

Humility in Proverbs

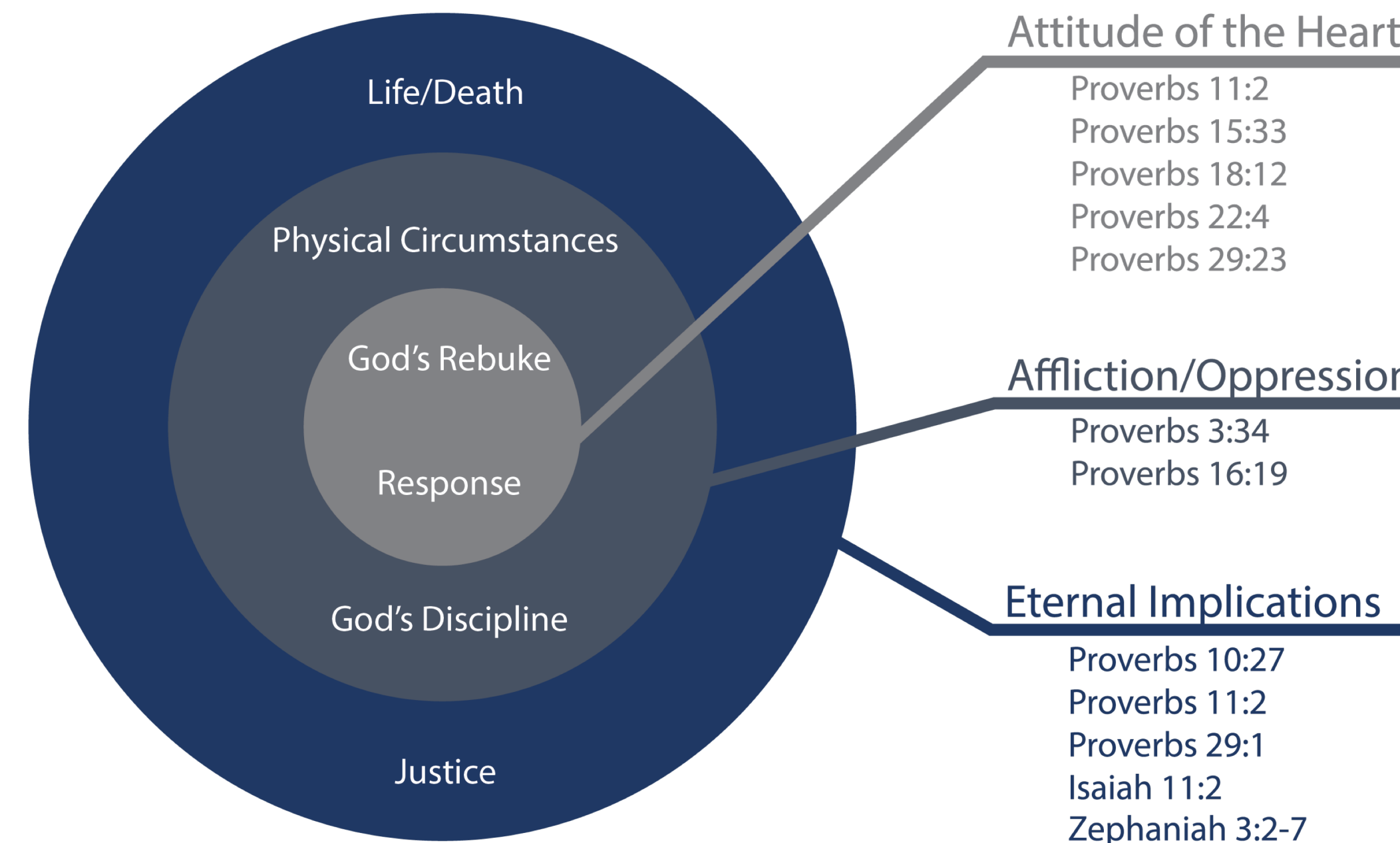
Jatniel Rodriguez

Dr. Rahel Wells, Advisor | Department of Religion & Biblical Languages

Abstract

This project utilizes thematic and exegetical methods to develop a practical definition of humility in Proverbs that fits within the greater framework of the book. Four verses in Proverbs explicitly use words translated “humility” in English (11:2; 15:33; 18:12; 22:4). The literary and theological connections between the Hebrew words in these four verses and the same Hebrew words in the rest of the Old Testament indicate that humility is complex, consisting of both internal and external characteristics. For instance, humility is demonstrated by obedience to God’s commands, justice for the oppressed, as well as an attitude of the heart.

