**Proverbs Commentary**

**Proverbs Chapter 1**

Pro 1:1

**“The proverbs of Solomon.”** Proverbs 1:1 serves as the title for the collection of Proverbs spanning from 1:1-9:17. It is not to be misunderstood as if it were functioning as the heading for the entire book of Proverbs (and thus ascribing authorship of all the proverbs to King Solomon). Other sections are attributed to other authors, such as “the wise” (Prov. 22:17; 24:23), Agur (Prov. 30:1), and the mother of King Lemuel (Prov. 31:1).

No one is completely sure when the proverbs in Proverbs were finished being collected and then put in the order in which they appear in our modern Bibles. When the Septuagint was written, which started around 250 BC and took a number of years, some of the proverbs in it are not in the same order as the order we find in the Hebrew Bible. The way the proverbs appear in Proverbs, it is possible, but not certain, that they were put in some basic form of chronological order. In any case, the proverbs written by Solomon or his scribes (Solomon reigned c. 980-940 BC) were put first (Prov. 1:1-9:16). Then came proverbs spoken by Solomon that other scribes wrote down (Prov. 10:1-22:16).

After those proverbs came the “words of the wise” (Prov. 22:17-24:22 and Prov. 24:23-34). Although these proverbs may have been spoken by wise people who lived after Solomon, there are scholars who believe that “the words of the wise” are proverbs that were spoken before Solomon lived that Solomon collected and had written down. That may be true, because the next section, Proverbs 25:1-29:27 were proverbs spoken by Solomon that the men of King Hezekiah wrote down (Prov. 25:1), and Hezekiah reigned about 725-700 BC.

Then Proverbs records the proverbs of Agur son of Jakeh, a person we know nothing about (Prov. 30:1-33). The last chapter of Proverbs, Proverbs 31, was written by “King Lemuel,” who was not a king of Israel or Judah; in fact, there is no known king by that name. Many scholars believe Lemuel may have been a wise foreign king who believed in Yahweh. His name means “Devoted to God,” and he certainly believed in Yahweh (cf. Prov. 31:30). Although many scholars dispute his existence or say his name is likely fictional, there is no evidence for that except that neither Lemuel nor his kingdom appear in history; but millions of people and places have not been preserved in the secular historical records, and Lemuel would simply be one of them.

If Lemuel is a foreign king converted to Judaism (cf. Dan. 4:37), and especially if he lived after the time of Hezekiah, that speaks volumes about God’s desire to bring every human to salvation. During the time that Hezekiah was king of Judah and Isaiah was prophesying, God divorced the nation of Israel and sent her away into Exile (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8), and He said He would bring light to the Gentiles, the “nations” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). If Lemuel was a Gentile believer in Yahweh whose wisdom appears in the Word of God, then he certainly was an early harbinger of that prophecy coming true.

Proverbs is one of the books that shows us that God transcends human limitations. Just as He chose four different people from different backgrounds to write the Four Gospels, so He chose different people from different backgrounds and different times to write Proverbs, but Proverbs becomes part of the Word of God, which is indeed, “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). We can trust its guidance in our quest for wisdom.

Pro 1:3

**“to receive wise teaching *in* righteousness, justice, and integrity.”** Proverbs is a book of wise teaching on a variety of subjects. One helpful way to read Proverbs is to realize that there are 31 days in the average Western month, and 31 chapters in Proverbs. Reading a chapter a day will result in reading through Proverbs every month, which over time builds strong biblical beliefs and morals.

**“wise teaching.”** The Hebrew word translated as “wise teaching” is *sakal* (#07919 שָׂכַל) and it generally refers to having insight or being insightful. As translated in the REV, it refers to wise or insightful teaching. It can also refer to wise dealing or behavior, as some versions have.

It is worth noting that the Hebrew text can be translated as it is in the REV: “wise teaching *in* righteousness, justice, and integrity” (cf. CEB, CSB, ESV), or it can be translated like it is in the NASB: “To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and equity.” In the NASB, “wise” does not modify “instruction,” but is one of the subjects we receive instruction in, i.e., wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and equity (cf. ASV, BBE, KJV, NAB, NIV, NRSV). The Hebrew text is unclear as to which way the verse should be translated, but in fact, both are true: Proverbs gives us wise instruction and instruction in wisdom or wise behavior.

Pro 1:4

**“prudence.”** In English, the word “prudence” refers to the wisdom to rule one’s life by reason. It also includes (and this is sometimes the most common meaning of “prudent”) caution and circumspection in life. The prudent person has the ability to manage their life and does not act rashly or unreasonably, and also they have taken the time to foresee the consequences of their action. In English, “wisdom” usually applies more to a mental state, that is, knowing what is going on and how to do things, whereas “prudence” more usually refers to action; how one actually lives out their life, making wise choices and being cautious instead of rash and impetuous. Generally in English vernacular, the wise person knows what to do while the prudent person acts with wisdom and caution.

The Hebrew word translated as “prudence” is *‘ormah* (#06195 עָרְמָה), a feminine noun, and it can refer to prudence, but it also has a wider semantic range than the single English word “prudence” does. It refers to “prudence, shrewdness, craftiness”[[1]](#footnote-23518) and also “cleverness.”[[2]](#footnote-15360) The word *‘ormah* is used in both a positive and negative sense in the Bible, but in Proverbs it is used positively of living a prudent life (cf. Prov. 1:4, 8:5, 12; 15:5; 19:25). “Prudence” is one of the female associates with Lady Wisdom (see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

**“youth.”** The Hebrew word translated “youth,” is *naar* (#05288 נַעַר), and it specifically refers to a boy or young male, and thus it can refer to a boy, youth, or young male servant, disciple, or slave. Due to the culture of the time, most of Proverbs was specifically addressed to males, with an underlying assumption that the knowledge would be important and applicable to women also. One thing that makes that clear is that the teaching of Lady Wisdom and the mothers in Proverbs is important (cf. Prov. 1:8 and 6:20), and those women had to be taught to become wise themselves, so it was not just males that were taught even if that was the primary emphasis in the culture of the time.

Another thing that justifies the use of more gender-neutral terms rather than simply retaining words like “boy” with a specific male gender is how the New Testament writers cite passages out of Proverbs with a view to it being applicable to both males and females (e.g., Prov. 24:12 in Rom. 2:6; Prov. 1:16 in Rom. 3:15; Prov. 25:21-22 in Rom. 12:20; Prov. 3:11-12 in Heb. 12:5-6; Prov. 3:34 in both James 4:6 and 1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 10:12 in 1 Pet. 4:18; Prov. 11:31 in 1 Pet. 4:18; and Prov. 26:11 in 2 Pet. 2:22). In other words, while the collection of Proverbs was primarily intended for a male audience (but see esp. Prov. 31:10-31), we have followed the example of the New Testament authors in widening the application of the verses to include both males and females by using gender-neutral terms like “youth” rather than “boy” when it fits the greater context and scope of Scripture and does not unduly twist the meaning of the verse. The REV also often translates words that in Hebrew more specifically refer to males in a neutral fashion as “people,” “ones,” etc., see commentary on Proverbs 2:12, “the one.”

Pro 1:5

**“wise person.”** Those who claim to be wise must continue to seek after wisdom through active listening and acquisition of guidance. There is no graduation from the growth process among the wise; learning and growth continue from birth to death. The REV has translated the Hebrew adjective *chakam* (#02450 חָכָם), wise, as “wise person” to indicate that it is singular. If a person rejects the Word of Yahweh they are not a wise person no matter how much “worldly wisdom” they have; in the end they will end up dead in the Lake of Fire (Jer. 8:9; Rev. 20:11-15).

Pro 1:6

**“obscure expression.”** The Hebrew word is *melitsah* (#04426 מְלִיצָה), and it has a very large semantic range, making it very hard to translate as one English word or phrase. Translations include: “obscure expression” (CJB, REV); “obscure saying” (NJB); “enigma” (NKJV); “parable” (HCSB); “allegory” (DBY); “saying” (ESV); “clever saying” (GW); “figure” (RV, NASB1995); “satire” (Rotherham); and “secret” (BBE). The *TWOT*[[3]](#footnote-27971) defines the word as “figure, enigma” and “satire, mocking poem,” and the BDB[[4]](#footnote-31764) defines the word in the same way. The *HALOT*[[5]](#footnote-30937) has “allusive expression” referring to an allusion of some type (not to be confused with “illusive” expression).

When we read Proverbs, we are struck with how accurately Proverbs 1:6 describes the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs has proverbs (wise sayings to be used in ruling life); obscure expressions that include enigmas, satire, mocking poems, and figures; words of wisdom that are simple and straightforward but profound; and “riddles” (see commentary below on “riddles”).

The question has been asked, “Why would God write like that? If God wants us to know something, why not just say it?” That opinion seems to echo the request of the religious Jews when they spoke to Jesus, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” But Jesus never did tell them “plainly” until his trial (Matt. 26:63-64). Jesus followed the pattern his Father, God, had set. God does not want to be just an “information dispenser.” He wants to be a Father and to have a deep and wondrous relationship with His followers.

God’s obscure expressions, riddles, satires, and figures accomplish a few different things. For one thing, they separate out those people who are not interested in the things of God if they have to work for them. Also, they cause those who are interested in knowing God to go to Him in prayer, study, and reflection to find His deeper wisdom and understanding, and to get to know Him better. Also, the multifaceted way that God reveals His wisdom shows some of the wonderful depths of God and how we cannot “put God in a box.” There are times we are not exactly sure what God means; we have an idea, but not a certainty. That makes some people uncomfortable, but that is not always a bad thing. There is a lot about God we don’t know, and we should never be completely comfortable with God. He is loving and good, but He is also God, and we should always have an attitude of awe and wonder, and if Proverbs is right, a tinge of fear, or at least caution, in His presence. Furthermore, many of the proverbs have more than one meaning. Often the Hebrew words can mean more than one thing, so the proverb can have more than one meaning.

The book of Proverbs does indeed contain “figures,” “obscure sayings,” “enigmas” “riddles,” and “satire.” Proverbs is full of similes, metaphors, and allegory. For example, some people’s words are “like” the piercing of a sword (Prov. 12:18). Also, “Wisdom” and “Folly” are personified and allegorized throughout Proverbs, being portrayed as two women who vie for the attention of the people. Some of the proverbs are “obscure sayings” such as Proverbs 1:31 that fools will be “satisfied” from their own plans. Some are satire, such as Proverbs 19:27, which is meant to be taken the opposite from what is said. Some are riddles, such as Proverbs 26:4-5, two proverbs that seem to give the opposite advice. There is great wisdom in Proverbs, but it is not all on the surface. But as we get to know and understand Proverbs, we better know and understand God.

**“riddles.”** The Hebrew is *chiydah* (#02420 חִידָה), and means a riddle, an enigmatic saying, an obscure saying. In today’s vernacular, a “dark saying” is a dismal, gloomy, saying with a foreboding or somehow threatening message. That is not the case with this Hebrew word. There are no “dark” overtones. It is a riddle, an obscure saying. This verse is a huge key to understanding Proverbs. There is a movement in Christianity today, evidenced by the “dynamic equivalent” translations on the market that make the Bible “easy” to read and understand. The problem with that is that the underlying languages were not easy to understand even for the people who spoke those languages. Many of the Proverbs are “obscure,” or “enigmatic,” or just plain riddles. God is asking for our time and energy to figure out what these verses mean and how to apply them.

Pro 1:7

**“the fear of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew word “fear” in Proverbs 1:7 is the feminine noun *yirah* (#03374 יִרְאָה), and it has a wide semantic range. Its meanings range from “terror, fear, being afraid” (Gen. 26:7; Exod. 2:14; Judg. 6:27); to “respect, reverence; sometimes mixed with a sense of awe” (Lev. 19:3; Deut. 10:12; Josh. 4:14; Job 1:1. The masculine noun gives more the sense of awe in 1 Kings 3:28). Sometimes all the meanings exist in one context because it is possible to be afraid of something and reverence it and hold it in awe at the same time.

Although it is common today for Christians to think that “fear God” only means “respect God,” or “hold God in awe,” that is not correct, and it is not being honest with the text or the cultural context and social history of the phrase. Historically people did “fear God” in the sense that they were genuinely afraid of Him. Although He bestowed blessings, He also was a God of judgment. In fact, the reason that “respect God” was biblically phrased as “fear God,” or “the fear of God” was that respect for God was rooted in the fear of God: if you did not respect God, you had good reason to fear Him. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

Throughout the Bible, we see evidence of why people were afraid of God. For example, in Genesis there was Noah’s Flood that wiped out all the evil people on earth; and also God’s fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin (Gen. 18:20-19:25). In Exodus we see the plagues that came upon Egypt, some of which also affected the Israelites in Egypt. In Leviticus, we see that when Aaron’s sons offered unlawful fire before Yahweh, fire came out of their censers and burned them to death (Lev. 10:1-3). God also had His tent (the “Tabernacle”) put behind curtains that were five cubits high (about 7.5 feet based on an 18-inch cubit; Exod. 27:18) so that people could not see over them, and in this way, He was kept separate from all Israelites who were not Levites or priests. Any unauthorized person who came to God’s sanctuary was to be put to death (Num. 3:5-10, 38).

Although in New Testament times we do not often see disobedience to God bring harsh and immediate consequences, there are still consequences. Furthermore, those consequences can be very serious. God does not threaten us, instead, He lovingly and honestly warns us the way a concerned parent warns a child. For example, He tells us that the unsaved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. He does not want for that to happen, but He honors our choice to live and die, as He always has: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your seed” (Deut. 30:19). It is our choice to obey and be blessed or disobey and receive consequences.

Examples of disobedience bringing consequences exist throughout the Bible. God was not to be trifled with. Disobedience was dangerous. We should also keep in mind that in the biblical culture, the fact that God was dangerous was not something unusual. Pagan gods were dangerous too. But whereas God was righteous and dangerous to the disobedient, pagan gods were capricious and cruel and dangerous to everyone (which makes sense because they were actually demons).

A problem we have today with the word “fear” is that it is seldom understood because it is not often used in the context of healthy fear of a righteous judge. Often we “fear” things that can hurt us unexpectedly or in unexpected ways, such as cancer. Or we fear things that are always dangerous and unpredictable, such as sharks. Or we fear what we don’t really understand or don’t want, like death. But God is different than those things. He is not unpredictable. In fact, quite the opposite. He is very predictable and cannot lie. God will not hurt us unexpectedly, and if we don’t know much about Him that is only because we have not really taken the time to learn about Him. He says, “For my people are fools, they do not know me (Jer. 4:22; cf. Jer. 9:3). A reason to fear God is that He is the Most High God and He will punish evil and disobedience, just as He has said over and over. But because God is righteous and is predictable and does not lie, we don’t have to have an unhealthy fear of Him or of Judgment Day. It is not hard to love and obey God. As Jesus said, his yoke is gentle and his burden light.

The Bible, especially the New Testament, reveals the character of God and shows that He is loving and worthy of our love. However, the Bible also reveals that God is righteous and just, and the disobedient and rebellious will receive consequences for their ungodly behavior, and it is wise to be afraid of those consequences and hence “fear God.”

**“fools.”** The Hebrew word for “fool” is *eviyl* (#0191 אֱוִיל). It is a very significant word within Proverbs, and 70 percent of all its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible can be found there. A fool is not so much someone who lacks raw intelligence as one who possesses deep-seated foolish attitudes, as this verse makes clear. A fool thinks wisdom and knowledge are not important, in fact, they hold them in contempt and sometimes even despise them.

**“show contempt for.”** The Hebrew word is *buz* (#0936 בּוּז pronounced booze), and it means “to despise, to have contempt for, to count as insignificant. All those meanings are important and applicable in this context. There are some fools who actually “hate” knowledge, but most fools just have contempt for it or think it is insignificant.

[For more on “show contempt,” see commentary on Prov. 23:22.]

Pro 1:8

**“instruction.”** The Hebrew word is *torah* (#08451 תֹּרָה *torah* or תּוֹרָה *towrah*). Traditionally, *torah* is translated “law,” but that translation is easily misunderstood by giving the wrong impression because *torah* means much more than just “law,” in the sense of legal codes to obey. On a basic level, it means guidance or instruction, but it also has meanings that include doctrine, custom, theory, etc. We see this clearly in “the Torah,” which was the name the Jews gave to the first five books of the Bible, the five “Books of Moses”—Genesis through Deuteronomy.

“The Torah” is much more than regulations (“law”); it is a whole set of examples, historical records, moral and legal regulations, customs, and the acts of God, which people are to then use as the basis of their society and to develop sound thinking. The Torah gave guidance, and even some specific regulations to obey and use as examples in their lives. A person who studies the Torah learns how to think like God thinks, and gains wisdom and insight, learns how to deal with life in order to be godly, learns the importance of godly families, and learns the basics of how to live in and govern a godly society. Actually, *torah* does not even mean “law,” even though it gets translated that way in the majority of English Bibles. It is well-known that at age 13 a proper Jewish boy goes through a ceremony called “Bar-mitzvah,” and becomes a “son of the law.” That is because “bar” means “son” and *mitzvah* (#04687 מִצְוָה) means “law” or “commandment.” So, if we were going to pick an English word that was somewhat close to *torah*, a better choice than “law” would be “instruction.”

So, in many places in the Bible, translating *torah* as “law” is far too limited in scope, and although “teaching” or “instruction” is a better translation, in order to properly understand the Bible, the wise Christian should learn what *torah* means so he can better understand and appreciate what God is saying. *Torah* is at the very heart of the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

Pro 1:9

**“wreath…necklace.”** Note the striking poetry and metaphor that depicts God’s instruction and Torah as ornaments to be visibly and unashamedly worn. The necklace and wreath are symbols of honor and accomplishment (cf. Prov. 3:3-4, 21-22; 4:8-9; Gen. 41:42; Ezek. 16:11; Dan. 5:7, 16, 29). They are openly worn and seen by others just as one’s wisdom and knowledge are seen by others and are attractive to them. Also, in many cultures, a “wreath” on the head, a garland worn on the head, was a symbol of achievement and victory over one’s enemies and opponents (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25 where the garland of the victor was called a “crown”). The person who is wise and does not fall prey to the deceptions of the Adversary achieves victory in this life and rewards in the next.

Pro 1:10

**“My son.”** This section of Proverbs begins the warning for readers to avoid associating with what might be appropriately labeled as ‘gangs’ and other bad company (cf. 1 Cor 15:33). Believers should not be so naïve as to assume that they can hang around with godless sinners and not be affected by them or be tempted to live according to their ways. It is a very fine line to be able to associate with sinners and bring the Good News to them while staying separate from the way they think and act. “Come out from the midst of them, and be separate, says *the* Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17).

Pro 1:11

**“come with us.”** This phrase is more powerful in Proverbs than we normally take it, due to the culture of the time and the vocabulary of traveling on a road or path as an idiom for a way of life. The sinners were not inviting the young man to go with them on a one-time crime spree; they were inviting him into a sinful and criminal way of life—one that would end in disaster here on earth and annihilation in the next life. The father understood that, so he says, “do not walk on the road with them,” meaning “do not get involved with that lifestyle” (Prov. 1:15).

What the naïve, inexperienced, simple, and foolish people don’t realize is that sin is not just an event, it becomes a lifestyle with tentacles that reach into every part of one’s life. Once someone gets involved in sin, the tendency is to go deeper and deeper into it, and it is extremely difficult to extract oneself from a sinful lifestyle. The best plan is the father’s plan—don’t get into it in the first place. The next best plan is that if you are caught up in sin, do what it takes to get out. There may be painful consequences here on earth, but they will be nothing compared to the eternal consequences you face after Judgment Day if you continue in sin. And always keep in mind that God wants people to repent and walk with him, and many people have humbled themselves, repented, and changed their lifestyle only to find that God gave them great grace and supported them in ways they could not have imagined while they were afraid and caught in sin.

**“to *shed* blood.”** The Hebrew phrase literally means “for blood,” which is a metonymy for the blood that is shed when someone is killed. The proverb is talking about ambushing an innocent person and violently murdering someone.

Pro 1:12

**“Sheol.”** In this verse, the Hebrew word *Sheōl* is transliterated directly into English. Sheol is most accurately, “the state of being dead.” Although sometimes the “grave” is an acceptable translation of Sheol, the Hebrew has a specific word for the physical grave, *qeber* (#06913קֶבֶר). The fact that Sheol has no accurate English equivalent word, we chose to transliterate Sheol so the English reader could see when it was used.

Translating the Hebrew word “Sheol” as “hell” or “Hades” is a mistake and causes confusion because according to tradition, the dead people in Hell and Hades are alive and suffering, while the Bible makes it clear that people in Sheol are dead—totally dead, with no part of them alive. The biblical truth is that when a person dies, they enter Sheol, the state of death, and are dead. Every person goes to Sheol, the state of being dead, when they die (cf. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 90:3; Eccl. 3:20).

Here in Proverbs 1:12, Sheol is personified as having a mouth with which it “swallows” its victims into the earth (cf. Num. 16:30-34; 26:10; Deut. 11:6).

[For more information on Sheol, and the Greek word *hadēs* that was used by the Septuagint translators as the Greek translation of Sheol, see commentary on Rev. 20:13, “the grave.” For more on the fact that when a person dies he is dead in every way and form, including his “soul” and “spirit,” see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.”]

Pro 1:13

**“valuable things.”** It is foolish and stupid to acquire wealth by means of sinful and immoral activities, even if those activities are “legal” in the eyes of human law. Any riches gained by immoral activity will actually count against people on the Day of Judgment. The wise can find true wealth by seeking after Lady Wisdom, with whom are riches and wealth (Prov. 8:18). If despite a person’s hard work and wisdom he does not gain earthly riches, he should not be overly concerned. The possession of wealth does not make one “blessed” by Yahweh, for He is more concerned with the motives of the heart than any physical wealth. Jesus taught, “Take care, and be on guard against every *form of* greediness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

Pro 1:14

**“share the loot.”** The Hebrew is “have one purse,” but that does not make it clear they will share what they take, which is the intention of the Hebrew text.

Pro 1:15

**“walk on *that* road.”** The Hebrew has both a literal and idiomatic meaning. The word “walk” and the metaphor of a road was widely used idiomatically for living life. When the father admonishes the son not to “walk on the road with them,” he means it literally, and he also means do not get caught up in their lifestyle.

