוֹשׁ for the preference of "grandees, rulers or chiefs." מִשְׁפָּט (judgement) is assigned a twofold meaning--"righteousness" and agricultural "regulation." The concept of "execution of judgement between individuals"¹⁸ has been removed from this term. The fact that syntactically belongs to מִשְׁפָּט (through injustice) has been completely ignored by those who propose to translate 13:23 "The tillage of the poor will yield abundantly if properly tilled." There

is no end to these fanciful translations. The proverb states emphatically that the snatching away of the poor man's resources is due to the lack of justice. An oppressive and unjust landowner (Jer. 22:13-14) is capable of afflicting a poor man with injustice.

Oppression. God denounces ambivalence in one's relationship to Him and in one's relationship with fellow-creatures. Thus God denounced His covenant people for trying to worship Him and at the same time oppress the weak (Isa. 1:10-17). The oppressive treatment of the already poor person is identified as an insult to God's honour because such treatment "reproaches His Maker" (14:31, 17:5). The verb **קָרַח** in its intensive form suggests how God is intensely angered by the oppressive treatment of the poor. God as the common Creator of the oppressor and the oppressed is despised or reproached when the poor person is unkindly treated by the oppressor. Those who are poor in material things or destitute (**אֲבִיּוֹן**), need gracious and sympathetic help. God's honour is involved in the gracious helping of the destitute. This kind of help is diametrically opposite to the oppressive treatment of the poor. The antithetic parallelism of 14:31 encourages gracious help in contrast to "the act of oppression which is an insult to God who created the poor man."¹⁹

The double sense that is proposed for the phrase **לְדָל** **עֲשֵׂק** does not soften the reality of the poor man's plight.

Whether one assigns the meaning of "he that slanders" (referring to the oppressor) instead of "he that oppresses" to עִשָּׂק, it will not alter the dishonor that is brought on God. The victim of poverty is mocked or held in derision when the oppressor maliciously rejoices at the calamity of the already helpless person (17:5). The exploitation of the poor does not guarantee the enduring enrichment of the oppressor (עִשָּׂה - - he who oppresses) in that the exploited and the oppressor will "both come to poverty" (22:16 N.I.V.). The "man of poverty" will be impoverished by the means of oppression, because the oppressor's oppressive measures are aimed at making much for himself- לְהַרְבֹּת לוֹ.

Surety. One is encouraged not to become entrapped in financial entanglements by avoiding being drawn into a surety when "there are not adequate financial resources to cope comfortably with any contingency which might arise from the bond."²⁰ The taking on of a pledge or giving of a pledge for the debts (11:15) of another is one of the dangers a person is advised to avoid (6:1-5). Moneylending transactions seem to have been the order of the day during Solomon's reign. These practices came "to be among the grave dangers that beset the path of youth."²¹ It was becoming a risky transaction for those who were generous in their friendships even to the extent of allowing the wealthy greedy speculator to manipulate them to risk their lives as a convenient sureties.

Delitzsch aptly observes that "improvident suretyships are wont to be punished."²²

When the individual is aware of the internal and external factors that cause poverty, he will be in a better position to deal with this human reality.

The condition of poverty

Appropriately, the writers of Proverbs discuss the condition of poverty. This condition is discussed from the *Godward* aspect, *manward* aspect and the *selfward* aspect. This presents a balanced approach to such a misunderstood and sensitive issue.

Godward. The individual's relationship to God is unaffected by his destitute state, rather he is reminded of having a mutual Creator with the rich (22:2). Thus God puts no special premium on being poor since His endowment of life to all humans equalizes the dignity of human life irrespective of one's economic station in life (29:13). Thus it seems that God encouraged the poor to graciously accept their condition. One has the responsibility of recognizing that both poverty and riches are permitted by God. Agur's prayer in 30:8-9, recognizes this fact when he prays "Give me neither poverty nor riches . . ." In this tension to live a contented life, Agur possibly did not believe that God could bring something good out of one's poverty. Wisely enough, he recognized these two economic extremes and thus presented a

middle course. When Agur objectively considered these economic extremes, he realized that both could turn one away from God. Specifically, one's poverty could lead to stealing with an ultimate denial of God. One's prosperity could make him indifferent to God. God cannot be charged with the moral dangers of denial and forgetfulness about the poor.