Diagrams & Charts



Methodology

Hebrew Exegesis is a process that seeks to reveal the original context of the Old Testament Scriptures. The steps I followed are loosely based on Douglas Stuart’s *Old Testament Exegesis*. First, I gathered all of the texts about humility in the book of Proverbs and created my own translations to better understand the language of the text. Second, I analyzed texts considering pride in opposition to humility. Third, using the key Hebrew words in the proverbial texts, I identified cross-textual themes in the Old Testament. Fourth, I identified the major theological themes of the proverbial texts aided by the intertextual connections. Lastly, I considered the literary structure of the texts and built applications concerning humility from Proverbs 11:2; 15:33; 22:4; 18:12.

Conclusions

My analysis of humility in Proverbs has pointed to specific overarching themes in regards to lexical connections with the rest of the Old Testament. The most important aspect of humility is the attitude of the heart, which reflects an inner focus extending into the external actions of life. This is reflected in the proverb “when pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Proverbs 15:33).

The heart attitude prescribes how one responds to the second aspect of humility, which is an external situation reflecting either God’s rebuke and discipline or other physical circumstances. For example, other proverbs state: “Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.... Stern discipline awaits anyone who leaves the path; the one who hates correction will die.... Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy” (Proverbs 19:20; 15:10; 29:1).

The third exegetical theme concerning humility in Proverbs involves the eternal implications of an attitude of the heart. The choice is between life and death, which comes down to obedience or disobedience of God’s precepts. This is shown in the following proverb, “there is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD” (Proverbs 21:30). Clearly, all of these themes interconnect, though many scholars may not consider all the nuances provided by the various contexts, the nuances give the complete picture of humility and obedience ultimately seen in the Messiah.

Word (English)	Key Texts	Conclusions
עֲנָוָה (Humility)	Proverbs 3:34; 15:33; 16:19; 18:12; 22:4; Zephaniah 2:3	Represents an attitude of the heart in response to God’s teachings, also represents being poor and afflicted
חֵכְמָה (Wisdom)	2 Chronicles 1:10-11; Job 28:18, 28; Psalm 51:6; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 17:16; Proverbs 17:24; Proverbs 21:30; Proverbs 24:14; Proverbs 30:3; Isaiah 11:2; Ezekiel 28:12	God is the giver of wisdom, it is worth more than any possession and only God can bestow it. It begins with a fear of God and those who have understanding, keep his commandments. There is no wisdom or understanding that can prevail against the Lord. Fools look for it elsewhere but there is no hope for them.
מוֹסֵר (Correction/Discipline)	Psalm 50:17; Proverbs 13:1; Proverbs 15:10,32; Isaiah 53:5; Jeremiah 7:28	God disciplines against all evil, and keeps his followers on the straight way. Accepting discipline is a sign of wisdom, God disciplines to peace and wholeness.
יִדְוָה (Pride)	Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 21:24; Jeremiah 49:16; Jeremiah 50:31-32; Obadiah 1:3	The arrogance of hearts deceives humanity and defies God. Those who are arrogant fall and no one helps them up, God will justly deal with His proud enemies.
כְּבוֹד (Honor)	Proverbs 21:21; Proverbs 29:23	Whoever pursues righteousness and grace finds life, prosperity, and honor.

Bibliography

Brown, Francis, Edward Robinson, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1979.

Hatton, Peter T.H. *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008.

Kittel, Rudolf, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, Hans Peter Rüger, G. E. Weil, and Adrian Schenker. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.

Stuart, Douglas K. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009.