Pro 1:16

**“feet.”** Feet are used to run and to take people from one location to another. Here, the sinners use their feet to run to do evil. Jesus may have had this verse in mind when he said that if your hand or foot cause you to stumble, cut them off and throw them away (Matt. 18:8; Mark 9:45). No doubt many of the people in his audience would have known this section of Proverbs very well.

Pro 1:17

**“the net is spread.”** This refers to a custom, and a way of capturing birds to eat. One way was that a net was spread on the ground, covered over or disguised in some way, and some kind of feed or grain was scattered on top. When the birds came to eat, the net was yanked and the birds were caught. A similar way was that two rectangular nets were spread out and concealed, and bait was placed between them, and when the birds came to the bait they were pulled up on either side of the birds who were caught when the birds tried to fly away. But you could not spread the net out while the birds were watching, or they would not be tricked and caught. Some commentators have suggested that the verse contains an ellipsis, “in vain is the net spread [with bait] in the sight of any bird.” While that is possible, it is not necessary. Another idea is that the verb we translate as “spread” should be “lift up,” with the idea that it is in vain to lift up the net before the birds are settled, eating, and distracted. In any case, the point is that if the birds see the net, you will not be able to catch them.

The Bible is making the point that people who participate in evil by doing things like killing and robbing are more foolish than birds. The “net” and “death” that awaits them in their future should be clear to them because God speaks of it so clearly in so many places, but like foolish birds that ignore the net, they are caught in their own sin and will be destroyed in Gehenna after Judgment Day.

**“bird.”** The Hebrew is an idiom: “the possessor of wings.”

Pro 1:18

**“they set an ambush for their *own* souls.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves. This can happen in many different ways, and often in multiple ways at the same time. Sometimes the righteous people in a society catch the evildoers and judge and punish them. Sometimes, because evil people associate with other evil people, they get betrayed by the people they are working or dealing with. Also, consistently evil people often become attacked by demons who afflict them physically, mentally, and spiritually. Also, always, evil people are eventually judged by God and get the righteous consequences of their evil actions.

Evil may seem to pay off in the short term, but eventually, it results in terrible consequences. Many verses say that the evil deeds of evil people will eventually come upon their own heads (e.g., 1 Kings 8:32; Ps. 7:15-16; 9:15; 10:2; 35:8; 57:6; 94:23; 140:9; 141:10; Prov. 1:18, 31; 5:22; 11:5; 14:14; 26:27; 28:10; Jer. 2:19; Ezek. 11:21; 22:31).

[For information about evil and ungodly behavior opening a person up to demonic attacks, see commentary on Prov. 13:21.]

Pro 1:19

**“who pursues unjust gain.”** The Hebrew is an idiom and does not make sense when translated into English, which explains why there are so many different English translations. The Hebrew is more literally, “all who cuts off a cut”[[6]](#footnote-31096) but the word “cut” used in that context refers to unjust gain, almost like we might say in English that the thieves each got a “cut” of the loot. The NET text note picks up the idea of “cut” referring to unjust gain and goes with those who “unjustly gain unjust gain.” The English Bibles try to bring the Hebrew idiom into English, some being more literal, some simply trying to find some sort of equivalent English idea: “greedy of gain” (ASV, KJV; cf. CJB); “greedy for unjust gain” (ESV); “gains by violence” (NASB); “make profit dishonestly (HCSB); “go after ill-gotten gain” (NIV); “greedy for money” (NLT).

The translations differ, but the idea is clear: if a person goes about to enrich himself or make a living off of profit that he has gained unjustly, then “it takes away the soul” of the person. This taking away of the soul, where “soul” means “life,” has both an immediate and eschatological meaning. Here in this life, the dishonest person loses his “life.” Not only does he lose the fullness and joy of living, living a life of always looking over his shoulder to make sure he is not discovered and having to harden his heart against the people he is cheating, he is subject to quick and violent death if his activities are discovered. From an everlasting perspective, the person will lose his life, burning to ashes in the Lake of Fire. This verse should serve as a severe warning to those people who are not doing well financially in life and are tempted to turn to a life of crime to supposedly be better off.

[For more on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Pro 1:20

**“Wisdom.”** We can see from the scope of Proverbs and from the context of this verse that “Wisdom” is being used figuratively—it is being portrayed as a person; a woman. Taking a concept and speaking of it as if it were a person is the figure of speech “personification,” and personification and zoomorphisms are quite common in the Bible, especially in Hebrew poetry (zoomorphism is described below after personification).

“Personification” occurs when something that is not a person is described as a person or ascribed the attributes of a person. We humans relate so well to other humans that referring to something as a person often makes a complex subject easy to understand. Personification can also make an abstract idea or thought easier to understand than literal narrative does because it uses concrete imagery from human experience, so the Bible often uses personification when describing intangible concepts.

Whereas stating something factually gives us information, the figure of speech personification communicates both information and emotion well. For example, saying the people of Israel broke their covenant with God gives us information but does not communicate much emotion. In contrast, referring to Israel as a woman and saying she deserted her husband and committed adultery with pagan gods—her pagan lovers—gives us the information but also brings up a host of emotions. Similarly, we can very factually say the earth will be blessed when it is restored to a pristine state in the Messianic Kingdom, or we can communicate the joy and excitement by personification and say, “the mountains and the hills will break forth into singing…and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12).

There are many dozens of examples of personification in the Bible. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman calling out for people to listen to her (Prov. 8:1). Ethiopia is portrayed as a woman stretching out her hands to God (Ps. 68:31); The blood of Abel is portrayed as a person crying out from the ground after Cain killed him (Gen. 4:10). The waters of the sea, which split to let Israel escape from Egypt, are portrayed as being afraid of God and thus running away: “When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid” (Ps. 77:16 ESV).

Wisdom is personified in the book of Proverbs so that the reader can better understand the virtuous qualities that wisdom can offer and the role it played in God’s acts of creation. Similarly, “Folly” (foolishness) is personified in Proverbs (cf. Prov. 9:13) so we can see how foolish people think and act, and also see the disastrous consequences of their actions.

We should also pay attention to the fact that in Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a woman, not a man. So is “Folly” (Prov. 9:13), who is also described in Proverbs as “the strange woman” or “the foreign woman” (e.g., Prov. 2:16). Thus Proverbs describes a kind of contest: the woman Wisdom and the woman Folly are both vying for the attention of the young man. Unpacking the figure of speech personification gives us the real-life message of Proverbs: God wants people to make wise choices and the Devil wants people to make foolish choices. Wise choices usually involve work, self-discipline, and patience, whereas foolish choices usually offer instant gratification and fleshly pleasure. Who will the young man in Proverbs choose? Wisdom or Folly? What choices will people make? Wise choices or foolish choices? “Wisdom” is pleading with people to make wise choices.

It is also important to note that Lady Wisdom has a number of “female attendants” who help and support her mission to win people to her way of doing things. These “women” include “discernment,” *tebunah* (#08394 תְּבוּנָה; Prov. 2:2; 3:13); “understanding,” *biynah* (#0998 בִּינָה; Prov. 2:3); “prudence,”*‘ormah* (#06195 עָרְמָה; Prov. 8:12); and “discretion,” *mezimmah* (#04209 מְזִמָּה; Prov. 2:11)—all these are feminine nouns, as is “wisdom.” In fact, one cannot read Proverbs in Hebrew without getting the feeling that God has gone out of His way to find feminine nouns that support the personification of Wisdom and her attendants, and thus support Lady Wisdom and her associates against Lady Folly and her associates such as “the strange woman.”

Casting “Wisdom,” “understanding,” “discernment,” “prudence,” and “discretion” as women adds to the overall sense of what God is saying in Proverbs about desiring those qualities and seeking them in life. Culturally, the readers of Proverbs would be men because women (and lower-class men) typically were not taught to read, and Proverbs is specifically for the young and inexperienced, thus the young men, although to others as well (Prov. 1:4). The young men should be interested in, and desire, the godly women, but will they? Wisdom and her female friends call out to them, but they are godly and demand things like being wise and exerting self-control. Alas, Wisdom’s rival, Folly (Prov. 9:13), uses her sex and sensual pleasures to appeal to the young men, and despite Wisdom’s warning that those who “visit” her end up dead, many foolish young men ignore the consequences and follow their fleshly desires.

One thing that is important to understand when reading a personification, such as Wisdom, is that even though it is portrayed as a woman, “Wisdom” refers to any wise person, male or female. Thus, when Proverbs 14:1 says that “Lady Wisdom has built her house,” the person who understands the figure personification knows that “Lady Wisdom” refers to both women and men. The verse is saying that the wise woman or man builds up their house, but “Folly,” the foolish woman or man, tears it down.

Culturally, Proverbs portrays Lady Wisdom doing things that women would not do, or almost never do, in the biblical culture. For example, women would almost never be calling out at the city gate, which is where the town elders gathered, who would have been men (Prov. 1:20; 8:3); nor would a woman send her young female servants out into the town to gather people for a feast; male servants would be sent to do that (Prov. 9:3). Similarly, “Wisdom,” as an advisor would be either a man or woman depending on who was getting the advice (Prov. 13:10). These verses are not a cultural aberration giving women jobs they culturally would not do; the reader would understand those jobs are being done by wise men, who are included in the meaning of the text and in the figure personification.

Every person makes the decision to follow either God or the flesh, and how we decide is reflected in what we think, say, and do, as Jesus said, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16).

To more accurately understand the Bible it is worth noting the difference between the figure of speech personification and the figure of speech zoomorphism. “Personification” gives human qualities to something nonhuman. For example, here in Proverbs, by the figure personification, the qualities of wisdom and folly are given human characteristics and portrayed as women, which makes those qualities more personable and easier to relate to.

In contrast to personification, the figure of speech zoomorphism gives animal qualities to things that are not animals, including people, or gives the qualities of one animal to another animal. Giving an animal quality to a person or concept brings action and emotion to the situation. For example, note the different feel of the situation between a person simply giving orders, or “barking out orders,” or “purring” their request. Or, the different mind-picture between a person walking across the room, slithering across the room, or galloping across the room. Zoomorphisms often occur in similes or metaphors, such as, “you eat like a pig” or “what you said ruffled my feathers.” An example of zoomorphism of a concept occurs in Genesis 4:7 when sin is portrayed as an animal “crouching” at the door of Cain’s tent. Zoomorphisms are often inherent in other figures of speech, such as when the Devil is called “the serpent”—which is a zoomorphism—by the figure of speech hypocatastasis.

[For more on the three figures of comparison, simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“raises her voice.”** The Hebrew is literally, “gives forth her voice,” but it is an idiom for speaking loudly, raising one’s voice, or shouting. Idioms can be hard to spot when the literal seems to make sense, and this is one of those places. That is why a scholar has to know the language very well.

Although it would not necessarily be common to hear women raising their voices in public in the biblical culture, it was not unheard of. Throughout history, there were wise women who rose to prominence and were given a voice in the city and even in the whole country. Deborah became the judge over Israel because of her wisdom and prophetic ability (Judg. 4-5). A wise woman saved the city of Abel-beth-maachah from Joab and David’s army (2 Sam. 20:16-19). A read through the Old Testament shows a number of wise women, especially prophetesses, who rose to prominence through their wisdom and actions.

Pro 1:21

**“at the head of noisy *streets*.”** The Hebrew is literally, “at the head of the noisy,” with noisy being an adjective, a substantive, which native Hebrew readers of the time would automatically fill in with “noisy places,” “noisy streets,” etc. The point is that Wisdom wants people to have the opportunity to hear her, so she goes where the people are, which then are the “noisy” places.

The reason the verse says “at the head of noisy streets” is that it is making a reference to the city gate, which is the “head” of all the streets in the city. Although the large city of Jerusalem had several gates, that was unusual because Jerusalem was one of the largest cities in ancient Israel (Hazor was likely as large or larger). Most of the cities in Israel had only one gate (although sometimes the location of the city gates changed, as we see at the city of Dan, which had a Bronze Age gate on the east side, but a later gate on the south side). From the city gate, all the different major streets of the city would start and then wind their way through the city, branching into different alleyways, but the gate was the “head” of all the streets.

**“where the city gates open.”** The gates of the cities in Israel almost always opened to a large open area where people gathered to meet friends, get the news, conduct business, and just hang out to see what was happening. In Greek towns, this happened more at the town center, the agora (Acts 17:17), but in the cities in Israel, the city gate was where the elders sat and the people gathered.

In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, it was the custom that the elders of a city would sit at the city gate (Gen. 19:1, 9; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 4:18; Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2; Lam. 5:14; Dan. 2:49; cf. Amos 5:10). Sometimes even the king of the land would sit at the gate of the city (2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10). Most cities had only one gate, and so everyone who went in or out of the city would have to pass through that gate. Furthermore, there was usually an open space just inside the gate so there was plenty of room for people to gather.

The elders at the gate were generally older, mature men who were the powerful men of the city. As elders and often acting as judges, they were supposed to be godly and wise, which is why “Wisdom” could be found at the city gates (cf. Prov. 1:20-21). However, it was sometimes the case that the powerful men of the city were self-centered or ungodly, in which case the advice they gave would be ungodly too. Proverbs, reflecting the wisdom of the time, advises people to get advice from a multitude of counselors, and often those wise counselors could be found at the city gate (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).

The larger cities often had a “double gate” for security. A double gate was a gate complex consisting of an outer gate and an inner gate with a space between them. The idea behind the double gate was that if an enemy managed to break down the outer gate they would not be able to break down the inner gate because while they were trying to breach it the city defenders could shoot arrows and spears, or throw rocks, or pour boiling water or oil down on top of them from the city walls surrounding them. The Old Testament city of Lachish is a good example of that.

If the city had a double gate, sometimes the elders sat “in” the gate, in the shade between the walls. The Hebrew “in” can also usually be translated “at,” so whether the elders were “at” the gate or “in” it usually has to be determined from the archaeology of the city. For example, Bethlehem was not a big city so when it did have a wall during what archaeologists refer to as the First Temple period, it would have been a simple wall with just one gate, not a double gate, so the elders would have sat “at” the gate, not “in” it.

Here in Proverbs 1:21, “Wisdom” is a personification; there is no “person” named wisdom, so what does it mean that she raises her voice in the noisy places? There were always older people and wise people with whom one could confer at the city gates and where people gathered.

The idea of the elders and judges of a city being present at the gate of the city is a consistent one throughout Scripture and the point Scripture is making is that there is no reason to be unwise about something, there are people who can give you wise advice if you seek them out.

Pro 1:22

**“How long.”** This begins the speech of Lady Wisdom, which continues until the end of the chapter.

**“O naïve ones.”** A naïve person is ignorant and inexperienced, and generally simple in their thoughts and ways. However, as Proverbs 1:22 shows, that naïvety can be wilful naïvety. The foolish person does not want to get deeply involved with life and its complexities or engage in the battle required to become truly godly.

**“hate.”** In this context “hate” has a number of different possible meanings, or a range of possible meanings, because there are many different kinds of fools. Some fools are hostile to knowledge, while others simply ignore it.

When the English reader sees the word “hate” in the Bible, it is natural to think in terms of the common dictionary definition of “hate,” which is an intense aversion, an intense emotional dislike, or an intense hostility to something. For example, the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* defines hate as a “deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards a person, group, or object.” But the Hebrew and Greek words for “hate” have a much broader range of meanings than the English word, and this can confuse the English reader.

The most common Hebrew word for hate is *sane* (#08130 שָׂנֵא) and the Greek word for hate is *miseō* (#3404 μισέω). The word “hate” in Hebrew and Greek can run the full scope of meanings from intense emotional hostility to simple avoidance. The uses of “hate” listed below show some of the semantic range that the Hebrew and Greek words have in the Bible.

1. “Hate” in the Hebrew and Greek languages can have the same basic meaning as it does in English: “an intense emotional dislike and hostility” that can result in acting against someone. Psalm 11:5 says that God “hates” those who love violence; He has an intense dislike for, and hostility toward, them. Genesis 37:4 says Joseph’s brothers “hated” Joseph, which is why they were going to kill him. Proverbs 6:16-19 says God hates pride, lying, hands that shed innocent blood, etc. 1 John 3:15 says a person who hates is a murderer, because if you genuinely hate someone you “assassinate” their character and even sometimes physically kill them.
2. “Hate” can mean “to have nothing to do with; or to have a lack of love and kindly sentiment toward someone or something.” 2 Chron. 19:2 says the people of Israel “hate” Yahweh, but most of them simply had nothing to do with Him and showed no kindness to Him. Proverbs 19:7 says that a poor man is “hated” by his brothers because he is avoided by them (and they may be disgusted by him). Proverbs 11:15 says a wise person “hates” putting up collateral for someone else, in the sense that he avoids it. Proverbs 25:17 says a neighbor who visits too often becomes “hated,” i.e., avoided and resented. Isaiah 60:15 says the city of Jerusalem was “hated” because it was neglected and avoided.
3. “Hate” can refer to a feeling of disgust, repulsion, or abhorrence. Isaiah 1:14 says that God “hated” the Israelites’ festivals; they disgusted Him. 2 Samuel 13:15 says that after Amnon raped Tamar, he “hated” her; his “love” (attraction) turned to disgust and repulsion and he then rejected and ignored her. Psalm 119:163 says the psalmist “hates” lying, but loves the Law, the Torah; lying repulsed him, while he gave his attention to the Law (he “loves” it). Romans 7:15 says Paul did the things that he “hated;” that is, he did things that disgusted him. Jude 1:23 says we are to “hate,” be disgusted with and repulsed by, even clothes that have been stained by sin.
4. “Hate” is used to mean to “ignore,” “neglect,” “love less,” and it is often used that way when being compared to “love.” People “hate” (ignore and neglect) someone or something because they “love” (give attention to, support) someone or something else more. In the same way, “love” can be used in the sense or with the overtones of “to choose” while “hate” can refer to someone or something being not chosen. Genesis 29:31 and 29:33 say Jacob’s wife Leah was “hated,” because Jacob ignored her and paid attention to Rachel. Similarly, Deuteronomy 21:15 says a man with two wives may “love” one and “hate” the other, that is, choose the one to give attention to while paying less attention to, or even ignoring, the other. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 that a person cannot have two masters or he will “hate” (ignore) the one and “love” (pay attention to; support) the other. Luke 14:26 says that a person must “hate” his family to be a disciple of Jesus, that is, he has to care more for Jesus than for them. John 12:25 says that we should not “love” our life in this world, that is, give it all our attention; instead, we are to “hate” our life, that is, ignore things that we want and even be willing to give up life itself. When the Bible says that God “loved” Jacob but “hated” Esau (Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13), it means God chose Jacob over Esau to be the line to the Messiah (God had to choose one to lead to Christ and He chose Jacob), and then gave “Jacob” (“Israel”), more attention and support than He gave “Esau” (“Edom”).
5. “Hate” can simply mean not acting on behalf of someone, leaving them alone, although it may include doing things that hurt or hinder them. Malachi 1:2-3 says that God hated Esau but loved Jacob. In that verse, “Esau” refers to the country of Edom, founded by Esau, and “Jacob” refers to Israel, which Jacob founded. God actively supported Israel throughout its history, but ignored Edom and left it alone, thus, He is said to “hate” it. Proverbs 13:24 says that the one who fails to discipline his children “hates” them because if a person fails to discipline his children he is neglecting them, leaving them alone, and a child left to himself will eventually bring shame to the family (Prov. 29:15).

Often the word “hate” has a combination of the above meanings. For example, when God tells us to “hate” evil and love good (Amos 5:15), He wants us to have nothing to do with evil, be disgusted and repulsed by it, and actively work to eradicate it. That extensive meaning goes for verses such as Deuteronomy 16:22, where God says he “hates” the idolatrous sacred pillars. Ecclesiastes 3:8 is another verse that lumps many different meanings into the one use of “hate.” It says there is a time to “love” and a time to “hate,” but that can mean everything from there being a proper time to engage in helpful or hostile activity toward someone or something; a proper time to be delighted in or disgusted by someone or something; or a proper time to pay attention to or neglect and ignore someone or something.

Sometimes the exact nature of the “hate” in a given context is unknown, or the context covers such a large number of individuals that “hate” includes all the different meanings that apply to the different people in the group. For example, when Moses was moving the camp of God through the desert toward the Promised Land, he said, “let those who hate you flee before you” (Num. 10:35). While there were people in Canaan who actually “hated” Yahweh in the sense they were actively hostile to Him, the majority of the Canaanites were simply engaged in the worship of other gods and did not know or did not care about Yahweh. Given the range of meanings of “hate,” all those unbelieving Canaanites “hated” Yahweh even though some were emotionally and physically hostile to Him while others simply ignored Him.

The word “hate” is a good example of a word that has a specific meaning in English but does not have that same meaning in the Bible, which is why we have to learn the language, customs, and idioms of the Bible.

Pro 1:23

**“to you all.”** The Hebrew is literally, “with you all.” Although the meaning is closer to the English translation “to you,” it helps us understand the Bible when we know that the Hebrews spoke of words (or knowledge) being “with them.” Once we know that background, we can better understand why John 1:1 would say the Word was “with God.” A wise person kept Wisdom’s words “with them.”

Pro 1:24

**“stretched out my hand.”** The imagery here of lady Wisdom “stretching out her hand” should be read as an extension of the poetic metaphor used to personify God’s wisdom as actively involved with His creation; she is actively trying to help people. Wisdom stretching out her arms is not to be regarded as an indication that Lady Wisdom is an actual person alongside Yahweh who has literal physical arms. The exact Hebrew phrase about stretching out the hand is used of Yahweh in Ezekiel 16:27 to indicate His interaction with the Israelites in an attempt to offer help and deliverance (see also Exod. 7:5; Deut. 4:34; and Isa. 9:12).

Pro 1:25

**“neglected.”** The Hebrew is literally, “let go of,” which in this case refers to neglect. It is not that the person never had, or had readily available, God’s counsel and advice, but rather he “let it go,” he neglected it. Far too many Christians neglect God’s Word and then don’t have it in their minds when it could really help them. Jesus Christ is our example and it is clear that he had God’s Word and “it is written” clearly in his mind.