Manward. The victims of poverty happen to have social contacts with other human beings. The sages fittingly discuss the actions of others towards the victims of poverty (14:20; 19:4, 7; 18:23; 22:7). The social contacts of the impoverished are tenuous. He is the victim of *friendlessness* (אֲנִי־אֵין־רֵעַ) and *hateful treatment*. Estrangement is his normal lot, because "his neighbour spurns him" (14:20), and his "closest friend deserts him" (19:4). Delitzsch identifies this treatment of the poor as:

. . . apart of the dark side of human nature, and one should take notice of it, so that when it goes well with him, he may not regard his many friends as all genuine, and when he becomes poor, he may not be surprised by the dissolution of earlier friendship . . .²³

The possessions of an individual are only a means of gaining friends (19:7b). There is a lack of constancy in this friendship to the extent that "the poor man's only friend cools toward him."²⁴ The poor man's repeated requests for help have brought on the strained relationship with his family (19:7a).

The plight of the poor is further evident when he is subjected to *harsh treatment* by a fellow poor man. This

oppressor takes advantage of the weak and poorer state of his fellowman (22:22; 28:3). Delitzsch's translation of 28:3 permits him to identify the **רֶשֶׁת גְּבֵר** as a prince or potentate since he links **רֶשֶׁת** with **רֹאשׁ** (ruler). The comparison of the sweeping rain in its devastating force, according to Delitzsch, is what fits his identification of **רֶשֶׁת גְּבֵר** as an oppressive master.²⁵ McKane seems to follow the same reasoning as that of Delitzsch when he concludes that "Such an administrator or executive is like the hard, driving rain . . . the harbinger of famine . . ." ²⁶ These options do not take into account the strong temptation of a poor man becoming exploitive of one that is poorer than himself. This kind of oppressor has a strong drive for self-enrichment and thus he can masterfully manipulate the **דָּלִים** which are characterized by helplessness, meagerliness and frugality.

Not only does the victim of poverty have to contend with the harsh treatment of his fellowman, he is also to adopt a dependent attitude towards others because he is dependent upon them for help (18:23). Even his speech has a continuous tone of entreaty, while his wealthy counterpart gets away with rough speech. The rich normally adopt a heartless, unsympathetic attitude towards the poor. Since poverty means dependence the victim of poverty is brought into a subservient role to the one who has acquired power because of his wealth (22:7). Money's leverage over the poor seems to indicate that the poor man completely loses his

independence because of his experience of looking to someone else for help. In this instance poverty is rightly regarded as an evil from which the poor man needs deliverance since "All the days of the oppressed are *wretched* . . ." (15:15). Deuteronomy 15 echoes the rights of the poor.

Selfward. Fittingly, the writers of Proverbs have not glossed over the selfward aspect of poverty. They do not minimize the destructive power of one's poverty when they identify poverty as "the ruin of the poor" (10:15). The one drawback of poverty is that many disabilities are placed upon the back of poverty. Prolonged poverty can ruin the strongest person when it eventuates into a life of theft and denial of God. Within himself the individual ought to consider integrity and discernment as non-negotiable qualities of life (19:1,22). The formal parallelism of 28:6 reinforces the fact that honesty is a preferable value rather than allowing one's poverty to rob him of his integrity. In fact, the poor man that walks in his integrity possesses the ability of "seeing through" the conceit of the wealthy person (28:11). Hence the victim of poverty is not given any reason to demean himself by adopting a low self-image or resorting to a dishonest lifestyle in order to cope with his problem.

Cure for poverty

Appropriately, the sages do not treat the condition of poverty as an incurable state, rather in their typical

pragmatic fashion they propose a cure for poverty. This cure for poverty involves the victim's personal responsibility and the social concern of others. This approach to the problem is in keeping with God's sovereign plan of using human beings to make life profitable for themselves or for others.

Personal responsibility. Since God does not arbitrarily ordain man's economic status, He expects the individual to be personally responsible for his economic state. Personal diligence and personal discipline comprise this aspect of the cure of poverty. It almost seems redundant for the sages to remind one about the importance and fruit of personal diligence ("the hand of the diligent maketh rich" 10:4, "in all labor there is profit" 14:23). These verses are antithetical to the plight of laziness. Human nature being what it is needs to be reminded that God has not changed and does not intend to change His way of giving man the dignified place of working to provide for one's needs. Diligent work is one of the proven ways of curing poverty. Planned, active involvement in work guarantees the alleviation of a state of poverty. There is no way of getting around the principles enunciated in these verses.

