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## An Obedient Son 23:12 to 24:2

**A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.**



An education that sounds very much like the prologues to the book (**to see link click Aj - Proverbs to the Youth**) and to **the Thirty Sayings of the Wise** (see **Cz - Prologue to Thirty Sayings of the Wise**) marks off the next seven **sayings**. **They** share the same theme and are entitled “An Obedient Son.” **Heart** is a key word that runs through **the sayings**. These **sayings** follow a chronological order, spanning one’s entire lifetime, from **childhood (23:13-14)** to **a mother grown old (23:22)**. **Sayings 17** and **18** implicitly contrast the wise and the foolish woman, resembling **Lady Wisdom** (see **Bn - Lady Wisdom’s Invitation to Life**) and **Madam Folly** (see **Bo - Madam Folly’s Invitation to Death**). Thus, the verbal links, structure, and other literary features bind this subunit together and almost function as a prologue to the rest of the **sayings**.<sup>451</sup>

**Introduction to sayings eleven to thirty (23:12): My son, apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge (23:12 CJB). Verse 12**

has all the markings of beginning a new unit, strongly resembling **22:17**, and every word is identical in terms of **the father's** introductory warnings to **his** lectures from **1:8** to **9:18**. After an initial warning to **apply** oneself to **instruction** through **words of knowledge**, the text turns to the topic of **children**.

**The eleventh saying (23:13-14): Don't fail to discipline your children; the rod of punishment won't kill them. Punish them with the rod and save them from sh'ol** (see [Af - Sh'ol](#)) **(23:13-14 Hebrew)**. This passage fits with others that also speak of the need to discipline **children**. The fact that **the rod** is mentioned indicates that **the sages** had no illusions about **children**. It is not a matter of trying to bring the best out of **children**. **Wisdom** had to be drummed into **them**, sometimes literally. To withhold **discipline**, even physical **discipline**, is a matter of neglect. Forcing **them** to **instruction** is a **lifesaving** act. **The sage** is not talking about rigorous beating, but something equivalent to appropriate spanking. This may be inferred from the matter-of-fact statement: **save them from death**, as well as the book's general emphasis on moderation, kindness, and gentleness.

**The twelfth saying (23:15-16): My son, if your heart is wise, my own heart will rejoice, everything in me will celebrate when you speak what is right (23:15-16 NLT)**. A teacher's joy is contingent on the student's demonstration of **wisdom**. After all, this is the purpose behind the teacher's efforts at **instruction**. These two verses demonstrate again (16:23 as well) the connection between the inner person and speech. **A wise heart** will lead to words of integrity, and from words of integrity, the hearer can deduce **a wise heart**. The desire is that **the son** will seek out and speak like **Lady Wisdom**.

**The thirteenth saying (23:17-18): A prohibition not to be jealous of sinners now complements the parent's teaching of wisdom. Don't let your heart be jealous of sinners, but always live in the fear of ADONAI. You will be rewarded for this, and your hope will not be cut off (23:17-18 NLT)**. **Psalm 73** and **psalm 37** are classic examples of a person who struggled with **jealousy** toward **sinners** and may serve to give a solid example to the principle expressed here. **The psalmist** looked at **the wicked** and saw that **they** seemed to live a much more pleasant life than **he**, a godly person, enjoyed. **He saw them prosper despite their wickedness (Psalm 73:3 NLT)**. **They** seemed rich, healthy, and happy, while **he** was struggling. As a result, **he** began to question **ADONAI**. The psalm, however, was written after the struggle. He had come to see that the prosperity of sinners was only short-lived. They were actually **on a slippery path** .