Pro 1:26

**“I will mock.”** This sounds so harsh, but it is actually just a statement of fact. People mock God and Wisdom, and then get themselves into trouble and receive the consequences of their actions. Those consequences often cannot be undone, and sometimes cannot even be mitigated. A person who ignores Wisdom and drives drunk, wrecks his car and cripples himself and kills his passengers cannot undo that damage, and will pay for it for years to come—perhaps his whole life. A man or woman who is sexually promiscuous and gets an incurable venereal disease may live with that consequence the rest of his or her life. The point of the Bible personifying Wisdom and saying she “mocks” is making the point that she cannot undo the damage you did to yourself. Wisdom is not bringing the punishment, the punishment is a consequence of one’s own actions.

**“what you dread.”** The literal Hebrew is “when your dread comes.” The main emphasis is a metonymy, where “dread” is put for “what you dread.” However, there is also a very literal sense to the verse, because when “what you dread” comes, your dread comes too. Although sometimes what people dread comes upon them in this life, often those who mock God and Wisdom die rich and in peaceful circumstances. Nevertheless, no one can escape God’s judgment. Judgment Day will come upon them, and because they had no fear of God, they will fear the flames of Gehenna, and die in them.

This verse, like hundreds of others like it, puts the responsibility for disaster upon the person—no one has to mock God, no one has to reject Wisdom. God begs people to turn from wickedness and be saved, but if they refuse, God respects their decision and they will eat the fruit of their ways.

Pro 1:27

**“terror.”** Here “terror,” “calamity,” “trouble,” and “distress” are personified as actually traveling to those who refuse to heed the voice of Lady Wisdom. That these four are personified continues the line of the use of the figure of speech personification within this section, which began earlier with Lady Wisdom. It is not just an accident that people who ignore God and wisdom have trouble in their lives. Sinful activity actually brings trouble upon people, and that trouble can come from many different sources, including lawful authorities bringing justice and vengeful “partners” or competing parties who want any ill-gotten gain for themselves, and much more. Some ungodly activities can even open the doors of a person’s life to demonic oppression and possession. Although godly people experience troubles too, at least they will be vindicated on Judgment Day. Not so the wicked, who suffer both in this life and in the next.

Pro 1:28

**“I will not answer.”** This is a statement of fact. People who are in trouble because they ignored Wisdom often call out for her and for the deliverance they want, but to no avail. Often the consequences of foolishness cannot be undone. See commentary on Proverbs 1:26, “I will mock.”

Pro 1:29

**“hated.”** This is one of the places where “hate” refers to something that a person did not choose, and thus did not support and pay attention to, but instead chose something else. One of the standard Semitic definitions of “hate” was “to “ignore, neglect, love less” or “not choose someone or something,” instead choosing someone or something else.

The immediate and remoter contexts of this verse lead us to believe that “not choose, ignore, and neglect” is the meaning of “hate” in this verse, because “hate” in the first phrase is juxtaposed with “not choose” in the second phrase. The “they” in the phrase “they hated knowledge” refers to the naïve ones, the mockers, and the fools (Prov. 1:22). The naïve ones “loved” their naivety, that is, they chose it over knowledge, and the mockers did the same thing by “delighting” in their mocking. Meanwhile, the fools “hated” knowledge, that is, they chose ignorance over knowledge.

There is no need to be naïve, a mocker, or foolish. As we see in Proverbs 1:31-32, that kind of stupid behavior only results in trouble, and can lead to death and destruction—dying in this life and everlasting death instead of everlasting life in the age to come. God says, “Today I call heaven and earth to be witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live” (Deut. 30:19). We humans have the freedom of will to choose life or death, and the wise person chooses life.

[For more on the biblical use of “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22, esp. definition 4.]

Pro 1:30

**“counsel.”** Proverbs 1:30 sets God’s counsel in parallel with his words of reproof. Oftentimes, God’s counsel and advice suggests that the listener needs to repent and reorient their behavior. Since this particular counsel is godly counsel expressed through Lady Wisdom, it would be wise to change one’s behavior and thinking to line up with the counsel and reproof.

Pro 1:31

**“way.”** This is the Hebrew word *derek* (#01870 דֶּרֶךְ), referring to a road, not just a small path or “way,” but we felt like “way” read much better here than “road.”

**“fill.”** This is one of the wonderful “obscure expressions” and “riddles” of the wise (cf. Prov. 1:6). The Hebrew word translated “fill” here in Proverbs 1:31 is *saba* (#07646 שָׂבַע), which refers to eating or drinking enough to be satisfied. However, it also has the negative meaning of eating to the point of being overfull and then getting sick or getting to the point the food is revolting, and in that sense, it is used for being repaid for what one has done, thus they will “get what their ways deserve” (Prov. 14:14 NRSVUE). The context determines which meaning *saba* has, but in this verse, both meanings apply. The two contrasting meanings of *saba* account for the different translations, those which read “satisfied” or “filled,” (ASV, KJV, NASB, NIV, Rotherham), and those which try to say “filled” but in a negative way (“overfilled” CJB; “glutted” HCSB, NAB; “stuffed full” NET).

This is a good example of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre), where a word has two (or more) different meanings and both are true. The people who ignore the counsel and reproof of Wisdom are generally “satisfied” with the choice they have made. For example, if they choose to ignore Wisdom and steal and rob to get rich, they may be very satisfied with their wealth, or if they choose to lie and defame others to get political position and power, they may be very satisfied with that. But eventually, even if it takes until Judgment Day, those fools will be “stuffed full” to the point of revulsion with the results of their own plans. This verse is similar to Proverbs 14:14. It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

Pro 1:32

**“turning away.”** The Hebrew is *meshuwbah* (#04878 מְשׁוּבָה) and it occurs 13 times in the OT, with all the occurrences in Jeremiah and Hosea except this verse in Proverbs. In the prophets, it referred to Israel turning away from God and the Covenant they made to keep His laws. Here in Proverbs the simple one, a naïve and foolish person, turns away from wisdom, the right way, etc. It seems that because in Proverbs it is the simple one who turns away that it is not referring to someone who sets out to do evil, rather it is the simple person who gives no thought to his way and just follows every emotion and inclination. In fact, he could wander back and forth between truth and error if that was how he felt at the moment (cf. “aimless wandering” CJB by D. Stern). He does not “turn” from his way to follow wisdom (Prov. 1:23), but “turns away” from wisdom and what is right, and ends up dead—eternally dead, but sometimes even coming to a premature death on earth. Such grave consequences! God created us and expects us to love and obey Him. If we are too foolish to do that, we “eat the fruit of our own way” (Prov. 1:31). We could see “turning away” as a personification here, although it is a weak one, because “turning away” kills the person.

**“*false* security.”** The Hebrew word is *shalvah* (#07962 שַׁלְוָה), and it means quietness, ease, rest, security, unconcern, or prosperity. It can refer to a feeling of security, or a feeling of false security. Here it refers to the feelings of false security that the fool has, not seeing the dangers of life or his responsibility to God and man, he does not see disaster coming. The ASV says, “careless ease,” and fools certainly have that too. Other versions read ‘complacency,” which means “an inclination to please,” and does not seem to fit the profile of most fools.

Pro 1:33

**“will live in safety.”** This is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. We do not, so this promise will be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

**Proverbs Chapter 2**

Pro 2:1

**“if you receive my words.”** It is clear throughout Proverbs that people can gain wisdom and the understanding, discernment, discretion, etc., that comes with it. But that takes a concerted effort, as the verses show, and sadly, many people do not make any effort to gain wisdom, and many of them would not even know where to start.

In today’s world, the Adversary has a very aggressive agenda against people gaining wisdom. It is possible to spend hundreds of hours wasting your time and not gaining an ounce of wisdom or understanding. And, considering that in the ancient world “wisdom” and “understanding” did not just refer to the knowledge one had but the practical application of that knowledge—using your knowledge as you lived life, worked, helped others, volunteered, and made a positive contribution to society—spending an inordinate amount of time selfishly engaged in activities that neither enrich the individual nor contribute to society is a real “win” for the Devil and a real loss for the individual.

God created people “to do good works” (Eph. 2:10) and if we are not doing them we are defying Him, whether we mean to be or not. “I’m not hurting anyone” sounds good, but it is not God’s will for our lives. A hermit can live his life in a cave and “not hurt anyone.” God created us to help people and make disciples, and we either are or we aren’t. If we aren’t, we are (and will be) the losers.

**“store up my commandments with you.”** The words and commands of God are a great treasure, so the believer is wise to store them up in his mind and keep them with him at all times. The Hebrew is literally, “hide with you,” but that does not make good sense to the modern reader. However, in biblical times people would hide things that were valuable to them because the culture did not offer many safe places to put something. People’s houses and tents were always susceptible to people entering at a time when no one was home and stealing valuables. The commands are to be “with us,” in our minds. God sets Himself as an example in this, and keeps the Word with Him, as we see in John 1:1, because the Scripture says “the word was with God.”

In the biblical idiom, things that are part of our mind or knowledge, or things that are attributes that we have, are said to be “with” us. For example, Abigail, speaking about Nabal, her foolish husband, does not say, “He is a fool,” but says “folly is with him” (1 Sam. 25:25). Similarly wisdom is said to be “with God” (Job 12:13, 16). Here in Proverbs 2:1, we would say, “Remember my words,” but in the biblical idiom they say, store up my words “with you.”

Pro 2:2

**“Wisdom.”** Wisdom is personified here as a woman that we are to listen to, hence the capital “W.” As we will see in the next few verses, “Wisdom” has other “female attendants” that work with her (e.g., “discernment” “understanding” and “discretion;” see commentary on Prov. 1:20). They are part of the background of the personification of Wisdom, but the REV does not capitalize them, but only capitalizes Wisdom.

Pro 2:3

**“to understanding...to discernment.”** Here in Proverbs 2:3, the figure of speech personification that we see so clearly in Prov. 2:2 is continued. We are to call out “to” discernment and “to” understanding. The Hebrew can also be translated “for” as well as “to,” but given the figure personification in the context, the “to” is the better choice. Of course, what we are calling out to Discernment and Understanding for is discernment and understanding. God is making it clear that if we want wisdom, understanding, and discernment, it will take some effort and persistence on our part—that is the meaning of “call out” and “raise your voice.”

“Understanding” and “discernment” are both feminine nouns and are represented by the figure of speech personification as being associates and helpers of Lady Wisdom (see REV commentary on Prov. 1:20).

**“*if* you raise your voice.”** The word “if” is supplied from the context and thus is in italics. It is not in the Hebrew text, but is clearly implied from the stanzas before and after it.

Pro 2:4

**“hidden treasure.”** In biblical times banks and safe places for money and valuables did not readily exist, so it was the custom for people to find hiding places for their valuables. This has turned out to be a boon for archaeologists and is one reason that wonderful and valuable things are regularly dug out of the earth.

Pro 2:7

**“a shield for those who walk blamelessly.”** The versions and commentators are divided as to whether the “He” that opens the verse should be pulled by ellipsis into the second phrase making the second stanza in the verse read, “He is a shield,” or whether the verse is saying that sound advice is the shield for those who walk blamelessly. It is quite possible that a native Hebrew reader of that time would see both meanings here, making the verse an amphibologia (double entendre), with both meanings being true. It is certainly true that God is a shield to those who walk uprightly, and it is also true that sound advice is a shield, as we see throughout Proverbs. Since the Hebrew text does not have “He is” in the second stanza, we deferred to the way the Hebrew text was worded.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

Pro 2:10

**“Wisdom will come into your heart.”** This is continuing the personification of wisdom (a feminine noun), and portraying her as someone who feels welcome and comes into your heart.

**“your soul.”** A very common biblical idiom for “you.”

Pro 2:12

**“way of evil.”** The Hebrew reads “road of evil,” which can also be understood as, “the way of evil people.”

**“the one.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “man,” *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman, a husband, or a man opposed to an animal or God. However, *iysh* can also refer more generally to a person or human being, inclusive of both men and women. Also, in certain contexts, *iysh* takes on other meanings. These include being an indicator of rank or position, or to indicate a “mighty man” or “valiant man;” a man as a servant, follower, or soldier. Furthermore, *iysh* can be used in an impersonal sense as “someone” or “everyone,” or “each,” and it can even be used of animals, but rarely is.[[7]](#footnote-14331)

Proverbs uses the word *iysh* to show a primary emphasis on men in contrast to women because the Hebrew text could have used the Hebrew word *adam*, which is more generally used to mean “people, mankind.” But it makes sense in both the culture and scope of Proverbs that *iysh* would be used. Culturally, men dominated the society and were the primary actors in it. One obvious reason for that was the physical strength men had over women, but a less obvious reason was that most women had a large number of children and grandchildren, and so for most of their lives they were pregnant, nursing, and/or caring for children; both their own and those in the extended family. Mary, the mother of Jesus, had at least seven children herself (Matt. 13:55-56).

Additionally, the book of Proverbs uses the sexual attraction between men and women as a background to show the necessity for reason and self-discipline in living a godly life. Proverbs specifically portrays Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly competing with each other and vying for the attention and affection of naïve young men. Indeed, Proverbs seems to go to great lengths to portray and personify Wisdom, understanding, discernment, discretion, and also Folly, as women who have attributes that could attract a young man. It is up to the young man to choose between the unbridled, boisterous, glamourous, and sexy life of Folly, or the self-controlled and peaceful life of Wisdom and her attendants.

In spite of the dominant male language in Proverbs, however, there is good reason to translate the word *iysh* as a gender-neutral word such as “person” or “one” in many verses. Although the verses were more specifically addressed to men in the biblical culture, the author did not want to exclude women, and we must keep in mind that *iysh* can legitimately refer to both men and women. It is clear from the proverbs themselves that wisdom and knowledge are intended for both men and women. For example, the teaching of the mothers in Proverbs is important (cf. Prov. 1:8 and 6:20), and those women had to be taught to become wise themselves. Also, Lady Wisdom imparts knowledge and wisdom, and thus she herself was taught, and is honored for imparting her wisdom and knowledge to others, including the men who listen to her. So, it was not just males that were taught, even if that was the primary emphasis in the culture of the time, something that is reflected in the many uses of the Hebrew *iysh*.

It should be noted that many of the older English versions, such as the King James Version, do translate *iysh* as “man.” However, while that is a very accurate translation, it must also be remembered that up until recently, when the word “man” was used, it was used more inclusively of both men and women than it is today. Today, “man” tends to exclude women, not include them, so culturally, “man” has often become less accurate in reflecting the meaning of the text than a gender-neutral word like “person.”

The importance of women feeling included in the teaching of Proverbs cannot be overstated, especially in modern Western culture when women are not kept cloistered at home but are educated, have their own money, and are out and about in society. Both men and women must make the choice between Wisdom and Folly. Proverbs applies to women today in a way that it has never applied so fittingly before in history. Therefore, because *iysh* can legitimately be gender-neutral and apply to a “person,” and because many proverbs themselves apply so fittingly to women, we have often used a gender-neutral term when *iysh* appears in the Hebrew text.

[For more on the use of gender-neutral terms for the masculine terms in Proverbs, see commentary on Prov. 1:4, “youth.” For more on Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, and the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“perverse things.”** The root of the Hebrew word means to flip upside down. Something “perverse” is upside down from the way God intended it to be.

Pro 2:14

**“are glad.”** The Hebrew is *sameach* (#08056 שָׂמֵ֫חַ), and means to take pleasure in something, to be glad, to be merry. It is often translated as “joyful,” or a related “joy” word, but biblically, joy comes from inside a person due to eternal verities such as our Hope. Therefore, glad, merry, pleasure, jubilation, etc., are better translations.

Pro 2:15

**“*from those* whose paths.”** We worded the text to fit with the previous verse and to read more easily in English. The Hebrew text starts abruptly: “their paths are twisted.”

**“twisted.”** The Hebrew is *`iqqesh* (#06141 עִקֵּשׁ), and it means “twisted, distorted, crooked, perverse, perverted.” We have chosen “twisted” as the translation of this word so the English reader can build the picture of those whom God refers to as twisted, or perverse. The Hebrew word *`iqqesh* appears 9 times in Proverbs 2:15; 8:8; 10:9; 11:20; 17:20; 19:1; 22:5; 28:6, 18. The Hebrew reads, “their paths are twisted,” but we brought the “from those whose” in from the context for clarity.

Pro 2:16

**“flattering.”** The Hebrew is literally, “making smooth,” which refers to smooth talk or flattery. Evil people are very good at flattery, lying, and smooth talk, which is why Christ taught us to look at a person’s “fruit” (Matt. 7:16-20). Words can be very deceptive, but what a person does and the fruit of their lives reveals who they really are.

Pro 2:17

**“mate.”** The Hebrew word literally means “friend, companion,” but in this case, it refers to the woman’s husband. It would be confusing to the modern reader to say she had left the friend of her youth, and because the “friend” is obviously her husband we went with “mate.”[[8]](#footnote-13717) However, there is an important lesson in that the person we marry is supposed to be our best friend and companion. In biblical times, marriages were arranged, and often the young man and woman had never even met each other before their wedding. It was taught in the culture that love developed after marriage, not before it, and that has been shown to be true in many cultures.

**“the covenant she made before her God.”** The Hebrew text reads that the woman forgot “the vow of her God,” and the genitive “of” can grammatically refer to a covenant made with God or a covenant made before God such that God is the witness. Since the context here is the marriage covenant, the covenant is made between the man and the woman before God, i.e., with God as a witness.

Pro 2:18

**“house.”** Thus, not only the woman, but those who visit her house, sink down to death. Who we connect ourselves with influences us and thus our future.

**“sinks down to death.”** The Hebrew image is somewhat difficult but it is understandable. The house of the foolish woman sinks down to death, so the righteous person does not want to be in it.

**“paths.”** This is not the standard word for “path,” but in Proverbs is *magal* (#04570 מַעְגָּל), and it really means more like “rut, track, entrenchment,” and it refers to the ruts and cuts in the ground made by carts and wagons. Some translations use “tracks,” but to most readers “tracks” refer to the footprints left after a person or animal has traveled over the ground. This is more like a “wagon path” or “wagon trail.” We tried to keep it simple by saying “path.”

Pro 2:19

**“go to her.”** Besides having the literal meaning of going to the woman in the sense of entering a physical place, this phrase and similar phrases are also used idiomatically for a man going to a woman and having sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 6:4; 16:2; Prov. 6:29). It is important to note that the phrase “go to her” implies a “harmless” start; the naïve person begins a downhill path by simply “going” to the wicked person, Folly. The way the phrase “go to her” is used, becoming intimately involved in illicit and destructive relationships starts with “going to” the person or place. The wise person senses danger and stays away from destructive relationships. It is important to keep in mind at this point that the “woman” in the proverb is Folly, and she is not a literal woman but represents foolish and destructive people and relationships, and destructive relationships come in all shapes and sizes, in all sexes and genders.

The Hebrew text uses the participle form, perhaps more literally, “is going to her,” indicating that this is not a one-time event. The man has made a habit of visiting prostitutes. The proverb, in typical hyperbolic fashion, states that people who get caught up in sexual sin “do not return” and do “not reach the paths of life,” meaning that people who make a habit of sexual sin generally do not escape it and do not turn to God for salvation. There are a couple of points we must understand about that. The first is that Proverbs states the general and most common thing, not an absolute truth. There are people, like David, who escaped sexual sin, but even wise people like Solomon got completely caught up in it and never escaped. Also, after the Day of Pentecost when the New Birth became available, salvation was permanent by birth so a person could not lose salvation by becoming caught up in sexual sin. Nevertheless, a person can lose all his rewards and enter the Kingdom with nothing, so sin in general, and sexual sin, are very serious.

[For more on salvation and the guarantee of everlasting life, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For the difference between salvation and rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“life.”** The Hebrew word is plural, which is most likely a plural of emphasis for the abundance of life; the wonderful life. There are many paths of life, but only one everlasting “life,” but it will be wonderful indeed!

Pro 2:20

**“on the road of good people.”** The Hebrew uses the word “road” idiomatically for “way of life” in dozens of verses (cf. Ps. 1:6; 18:30; 27:11; 36:4; 101:2; 119:30; Prov. 4:14, 19; 12:15, 26; 16:29; 28:10).

**Proverbs Chapter 3**

Pro 3:1

**“instruction.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 3:3

**“covenant loyalty…faithfulness.”** These are the figure of speech personification because the Hebrew text is stated as if they are people and could leave on their own and somehow we could prevent them from doing so—which is actually close to the truth. If we neglect something for too long a time, we become unclear about it and eventually forget it. So here we see covenant loyalty and faithfulness added to their friends, Wisdom, prudence, and discretion. For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Proverbs 1:20, “Wisdom.”

**“neck”** The word is plural in the Hebrew text to agree with the plural subject, “you [all],” but we leave it singular for ease of reading in English. The essence of the verse is, “You all, do not let covenant loyalty and faithfulness leave, bind them around your necks.”

**“write them upon the tablet of your heart.”** This phrase may have been added to the text. It stands out because it is the first time a third stanza has been added to a verse in Proverbs. It is missing from the Septuagint texts, and some of the Septuagint texts we have of Proverbs are much older than the Hebrew texts. While it is common for the Septuagint to differ from the Hebrew, it is not common for an entire sentence to be absent from the Septuagint but included in the Hebrew text. The REV retains the verse because it is in the Hebrew text and because it fits in the context. Additions like this can come into the Hebrew or Greek text because the copies were made by hand, so if someone left out a phrase while copying, they wrote it in the margin so it could be copied back into the text by the next scribe. However, it was also common for scribes to write notes in the margins of their Bibles, just as we do today, and occasionally one of those notes got copied into the Bible as Holy Scripture.

Pro 3:4

**“people.”** The Hebrew text reads *adam*, “man,” in the singular, but it was understood as a uniplural noun, like the English “fish” or “deer” which can be singular or plural depending on the context. Here the word is to be understood as plural, so literally, “man” (men); but it is meant for both men and women so “people,” “mankind,” or “humanity.” We went with “people” to be clear that women were included.

This verse reveals the fact that Proverbs says things that are generally true, not universally true. People who show covenant loyalty and faithfulness will generally find favor and have a good reputation among the population, but not among everyone, because evil people will resent and stand against them.