The basis for personal diligence is personal discipline. This is an attitude which the sages consider as tantamount to an active and diligent lifestyle. Greed (28:22), indiscipline, gluttony (20:13; 23:21), and somnolence (20:13;

6:11; 24:34) sap away one's desire to engage in diligent work. One is thus encouraged to be done with these self-defeating attitudes and actions.

Social concern of others. Others also feature into God's way of curing poverty. God has so structured a person's relationship with Him that the practical outworkings of such a relationship involves a social concern for others-- "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (21:3). The *righteousness* and *just treatment* of others is an important issue to God. Hence the exploitation of the poor is absolutely prohibited by God (22:22; 23:10, 11). God promises to champion the rights of the poor--"the Lord will plead their cause" (23:11; 22:23). He considers that a wrong done to a lowly person is the same as though it were done to Himself.

Positively, God encourages us *to give gracious and generous help* to the needy (19:17; 22:9). God considers Himself as no man's debtor thus He promises to repay, to bless the beneficent person--"He that giveth to the poor shall not lack . . ." (28:27), ". . . his good deed will He repay unto him" (19:17). Constantly one is reminded to defend the rights of the poor (31:9). This reminder makes sense to the righteous who is already involved in defending the rights of the poor because it is his disposition to be sensitive and concerned about every living thing--even his beast of burden

(12:10).

In concluding the discussion on poverty, one cannot say that God has a special favoritism for the poor. Poverty itself is an amoral issue. God has a special interest in the victims of poverty because they do cry to Him as their hope, deliverer and protector. More importantly God is interested in the spiritual response that comes out of this crisis. Thus it makes sense for God to sovereignly espouse the cause of the poor and to identify Himself with their plight--their ill-treatment, willful neglect by others and disregard of their interests.

Prosperity

The writers of Proverbs intimate that prosperity as the counterpart of poverty is not a neutral matter to God. Their discourses on prosperity (3:1-2), health (3:7-8), abundance relative to physical and material wealth (3:9-10), life, riches, honor and peace (3:13-18), and blessing, grace and honor (3:33-35) represent their attitude towards this human reality. In this essay we are going to explore the wisdom writers' concern about the material well-being of the reader. Anyone at any time (1:20, 21; 8:1-5) can benefit from the Book of Proverbs when he aligns himself with the principles for moral conduct which form the basis of one's material well-being. It is not fully proven or taught in Proverbs that financial prosperity always indicates spirituality.

Those who live skillful lives in accordance with God's order for the universe can expect "to flourish" (14:11; 11:28), "to be made fat" (11:25; 28:25), "to enjoy a happy and peaceful existence" (13:2, 21; 16:20; 19:8; 28:10; 16:20; 28:14). Although riches are listed as one of the consequences of righteous and wise living, this is not invariably the case. There are a great many righteous people who are not necessarily wealthy: What is always true is that "The attainment of true wisdom (ethical wisdom) is commended . . . as superior to . . . riches (4:13)."²⁷

The value of prosperity

Payne aptly observes that "The private ownership of property (wealth) is encouraged throughout the book of Proverbs."²⁸ Wealth is thus assumed as a good thing. Wealth is *advantageous* because it (1) serves as a source of help which provides for one's needs (27:26, 27), (2) safeguards one from disaster and temptation (10:15; 30:9), (3) serves as a means of gaining honor and friends (14:24; 19:4; 14:20). All of these advantages have to do with making one's sojourn here on earth an enjoyable one. Amidst these advantages, the sages inform the public that wealth has its *limitations*: A false sense of security can be derived from wealth--"He who trusts in his riches will fall" (11:28). Wealth evaporates--"for riches certainly make themselves wings" (23:5). One needs to realize that wealth never delivers from death (11:4). Hence

one is properly cautioned about the comparative value of wealth, because wealth does not effectively serve as a *substitute* for righteousness and integrity (28:6; 16:8), for a good reputation (22:1).