. . **sliding over the cliff to destruction (Psalm 73:18 NLT)**. He saw that his reasoning up to this point would have led him to his own destruction. In other words, it would have taken away his hope for the future. He came to realize that **my health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever (Psalm 73:26 NLT)**. Thus, he began his poem with: **Truly God is good to Isra'el, to those whose hearts are pure (Psalm 73:1 NLT)**. Thus, the teacher hopes the student will adopt the same perspective.<sup>452</sup>

**The fourteenth saying (23:19-21): Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart (the seat of intellect and controls actions) on the right path (23:19 NIV)**. This passage begins with the encouragement to **be wise**. It is followed by another command warning **the son** to **set his heart** on a godly **path**. What is surprising about this is that elsewhere in **Proverbs** that the natural inclination of **the heart** is always towards evil. I think the best understanding of the dynamics of this verse is that it assumes that **the son** has made a commitment to stay on **the path** of **wisdom**. Once the decision to follow the godly path has been made, **the father** is encouraging **the son** to stay **on the right path**. At this point the passage turns into a prohibition of excess in terms of **alcohol** and **food**. **Do not join those who drink too much or gorge themselves with meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and too much sleep clothes them in rags (23:20-21 NIV)**. **Drunkenness** and **gluttony** are criticized. Elsewhere, the rationale for criticizing **drunkenness** has to do with affecting one's ability to make decisions (**20:1, 23:29-35, and 31:1-9**). In other words, it disrupts one's ability to act **wisely**. The same thing can be said about **overeating**, which would lead to sluggish behavior, not the kind of diligent work so frequently encouraged in **the book**. However, the clear motive given here is specifically against **drunkenness** since such excess would lead to **poverty**. Spending too much money on **alcohol** would be **foolish**. Because **wine is a mocker and beer is a brawler, whoever is led astray by them is not wise (20:1 NIV)**.

**The fifteenth saying (23:22-23): Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old (23:22 NIV)**. This passage reminds us of the warnings of the first part of **Proverbs**, where we read: **A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother (10:1b NIV)**. It all begins with **the child's** willingness to pay attention to **instruction** that **the wise parents** teach **their children**. After all, the very **life** of **the child** is the result of the union of **the father** and **the mother**. Besides the

appeal to birth, we also see the advanced age of **the mother**. This reference to age is not an appeal to pity, but highlights **the mother** as a source of great **wisdom**. Therefore, **the child** should **buy the truth** [of the parents] **and never sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding (23:23 Hebrew)**. Basically, as we have seen in so many places in **Proverbs**, there is no amount of wealth that would be worth parting company with **wisdom**.<sup>453</sup>

**The sixteenth saying (23:24-25): The father of a righteous child has cause for joy. What a pleasure it is to have children who are wise (23:24 NLT).**

This verse is about **parental** joy, a **father** of a **righteous** or **wise child** experiences great happiness and delight in **him**, emphasizing the reward of raising **children** to follow **God's path** and **wisdom**, contrasting with **foolishness** and worldliness. **So give your father and mother joy! May she who gave you birth rejoice (23:25 NLT)**. Every one of us has a **dad** and a **mom**. So **ADONAI** is speaking to all of us here. How can we grow in **wisdom** toward our **parents**? The key words in **Proverbs 15:20** and **20:20** are **despises** and **curses**. Those words are the opposite of **wisdom**. The fifth commandment says: **Honor your father and your mother** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bp - Honor Your Parents**). And that command not to **despise**, not to **curse**, but to **honor** our **parents**. And that command applies to us all of our lives, even after we grow up and leave home.<sup>454</sup>

**The seventeenth saying (23:26-28):** Again, **the father** appeals to **his son** to pay attention to **his** teaching. **He** desires that **his son** follow **his instruction** and thus stay on **the right path**. **The path** is a metaphor for the course of one's life and derives from the idea that **life** is a journey. This metaphor is extensively used throughout **Proverbs**, especially in **Chapters 1-9**. **My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways, for a harlot is a deep pit and an adulterous woman is a narrow well (23:26-27 NIV)**. The image of a **deep pit** is used for **the mouth of an adulterous woman in 22:14**. On the surface, a **deep pit** and a **narrow well** are metaphors of danger. If one falls into a **deep pit** or a **narrow well**, then injury or even **death** would be likely. The reference to sexual danger, however, cannot be missed. **Like a bandit she lies in wait, and increases the faithlessness among men (23:28 NIV)**. **She** ambushes like a **robber (Job 9:12)**. It's not to say that **the young man** who falls for **her** allure is guiltless, but **the sage** sees **the woman initiating** the advance. The proverb only provides a snapshot. The **proverb** is a warning, not to just any **young man**, but to those who are on **the right path**. Not **young men** out looking for prostitutes, who

would be described as **fools**. **The proverb**, then, may recognize that illicit sexual relations are an especially difficult temptation, even for **young men** who have **their eyes on the right path**.