Pro 3:5

**“do not lean upon your own understanding.”** The allusion here is to the walking staff that almost every man carried for support and protection (which is why Jesus allowed his apostles to take one when they traveled; cf. Mark 6:8 and commentary on Matt. 10:10). Men leaned upon their staffs in all kinds of situations, but they were notoriously unreliable for a number of reasons. If modern hiking is any guide to us, the most common reason a staff is unreliable is that it can unexpectedly slip, causing a dangerous fall. Also, a staff may break and pierce the hand of the one leaning on it. This happened often enough that the emissary of the king of Assyria spoke about it to the people in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:21; Isa. 36:6).

Human understanding is like a walking staff. It is just reliable enough that people can begin to trust in themselves rather than in what the Bible says, but then unexpectedly it slips or breaks and causes injury and harm—sometimes great harm. Wise Christians always trust God and never completely trust themselves, allowing for the fact they may be wrong.

Pro 3:7

**“evil.”** The Hebrew text uses the common word for “evil” or “bad,” *ra* (#07451 רַע), which has a large semantic range, including evil, bad, wrong, unpleasant, disagreeable, sad, unkind, wicked, adversity, misery, etc. For example, in the KJV, it is translated evil, wicked, wickedness, mischief, hurt, bad, trouble, sore, affliction, ill, adversity, harm, grievous, sad, etc.

It is important to see the range of meaning of *ra* in this verse because many things are “bad” or hurtful behaviors that we would not consider “evil.” And the verse is in a couplet, that if we fear Yahweh and turn away from what is “evil,” “bad,” “unhealthy,” it will be health to our body and cause our bones (also a metonymy for our body) to be strong. Obviously, we must turn from “evil” such as lying and stealing or we will suffer for it, but there are many behaviors that are “bad” that we would not consider “evil” in the classic sense. For example, “worry” is bad for us and unhealthy, but people don’t consider it “evil.” If we humans want to truly be healthy in body and mind, we have to turn away from evil behaviors, and also “bad,” unhealthy behaviors.

**“turn away.”** The Hebrew means “to depart” from evil. It is an indication of refusal to even entertain evil in one’s life. To turn away means to completely avoid the path of evil, but also to have an attitude of disapproval and despising of it.

Pro 3:8

**“flesh.”** The Hebrew text literally reads “navel.” This is the figure of speech synecdoche, where the part, the navel, is put for the whole, the whole body. However, there seems to be a good reason God picked “navel” here. The navel is the very font of life of the body, feeding the body with everything it needed in the womb, and so it presents a good word picture here. The “navel” was the source of our well-being in the womb and also as we entered life as independent beings. In a similar way, fearing Yahweh and departing from evil is the very source of life for us in this life and will see us off to a wonderful start in our next life.

[See word study on “synecdoche.”]

In general, fearing God and turning from evil keeps us healthy and strong mentally, emotionally, and physically. People who ignore God and get mixed up in an evil and/or bad lifestyle invariably suffer for it.

**“refreshing drink.”** The Hebrew text reads *shiqquv* (#08250 שִׁקּוּי) in the singular, and thus means, “a drink.” The “drink” is put by metonymy of effect for the effect that the drink brings, which is “refreshment,” which is why so many English versions read that way. The REV combined the literal with the metonymy and went with “refreshing drink,” which catches both the Hebrew word and its meaning in this context.

[See word study on “metonymy.”]

In the biblical culture, bones that were “wet” were known to be strong, while bones that were “dry” were weak. Proverbs says a crushed or broken spirit (referring to depression), dries up the bones (Prov. 17:22; see commentary on Prov. 17:22). Job complained that the bones of the wicked were well watered (Job 21:24). See also Psalms 109:18.

The mention of both the navel, which is on the outside of the body, and the bones, which are the inner support of the body, further emphasizes that this verse is saying that fearing God and turning from evil will be healing to the whole body.

Pro 3:9

**“and from the firstfruits.”** This verse is the only verse in Proverbs that commands that people give of their increase, and in doing so supports what God said in the Law of Moses.

Pro 3:10

**“completely filled.”** The Hebrew text uses two nouns, “filled plenty,” which some versions translate as “filled with plenty.” We understood this to mean, “completely filled.” The Law of Moses commanded people to give a tenth of the grain they grew, as well as the other vegetable harvests such as grapes and olives (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21; Deut. 14:22). Animals were tithed also, but differently (Lev. 27:32). God promised that if Israel kept God’s commandments they would be blessed (Deut. 30:16; cf. Mal. 3:8-12).

This is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. We do not, and so there are people who honor God with their firstfruits who do not have full storehouses. There are many ungodly people who cheat and steal, and the Devil is the ruler of the world, so this promise will be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on tithing, see commentary on Deut. 14:22. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“overflow.”** The Hebrew is more literally “burst open.”

Pro 3:11

**“do not reject”** The grammatical construction of the Hebrew text places an emphasis on the word “reject,” although it can make the English translation hard to understand. A lot of the bad things that happen to people are their own fault, not an “attack of the Devil.” When we ignore Wisdom, we can get ourselves into serious trouble. Biblically, this is referred to as the discipline of Yahweh, because He is the one who set the principles of godliness, the laws of nature and physics, the moral and civil law, etc., in place.

To not reject the discipline of Yahweh is to take a hard look at what has happened in our lives that we consider “bad,” and see if we ourselves caused the problem, or part of it. Proud and arrogant people just assume that everything bad that happens to them is someone else’s fault, or a demonic attack, and will not own any part they played in the problem. Humble and godly people always assume that there is something they could have done to avoid or lessen any problem, and only exonerate themselves when they have thought through the situation and seen that they could not have done anything better than they did.

Pro 3:13

**“discernment.”** The Hebrew word translated as “discernment” is *tebunah* (#08394 תְּבוּנָה), and it has a range of meaning that includes “understanding” and “insight.” In English, the word “discernment” refers to the ability to separate things, to distinguish between different things, such as discerning the truth from a lie. In Hebrew, the word can have a passive sense, like “understanding” or “insight,” or an active sense, such as “discernment.” Many English versions see the passive sense here and have “understanding,” and that is part of the meaning of *tebunah*. However, here in Prov. 3:13, the REV translates *tebunah* as “discernment” and usually translates *biynah* (#0998 בִּינָה) as “understanding” (e.g. Prov. 2:3).

“Discernment” is one of the female associates of Lady Wisdom (see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

Pro 3:15

**“gems.”** See commentary on Proverbs 31:10.

**“nothing you desire can compare with her.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “your every delightful thing cannot compare with her,” but that is awkward in English.

Pro 3:16

**“right hand…left hand.”** In the biblical culture, the right hand was always more highly esteemed than the left hand. In fact, in some contexts, the left hand was considered the hand of cursing. That distinction was due to the fact that in the biblical culture people always washed themselves with their left hand after going to the bathroom, which also meant that they only ate with their right hand. Here in Proverbs 3:16, however, the use of “left hand” is not meant to convey a sense of cursing, but rather it is simply less esteemed than the right hand.

[For more on the right hand of blessing and left hand of cursing, see commentary on Matt. 25:33.]

It is noteworthy that the things in this verse are what most people want in life: long life, wealth, and glory (which includes “honor,” like you would get from your family. The word does not just mean “social recognition”). It is Wisdom and walking with God that brings those things. In other words, if you live a life of obedience to God and living wisely, you will get long life, wealth, and honor. In contrast, if you spend your energy trying to acquire wealth and glory, usually you will fail. If you do achieve them, they will be short-lived. Wisdom and obedience are the keys to everlasting success.

There is a valuable lesson for us in the fact that “length of days”—which here means more than just a long earthly life; it refers to a long life now and everlasting life later—is in Wisdom’s right hand, while “riches and glory” are in her left hand. Riches and glory are nice, but if a person does not have everlasting life, no amount of wealth and glory in this life will make up for not having everlasting life. Soon after the person dies he will be forgotten. How many people know the proper name of even one Pharaoh of Egypt or Roman Emperor? Fame and glory fade with death, everlasting life is forever!

**“glory.”** The Hebrew word can mean “glory” or “honor,” which are interrelated, because the one who has “glory” has honor, and vice versa, but the emphasis on “glory” here is important. In the Old Testament, Wisdom is personified, and God worked directly with her to accomplish His goals, and in the New Testament Jesus Christ is often associated with glory, and now God works with and through him to accomplish His goals. So the association with Wisdom and glory in the Old Testament projects well into the New Testament as Jesus Christ is closely associated with the concept of glory.

Pro 3:17

**“Her ways.”** The Hebrew text of this verse allows for a number of correct interpretations. The Hebrew reads more literally: “Her roads—roads of pleasantness; and all of her paths—peace.” The last stanza, for example, can be understood in at least two distinct ways. One is that her roads are peaceful roads, roads without a lot of trouble. It certainly is true that when we walk with wisdom, the roads we walk on are more peaceful—the life we live is a more peaceful life. However, the stanza can also mean that the paths of wisdom are peace: in other words, wisdom always acts in a peaceful manner, she always takes the path of peace. The way the REV is worded might take a little more prayer and study to understand than simply saying “all of her paths are peaceful paths,” but it is important to allow for the multiple interpretations that the original text allows for.

**“pleasant.”** Wisdom, and thus the wise person, knows the value of being pleasant and peaceful. A lot of the anxieties and frustrations of life come about because of entering into a quarrel that is not one’s business in the first place, or not overlooking someone else’s sin. We all make mistakes, and while sometimes pointing out a person’s mistakes is helpful, many times it just causes pointless trouble (cf. Eccl. 7:21-22).

Pro 3:18

**“taking hold of her.”** The present participle indicates the ongoing process of holding on to Wisdom. In the Old Testament, salvation required maintaining one’s trust in God to the end. Wisdom is a “tree of life,” the tree in the Garden of Eden which gave life, because holding onto her was the way to everlasting life.

Pro 3:22

**“neck.”** “Neck” here is plural, but the prenominal suffix is second-person masculine plural, so a singular neck seems more appropriate. Of course, the neck’s adornment is a necklace, which we have already seen in Proverbs. Furthermore, a “neck” is a proper parallel to *nephesh* in the first stanza, which can mean “soul,” “life,” and “throat.”

Pro 3:23

**“stumble.”** The Hebrew text of Proverbs 3:23 is literally, “and your foot will not strike,” which would, by ellipsis, mean, “will not strike [“a stone” or “anything”]. The meaning is that your foot won’t stumble over anything. The metaphor of the foot not stumbling is a continuation of the general metaphor throughout the Bible of “walking” referring to living life. The context here in Proverbs 3:19-23 is saying that as you “walk” through life, if you use Wisdom, discernment, knowledge, sound advice, and discretion, you will not stumble, but will live your life in safety. The amount of suffering people go through due to not being wise is incalculable. The “safety” that the wise person experiences refers to generally being safe in this life, and also extends to the real safety of having everlasting life.

Pro 3:24

**“lie down.”** The Septuagint has “sit down,” but the parallel line in the second clause, which speaks of sleep, seems to indicate that lying down unto sleep is what the verse is referring to.

Pro 3:25

**“terror.”** Proverbs 3:25 contains the figure of speech, amphibologia, or double entendre. The literal reading, “do not be afraid of sudden terror (or “sudden dread”) refers to the fact that many people experience occasions when they are suddenly gripped by fear, sometimes even for no apparent reason. We are not to be afraid of those times, but work through those times and deal with them. God is always our strength and protection.

Also in this verse, the word “terror” is used by metonymy for “that which causes terror,” that is, disaster or calamity. Thus, Proverbs 3:25 also means, “do not be afraid of sudden disasters.” In fact, translators feel that is the primary meaning here, even though it is not the literal reading of the Hebrew text (cf. HCSB, NET, NIV). We live in a fallen world and the Devil is the god of the age (2 Cor. 4:4) so there will always be disasters that strike suddenly. There is no value in walking around in fear of what might or could happen, even though sudden and unexpected disasters happen all the time. The wise person does his best to prepare for sudden disasters, but in the end takes comfort from the fact that every human is mortal and, unless the Lord returns and the Rapture occurs, everyone will die at some point. The only real protection in this life is salvation through Jesus Christ and the guarantee of living forever.

[For more on preparation for times of trouble and how Jesus taught us to prepare, see commentary on Luke 22:36.]

**“the devastation of the wicked when it comes.”** The wicked will be destroyed, if not in this life, in the next. However, the force of this Proverb is that generally, devastation, or some form of it, will happen to wicked people in this life. In any case, the person who has walked with Wisdom and is saved should not be afraid when the wicked are destroyed.

Pro 3:27

“**Do not withhold a good thing.**” The sentiment of Proverbs 3:27 is extremely similar to that of James 4:17 which reads, “Therefore, whoever knows to do good, but does not do it, it is sin.” This principle helps the Christian (and Old Testament believer) to escape from an overly law-keeping mentality that Jesus encountered in the Gospels when the Pharisees were concerned with Jesus’ healing a man on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). To them, it seemed like breaking the Law, even though there was no such command in the Law that one could not heal on the Sabbath. However, to Jesus, it was an opportunity to do good, and he had the power to do it. Jesus was demonstrating this principle from Proverbs 3:27 and James 4:17.

**“power of your hands.”** The word “hand” is commonly used as an idiom for power or authority (cf. Gen. 14:20; Exod. 2:19; Num. 4:28; Deut. 3:2). The key to really understanding this verse is the phrase “to whom it is due.” This verse is speaking about giving to people who legitimately need and deserve help, not just any person who has a need. There are many needy people who are not “due” help from others. This verse may, in fact, be speaking more specifically of people who are owed a wage but have not been paid, or a situation such as that. If you can do a good thing for someone to whom it is due, do it. Don’t wait until a later time. Sadly, there are people who “can’t bother” to give people what they are due and make them wait, and there are other people who feel some kind of perverse sense of power by making people wait for them. God’s people are to love others, not put them off for no reason.

Another important key to understanding this verse and the proper application of it is the phrase, “when it is in your hands to do well,” that is, when it is in your power or authority to do well. This principle is ignored far too frequently by governments and even individuals. Governments are in the habit of borrowing money and then giving it to “good causes.” But that is not a wise thing to do. Borrowing creates an undue burden on the people in the form of interest payments, and can have many harmful effects such as inflation, monetary devaluation, late payment of debt, non-payment of debt, etc. It is Satan’s way to get people to borrow because of the harmful effects it has on society. We live in a fallen world and there will always be more “good things” to do than the money and resources to do them. The godly person has to resist borrowing to give to a “good cause.” Godly people give to good causes when they have the money and resources to give.

Pro 3:28

**“with you.”** The words “with you” have a spatial connotation that is important to pick up on. Although some versions say something like “when you have it,” that does not necessarily imply the person actually has it with them. I may be able to pay a bill because I “have the money” but I likely don’t have it with me. Especially in an agrarian society in which bartering played a major role and payments were made by weight of silver or handing over of goods (Proverbs was written before coins were used) the fact that a person had the payment with them was a very important detail. If you owed a person a sheep, and you had it with you but would not hand it over, there is some major problem that is not being revealed.

Pro 3:29

**“trusts *you*.”** The idea in the Hebrew is that your neighbor who lives by you trusts you, so don’t devise evil against him. That could happen for a number of reasons. A person could become envious or jealous, like Cain who killed Abel, or it could be that if the person was starting to get involved in some ungodly activity he may start to want to get a godly neighbor “out of the way.”

**“near you.”** The Hebrew is literally “with you,” meaning living with you in the community (i.e., “near you, by you”) Today, “with you” likely means the person was living in the same home, while “by you” means close to you. However, in this context in Proverbs, the person may indeed be living “with you,” in the same house or same tent, but even then he is “by you.” The word “neighbor” in the Hebrew usually refers to someone who is close to you in physical proximity, i.e., “near you” or “next to you.” Thus, in the Hebrew, a “neighbor” could be the person eating close to you in the same house.

Police are quick to point out that a large percentage of the violence that people commit against each other involves people who are closely related in some way: they are of the same family, or they live together or near each other, or they work together. In those situations, we can annoy each other and even plot to harm each other. God knows that, so the Bible warns us about planning evil against the people close to us, knowing that that is a major problem in human societies.

Pro 3:30

**“quarrel.”** Proverbs 3:30 has a wide range of application. The word we translate “quarrel” is *reb* (#07378 רִיב) and it can mean to strive or fight physically or with words, to lodge a complaint against, or to make a lawsuit against. So the fullness of the Proverb is more like: “Do not fight with someone for no reason, or lodge a complaint or start a lawsuit with someone for no reason.” “No reason,” of course, means no godly reason. Getting money or proving your point is not a godly reason to quarrel with someone or start a lawsuit (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

Pro 3:31

**“ways.”** The Hebrew text of Proverbs uses quite a few different words referring to roads and paths. This is the Hebrew word *derek* (#01870 דֶּרֶךְ), referring to a road, not just a small path or pathway. Of course, most biblical “roads” were just dirt paths, but even so, a “road” was bigger and more well-worn than a “path.” It is possible that the word “road” is intentionally chosen here because there are many things a violent man might do that are not his “roads,” that is, what he does often and intentionally.

Pro 3:32

**“abomination.”** The Hebrew word *toebah* (#08441 תּוֹעֵבָה) translated “abomination” means “disgusting” or “loathsome,” and it designates anything that is offensive or condemnatory. “Abominations” are described as things abhorrent to God, such as what is hurtful, hostile, or destructive and in opposition to Wisdom and leads others astray from her road. Bad moral conduct and ungodly acts are condemned in Proverbs as being “abominations” in God’s eyes.

**“his counsel.”** The Hebrew word we translate “counsel” is *sod* (#05475 סוֹד), and it can refer to a council, or the counsel that comes from the council. In this case, we feel that it refers to God’s counsel. God’s “divine council” is a small group of high-ranking spirit beings with whom He works to run creation. Occasionally God makes His prophets or spokespeople privy to what is being said or done by the council (Jer. 23:18; Job 15:8). God often reveals His plans to people with integrity as we see from how He works with His prophets and apostles throughout the Word. The point of the Proverb is that God abhors devious people, but will share His plans with people with integrity.

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Jer. 23:18. For more on how God works with his divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on God’s holding general assemblies for all His spirit beings, see commentary on Job 1:6.]

Pro 3:34

**“He mocks.”** The “He” here starts a new thought and refers to Yahweh. It does not refer back to the nearest antecedent (the righteous one in Prov. 3:33). This verse is using language that borders on the idiom of permission to communicate truth (for information on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18). God does not “mock” His creation; He loves His creation, but He has given spirit beings and humans free will to make the choices they want to, and sometimes those choices are bad and bring serious consequences. When people mock God, disobey Him, and rebel against Him, they bring evil and harm to themselves, which in the Semitic way of speaking, is God “mocking” them. Not that He actually does, but since God was the one who created the universe such that evil actions have evil consequences, the Semitic way of speaking is that God “mocks” the mockers.

**“he gives grace to the humble.”** This verse is referenced in James 4:6. Note how it is toned down in James, which says that God opposes the proud. Here, God does more than just oppose those proud mockers, He mocks them.

**Proverbs Chapter 4**

Pro 4:1

**“O sons.”** This is the first occurrence of the plural, “sons.” The translation reflects the Hebrew text and the culture of the time, in which a father would instruct the male children, particularly as they got older. However, the instruction is as valuable for women as for men.

**“learn.”** The Hebrew word is literally the common word *yada* (#03045 ידע), “to know,” but here it is being used more in the sense of “to learn.”

Pro 4:2

**“good.”** The Hebrew word is *tov* (#02896 טוֹב), the standard word for “good,” which has a huge semantic range. It is the word used in Genesis 1 when God said of His works that they were “good.” It refers to good of all kinds, including mental, moral, and material good. Thus it can mean things such as, “pleasant, agreeable; good, right, excellent; valuable, rich, prosperous; happy, glad; kind; appropriate; and better.” In this context, it clearly also includes “sound” or “accurate.” The best way to understand the teaching that the father gave is that it is “good” in lots of different ways. It would be sound and accurate, mentally and morally helpful, valuable, etc.

**“instruction.”** The Hebrew word is *torah* (#08451 תֹּרָה *torah* or תּוֹרָה *towrah*). Traditionally, *torah* is translated “law,” but that translation gives English readers the wrong impression (the Hebrew word *mitzpah* means “law” or “commandment”). *Torah* means much more than just “law.” On a basic level, it means guidance or instruction, but that instruction also includes doctrine, custom, theory, regulations, etc. “The Torah” instructs us through moral and legal regulations, examples, historical events, practical advice, customs, and the acts of God. We are to use Torah to develop sound thinking. A person who studies the Torah learns how to think like God thinks.

[For more on Torah, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

Pro 4:3

**“only son.”** This phrase is rare (under ten times in the Masoretic Hebrew text), but its most prominent use is in Genesis 22:2, where it means “only son” within that context. The fact that the teacher says “only son in the sight of my mother” means he may not have been the only son but felt special as if he were.

Pro 4:7

**“Wisdom *is* the principal thing.”** It is obvious from the scope of Proverbs that Wisdom is vital to life. Wisdom comes from Yahweh (Prov. 2:6), in fact, the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Wisdom is to be prized more than jewels or anything else people desire (Prov. 8:11). The person who finds wisdom is blessed (Prov. 3:13), but fools die because they lack wisdom (Prov. 10:13). Wisdom is the principal thing, the chief thing, it is supreme (cf. ASV, KJV, RV, GNV, NIV84, NET, Rotherham, YLT).

Like many things in life, wisdom can be simple but difficult. It can be easy to know what to do but difficult to do it. In the Semitic mindset, a person is not wise when he knows what to do but does not do it, he is wise when he actually does what he knows to do. Knowing what to do but not doing it is not wisdom in the biblical sense of the word; in fact, it is foolishness. However, wisdom is the principal thing, the supreme thing, so we should make up our minds to acquire wisdom, which includes following through and acting on what we know to do.

The Hebrew word translated in the REV as the phrase “the principal thing” is *reshith* (#07225 רֵאשִׁית), and it means “first, beginning, best, chief thing, main point,” which explains the wording in Young’s Literal Translation: “The first thing is wisdom.” *Reshith* is well-known for its first use in the Bible, where it is translated “beginning” (Gen. 1:1). Scholars argue over the primary meaning of *reshith* in Proverbs 4:7, and whether it means “beginning, starting point,” or whether it means “chief thing, supreme thing.” The NET text note briefly explains the problem: “The absolute [state] and construct state of ) רֵאשִׁית*re*’*shit*( are identical [see BDB]. Some treat ) רֵאשִׁית חָכְמָה*re*’*shit khokhmah*) as a genitive-construct phrase: ‘the beginning of wisdom’ )cf. NAB, NASB, NRSV(. Others take רֵאשִׁית [*reshith*] as an absolute functioning as predicate and חָכְמָה [‘wisdom’] as the subject: ‘wisdom is the first/chief thing’ (cf. KJV, ASV).”