Riches are not superior to spiritual and moral treasures because the "Lord blesses with riches" (10:22) to the extent that "In the house of the righteous is much treasure" (15:6). Syntactically the phrase "The blessing of the Lord" is placed at the beginning for emphasis sake. God's blessing is the source of one's riches, hence there is no mental anguish (אֲנָחָה--anxiety Prov. 15:1) with it (עֲמָה). The source of blessing יהוה is the subject of יְהוָה, so that the idea of Proverbs 10:22 is there is no anxiety when the Lord Himself blesses with riches. God's protection and blessing allows the righteous to enjoy good things (15:6).

The acquisition of prosperity. Righteousness and the fear of the Lord (13:11), are used synonymously as the primary foundation for acquiring wealth. McKane emphasizes that "It matters how a man acquires his wealth and wealth by itself is not a title to dignity and influence."²⁹ Proverbial wisdom endorses McKane's observation by teaching us that wealth at the price of righteousness is worthless (15:16; 16:8). The major negative concepts associated with wealth are the ulterior motives for acquiring wealth and the negative methods of acquiring wealth. *Vanity* can motivate one in

his acquisition of wealth. This motivation produces diminishing returns when one allows bribery, dishonesty or cruelty to replace hard honest and consistent toil for one's wealth (13:11). Wealth steadily accumulated grows in amount. *Greed* is also listed as another negative motivation (11:29; 15:27). Hastily gained wealth (20:21), greedy acquisition of wealth (15:27), wearisome ambition for wealth (23:4) and disregard for honesty; integrity and fidelity (28:20,22) are evidences of a covetous lifestyle.

An inordinate love of money can drive one to ignore God's standards of acquiring possessions. "Great revenues with injustice" (16:8b) and dishonest business deals (20:23) are some of the principles employed by a greedy person in his acquisition of wealth. This greedy man "troubles his own house" (15:27a) when God sovereignly diverts the greedy man's gains into the possession of a nobler person ("wealth of a sinner is laid up for the righteous" Prov. 13:22) who will eventually help the needy with his gain (28:8).

Righteous living heads the list of the positive principles for acquiring wealth (10:2, 3, 6; 15:16). The writers of Proverbs presume that the reader is in agreement with their thesis that wisdom, humility and the fear of the Lord produce material prosperity--"The reward of humility is the fear of the Lord, even riches, and honour, and life" (22:4).

Diligent work should follow righteous living because

the former should build on the latter (10:4-5; 14:23; 27:23-27; 28:19). These verses do not encourage one to engage in rash speculation or to hope for easy money. Rather one is explicitly told to buckle down to hard work. The diligent man is engaged in steady toil and then diligently invests his resources with no bent toward hasty accumulation (21:5; 13:11).

The use of wealth. God is vitally interested in how one uses his wealth. The wise man is encouraged to use his wealth discretely *by refusing to live indulgently* and extravagantly (21:17-18; 23:20-21; 12:11). He is further encouraged to use his wealth liberally in meeting the needs of others. The wise man believes that liberality is the essence of *honoring* God with one's wealth (3:5). He is fully aware of the fact that God approves of using His bounty in helping the poor (19:17; 22:9; 28:27). God Himself promises multiplied and abundant resources (3:10). The generous treatment of one's enemy during his time of hunger or thirst can create remorse within the enemy's heart can also result in one having the opportunity of being rewarded by God (25:21-22). Thus the wise man replaces a greedy and miserly lifestyle with generosity that comes out of a compassionate and merciful heart (11:24; 21:26; 22:9). The way one uses his wealth is an indication of how he feels towards wealth. The righteous man manages his wealth with an appreciation for the

value of money as well as with an understanding of wealth's limitations. Smugness, false confidence in one's wealth and pride which considers wealth as the ultimate, all these vain feelings towards wealth have no place in the heart of one who is endowed with true wisdom. This individual humbly enjoys God's blessings and he uses them for God's glory (10:22; 14:24).

*Theological Implications of Poverty
and Prosperity*

Although the instruction in Proverbs mainly supplies us with pragmatic knowledge, it does not mean that there is no trace of God's attitude towards these concepts. The fact that God desires His creatures to master life and overcome life's numerous difficulties is enough evidence that these concepts are grounded in a theological base. It is true that the blessing of the Lord enhances one's life in whatsoever state he finds himself (10:22; Phil. 4:11-12).