**The eighteenth saying (23:29-35):** This **proverb** warns against the dangers of excess **drinking** by providing a frightening picture of the grip of addiction. The passage begins with a series of questions that can be easily answered by reading the rest of the text. **Who has anguish? Who has sorrow? Who is always fighting? Who is always complaining? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes. It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns, trying out new drinks and then ends up gazing at the wine when it is red (23:29-30 NLT)? They** are in **anguish** because of the pain and distress **their** compulsion brings to **their** lives. **They** get into **fight**s when someone says, “Shut up,” but because **they** are so **drunk**, **they** hear, “Stand up!” **They** say the wrong thing at the wrong time and don’t see clearly, think clearly, or act appropriately under the influence.

The Bible doesn’t condemn drinking **alcohol**, the Bible condemns getting **drunk** (see **Ephesians Bt - Be Filled with the Ruach**). Earlier in **Proverbs**, **vats overflowing with good wine** were mentioned as a result of honoring **ADONAI (3:10)**. Indeed, **Lady Wisdom’s banquet** presents **mixed wine (9:2 and 5)**. But as with many good things, there is a danger for addiction; thus the warnings in **Proverbs** must be seen as highlighting the dangers of excessive **drinking**. For other passages that warn against this see **20:1, 21:17, 31:4** and **6**.

The warning comes in the next verse as **the sage** warns **young men** to stay far away from excessive **drinking**. **Don’t look at it when it sparkles in the cup and goes down so smoothly (23:31 Hebrew)**. **Don’t even look at it!** Like the **adulterous woman** (see **Chapters 5-7**), it **looks** so enticing, and **the drink goes down** the throat **so smoothly**, but the consequences are disastrous. **But in the end it bites and stings like a poisonous snake (23:32 CJB)**. So before it kills, it disorients. **Your eyes will see strange things**. **Strong drink** blurs the vision, so **the drunk sees** that they are not there. How can one act with **wisdom** if one cannot know the reality of the situation? Also, **the mouth** starts saying things that are offensive, **and your mind will say crazy things (23:33 Hebrew)**. The metaphors of **verse 34** capture the sickening lack of balance of a **drunk**. **You will stagger like a sailor tossed at sea, clinging to a swaying mast (23:34 NLT)**. **And you will say, “They hit me, but I’m not hurt. They beat me, but I didn’t feel a thing. When will I wake up so I can have another drink” (23:35 NIV)?**

**Drink** softens pain in a way that isn't helpful; there will be plenty of pain when **the booze** wears off. And if casual **drinking** turns into an addiction, **the drunk** will be in a frantic search for the next **drink**.

**The nineteenth saying (24:1-2): Don't envy the wicked or desire their company, for their hearts plot violence (24:1 NIV).** This passage is similar to **23:17-18** and **24:19-20**, and especially the comments about **jealousy** of **the wicked** as explained in **Psalms 37** and **73**. In this **proverb**, association with **the wicked** is prohibited because **the sages** understood the power of influence (see [AI - Bad Company Corrupts Good Character](#)). If one **envies** and associates with **evil people**, then it is more likely that they will become **evil** themselves. **And their lips always stir up trouble (24:2 NIV).** The second colon reminds us of the nature of **evil** people, once again showing the connection between **the heart** and **the lips**. **Their heart**, representing **their** inner character, desires **violence**, so **their lips** speak trouble that will lead to **wickedness**.<sup>455</sup>

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for being so wonderful! How important it is to listen to **Your** words and to follow them, for by following **You**, then I will be **on the right path**. I want to please **you** so much. How important it is to meditate on all that **Messiah Yeshua** has said, for **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden**. And **You give wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning**. May those who believe in **You**, be conformed into **Your image (Romans 8:29a)**. May I call on **You** for **wisdom (James 1:5)** and train up my **children** to be **wise** and **obedient**, living to please you! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*