Because God could have inspired Proverbs 4:7 to be written in a way that would not have allowed for the two possible translations, both of which are grammatically legitimate and both of which are true, we conclude that God intended for both meanings to be understood here: “Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom” and also, “the starting point of wisdom is this: get wisdom.” This makes Proverbs 4:7 an amphibologia; a verse with two meanings, both of which are true. A person fluent in biblical Hebrew reads the one verse and sees both meanings, while, sadly, English translators must choose which meaning they will put in their English translation and put the other meaning in a footnote or commentary entry.

The REV text has the translation, “Wisdom is the principal thing” because that seems to best fit the immediate context, and does not present a potential contradiction to the statement in Proverbs that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Many commentators opt for the primary meaning being “the starting point [or “beginning”] of wisdom” because the word *reshith* occurs five times in Proverbs (Prov. 1:7; 3:9; 4:7; 8:22; 17:14), and the other four occurrences of *reshith* all mean “beginning,” “starting point,” or “first.” However, it often happens in both the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament that a word has one definition in a majority of verses but a different meaning in some verses, which is one reason why biblical lexicons usually have a number of different definitions for any given word.

However, as we have said, both translations are grammatically correct and fit within the scope of Proverbs. “Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom” certainly fits in Proverbs. Wisdom is the principal, chief, supreme thing. It is better than wealth or power, and God’s people should “seek her like silver, and search for her like hidden treasure” (Prov. 2:4). Also, however, the beginning of wisdom is to get wisdom. The starting point of being wise is realizing how important it is and then getting it—making the diligent effort to acquire it.

It is vital for the Christian to understand the importance of wisdom. The Devil does, and so he aggressively downplays it in the world. How much do we hear about wisdom in the media or the world around us? Little or nothing. The world constantly encourages people to do unwise things. Many examples could be given. We are constantly bombarded by advertisements that encourage people to spend money and go into debt rather than be frugal and live debt free. We are encouraged to consume food and drink that is not healthy (such as candy and soda pop). We are encouraged to follow our feelings into relationships and sexual union rather than be cautious and use wisdom, despite the fact that the divorce rate is 40-50% and many people who stay married are unhappy. Many young men and women participate in extreme sports and wrench limbs and break bones that seem to heal well when they are young but later in life result in aches and pain such as traumatic arthritis that will bring years of discomfort. Many other examples could be given, for they are legion, but the point is that the world encourages unwise living.

In general, Christian teaching does not help much, because it often puts an emphasis on “faith” rather than on wisdom. In fact, there is so much teaching on “faith” in the Christian world, and what faith can accomplish, that a believer might think the Bible said “Faith is the principal thing,” but that is not what it says. One of God’s laws of life is that a person reaps what they sow, and having faith will not reliably cancel that and make a person’s life wonderful if they have made unwise decisions. In God’s pyramid of success, wisdom is the principal thing, it is supreme. Christians should be keenly aware of that and constantly be asking themselves if what they are doing is the wise thing.

[For more information on faith, see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust’”].

**“purchases.”** The Hebrew noun is *qinyan* (#07075 קִנְיָן), and it refers to something that is acquired, something that is purchased, or wealth. It has overtones that are not just “getting” in the sense of accidentally finding or being given something, but rather that the person has purchased it or paid for it in some way. Some versions (cf. NASB, NET, Rotherham) use “acquire.” There is a great lesson here. Some people are offended that getting the truth costs them something, but it makes sense that something as valuable as truth has to be purchased in some way, including with both time and money. The Hebrew text has the root word for “purchase, buy, acquire,” three times in this verse, and a more literal translation of the text would be “Wisdom is the principal thing, *so* purchase wisdom; and with all your purchases, purchase understanding.” The point of the repetition is to emphasize that even though acquiring wisdom can be costly, it is worth the price.

Pro 4:10

**“and the years of your life will be many.”** This is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. We do not, and so there are people who obey God and their parents but who do not live long lives for any of a number of reasons: accidents, disease, crime, the Devil (who is the ruler of the world), and more. This promise will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Pro 4:12

**“if you run.”** The Hebrew text is clearly “if,” although some English versions think it is supposed to match the first stanza and thus translate it as “when.” But “when” is not really accurate here. Everyone walks a path of life—“walking” is unavoidable. But not everyone “runs” on it. It takes a lot to run in life, especially to run the distance race—running year after year. Runners need to trust God and have vision, courage, and tenacity. But it is worth it to spend the time it takes in prayer, seeking the will of the Lord, studying, getting wise counsel, and whatever else is needed, to be able to run for God—to give Him all you’ve got.

Pro 4:13

**“teaching…her…she.”** The Hebrew of this verse reflects something that occurs elsewhere occasionally in the Hebrew text, which is that strict attention is not always paid to the gender of a noun, which is in part due to the fact that Hebrew only has two genders: masculine and feminine; it does not have a neuter gender. In this case, “instruction” is a masculine noun, but put with feminine independent pronouns thrusting even a masculine noun into a personified female role akin to Lady Wisdom.

Pro 4:18

**“until the full *light of* day.”** The Hebrew phrase is literally, “until the day is established,” but that might be unclear to the English reader because we are not familiar with the idiomatic speech used in the Hebrew Bible. The meaning is “until the full light of day,” when the sun is up and the light is bright.

This is a very encouraging verse because it points to the reward in this life for being faithfully righteous. It takes time to develop an understanding of God and life, but that understanding brings a blessing and comfort to those that have it. Life may not get easier as we grow in the Lord, but our increased knowledge and understanding make life make more sense, and make it easier to bear hard times. This verse is not speaking of the full light of day being our next life—it is encouragement for this life—but the blessings of the next life might be considered an undertone in the verse.

Pro 4:19

**“*gloomy* darkness.”** The Hebrew word translated “gloomy darkness” is *aphelah* (#0653 אֲפֵלָה), and it refers to “darkness, gloominess, calamity.”[[9]](#footnote-29243) But *aphelah* can refer to moral darkness, a darkness in the mind and soul as well as “darkness” (evil) versus “light” (good). *Aphelah* is used only ten times in the whole Old Testament, whereas other words for “dark” or “night” are used dozens of times.

The first time *aphelah* is used it refers to the supernatural plague of darkness that came upon Egypt as a judgment from God for their hardness of heart (Exod. 10:22). The second use of *aphelah* is in Deuteronomy 28 and was part of the curse pronounced upon Israel if it turned from the Law and Covenant. In the fourth use, Proverbs 7:9, the naïve young man goes to visit Folly, the adulteress. He goes “in the evening of the day, in the middle of *the* night and *the gloomy* darkness,” a graphic description of the physical and moral darkness involved in the seduction and adultery, as well as a good description of the moral darkness involved when people reject Wisdom and choose Folly, which is the wider context of Proverbs. The other uses of *aphelah* are Isaiah 8:22; 58:10; 59:9; Jeremiah 23:12; Joel 2:2; and Zephaniah 1:15.

Different versions and commentators have tried to capture the fuller meaning of *aphelah*, and so besides just “darkness,” English translations include “deep darkness” (ESV); “gloomy darkness” (NET); “darkest gloom” (HCSB); “total darkness” (NLT); and “night” (NJB). Michael Fox translates the verse: “The way of wicked is as the murk,” and quotes Ploger that this is “the darkness of their moral irresponsibility surrounding them.”[[10]](#footnote-19958) Bruce Waltke writes: “Without the moral light of either conscience within or of revelation without they do not know the cause of their calamity, for they see no connection between sin and death.”[[11]](#footnote-25160) Waltke also references Meinhold in noticing that this is the first time in Proverbs that the sinner “does not know” what he stumbles over, but that same judgment is made of the unfaithful wife (Prov. 5:6); the woman Folly (Prov. 9:13); and the ones seduced by her (Prov. 7:23; 9:18). These sinners do not know the ramifications of what they are doing or the consequences of their actions.

Sinners generally do not realize that when they begin to choose sin over obedience to God, their heart begins to harden and their conscience slowly becomes “seared as with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). The human heart is never stable, never “fixed.” It is constantly changing. That is good news for the sinner who wants to change, and it is why repentance works and people can change their behavior and thought patterns. But it is bad news for the person who wants to ignore God to indulge themselves in sin. Eventually, any tug of the conscience goes away. Also, eventually if not quickly, the consequences of sin become manifest in a person’s life, not to mention the unseen consequences to come on Judgment Day. Sin has done its work, darkness pervades, and the person does not know what they are stumbling over. That is why godly people must keep speaking up. Hope and help almost always must come from “the outside,” even if the outside help a person gets is a distant memory of a conversation or confrontation offering deliverance through Jesus Christ. There is always a chance that a sinner will hear the truth, come to realize their situation, and repent.

Pro 4:22

**“body.”** The Hebrew text is literally “flesh,” but in this case, it refers to the whole body. This is an example of the figure of speech synecdoche, which generally occurs when a whole is put for a part of, or as here, where a part is put for the whole for emphasis (the emphasis occurs because the statement catches our attention). Literally, “flesh” excludes the blood, bones, etc., but in this case, those things are included. One way we can be sure that this verse is a synecdoche is that we would not normally think in terms of “all their flesh” (or “their whole flesh”), so the inclusion of the word “all” alerts us to the synecdoche. E. W. Bullinger has an entire subsection on the word “flesh” being put for the body in his entry on synecdoche.[[12]](#footnote-16650)

[See word study on “synecdoche.”]

Pro 4:23

**“issues.”** The word “issues” is not an exact translation, but it captures the sense of the text, and especially so because the Hebrew text is hard to literally translate here. The Hebrew word is *totsaah* (#08444 תּוֹצָאָה) and means a source, a border, an exit, an outgoing, extremity, or end. We think Bruce Waltke gets the sense correct, and writes: “The noun…designates the actions of the verb, the “goings out.” The cartographer uses it for the ‘exits’ of a city (Ezek. 48:30) and, by metonymy, for ‘borders,’ ‘extremities’ of a territory (1 Chron. 5:16); the rescued psalmist uses it for ‘escaping’ from/before death (Ps. 68:20[21]). The point here is that the heart is the source of the body’s activities.”[[13]](#footnote-14040)

Michael Fox writes that the Hebrew word means “outgoings,” and says, “In 20 of its 22 occurrences [*totsaah*] is a geographical term meaning ‘extremities,’ ‘outskirts,’ a sense inappropriate here. The verse designates the heart as the source of the ‘outgoings.’ Context requires understanding the word as the process or action of departure. In other words, life proceeds from the heart, which in this context is the inner core of the person’s life, not just what he is thinking at the time; the heart is life’s source.”[[14]](#footnote-17626)

Jesus confirmed that the heart is the source of much of what we say and do (Matt. 15:18-19; Mark 7:20-23), and because of that, we can easily see why the Word of God tells us to guard our hearts more closely than anything else we guard. The heart needs to be guarded because it is constantly changing—we cannot “get our hearts right” and then neglect them, thinking they will stay “right” forever.

The Bible has a lot to say about how a person’s heart can change. For example, it can turn directions (1 Kings 11:2-3, 9), become hard (Exod. 4:21; Josh. 11:20; Heb. 4:7); become proud or lifted up (Deut. 8:14; 2 Chron. 26:16; Ezek. 28:5); become humble (2 Chron. 32:26); become tender (2 Chron. 34:27); become strong (Ps. 10:17); become broken or be healed from being broken (Ps. 69:20; 147:3); be cleansed (Ps. 73:13); be destroyed (Eccl. 7:7); become “fat,” meaning stubborn (Isa. 6:10; Acts 28:27); be deceived (Isa. 44:20); become dull and stubborn (Matt. 13:15), be nourished (James 5:5); be established (James 5:8), be purified (James 4:8).

The great gatekeeper of the heart is the mind. Things get into our hearts through the mind, which is why it is so important to watch what we see and hear, and control our thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says to think about things that are true, pure, righteous, etc. Peace is also one of the guards that watches over our hearts (Phil. 4:7). It is also vital to control our actions. Uncontrolled actions only reinforce any anger or evil that is already in us. That is one reason why “self-control” is one of the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:23).

The thoughts in our minds are constantly changing, which is why we use the phrase, “I changed my mind.” But the heart—the core of our mind and character—is more constant and changes much more slowly, and so it is a much better indicator of who we truly are as individuals. That is why the Bible says that God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7), and why He tests our hearts (Ps. 7:9; 17:3; Jer. 11:20; 1 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 2:23). People who want to please God must take Proverbs 4:23 seriously, and work diligently to guard their hearts so that they become more and more pure before God.

There is a great war going on between God and Satan for people’s hearts. The Devil knows that if he can win people’s hearts they will suffer a lot in this life and the next. For Satan to win someone’s heart they don’t have to openly worship him; they just have to think and act in ungodly ways. If we do not control our thought life and our actions and bring them in line with the Word of God, our heart will change and we will slowly become more ungodly, and sadly, we will often not even be aware we are being more and more ungodly. Solomon was the wisest man on the earth at one time, but he gave in to his sensual desires and his heart changed. He ended his life with lots of money, with 1,000 wives and concubines, and worshiping pagan gods (1 Kings 10:14-11:10), but Satan had won his heart and he “did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (1 Kings 11:6). The blessing of God was off of his life. Wise Christians guard their heart and diligently watch what they see, hear, think, and do.

[For more information on “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

Pro 4:25

**“Focus.”** The Hebrew word is *nabat* (#05027 נָבַט), which means “to look,” and here the verb is in the hiphil aspect, meaning to regard with one’s mind and sight. So it seemed like “focus” brought out the meaning of the verse more than just “look.”

God is not telling us in this verse to physically just look straight ahead and never look around; that would be foolish. In the idiom of Scripture, looking straight ahead is looking at the things of God, and also looking at the future. In Scripture, people who look to the side or turn to the side are turning to the ways of evil.

**Proverbs Chapter 5**

Pro 5:2

**“discretion.”** The Hebrew word is plural, but we express it in the singular in English.

Pro 5:4

**“in the end she.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the end of her.” This is the genitive of agency, that is, it refers to the end that she brings about.[[15]](#footnote-24373)

This is one of the many verses that show us that the truly wise person is the one who looks at the end result of a thought or action. Many things that seem “good” or “fun” in the beginning have a terrible, horrific, end.

**“two-edged sword.”** The Hebrew is literally, “a sword of mouths,” where “mouth” is plural, and the implied meaning is “a sword of two mouths” because swords often have two edges. The use of “the mouth of the sword” was a common idiom that is almost always translated “the edge of the sword” in English Bibles (*Young’s Literal Translation* is an exception). There are more than 30 verses in the Old Testament in which swords are personified and people are said to be killed “by the mouth of the sword,” as if the sword was eating the enemy (cf. Gen. 34:26; Exod. 17:13; Num. 21:24; Deut. 13:15; 20:13; Josh. 6:21; 8:24; 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39; Judg. 1:8, 25; etc.).

Pro 5:6

**“*yet* she is not aware *of it*.”** The Hebrew verb can be read as a second-person masculine singular (“you”) or a third-person feminine singular (“she”), which is why the versions differ (“you” KJV, NAB, YLT; “she” CJB, CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT). The vast majority of the versions favor “she,” and we agree (although it is true that “you” also may not know her ways are unstable and wander from the will of God). The flow of the context is about the woman and how she is, and the subject does not change until the next verse, with the opening, “But now, my sons” (Prov. 5:7), so we favored the reading “she.”

One of the things that makes the ungodly so dangerous to believers is that they are so sincere. Although there are some of them who have a sense that what they are doing is wrong, a large percentage of them think the way they are living their lives is fine. This verse is speaking about an adulteress, but the lesson applies to any sin the ungodly commit; they are so convinced that what they are doing is fine that they speak and act with passion and conviction, and many times that pulls the godly into their ungodly ways. The New Testament warns about this in a plain statement of fact: “Bad company ruins good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). To maintain godliness in an ungodly world, the believer must know how God wants us to live (which comes in large part from knowing the Bible), and then have the courage of conviction to say “No!” to sin.

Pro 5:18

**“be continually blessed.”** The Hebrew verb, “blessed” is in the participle form, thus occurring over a period of time, hence the translation, “be continually blessed.”

**“wife of your youth.”** The genitive is almost certainly temporal, and means the wife you married when you were young, rather than meaning the wife you have now while you are young. Stable marriages are an important part of a godly society.

Pro 5:19

**“a graceful mountain goat.”** In this text, the father (going back to Prov. 5:7) is trying to inspire his son to stop his adultery and become re-infatuated with his wife by telling him that she is loving, beautiful, and satisfying. The compliments in the ancient and agrarian society of the Old Testament can seem like insults today, but we can be sure they were not insults to the women who received those compliments at the time. In Song of Songs 4:1 and 6:5, the lover pays his beloved a series of compliments that would not be taken well by women today. He says, “your hair is like a flock of goats” (Song 4:1; 6:5), “your teeth are like a flock of sheep” (Song 4:2), “your neck is like the tower of David” (Song 4:4), and “your two breasts are like two fawns” (Song 4:5). He also refers to her as a garden that is locked up, or bolted closed (Song 4:12), and says she is as awesome as an army marching with banners (Song 6:10), which is a compliment that may relate well to men, but most women would not think that way.

Cultural idioms such as these compliments are one reason why Bible versions differ and sometimes why the Bible can be hard to understand. Some versions, such as the REV, think it is important to reproduce the wording of the original text and give the reader a window into the biblical culture. We trust that although most modern women would not like to receive those compliments themselves, they understand that those compliments warmed the hearts of the women of the time. Other versions might have a different point of view, and adapt the compliment to something more complimentary to women today, capturing the idea but not the vocabulary of the ancient world. The Hebrew word in this verse is “mountain goat,” and in the culture of the time they were considered graceful and beautiful.

The father has the right idea. It is important for men to look for the love and beauty in their wives. It is always the case that there might be a prostitute or an adulteress who seems “more exciting” than your wife, but as Proverbs says, in the end, she is bitter as wormwood and her path leads down to death.

**“satisfy.”** The Hebrew verb is *ravah* (#07301 רָוָה), which in the qal form means to be filled, but in the piel form, which it is here, means to drench, saturate, “make saturated with a liquid.”[[16]](#footnote-17011) So a literal meaning might be, “let her breasts drench you.” This could be a kind of hyperbole and would not necessarily have to refer to the man drinking the woman’s breast milk, but instead just being satisfied with her love, as the context indicates. However, the text certainly does not exclude the possibility of the man drinking her breast milk, because in biblical times big families were common and women were often pregnant or nursing, and also women regularly breastfed or supplementally breastfed until the baby was two or even older. For the husband to drink breast milk is considered erotic and/or bonding by some people.

**“going astray.”** The Hebrew word appears three times in five verses (Prov. 5:19, 20, 23). The Hebrew word is *shagah* (#07686 שָׁגָה), and it means “to go astray, stray, err, go wrong, meander, swerve,” and also refers to being intoxicated, drunk from wine or beer. The man “is drunk,” “wanders about,” or “loses himself” in her love in Prov. 5:19, and also “errs” and “strays” in his folly in Prov. 5:23, but it is best to bring the Hebrew into the same English in all three verses to show the connection the father is making. The interplay between the three verses is significant, but it is hard to find one translation that fits all three verses. We settled with “going astray,” which works quite well in all three verses.

Pro 5:20

**“go astray.”** See commentary on Proverbs 5:19, “going astray.”

**“embrace the bosom.”** The Hebrew translated “bosom” is *cheq* (#02436 חֵיק), and it designates the lower part of the torso below the breasts. Here, “embrace the bosom” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Pro 5:21

**“For a person’s ways.”** The Hebrew text (which is literally, “roads of a man”), and the context, indicate that this verse is directed to men, but of course, they apply to women as well. However, the primary context of this verse is the husband leaving his wife to be with an adulteress, and the father is reminding his son that God is watching. Implied in the culture, but not stated, is that God is not only watching, but His angel scribes are taking notes, and recording the actions of the man in the record books, which will be opened on Judgment Day (Mal. 3:16; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 20:12).

Pro 5:22

**“his *own* iniquities will capture him.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). The word “own” is added for clarity in English. The Bible makes it clear that God is not the one who decides who gets punished for sin and who does not. God does not make people sinful or holy, and God does not randomly pass out retribution for sin. People are captured, suffer, and are eventually punished by and because of their own sin.

**“will capture him…seized by.”** This is the figure of speech personification, where iniquity and sin are portrayed as people who capture and seize and tie up people who defy God by acting sinfully.

Pro 5:23

**“He will die because of lack of discipline.”** The Hebrew word *musar* (#04148 מוּסָר), normally translated “instruction,” is better translated as “discipline” in this context. In the biblical culture, if a person failed to apply what they had been taught, it was spoken of as if he had not been taught, even though it was through his lack of discipline that he had not applied the learning he had received. However, in our Western way of thinking, we do not say the person was not taught, we say he does not have the discipline to apply the teaching. Thus, although the Hebrew word is “instruction,” in this context we would say “discipline,” as most English versions do. The undisciplined person will also become poor (see commentary on Prov. 21:17).

**“abundance.”** The Hebrew word is *rob* (#07230 רֹב), and it means “greatness, abundance, multitude.” In this context, it can mean both “great” in the sense of “huge,” or it can mean “great in number.” The more primary meaning in this context seems to be “abundance,” although the man certainly committed some huge sins—so the man had a lot of sins, and some of them were big sins. The native Hebrew reader would see both meanings and get the full picture.

**“goes astray.”** See commentary on Proverbs 5:19, “going astray.”

**Proverbs Chapter 6**

Pro 6:1

**“put up security for.”** This proverb is almost 3,000 years old, yet it speaks of a person co-signing a loan for a neighbor. It has always been the case that people who have money (which in the biblical culture might mean you have cows, goats, or land with fruit trees) have been asked to secure a loan for someone who is needy. The person who co-signs “puts up security” or “becomes security,” or, in the more precise financial terms of many versions, “become surety” for the one who gives the loan.