*God's attitude towards
poverty and prosperity*

In discussing God's attitude towards these concepts, one must accept the fact that "Empirical and gnostic wisdom starts from the unyielding presupposition that there is a hidden order in things and events . . ." ³⁰ The wisdom writers understood that God was vitally interested in life with all of its departments. Von Rad further notes that: "Wisdom thus consisted in knowing that at the bottom of

things an order is at work, silently and often in a scarcely noticeable way, making for a balance of events."³¹ The frequent mention of the poor and poverty in the Book of Proverbs does not mean that God puts a stigma on this concept. It is God's way of balancing out life by allowing the poor and prosperous to perform a mutual service of respecting each other as beings of dignity. Thus God has allowed poverty to exist always and everywhere. Poverty is a fact of life (17:5). Human failure sometimes contributes to this state (11:16; 12:11, 24; 13:4, 18, 25; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:5, 17; 22:7; 24:34). The social life of the community may have their consciences stung by the victims of poverty and yet God does not treat these victims of poverty with anger and disdain. Realistically, God appeals to the heart of the individual to have a concern for the poor (14:21, 31; 17:5; 19:17; 22:9, 16, 22) by treating the poor generously (11:24; 19:6). He has encouraged mankind to share their prosperity. In becoming prosperous the individual must continually strive to integrate his faith in the true God into the way he reaches his goal of prosperity.

God also does not ignore the value of property although He is aware that it gains friends (19:4), and power (22:7), it pacifies (21:14), provides protection (10:15) and outweighs social position (12:9).³² God also has an awareness of the dangers of prosperity, and thus He counsels the wealthy not to allow wealth to become the final object of

their trust (11:28).

The concepts of poverty and prosperity are not neutral to God. Eichrodt is aware of this fact when he remarks that ". . . both in refusal and in unexpected bounty, this God constantly points men *to himself*, and makes his gifts the means whereby his own are led to . . . understand his nature more profoundly."³³ The copious references to poverty and prosperity in Proverbs indicate that God desires mankind to make their ethical commitment to concepts of poverty and prosperity. Irrespective of whatever side of the fence one may find himself, God has seen to it that these concepts have been objectively discussed in the Book of Proverbs.

The presence of a religious concept

There is some uncertainty as to whether there is always a religious concept involved in being poor or prosperous. The closest that the wisdom writers come to resolving this uncertainty is by listing riches and prosperity in general as the personal consequences of one who lives out his life according to God's order--"riches is the fount of wisdom" (3:16, 8:18), "a faithful man shall abound with blessings" (28:20). What is certain is that peace and piety are preferable to these concepts (17:1; 15:16). Israel, as the covenant people of God fully understood the relation between moral (internal) goodness and outward prosperity. Ethical righteousness was a desired quality for any individual

within the covenant community. The consequences of one's actions determined one's success in life.

Von Rad endorses this relationship of a religiously practised faith with the resultant blessing of God in these words:

But the wise men (particularly in the sentences in Prov. 10-15) never tire of expressing anew the idea that everything which emanates from such a righteous man also supports him and brings him--one is tempted to say--into a sphere of blessing.³⁴

In tracing the relationship of moral conduct to material goods Eichrodt seems to infer that one's moral conduct should be directed towards the attainment of goods. He further cautions one that the attainment of material goods should not be an end in themselves. The goods according to Eichrodt are evidence of God's favor on one's life.³⁵ At this stage of this study, it is a bit difficult to fully agree with this conclusion. It is a fact of life that there are many non-Godfearing people who are prosperous. This conclusion could also present God as being capricious in His dealings with the poor. Thus it is not always necessary to look for a religious connection between poverty and prosperity.

Summary

An attempt has been made to analyze the sages' teachings on the concepts of poverty and prosperity. The analysis began with a discussion on the causes, condition and cure of poverty. This discussion was then followed by

was then followed by a treatment of the value, acquisition and use of wealth. The analysis concluded with the listing of some of the theological implications of these economic concepts.