If the person who got the loan defaults, the “surety”—the one who promised to pay and put up the security for the loan—owes the money to the lender. If we were to put Proverbs 6:1-2 into much more colloquial English, we would say something like: “My son, if you have co-signed a loan for your neighbor, if you have shaken hands with a stranger, then you have been ensnared by the words of your mouth.” At that point, the father’s advice is to go and humble yourself and get freed from the commitment, and don’t rest until you are released.

Seeing the wisdom of this proverb could have saved many people a lot of grief. Co-signing a loan is rarely a wise thing to do. People who constantly need money are in that position for a reason. They may consistently have bad judgment and make poor decisions, they may not have learned to deny themselves the pleasures that drain their resources, they may not be willing to take the risk to quit a dead-end job so they can find other work and make more money, they may have loads of good ideas none of which actually work out, or they may just be lazy or not know how to work smart and hard. In any case, no matter how desperate their pleas, or how “good” and “profitable” their ideas are, the wise thing to do is to not take on their debt.

The needy person will try many angles to get you to help them get money: paint grand pictures of how wonderful things will be, tug on your heartstrings, or try to make you feel guilty for not helping. Follow the proverb and walk in wisdom; you will avoid many heartaches.

**“entered into an agreement.”** The Hebrew is more literally “struck your hands,” although the word “struck” can also be “clap” and can also refer to thrusting hands together as people would in a handshake. Thus, the Hebrew is an idiom that describes a custom that would have been the same as, or similar to, our modern handshake. It makes perfect sense linguistically that the Hebrew custom was not exactly described by the words involved. We do the same thing; for example, our modern “handshake” may not be a hand “shake.” Many times people today make an agreement by just clasping each other’s hand but not actually “shaking” it at all, but we still call that a “handshake.” So this verse is describing an agreement that was almost certainly made by some kind of handshake or clasping hands, not just by people who hit their hands together.

The origin of the custom of striking hands together, and the handshake, and exactly how they were done, is lost in ancient history. Like many things that were common and part of ordinary life, they were written about but never described. Here in Proverbs, written earlier than 900 BC, the custom of striking hands was already so well-known that the writer did not have to describe it—it is obvious it was already being used to seal an agreement, just as we today use a handshake to seal a deal (or at least some people still do). Other than slim epigraphical evidence like this in Proverbs, early material evidence comes from Greece. In the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, there is a bas-relief of soldiers shaking hands on a funerary stele that dates from the fifth century BC. So the handshake was not only practiced in the ancient Middle East, but in other places in the world as well.

Pro 6:3

**“be set free.”** Although some versions say, “free yourself,” the person cannot free himself, he has to be set free from the one he made an agreement with.

**“hand.”** Here, “hand” has the common idiomatic meaning of “power” or “authority.”

**“Humble yourself.”** The Hebrew is literally, “bring yourself low.” Arrogance and high-mindedness do not help a person win the favor of others.

Pro 6:5

**“from a hunter.”** This is the reading of the Septuagint, and there are a number of reasons why many scholars think it is to be preferred over the Hebrew, which reads, “like a gazelle from the hand” (although some English versions simply add to the text and say, “like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,” cf. ESV, NIV). The “hunter” in the first stanza parallels the “fowler” in the second stanza.

The gazelle and birds are wonderful object lessons in nature, and are chosen in this verse because they are both very good at escaping trouble. Someone who has entered into a bad agreement has to be very committed and persistent to get out of it.

**“fowler.”** A bird is a “fowl,” and a person who hunts birds is a “fowler.” The older English word for some of the guns we now call a “shotgun” was a “fowling piece.”

Pro 6:6

**“lazy one.”** The Hebrew word is *atsel* (#06102 עָצֵל), and it means “lazy, idle, slow, sluggish.” The opposite is “diligent.” The word occurs 14 times in Proverbs (Prov. 6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13, 14, 15, 16). It refers to one who is habitually lazy. According to Proverbs, the lazy man should learn from others, even nature itself (Prov. 6:6); will become poor (Prov. 6:9-11; 24:30-34); is a problem for those who rely on him (Prov. 10:26); has great desires, even craving and coveting throughout his days, but nothing to show for it (Prov. 13:4; 21:26); has a lifestyle that causes pain to himself and others (Prov. 15:19); goes hungry even when there is an opportunity to get food (Prov. 19:24; 26:15); will not do hard, productive work, so he will lack in life (Prov. 20:4) and may even die both physically and everlastingly (Prov. 21:25); makes up excuses to keep him from working (Prov. 22:13; 26:13); spends too much time in bed (Prov. 26:14); and thinks he knows more than everyone else (Prov. 26:16). Laziness is a character flaw, surely, but it is more than that. Proverbs contrasts the lazy person with the upright person (Prov. 15:19) and the righteous person (Prov. 21:26), so as well as being a character flaw, it is a moral issue. The lazy person is poor, but is never equated with the other “poor” in Proverbs whose poverty is beyond their control. Thus it is important to notice that, while generosity to the poor and needy is extolled in Proverbs (cf. commentary on Prov. 19:17), no one is instructed to give to the lazy who are poor. Proverbs 21:25 should arrest our attention, because it says, “The desire of the lazy *man* kills him.” The use of terms relating to life and death in Proverbs mean more than just life or death on this earth, and often extend to everlasting life or death. This is one of those verses, and the lazy person, who “never gets around” to learning about God, fearing God, and obeying God, will die not only temporally, but eternally.

Pro 6:9

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 6:10

**“Just a little.”** Notice this sentence is in quotation marks. This is either the son talking back to the father, or the father mimicking the words of the son as to why he won’t get up. The son wants, “just a little more sleep.”

**“folding of the arms.”** The Hebrew uses the word “hands” but culturally the “hand” included the wrist and forearm. This is why Jesus was nailed to a cross through his “hands” but the part of Jesus’ body the nails went through was his wrists. The person lying on his bed ignored the father’s advice to get up, and folded his arms, which was likely comfortable, but also likely had overtones of rejection—that he was refusing his father’s request.

Pro 6:11

**“and your poverty will come.”** The undisciplined person will become poor (see commentary on Prov. 21:17).

Pro 6:12

**“person of Belial.”** What do we know about people of “Belial” [*beliya`al*] from the OT itself? From Proverbs 6:12-14, we learn that these people have perverse mouths and hearts, are generally dishonest, seek to sow discord, and endeavor to lead others away from God. In cultures with many pagan gods, they may lead people to worship other gods or idols (Deut. 13:13), or in atheistic societies simply try to turn people away from God. They plot evil against Yahweh (Nah. 1:11); they defy the righteous worship of God (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22); they mock at justice (Prov. 19:28); they cause division (1 Sam. 10:27; 30:22; 2 Sam. 20:1); they are stingy and selfish (Deut. 15:9); they are unreasonable and committed to foolishness (1 Sam. 25:17, 25); they will give false testimony even if it means the death of the one they are lying about (1 Kings 21:10, 13); they will engage in illicit sex (1 Sam. 2:12, 22), even rape, including homosexual rape (Judg. 19:22); they will gather around powerful people to destroy godly society (2 Chron. 13:7; cf. the way Bar-jesus, who was called “a son of the Devil,” attached himself to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus in Acts 13:6-10); they plot evil (Prov. 16:27); they will burn others with their words (Prov. 16:27); and they need to be handled with spiritual power, not fleshly power (2 Sam. 23:6). Although there are people who engage in some of these activities who are not children of the Devil but are simply caught up in sin, the above activities are the kinds of things that children of the Devil are consistently involved in.

Both Jesus and Paul referred to certain evil people as children of the Devil (John 8:44; Acts 13:10), and given the information in the Bible about these people of Belial, it seems to miss the point to simply call them “worthless,” or “scoundrels.” It seems clear that the Bible is giving us information about the behavior of those people who have a connection to the Adversary such that they take on the character and desires of the Adversary. Jesus made this clear when he said to certain religious leaders, “You are of *your* father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44). Given the information the Bible provides, it will be most informative if we refer to these people as people “of Belial.”

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Pro 6:14

**“strife.”** The Hebrew word is plural, indicating that the wicked person initiates and also contributes to a lot of strife.

Pro 6:16

**“his soul.”** This is a good example of the use of “soul” meaning “himself.”

[For more information, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Pro 6:20

**“commandments.”** The Hebrew is singular, “the commandment,” but the singular is being used to reflect the whole body of the father’s teaching, so we would say “commandments.”

**“instruction.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 6:22

**“she will lead…she will watch…she will speak.”** The Hebrew text uses the feminine singular pronoun “she,” instead of “they” which seems to refer to both the father’s commandment (“commandment” is a feminine noun) and the mother’s teaching, her “Torah” (“Torah” is a feminine noun) as one body of teaching (cf. Prov. 6:20, 23). This may be because the commandment is part of the Torah, or because they are both part of Wisdom. The active verb has the commandment and Torah (or Wisdom) doing the leading, watching, and speaking, which is the figure of speech personification.

It is possible that the commandment and Torah are just other names for Wisdom, or they could also be separate personifications, as if Wisdom had other female friends that helped her bless and protect believers. Because there always has to be gender agreement between the noun and pronoun in languages that ascribe gender to nouns, we might think that the “she” should be an “it” (which is the way it is translated in many versions). The “it” makes the verse easier to understand for most English readers, and still retains the personification. However, it seems that God was really trying to drive the personification home to the reader and even went out of His way to pick nouns that are feminine and would be joined with the pronoun “she.” The words, “Wisdom” (#02451 חָכְמָה), “Torah” (#08451 תּוֹרָה), “commandment” (#04687 מִצְוָה), “understanding” (#0998 בִּינָה), “prudence” (#06195 עָרְמָה), and “discernment” (#08394 תָּבוּן) are all feminine nouns.

There are a number of lessons that seem to be subtly embedded in the feminine personifications. One would be that if the man is attracted to women, then wisdom, Torah, and understanding are much better choices than a strange woman, an adulteress. Another may be the value of wise counsel. We all need wise counsel and wise friends to give it, and Wisdom is not doing everything by herself, she has female friends to help her watch over people.

Pro 6:23

**“instruction.”** The Hebrew is “Torah.” See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 6:25

**“eyes.”** The Hebrew is literally “eyelids,” but that seems to be a synecdoche; the part of the eye for the whole eye. Although women seem to have always batted their eyelids to be seductive, in ancient times just as today, women painted and decorated their eyes in many different ways to bring attention to their eyes. Job named one of his daughters “Keren-happuch,” which seems to mean, “horn [or dish] of eye paint” (Job 42:14).

Pro 6:28

**“burned.”** The Hebrew is a different word than in Prov. 6:27, and an alternative reading is “branded.” If you step on hot coals, the coals burn marks into your feet as if you were branded. But today we use a “brand” for identification, so for the sake of clarity, we repeated the idea of being burned.

Pro 6:30

**“feed himself.”** The Hebrew is literally, “feed his soul,” where “soul” is being used for the person himself. This is an example of when using a literal translation in the receptor language would cause confusion because of the way words are used in the receptor language. The phrase, “feed his soul” is literal from the Hebrew, but in English when we use the phrase “feed my soul,” we do not mean with food, we use the phrase of mental rejuvenation: “Being here at the ocean feeds my soul.” Thus, although it can be good to keep “soul” in the English when it is in the Hebrew text, the REV made an exception here for clarity.

Pro 6:31

**“seven times.”** The Mosaic Law said four or five times, depending on what was stolen (Exod. 22:1). This is an example of the cultural use of “seven” to refer to completeness. The man will pay back completely.

**“all the wealth of his house.”** The Mosaic Law said if a thief did not have the means to pay back what the Law required, “he must be sold [into slavery] to pay for his theft” (Exod. 22:3). Although there were times it came to that, the man would sell everything he owned first, and then was allowed to sell his children into slavery (2 Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:5). If he still did not have enough to cover his debt for theft, then he himself would be sold into slavery. That slavery lasted seven years (Deut. 15:9; 31:10).

Pro 6:32

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart.

In this case, the man who commits adultery does not lack emotion or passion, in fact, he probably has plenty of that. What he lacks is “good sense.” The range of meaning of the Hebrew word “heart” in this context is reflected in the number and variation in the English translations of this verse: “void of understanding” (ASV, DBY); “without all sense” or “lacks sense” (CJB, HCSB, ESV); “lacks wisdom” (NET); “lacks judgment” (NIV84); “is an utter fool” (NLT); and the Amplified Bible says, “lacks heart and understanding (moral principle and prudence).” There is no way to capture the full meaning of the Hebrew word *leb* in this verse; there is simply no English word that carries the same connotations as the Hebrew word “heart.”

Thankfully, lacking good sense is a correctable problem if the person would begin to listen to Wisdom and act on what she says (cf. Prov. 1:20-33). In fact, that is part of the purpose of Proverbs—to teach people wisdom and good sense. If a person refuses to learn wisdom, then he is guilty before God on Judgment Day, which has very serious consequences, possibly even everlasting death. The seriousness of lacking sense and acting foolishly is an important reason that believers have a responsibility to try to get people to believe in God, get saved, and then begin to acquire good sense.

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.” For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

Pro 6:33

**“he will find.”** That is the reading of the Hebrew text and it takes some thought to properly understand it. The key is thinking about what the man thought he would find when he entered into the adulterous relationship, unwisely listening to the flattery and lies of the adulteress. She promised him lovemaking in sumptuous circumstances and good food, but when it was over what he really “found” was not love (she did not, after all, have any intention of actually being in love with him), but rather affliction and dishonor.

**“affliction.”** The Hebrew word is *nega* (#05061 נֶגַע), and it means a blow, thus a wound, and it also can mean a plague or the marks caused by a sickness or plague.[[17]](#footnote-15496) If the man is caught committing adultery with another man’s wife, he will almost certainly be beaten up by her family—actually, both he and the woman might be executed, although that punishment was not always enforced.

The Hebrew word’s meaning of “plague” also adds the possibility that the man will get a sexually transmitted disease, although the word “plague” is sometimes used to refer to other afflictions besides actual disease, for example, “That person is plagued by depression,” or “Kansas seems to be plagued by tornados.” Unstated in this verse, but stated elsewhere in Proverbs, is the fact that not only will the woman’s family be angry and vengeful, if the man does not repent, he will face God’s anger on Judgment Day. The way to avoid all the pain that can come from adultery is not to do it.

Pro 6:35

**“be persuaded.”** The Hebrew uses the idiom, “lift up the face of.”

**Proverbs Chapter 7**

Pro 7:2

**“instruction.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 7:4

**“relative.”** The idea is of the closest friendship.[[18]](#footnote-20083) It does not mean “blood relative,” but more like we call intimate friends of the family, “aunt” or “uncle” as an honorary position.

Pro 7:5

**“to keep you from.”** It is important to see that the things that keep us from the strange woman and foreign woman are the things collectively back to Proverbs 7:1.

**“foreign woman.”** Literally, “foreign.” She is another man’s wife, and in the biblical culture, there would be little to no chance of meeting her. She is a stranger, but in this context an adulteress.

**“flatters with her words.”** The literal Hebrew is more like, “makes her words smooth.” Michael Fox says this idiom “always refers to insincere talk (or glances, in Ps. 36:3).[[19]](#footnote-11274)

Pro 7:7

**“youths.”** The Hebrew is literally “sons,” but the reading, “I saw among the sons” is awkward in English.

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, the young man lacked “good sense.”

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 7:9

**“at dusk.”** Young men with nothing to do would walk the streets of a city through the evening and night, just as people today go to various places and “just hang out” until the wee hours of the morning.

**“the middle of the night and the *gloomy* darkness.”** This phrase confuses people because it cannot be “dusk” and the middle of the night. Many translators try to get around this in their translations, but that is what the text says. The second phrase is somewhat hyperbolic and also metaphorical. It is hyperbolic to show that what is happening between the young man and the adulteress is happening in the dark when people cannot see well, and the “*gloomy* darkness” is a double entendre for the fact that it is dark outside, and there is also “darkness” in what they are doing—they are “walking in darkness.”

[For more on “gloomy darkness,” see commentary on Prov. 4:19.]

Pro 7:10

**“the woman.”** (As per the LXX, and followed by the ESV). The woman of verse 8.

**“dressed as a prostitute.”** She was not a prostitute, she was another man’s wife, but she dressed as a prostitute to make her actions seem more legitimate. Prostitution was an accepted practice in the culture of the Bible, although certainly not condoned by Mosaic Law. This is the Hebrew word for a street prostitute, not a “sacred prostitute,” someone connected to cultic temple prostitution. The fact that the text says she was dressed like a prostitute almost certainly means that she had a veil on (cf. Gen. 38:14). The veil would identify her as a prostitute and also hide her true identity, which, as the wife of a homeowner in town, she would want to conceal from the public.

**“cunning.”** The Hebrew word means “guarded,” “secret,” or “hidden.” Her true self, her true motives, and the true consequences for being with her are all hidden from the unsuspecting person.

Pro 7:12

**“public plazas.”** The Hebrew refers to a broad, open place. We would think of the city square. The Hebrew is plural, suggesting that she is all over the city at the various open places (for example, if the city had more than one gate there would be more than one broad plaza), not just close to home.

**“at every corner.”** One adulteress cannot be at every corner. The text is making the point that there are lots of wanton women, just as there are lots of immoral men. You can find trouble in lots of places if you go looking for it. The key is to want to maintain a godly walk and learning to avoid trouble.

Pro 7:13

**“shamelessly.”** The literal Hebrew is an idiom, “with a strong face,” meaning that she has conviction. She is not doubtful or double-minded about her sexual immorality. She knows what she is doing and is not deterred in any way by the idea that it is wrong or that people, including her husband, will be hurt. It is a good lesson for people to learn that such evil people exist in our society. Sometimes Christians are so afraid of making a bad judgment about a person that we make excuses for people who are openly evil. That is not wise. As Jesus taught us, we are to judge with a righteous judgment (John 7:24), and if a person is evil, that means calling them evil. Jesus set the example for us (Matt. 23:13-33). Paul put overtly sexually immoral people out of the church (1 Cor. 5:2, 13).

Pro 7:14

**“I *made* peace offerings.”** The Hebrew is highly idiomatic. The Hebrew sentence has no verb, and simply reads, “Peace offerings before me,” which meant she was for some reason obligated to offer a peace offering. The woman had offered her peace offering that day, so she had fresh meat at home for a feast. When a person offered a peace offering, they got to eat part of the meat, which was a blessing. The great majority of people did not eat much meat in the biblical culture. Most of the people were poor and did not have herds or flocks that were big enough to allow people to regularly kill and eat an animal. Also, there was no reliable way to preserve the meat in that hot and often humid climate, so any animal that was killed had to be eaten quickly.

Also, when an animal was killed for food for the family, it was usually an older animal that could no longer bear young, give milk, or support the herd and family in other ways, so the meat was often not the best quality. In contrast, the meat from sacrifices offered to God was choice meat, because God required young and unblemished animals to be sacrificed to Him. This ungodly woman was using the good, fresh meat that she had at home as extra leverage to get the man into her house.

[For information on the Peace Offering (called the “Fellowship Offering” in some versions), see Lev. 3 and 7:11-34, but especially Lev. 7:15-16.]

Pro 7:15

**“came out to ... diligently seek your face.”** The woman is a liar. She flatters this particular young man, when in actuality she would have willingly been with any young man. She is rebellious and does not stay at home, but waits outside for people she can deceive into participating in her sin (Prov. 7:11-12). Sin weaves a web in people’s lives with many interconnecting strands. Sexual sin is life-dominating—the sinner must constantly plan how to have the illicit sex and not get caught, and weave a web of lies to cover his or her sin. This adulteress thinks nothing of lying to the young man, lying is part of the sin of adultery.

**“face.”** The Hebrew is “face,” here meaning the person himself, particularly in a close or even intimate relationship.

Pro 7:16

**“embroidered fabrics.”** The meaning of the Hebrew is debated, something that is reflected in the translations. For example, “striped cloths” (ASV); “colored linen” (HCSB, ESV); “richly colored fabric” (NET); “embroidered stuff” (NJB); and “dark-hued stuff” (Rotherham). What is not debated is that the adulteress had gone out of her way to make her bed alluring. There is a lesson here for married couples: people never lose their desire for romance, pleasure, and special treatment. If an adulteress can make her bed special to lure in victims, married couples can do it to keep the marriage fresh and fun.

Pro 7:18

**“Come.”** She is pressuring him to act quickly.

**“love.”** The Hebrew word we translate “love” is in the plural, meaning a lot of love, or “much love.” The woman entices the man, saying they would have “much love,” or make love all night, “until the morning.”

Pro 7:19

**“*my* husband.”** The woman will not be able to hide the fact she is married when she gets the young man into her house, so she comes right out and addresses the subject in a way designed to allay any concerns he may have.

**“home.”** The Hebrew is literally, “at his house,” but translating it that way might confuse the reader as to whether her husband had another house.

Pro 7:20

**“come home.”** The Hebrew is literally, “to his house.” See commentary on Proverbs 7:19, “home.”

Pro 7:21

**“great.”** The Hebrew word “great” can also mean “many,” but the word “persuasion” is singular in the Hebrew, so we felt “great” was the better choice here. The woman had “great” (and many) persuasion; she pressured him in many ways, and allured him with the promise of good food and all-night sex.

**“seduces.”** The Hebrew verb is causative. This is expressed differently in different versions. She pressured him until he yielded.

**“seductiveness of her lips.”** The Hebrew uses the idiom, “with the smoothness of her lips.”

Pro 7:22

**“Suddenly.”** This paints the picture of the young man who has been talking with the woman, considering her words and her proposition, and then “suddenly,” impulsively, he reacts and follows her. This is the opposite of wisdom. Wisdom considers her ways (Prov. 21:29), while the man is acting impulsively on his carnal desires.

Pro 7:23

**“until an arrow pierces his liver.”** The snare holds the stag until it can be killed, but here the thought is brought over and applied to the man as well. He is led astray (Prov. 7:21) and becomes like an ox going to the slaughter, like a stag caught in a snare about to be killed by an arrow. But the text is such that it can be the man who is pierced by the arrow and killed, and this is confirmed in Proverbs 7:26. The woman’s sin “pierces” the man, who dies. By his willing participation in evil, he eventually becomes evil and suffers the consequences.