It was seen that the state of poverty is traceable to at least seven causes--sleepiness, laziness, indiscipline, miserliness, injustice, oppression and surety. This state of poverty was also seen from its divine, social and selfward aspects. A cure for the state of poverty was proposed in which the individual had a part to play as well as the involvement (through social concern) by others. Wealth was also discussed along the lines of its advantages and disadvantages. Some of the negative factors (vanity, greed) were evaluated in the discussion on the acquisition of wealth. Those in the wealthy state were encouraged to use their wealth in a beneficent and God-honoring way. Finally, it was seen that poverty and prosperity were not neutral concepts to God in that God expects an individual to integrate his relationship to God into the way he feels about and acts toward his economic state.

Notes

- ¹BDB, s.v. "שנת," p. 446.
- ²William McKane, *Proverbs, A New Approach*, p. 324.
- ³BDB, s.v. "נוס," p. 630.
- ⁴McKane, p. 324.
- ⁵BDB, s.v. "רמה," p. 941.
- ⁶Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 131.
- ⁷McKane, p. 577.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 388.
- ⁹Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs, an Introduction and Commentary*, p. 144.
- ¹⁰McKane, p. 627.
- ¹¹Kidner, p. 172.
- ¹²McKane, p. 435.
- ¹³BDB, s.v. "בלע," p. 118.
- ¹⁴A. Cohen, *Proverbs*, p. 85.
- ¹⁵Kidner, p. 105.
- ¹⁶McKane, p. 463.
- ¹⁷Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, p. 168.
- ¹⁸BDB, s.v. "משפט," p. 1048.
- ¹⁹J. A. Emerton, "Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs," *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969): 202-207.
- ²⁰McKane, p. 379.

²¹T. T. Perowne, *The Proverbs with Introduction and Notes*, p. 65.

²²F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 6:102.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 305.

²⁴Cohen, p. 124.

²⁵Delitzsch, p. 224.

²⁶McKane, p. 629.

²⁷J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 345.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 340.

²⁹McKane, p. 421.

³⁰Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. 1:421.

³¹*Ibid.*, 1:428.

³²Payne, p. 340.

³³Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., 2:351.

³⁴Von Rad, *Wisdom of Israel*, p. 79.

³⁵Eichrodt, 2:349-50.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The introduction of this thesis stated that there was a need to present a balanced biblical perspective on the concepts of poverty and prosperity. From this study, it becomes obvious that the concepts of poverty and prosperity as treated in the Book of Proverbs mainly refer to an economic or material state. The definition of these concepts could not possibly make room for reading an exclusively religious or ethical content into these concepts by spiritualizing them, because two economic extremes are referred to in these concepts.

In discussing poverty's causes, condition and cure, it was discovered that poverty as the ideal for any person could not be glamorized. Wretchedness characterized the state of poverty. Conversely, it was also discovered that the possession of wealth cannot be considered as an end in itself. Both these concepts have the limitation of not being able to satisfy one's spiritual needs since only the material realm of life is involved in these concepts. Indifference to God and vulnerability to crime (Prov. 30:8-9) emanated as real dangers for both these concepts. Only those skilled in righteous living (Prov. 21:20) could overcome imbalance

within these concepts and thus enjoy in a sense enduring material treasure.

God's concern for the alleviating of the plight of the poor is well emphasized in Proverbs. God emphasizes the high level of human responsibility involved in the causes, condition and cure of poverty. The sages have stated how the individual himself can be a part in solving this physical problem and how the social concern of others could subsequently remedy this state of ruin. Hence the prosperous and the poor are also responsible for lessening the plight of the poor by remembering the following principles:

1. There is no special premium on being poor or wealthy in that both these realities have limitations cf. Proverbs 30:7-9.
2. The desire to get through life successfully can be realized when one's personal relationship with God is maintained by following God's moral order which He has built into the universe.
3. The absence of a personal relationship with God precludes the possibility of normalizing these economic extremes.
4. Human nature cannot guarantee the complete removal of iniquity and corruption since it is natural to be graspy and thus make riches an end in itself (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10).
5. God expects one to practise Biblical principles in

acquiring and using money. Honest and diligent work (Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:2), generous giving (Gal. 6:10), refraining from exploiting the poor are some of the principles which must be practised by the believing community.

6. When justice and fairness is implemented by employers, the morale of the believing poor will be raised to the extent that he will be a respectful and diligent worker (1 Tim. 6:2).
7. Each believer has the responsibility of using his resources as a means of honoring God. The highest possible use of one's wealth is to invest it in the work of the Lord (cf. Phil. 4:13-15).

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