Pro 7:25

**“ways.”** The Hebrew word is usually translated “roads,” but here “ways” fits better in English.

Pro 7:27

**“*many* paths to Sheol.”** Sheol is the state of being dead, and in this context, it refers to being physically dead in this life, and also everlastingly dead in the next life. It is a profound statement that the house of the adulteress has many roads leading to Sheol. Adultery is a life-dominating sin, and people involved in it not only are involved in sexual sin, they are covenant breakers, liars, and hurtful to others. Roads like that lead to death.

**Proverbs Chapter 8**

Pro 8:1

**“discernment.”** Here “discernment” (the REV could well have capitalized “Discernment”) is personified as a woman, along with Wisdom. Proverbs portrays Wisdom in association with other female helpers (e.g., “discernment” “understanding” and “discretion”; see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

Pro 8:2

**“takes her stand.”** The Hebrew reads “took her stand,” making the point that she has been there calling, but she is still there, so we would more naturally say “takes.”

Pro 8:3

**“Beside.”** The Hebrew text uses the word “hand,” and would very literally read something like, “to the hand of the gates,” but the meaning of the phrase in this context is “beside,” “beside the gates.”[[20]](#footnote-30802)

**“the gates.”** The elders and important men of the city sat in the city gates (see commentary on Prov. 1:21).

**“opening.”** The Hebrew reads, “mouth.” The “mouth” of the city was the city gate, the entrance to the city.

Pro 8:4

**“humankind.”** The Hebrew is “to the sons of man,” an idiom meaning humankind or people.

Pro 8:5

**“prudence.”** See commentary on Prov. 1:4.

**“*good* sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, the naïve men lacked “good sense.”

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 8:6

**“that are correct.”** Everett Fox translates this as “candid things,” and writes that the Hebrew word “*Negidim* (only here in this sense) means honest or forthright things, things that are directly before (*neged*) a person.”[[21]](#footnote-15285) Naïve and foolish people constantly overlook or ignore things that are correct or right. For example, there is a creation, there has to be a creator. Wisdom stands before everyone, giving practical, honest, and true advice.

**“the opening of my lips *brings forth* upright *words.*”** The Hebrew is more literally: “the opening of my lips – fairness/evenness/straightness.” Here once again we see the idiom of life being like a road or path, and people can walk on straight and even paths, or they can walk a crooked, perverse path. When Wisdom opens her mouth, she sets forth a level and straight path to walk on.

Pro 8:7

**“For my mouth.”** The Hebrew is literally, “for my palate,” that is, the roof of the mouth. Many sounds are formed by the tongue being placed against the roof of the mouth, just as a “dental” sound is formed by the tongue being placed against the teeth and a “labial” sound is formed by the lips. However, “For the roof of my mouth will utter truth” is very obscure and confusing, thus the REV nuanced the text to read, “For my mouth.”

Pro 8:9

**“those finding knowledge.”** The Hebrew verb is a participle, and indicates that the process of finding knowledge is an ongoing one. So we stayed with the literal, “those finding knowledge,” instead of the simpler but less accurate, “those who find knowledge.

Pro 8:10

**“choice gold.”** This term, in Hebrew and English, refers to gold that is “chosen” by the buyer for its value, its purity and its color. Some translations, thinking “choice gold” could be confusing, go with “pure gold” or “fine gold,” but the Hebrew verb is “choice” or “chosen.”

The truth of this verse is profound. God’s Wisdom is calling out to people to take her instruction instead of “choice gold,” and choosing Wisdom’s instruction is the right choice to make in order to be most blessed here on earth and in the next life, too. But fools don’t listen, and the “choice” that far too many people make is the wrong one: they choose money, power, prestige, sex, and other temporal pleasures instead of living wisely with God. If they do know God to some extent, and try to walk with the world and also with God, they will have trouble here on earth. If they really make the wrong choice, and choose the glory of the world rather than everlasting life, they will regret the “choice” they have made. On Judgment Day there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, but it will be too late to repent (Matt. 13:42, 50).

Pro 8:11

**“gems.”** See commentary on Proverbs 31:10.

Pro 8:12

**“I, Wisdom, dwell with prudence.”** The Hebrew word translated as “prudence” is *‘ormah* (#06195 עָרְמָה), a feminine noun, and it is one of the female attendants to wisdom (see commentary on Prov. 1:20 about the figure of speech personification). For more on what “prudence” is, see commentary on Proverbs 1:4.

**“I find.”** In this verse Wisdom herself models for us how wise people behave. She knows or learns what she needs and goes and finds it. Wisdom lives together with prudence, and finds knowledge and discretion. Actually, in this verse, “prudence,” “knowledge” and “discretion” are all personifications and could have all been capitalized, but we felt that the emphasis in Proverbs was on Wisdom, and only capitalized her. But the verse is teaching us that Wisdom keeps her friend Prudence close at hand by living with her, and then goes and seeks out and finds Knowledge and Discretion so that she can have a multitude of good counselors (Prov. 11:14; 24:6). Wise people follow Wisdom’s example. Lots of people suffer because they do not properly prioritize their lives and take the time to seek out and find the knowledge they need to succeed in whatever endeavor they are involved in and, indeed, succeed in life.

Pro 8:15

**“by me.”** The Hebrew text literally means “in me” and this is the use of the word “in” to indicate a close relationship, being “in relation with me,” or “in union with me.” The Greek has the same use of the word “in,” which some scholars refer to as the “static” use of “in.” We could have, and some people might argue we should have, translated this verse, “In union with me, kings reign,” etc.

The fact is, that as clear as it seems in English, the translation “by me” is somewhat shallow. It is not just “by” Wisdom that kings reign, but it is when kings and those in authority are truly “in union with Wisdom,” when they have a deep and internalized relation with her, that they can rule in a godly way like Jesus would rule. That is why it is vital for rulers and those in authority over others to take the time to really understand the Word of God. God’s word really is “Torah,” the instruction and guidance we need to live wisely and rule or guide others. God so badly wanted kings to understand His heart so they could rule over others in a godly manner, that each king was to write his own copy of the Torah (Deut. 17:18).

[For more on the static use of “in” see commentary on John 10:38.]

**“rulers.”** The Hebrew is actually a verb here, “the ones ruling,” but “rulers” reads more easily and does not change the sense of the verse.

Pro 8:16

**“By me.”** See commentary on Proverbs 8:15, “by me.”

Pro 8:17

**“love.”** The Hebrew is a participle, indicating ongoing action. Wisdom “is [continuously] loving” those who love her.

**“love me.”** There is a scribal emendation in some texts to “love her,” but it seems clear from the context that “me” is correct.

**“desire.” The Hebrew verb is** *shachar* (#07836 שָׁחַר) and in the qal form it means to “seek,” but in the piel form, which it is in this verse, it means to seek or to desire. While the context would fit “seek” well, the first stanza is about “loving” Wisdom, so in that context, those who love her want her badly, they “desire” her, and will go after her. There is a beautiful word picture being painted here with Wisdom as the woman who should be loved and sought after by the young man. He (indeed, we!) should love Wisdom, yearn for her, desire her, and seek her out. All who do so will find her. The Lord Jesus said, “keep seeking, and you will find” (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9).

Pro 8:23

**“From antiquity.”** Occasionally, Proverbs 8:23 is used to try and support the Trinity and the preexistence of Christ by saying that “wisdom” was appointed from eternity, and since Christ is the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), therefore, Christ existed from eternity. However, this position has not found strong support even among Trinitarians. The wisdom in Proverbs was “woven” by God (verb is in the niphal aspect; “woven, shaped;” cf. *HALOT*[[22]](#footnote-27867)) and is therefore subordinate to God. Proverbs 8:22 explains that wisdom was “brought forth as the first of His [God’s] works.” If this “wisdom” actually was Christ, then Christ would be the first creation of God, which is an Arian belief and deemed to be heretical by orthodox Trinitarians. Therefore, many of the Church Fathers rejected this verse as supporting the Trinity. Among such Church Fathers were Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Epiphanius, and Cyril, to mention a few.

We can see from the scope of Proverbs and the context of this verse that the term “wisdom” is being used figuratively. Taking a concept and speaking of it as if it were a person is the figure of speech personification, and this was quite common in Hebrew poetry. The figure of speech personification often makes it easier for an author to convey an abstract notion or thought than literal narrative does because it uses concrete imagery from human experience. Personification was common among the Jews especially when explaining or describing intangible concepts. Thus, “wisdom” is personified in the book of Proverbs so that the reader can better understand the virtuous qualities that wisdom can offer and the role it played in God’s acts of creation.

Christ is said to be the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians because it was through him that God was able to redeem humanity. In other words, the plan for humankind’s redemption was conceived and brought to completion according to the wisdom of God.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” and therefore not existing before his birth except in the plan of God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“established.”** The *HALOT* gives to “be woven, shaped” as the meaning of *nasak* (#05258 נָסַךְ) in the niphal aspect. This meaning is resisted by those who see Wisdom as eternal with God, but actually, this verse is just one of many that show God created Wisdom, and in doing so she was “established,” giving a beautiful picture of Wisdom being used by God from the beginning of all His work. On the other hand, Waltke suggests the meaning of “formed” for *nasak*.[[23]](#footnote-23446)

Pro 8:24

**“abounding with waters.”** Literally, “made heavy with waters,” implying an abundance of water.

Pro 8:25

**“settled.”** The literal Hebrew is “sunk,” and while the word “sunk” may be misleading to English readers who think of the mountains standing high above the earth, in fact, the mountains are “sunk” into the earth’s mantle as any geologist will testify. Thus, this verse is one more proof that God is the Author behind the Scripture. No human knew the mountains were sunk into the earth, but God knew it because He did it.

Pro 8:27

**“prepared.”** The Hebrew verb is in the hiphil aspect, causative, thus “prepared” seemed the correct meaning here; cf. “prepared” (Darby, Douay-Rheims, Geneva Bible, KJV, Rotherham); cf. “made ready” (BBE).

**“the heavens.”** In the Hebrew text, the noun is always plural, so it could also be translated “heaven.”

**“inscribed the horizon above the face of the deep.”** Or “inscribed a circle.” The “deep” here refers to the oceans on the face of the earth, and God inscribed a circle upon them, which we see as the horizon.

Pro 8:28

**“strengthened the springs.”** The idea is that the springs now had enough strength, enough force, and water that they could sustain life.

Pro 8:29

**“his command.”** The Hebrew text says “his mouth,” which is a metonymy for the words that come from the mouth, i.e., God’s “command.”

Pro 8:30

**“great delight.”** The word “delight” in Hebrew is in the plural, “delights,” and is a plural of emphasis, thus the translation, “great delight.”

**“playing.”** The Hebrew is *sachaq* (#07832 שָׂחַק), and it means to laugh, play, joke; including playing when there is music, singing, and dancing. Wisdom “laughs” at the destruction of the wicked who have ignored all her pleas to become wise (Prov. 1:26). Wisdom is portrayed as laughing and playing when God made the earth. The picture is one of great joy at the plans and purposes of God. The earth was going to be such a wonderful place for God’s people, Wisdom laughed and played as God made the earth. In Proverbs 31:25, the wise woman, the embodiment of Wisdom, has lived so wisely and prepared so well that she laughs at the future.

Pro 8:31

**“playing.”** See commentary on Proverbs 8:30.

**“humankind.”** Literally, “the sons of man,” an idiom.

Pro 8:35

**“finding me.”** The verb is a participle, and in this case, there seems to be a clear sense that one does not “find” wisdom as a one-time event, but rather we keep “finding” her as we journey down the road of life.

Pro 8:36

**“hate.”** The word “hate” in the Bible does not always have the meaning it has in English, an intense feeling of animosity, anger, and hostility toward a person, group, or object. In Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large range of meanings from actual “hate” to simply loving something less than something else, neglecting or ignoring something, or being disgusted by something. Here the word “hate” is used in the sense of ignoring or neglecting Wisdom, and loving other things more than she. We can see in the context the fools “reject” Wisdom.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

**Proverbs Chapter 9**

Pro 9:1

**“seven pillars.”** The use of “seven” here is symbolic of completeness and perfection, not that there is a “perfect” house that is built with seven pillars. Wisdom’s house is completely ready for people to come to. She is ready for guests.

Pro 9:2

**“slaughtered her meat.”** The Hebrew uses the figure of speech polyptoton to catch our attention, and reads, “she has slaughtered [verb] her slaughter [noun].” The phrase “her slaughter” refers to the animals she has slaughtered to have fresh meat. Since the phrase “slaughtered her slaughter” is unclear to English readers, we opted for, “slaughtered her meat.”

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**“mixed her wine.”** The wine in the biblical world was thick like a thick syrup, and so it was mixed with water before being served to guests.

**“table.”** At this time in biblical history, the “table” was either a cloth on the dirt floor (almost no one could afford a stone floor), or it was a very low table. Guests sat on the floor, eating with their right hand.

Pro 9:3

**“sent out her female servants.”** The Hebrew word *naarah* (#05291 נַעֲרָה) generally refers to a young unmarried girl, who in this case, because they are the young women belonging to Wisdom, are her “servant girls” or perhaps better in the culture, her “slave girls.” Because it could be hard to tell when a feast would be ready, it was customary, particularly in a small town or village, for the wealthy person who was hosting a feast to send out his servants to let everyone know it was time to come to the feast (cf. Matt. 22:3).

Pro 9:4

**“says.”** The Hebrew is in the perfect tense as if it happened in the past. She continues her calling out, but it is clear she has been doing so for a long time.

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, the naïve people lacked “good sense.”

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 9:5

**“food.”** Bread was the staple food, so here the Hebrew text is literally “eat my bread” put by metonymy for “eat my food.” Bread would be in abundance at any feast, and also “bread” was put by metonymy for food in general. Sometimes we translate the Hebrew word “bread” as “food,” but in this case, since “bread” was mentioned along with “wine,” the verse had symbolic and even prophetic overtones. God’s Wisdom provides bread and wine, in His wisdom God provided us with the body and blood of the Lord, which was symbolized at the Last Supper, and almost certainly by Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), as bread and wine.

**“mixed.”** It was customary to mix wine with water. See commentary on Proverbs 9:2.

Pro 9:6

**“Leave *your* naïve ways and live.”** This seems to be the best reading (cf. Waltke[[24]](#footnote-18452); and Keil and Delitzsch[[25]](#footnote-19275) give the same essence). The word “naïve” refers to the naïve person, the simple fool *peti* (#06612 פֶּ֫תִי). There are other ways to interpret the verse, however. The NIV (cf. ESV) reads “Leave your simple ways,” but the word “simple” is a noun, not an adjective, so the NASB, “Forsake *your* folly and live,” gives the same basic idea, while retaining the noun form of “simple.” However, it is less likely that the verse is telling us all to forsake our simple ways, and more likely that it is telling the naïve to forsake their ways. It is important to note that the rendition of the KJV is possible, “Forsake the foolish, and live,” but this rendition is not taken by most commentators as the more likely meaning. The context is Wisdom, who has built her house, set her table, slaughtered her animals, mixed her wine, and is now inviting people to her feast (Prov. 9:1-5). The simple, naïve, ignorant fools of the world are encouraged to leave their ignorance and dine with wisdom.

One thing this verse clearly does is make it known that people do not have to be, or remain, naïve or simple. Too often people think they cannot change, or think that change requires too much work to be worth it. God expects people to keep working on their knowledge and character and become truly godly people.

**“on the road.”** We all walk on a road in life. The godly are supposed to walk on the road of understanding, and make the effort to stay straight ahead on it. A person trying to leave naïve and foolish ways may find many reasons, including pleasures and pressures, to return to foolish ways, but Wisdom prods us to walk straight ahead on the road of understanding.

Pro 9:7

**“rebukes a mocker.”** The verse does not say not to rebuke a mocker, because sometimes that is necessary. However, it makes the point that there will always be ramifications. For example, there will always be people who think the mocker was correct and the person who rebuked him was wrong, or the rebuke was too harsh, or done at the wrong place or time, or something. There are always people who criticize and “shame” those who fight for godliness. God’s people must make up their minds that doing right is not a popularity contest; we only need to be popular with God, the world will always be against godliness. Sadly, too many people who know to do what is right don’t do it because of the conflict and shame that go with it, but the world won’t be handing out rewards on the Day of Judgment, God will, so the wise person does the will of God even if it means being shamed by some people here on earth.

**“*brings* injury.”** The Hebrew is literally “a defect, a blemish,” but it comes as an injury, although the meaning also includes a moral blemish, in that case, equivalent to “shame” in the first stanza, so we could almost expand it to “shame and injury.” Whereas the mocker is most likely to smear and shame anyone who tries to rebuke him, the wicked person is more dangerous and is likely to try to harm anyone who tries to reprove him. That does not mean we should not try to correct wicked people; sometimes it is necessary. But it does mean we must be aware that there is always a risk to ourselves. It is because of the shame and even potential danger of rebuking mockers and wicked people that believers have to be wise, pray for God’s help, and walk by the spirit of God.

Pro 9:9

**“Give *instruction* to.”** The Hebrew is simply “Give to,” requiring the reader to supply the subject from the context, which is “teach” in the second stanza. Although we filled in the subject with “instruction,” which is no doubt the primary meaning, the fact that the Hebrew text leaves the subject out alerts us to be aware of the many things we could give to the righteous man so he would continue to be wise, including reproof and correction.

Pro 9:10

**“the Holy One.”** The Hebrew text is plural, literally, “the Holy Ones.” This is a grammatical plural, a plural of majesty referring to God.

Pro 9:12

**“for your own *benefit*.”** The Hebrew is literally, “you are wise for you,” but the meaning is for your own benefit or advantage. Being wise may help others too, but the real advantage of wisdom is to the individual who is wise. There are many times when a wise man tries to help others but his wisdom is rejected or not even recognized, in fact, evil people may call wisdom “evil,” because evil people call good, “evil” (Isa. 5:20).

**“you will bear *the consequences* by yourself​.”** That the mocker will bear the consequences of his actions seems so obvious to the wise that they may feel that it does not need to be said. However, the mocker does not think that way. Mockers, no-goods, and evil people often act in groups or gangs, getting strength and encouragement from each other. A person may do evil as part of a group, but he will bear the punishment all alone. Although this verse is meant to have immediate temporal relevance, it also has eschatological overtones, because the great benefit of being wise comes on the Day of Judgment, and the great tragedy of being a mocker also occurs on the Day of Judgment, when a person bears the consequences of his judgment alone.

Although the words “the consequences” was added for clarity, it must also be kept in mind that they exclude some things. For example, the Law is clear that the sinner must bear his sin, and that sin can have a very heavy weight to it. Mocking is a sin, and if a person mocks, they must bear that sin until they confess it and get it taken from them.

Pro 9:13

**“Lady Folly.”** This verse introduces us to the counterpart and adversary to Lady Wisdom (Prov. 9:1; cf. Prov. 1:20), and “Lady Folly” is the personification of foolishness just as “Lady Wisdom” is the personification of wisdom. Translating the Hebrew text as “a foolish woman” is perhaps more grammatical, but then it is not nearly as easy to see the contrast and conflict between the two women of Proverbs: Wisdom and Folly. Understanding her as “Lady Folly” is acceptable in the Hebrew text, and it communicates what God is trying to say. Other English versions pick up on this as well, e.g., “Folly” (NIV); “The woman, Folly” (HCSB, ESV); “Woman Folly” (NAB); “the woman named Folly” (NLT).

**“is boisterous.”** The Hebrew word is *hamah* (#01993 הָמָה), and although it often refers to making a loud noise or growl, it can refer to being restless or turbulent. Thus translations of Lady Folly’s character include “rowdy” (HCSB); “loud” (ESV); “raucous” (NAB); “boisterous” (NASB); “brash” (NET); and “unruly” (NIV). She is all of these.

Pro 9:15

**“calling out.”** The Hebrew is “to call out,” but Waltke refers to this as “the gerundive use of the [Hebrew letter] *lamed* with the infinitive,” and thus the sense is “calling.”[[26]](#footnote-28384)

**“making their paths straight.”** One of the attributes of Folly (foolish people) is that she does not just consort with other fools, but works to lure in people who are trying their best to walk a straight path with God. That is why it is so important to have a personal vision and goals, and good counselors (friends) to help us stay on the right path.

Pro 9:16

**“Whoever is naïve.”​** Wisdom and Folly have the same invitation to the simple and ignorant: “Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here” (Prov. 9:4 16). But their intent and the end of accepting their invitation is totally different.

**“says.”** The Hebrew is in the perfect tense as if it happened in the past. She continues her calling out, but it is clear she has been doing so for a long time. So in that sense, she is just like Wisdom, calling and calling for people to listen. The perfect tense verb is also used for Wisdom (cf. Prov. 9:4).

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, the naïve people lacked “good sense.”

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 9:17

**“Stolen waters.”** A not-so-veiled reference to sex. Women were often compared to wells, springs, or fountains (cf. Song 4:12). She was luring the man with sexual pleasure, but other fleshly pleasures were being offered as well. The reference to “stolen” shows that the woman was open about her being married (something that in any case would have been quickly obvious to the man she was seducing), showing that foolish and evil people are not ignorant about their sin, but rather simply don’t care about it and have no ethical problem defying God and hurting others.

**“food.”** The Hebrew is literally “bread,” but it is used for food in general.

**Proverbs Chapter 10**

Pro 10:1

**“grief.”** The Hebrew word is *tugah* (#08424 תּוּגָה) and means grief, heaviness, sorrow. The “interpretation” of the verse involves only the mother, but the application of the verse is much broader, because fools bring grief and sorrow to all those who take an interest in, and are involved in, their lives.

Pro 10:3

**“cause the righteous soul to go hungry.”** The verb *raeb* (#07456 רָעֵב) means “to be hungry” in the qal aspect, but this verb is in the hiphil aspect, the causative aspect, and that is important here. There are righteous people who go hungry, but God does not cause it. On a broader note, the Proverb can also be taken to mean that the righteous soul will not be allowed to hunger, but that would be a general statement with plenty of exceptions.

Pro 10:4

**“idle.”** The Hebrew word is *remiyah* (#07423 רְמִיָּה), and has two fundamental meanings: 1) slackness; sluggish, lax, negligent, and careless behavior, and 2) deceitfulness, treachery. It occurs 16 times in the OT, of which 5 are in Psalms and 4 are in Proverbs (Prov. 10:4; 12:24, 27; 19:15), and it has the definition of slackness; sluggish, lax, negligent, and careless behavior all four times in Proverbs. The difficulty of the reading of the Hebrew text has caused most versions to word this verse in a way that is more easily understood in English, but it is true that many poor people could work more diligently if they decided to, and cut expenses, increase income, or both. Many poor people do indeed “make” their palm idle. Keil & Delitzsch explain the wording of the “idle palm” as an accusative of manner explaining the manner in which the poor person utilizes their hands.[[27]](#footnote-31186) They do not employ them in an active manner but rather in an idle manner, thus resulting in poverty instead of gaining wealth.

Pro 10:5

**“summer…harvest.”** In many countries these are two different seasons, summer being the growing season and autumn being the harvest season. However, in Israel, much of the harvest, especially of grains and grapes, occurs in the summer. Some even occurs in the Spring.

**“the one who is fast asleep at the harvest.”** This proverb is teaching that it is shameful to miss opportunities right in front of you and to not do the work you are supposed to do. It is time to harvest yet the shameful son is sleeping.

**“a shameful son.”** Literally, “a son being put to shame.”

Pro 10:6

**“a righteous person…the wicked**.” The word “righteous” is in the singular, the word “wicked” is plural. We see many times in Proverbs where the godly person is singular and the ungodly person is plural. Many times godly people walk alone, while it seems like ungodly people are everywhere. Also, verses such as this may have been some of the inspiration for Jesus saying that the road to destruction was broad and many would travel on it, while that road to life was narrow and few would find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Pro 10:8

**“wise heart.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the wise of heart,” but this is most likely an attributed genitive, meaning, “the wise heart,” and also the word “heart” is put by the figure of speech synecdoche for the person, especially the center of their thinking. Thus, the “wise heart” is parallel to the “foolish” person.

**“lips.”** The Hebrew word is *saphah* (#08193 שָׂפָה) and means “lip,” or, by common metonymy, “language.” Although many versions have “babbling,” that makes it seem that the speech is utter nonsense, and that is not necessarily the case, although that happens too. The unreasonable fool pour out his opinions, which are right in his eyes (Prov. 12:15) but devoid of true wisdom.

**“come to ruin.”** The Hebrew is *labat* (#03832 לָבַט) and means to be thrown down, thrown out, thrown away, ruined. This is a wonderful example of depth of meaning being displayed in the Hebrew word. When a person or city is thrown down, it is “ruined.”However, on a more literal note, the unreasonable fool, in this life, is thrown down, and then, at the Judgment, he is “thrown out” like garbage, into Gehenna.

Pro 10:10

**“causes.”** The literal Hebrew is “gives,” but we would say “causes.”

**“foolish with his lips.”** See commentary on Proverbs 10:8.

Pro 10:11

**“but the mouth of the wicked.”** This second stanza is the same as the second stanza in Proverbs 10:6.

Pro 10:12

**“love covers.”** This stanza is quoted in 1 Peter 4:8.

Pro 10:13

**“*will strike* the back.”** The Hebrew text does not have the verb, so it has to be supplied from our understanding of the culture. Thus, some versions have “is for,” or “is in store,” or a similar phrase. People who behaved foolishly were sometimes beaten with a rod, or hit, struck, poked, or tapped with it, depending on the person and the situation.

It was a common custom for men to carry a walking stick, a “rod,” that they would use for support on the rough ground and for self-defense (even against snakes and scorpions), and so it was always handy and easy to use, and they would use it to correct people if the situation warranted. Misbehaving or disobedient slaves (Exod. 21:20-21) and children (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15) were commonly corrected with the rod (cp “fools,” Prov. 26:3). Because the physical rod was commonly used for correction, the word “rod” became used figuratively for correction in general even though an actual “rod” was not used (2 Sam. 7:14; Job 21:9). That the “rod” was used figuratively for correction that came in other ways besides the actual rod means that we have to pay attention to verses such as Proverbs 22:15 where the word “rod” can have both the meaning of a physical rod and correction in some other way as well.

The correction of children, while done from love and concern, was generally much harsher in biblical times than it is today, and that stemmed from the fact that medical care was primitive at best. Injuries that would be considered minor today, such as a cut or a broken bone, could mean the life of the child.

Our society has in large part moved away from the idea of stern correction, but there is no evidence that we are better off for it. Quite the contrary. If the way students behave in school is any indicator at all, the absence of stern correction is deleterious to people. We should note that God, who created people and knows us better than we know ourselves, advises stern correction to put an end to foolishness.

Pro 10:15

**“poor.”** The noun is plural. The plural noun does not mean there will always be lots of poor, but it supports that understanding of the verse. Verses like Proverbs 10:15 support the validity of Jesus saying, “you will always have the poor with you” (Mark 14:7; cf. John 12:8).

Pro 10:16

**“The wage of the righteous person is life.”** In this context, the word “life” means living to the fullest today (not necessarily having lots of material things, but having joy, peace, love, etc.), and also has an eschatological meaning and refers to “everlasting life.”

This verse is the antithesis of Romans 6:23, which says, “The wages of sin is death.” Here, the wage earned by the righteous person *is* life—a meaningful life here and everlasting life in the hereafter. The verb “is” is supplied, but it was common to leave out the “to be” verb, which would be supplied by the reader (in fact, Hebrew does not have a present tense “to be” verb), and Greek often does the same thing. The “wage…is life” would be the most common way to understand the Hebrew text.

The fullness of Romans 6:23 is that the wages of sin is death, but the “free gift of God is life in the Age to Come in Christ Jesus our Lord.” If Romans says everlasting life is a free gift, why is it called a “wage” here in Proverbs? This is an important point and needs to be understood. Everlasting life is never called a “gift” in the Old Testament; that is a New Testament concept. There has always been the sense that everlasting life is a gift of some sort because there is no way a human could purchase it. However, the Old Testament never called it a gift because people had to maintain their trust in God and their faithfulness to Him throughout their lives in order to receive it (Hab. 2:4). That is why there are so many Old Testament Scriptures that say that “righteous” people attain life. In the covenant world of the Old Testament, a “righteous” person was someone who maintained their covenant agreement with God and trusted Him. An unrighteous person broke their covenant with God and disobeyed Him.

Salvation has always been by trusting God, by “faith.” Faith does not earn salvation; it is a necessary condition for salvation. Today, in the Administration of Grace, we believe “unto” salvation (Rom. 10:10). Our trust does not save us, but it opens the door for God to save us. However, people who lived before Jesus paid for the sins of mankind (and before God made the New Birth available on the Day of Pentecost—Acts 2) had to maintain their trust in God throughout their lives, so it was appropriate that God referred to everlasting life as the “wage of righteousness,” the “wage earned by righteousness.”

[For more on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:2. For more on the New Birth and salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“Sin.”** In this verse, sin is both literal in this life and a metonymy of the effect for that which sin results in: punishment.

[See word study on “metonymy.”]

Pro 10:17

**“goes astray.”** The Hebrew simply reads, “leads astray,” and this is one of the riddles of the wise (Prov. 1:6). The obvious idea of “leads” is “leads others,” but the first stanza of the proverb would seem to suggest “leads himself.” The commentators and the English versions are divided. Actually, the verse has both meanings. We decided to leave the ambiguity of the Hebrew text in the verse.

If we want to be successful in life, we have to follow Wisdom’s advice. In this case, we should be aware of those people around us who ignore or reject reproof and correction. Why would they do that? Pride, or perhaps they were previously hurt, or perhaps they are more evil than we think. In any case, when we see people around us who ignore reproof we need to be very careful, because association with them will not turn out to our benefit, even if it is only because they set a very bad example.

Pro 10:18

**“The one hiding *his* hatred has deceitful lips​.”** Commentators differ as to whether this rendition, which is similar to the NASB, “He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips,” or a rendition similar to the KJV, is the meaning of the Hebrew. However, the REV translation follows the standard way Proverbs handles the stanzas as each having an independent meaning.

Pro 10:20

**“The tongue of a righteous person is choice silver.”** Proverbs 10:20 compares the words a righteous person speaks with choice silver, using a metaphor, a comparison by representation. Many English translations read “is like choice silver,” making the metaphor into a simile, but the metaphor is a stronger comparison. The words of a righteous person are “choice silver,” they are of great worth. Sadly, however, those wise words are often overlooked in the world. Worldly people who would never refuse a gift of silver will often walk away from a wise person and not pay attention to what they have to say. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

[For more on the figures of speech of comparison—simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis—see the REV commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“a righteous person.”** The “righteous person” is the one who does what is right in the eyes of God; the one who knows God and what His will is, and lives according to God’s will.

**“*worth* little.”** A cultural idiom or equivalent for “worth nothing.” In an honor-shame society, it is almost more of an insult to say someone is worth little than that they are worth nothing.

Pro 10:21

**“The lips of a righteous person will shepherd many people.”** There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21). Proverbs 10:21 has two figures of speech that give it grammatical punch: “lips” is put by metonymy for the words spoken by the lips, and the fact that the lips will “shepherd” people is the figure personification (for more on the figure personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, fools die because they lack “sense,” or good sense. In this case, the fools not only die on this earth, they experience everlasting death because they are so foolish they never get saved and gain everlasting life.

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 10:23

**“Acting indecently is like pleasure to a fool​.”** This verse is a wonderful example of how the nature of Proverbs pulls us into thought, prayer, and meditation. There are so many nuances of meaning to the words involved that the translator has an impossible time bringing them all into English. This is the reason for the many different translations of this verse, which though similar in many ways, differ quite significantly in what they mean.

**“Acting indecently.”** The Hebrew word is *zimmah* (#02154 זִמָּה), and it can mean a plan or an intention, either good or bad; or lewd, crass, and shameful behavior, or villainy, which are often sexual in nature. The preponderant number of uses of this word in the OT are sexual in nature, and fools tend toward the lewd and shameful, so it makes sense in this context to use a translation that is more sexual in nature than just criminal in nature. Perhaps, “Lewd behavior” would have been very good.

**“pleasure.”** The Hebrew word is *sechoq* (#07814 שְׂחוֹק), and it means laughter, pleasure, mockery, or derision. Waltke writes, “The 15 occurrences of *sechoq* in poetry denote an outward audible expression of inner mirth and pleasure….”[[28]](#footnote-32100) The lewd and shameful behavior of the fools produces such pleasure that he laughs and squeals with delight. The fool finds fun and pleasure in doing wrong. It entertains him. In contrast, the man of understanding finds pleasure in making wise choices. Due to the range of meanings in the verse, a sampling of translations can be helpful if one is to more fully understand it.

**ESV**: Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

**KJV**: *It is* as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

**NASB**: Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool; And *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.

**NIV**: A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.

**NJB**: A fool takes pleasure in doing wrong, the intelligent in cultivating wisdom.

**Waltke**: To commit villainy is like [the pleasure of laughter] to a fool, but wisdom [is like the pleasure of laughter] to an understanding person.

Pro 10:24

**“wicked person’s horror will come upon him.”** Proverbs 10:24 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. We do not. The Devil is the ruler of the world, and so neither the wicked nor the righteous always get what they deserve in this life. This promise will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Pro 10:25

**“When the storm passes through.”** This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (comparison by implication) where the “storm” is the Day of Judgment.

[For more on the figure hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Pro 10:26

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 10:27

**“will be cut short.”** Although this Proverb can apply to life here and now, it really has an eschatological tone, because although wicked people may live a long life here on earth, they will not live long after Judgment Day when they are thrown into the Lake of Fire and are annihilated.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Pro 10:28

**“is joy.”** The absent Hebrew verb would normally be supplied by “is,” and the primary meaning of the verse is that the righteous person hopes for the great joy God promises in the next life because this life can be so challenging (Isa. 35:10; 51:3; 60:15; 61:7; 65:17-19; Jer. 30:19; 31:12-14). However, since the verb is supplied, a secondary meaning is that “the hope of the righteous *brings them* joy.”

**“will perish.”** The wicked and all their hopes and dreams will end with annihilation in the Lake of Fire.

[For more on the annihilation of the wicked, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.]

Pro 10:29

**“place of refuge.”** The Hebrew can mean “stronghold,” or “mountain stronghold.”

Pro 10:30

**“be moved.”** The verb is “shaken,” but in this context it means shaken to the point of falling over, thus “toppled.”[[29]](#footnote-19049) In this context it refers to being “shaken” off the land, or “removed,” “moved,” or “overthrown.”[[30]](#footnote-11597)

Pro 10:31

**“cut off.”** This is better than “cut out,” which many versions have. The point is that the tongue of the wicked will be stopped, which will happen on Judgment Day. Until that time wickedness will increase. The tongue of the wicked will never really be “cut out.”

**Proverbs Chapter 11**

Pro 11:1

**“fair weight.”** The literal Hebrew is an idiom, “a stone of peace,” but that would not make sense in English. A “stone of peace” was a just and true weight.

In the ancient world, most goods were exchanged by using a balance and stone weights. A merchant would have a balance, which was usually a stick with a cord in the middle that he held on to, and on each end of the stick was a cord that went down to a pouch or pan. (The iconic image of “Lady Justice” that appears in many courthouses in the USA is a blindfolded woman holding out a balance).

Traveling merchants would carry the balance with them, and also carry their “weighing stones,” which they used in buying and selling, which were stones of different weights (1 shekel; 5 shekels; 20 shekels; etc.). The weights that were used by merchants in Old Testament times were usually made of stone; metal weights were not common.

When buying or selling, the merchant would place the item being bought or sold, for example, wheat in one pan and his weighing stones in the other pan, and adjust either the amount of wheat or the stones until the wheat and stones “balanced,” at which point the weight and thus value of the wheat was known.

Unscrupulous merchants often kept different stones in their bag that only they could easily tell apart, stones that were a little heavier for buying and stones that were a little lighter for selling, so that they bought a lot and sold a little. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh. Yahweh commanded traders to use honest weights and measures, which gave people what they deserved in a business deal (Lev. 19:35). In ancient Israel, it was the job of the Levites to maintain the standard weights and measures that merchants could use to standardize their own weights and measures so people got a fair deal.

In modern times “balances” have been mostly replaced by “scales.” A balance is accurate, but it took considerable time and tweaking to get both sides of the balance to be the same weight so it would balance out and be level. Besides that, sometimes a person would have to buy or sell a little more or less than they really wanted because the stone weights were set amounts and the person had to add or subtract a little wheat to make the balance level out. Today, stores use scales for weighing that use different ways of producing known resistance to weight, for example, many scales use springs. Grocery stores use scales to weigh meat and vegetables. In scientific terms, a balance measures relative mass, comparing one object to another, while a scale measures the weight of an object using resistance to gravity. The subject of balances and scales can be somewhat confusing because often “balances” are called “scales,” but technically they are not.

There was enough dishonesty in ancient dealings that God spoke about being honest several different times (cf. Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23; Ezek. 45:10; Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11).

Pro 11:2

**“wisdom is with the modest.”** The idea that wisdom is “with” someone is very Semitic. Today we would say, “the modest are wise” (see commentary on John 1:1, “the word was with God”).

Pro 11:4

**“wrath.”** The Great Tribulation and Battle of Armageddon are times of God’s wrath (cf. Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15).

Pro 11:5

**“the wicked person will fall by his wickedness.”** Many verses testify that wicked people will perish by their own wickedness, see commentary on Proverbs 1:18.

Pro 11:7

**“hope of wealth.”** The wicked person hopes to gain wealth, but that hope perishes when he dies. It is commonly said, “You can’t take it [wealth on earth] with you,” but wicked people act as if they could. They ignore the God who could give them everlasting life and joy, and follow after their fleshly desires. The translation wealth comes from the *HALOT*.[[31]](#footnote-26862)

Pro 11:9

**“knowledge.”** This is a clear example showing that the Semitic understanding of “knowledge” is different than the Greek (and modern) definition. To the Hebrews, a person did not “know” something if he did not act on the knowledge. To the Hebrews, knowledge and action were conceptually combined. In contrast, the Greeks were much more cerebral, and more carefully separated knowledge from action. A Greek could “know” something but not act.

In this verse, it is not just “knowledge” that delivers the righteous, but the fact that the righteous person will act decisively on what he knows. In this context, the wicked “neighbor” (which in Hebrew includes anyone close by, such as a family member) is saying harmful things, and the righteous person finds out about it and acts to counteract the harm. Note that the righteous person does not “just pray about it.” He would have prayed, but he would have acted in some way as well. Too often the wicked have more effect than they should have because the righteous do not take action.

Pro 11:10

**“prosperity.”** Here it means more than financial or material. It means to prosper, or do well, in every way.

Pro 11:12

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, a person who does not take the time to figure out how to live in peace with his neighbors lacks good sense. People did not move very much in biblical times, so a person was likely to have the same neighbors his entire life, and would often need their help in difficult times (cf. Prov. 12:26; 27:10; Luke 11:5-8). It was foolish to not learn to get along with them.

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

**“understanding.”** The Hebrew text is plural, “understandings.” This is most likely a plural of emphasis, and indicates “great understanding.”

Pro 11:13

**“gossip.”** The Hebrew word translated as “gossip” is *rakhil* (#07400 רָכִיל), and it can refer to a gossip (CJB, CSB, NIV, NLT, NRSV), or a slanderer (CEB, ESV, NAB, NASB2020, NET). In this context “gossip” seems more likely because in common English a “slanderer” spreads lies and misinformation and purposely tries to harm the person they are slandering, while in contrast, a gossip is just someone who has no discretion and says things that they should keep secret. Here in Proverbs 11:13, there is no evidence the gossip is purposely trying to hurt people; the gossip just says things they should not say.

**“spirit.”** This is the use of “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach* #07307 רוּחַ) that refers to the activities of the mind: the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” Usage #13 concerns thoughts and emotions.]

Pro 11:14

**“guidance.”** The Hebrew is plural, guidance from many sources.

**“people.”** The Hebrew indicates that this is a group of people, not just a single individual. It would generally be a group of people who are related to each other in some way, a family, tribe, clan, or even a nation. If the leader or leaders don’t get good advice the whole group will be affected.

**“with a multitude of advisors there is deliverance.”** No one person can think of every possibility or see every problem and every solution, so the Bible tells us there is safety and deliverance in having a multitude of advisors (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; and 24:6). The final phrase in the verse, “there is deliverance,” can be translated from the Hebrew in several different ways, including “there is safety,” and “there is victory.”

Pro 11:15

**“puts up security.”** The Hebrew is a cultural idiom, “hates striking,” referring to striking hands in a deal.

**“secure.”** The Hebrew word means “trusting,” but in this context, it means that he has security in his life because he protects himself from making foolish deals and is not preoccupied with worry over making such deals.

Pro 11:17

**“benefits himself.”** The kind person gives to others, but in so doing gets blessings from God and from others. Thus, in giving to others he actually gives to himself.

Pro 11:19

**“eagerly pursues.”** The verb “pursues” is in the piel aspect and so is intense; thus “eagerly pursues,” or “diligently pursues.”

Pro 11:21

**“Be assured.”** The Hebrew text uses an idiom and says, “hand to hand,” meaning “be assured,” or “depend on it,” according to *HALOT*.[[32]](#footnote-26619) The idiom and custom of shaking hands or striking hands was a well enough known custom that it did not need to be described in detail, and the simple phrase, “hand to hand” carried the meaning. The history of the handshake or hand clasp is not exactly known, but it is known that clasping hands or shaking hands goes back to very early times, and seems to be depicted in both Egyptian and Babylonian art and/or writings. By the time of the Greeks, handshaking is well documented. The point of this proverb is that the righteous people who are afflicted and don’t seem to see the wicked getting punished for their wicked deeds here on earth should not get discouraged and think that God will never vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked. He will, and the righteous need to draw strength from that and not give in to the temptation to act unrighteously.

**“will escape.”** The Hebrew text literally says, “have escaped, or have been delivered.” This is an example of the idiom of the prophetic perfect, where a future event is spoken of as if it has already occurred. This idiom is used to assure people that the event will occur.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Pro 11:22

**“pig’s snout.”** This verse would hit home much harder in the biblical culture than it does in our modern culture because it was the custom in biblical times for women to wear nose rings rather than earrings. The women not only had long hair, but often wore head coverings, and those things covered any earrings so that they could not be seen, so the women customarily wore nose rings as personal decoration (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12).

This verse was especially graphic because the pig was an unclean animal to the Jews, and could not be eaten. Humans are impressed by physical beauty, but God, and godly people, are not. A beautiful woman who does not have good judgment is as disgusting to God as a pig wearing a gold ring in its nose. Godly people have to learn to think about humans the way God does. God looks on the heart, not on the flesh (1 Sam. 16:7).

[For more on the custom of nose rings, see commentary on Gen. 24:22.]

Pro 11:23

**“only.”** The Hebrew word can also mean “surely.” That the desire of the righteous is good but is not “natural” to them is because righteous people battle with their flesh and work hard to think and act in a godly way.

**“the hope of the wicked *ends in* wrath.”** This verse is one of the riddles of the wise, which invites our prayer and meditation. A primary interpretation of this verse is that the wicked hope for “wrath” upon people that they do not like. Whereas the righteous think in terms of what is good for other people, including evil people, wicked people are self-centered and just wish “wrath” upon those they think are somehow in their way.

Another interpretation of this verse uses irony: the wicked hope for fury upon their enemies, but in the end, their hope is “wrath;” the wrath of God upon them.

Pro 11:25

**“person who blesses *others*.”** The Hebrew reads, “the soul of blessing,” where “soul” refers to an individual and “a person of blessing” is a person who blesses others.

**“prosperous.”** The literal Hebrew is “fat.” Proverbs 11:25 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. But because there are evil people and the Devil is the ruler of this world, people who help others do not always prosper in this life. This promise will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“will be watered.”** The Hebrew verb is in the *hophal* aspect, and so more literally reads, “will be taught.” This sheds light on what the verse is speaking of when it talks about watering others; there is a primary influence in instructing them. Then, the instructor himself learns more as well. But the verbs refer to more than just teaching and being taught because they are being used metaphorically. There are many ways to water others, but teaching is a primary one, especially in the larger context of Proverbs, with all its emphasis on gaining wisdom and understanding.

Pro 11:27

**“who is intent on.”** In this context, the Hebrew word, which refers to searching, means “is intent on.”[[33]](#footnote-11339)

Pro 11:28

**“he will fall.”** The grammar also allows for this verse to be translated “it will fall,” with the “it” referring to wealth. The primary meaning of the verse is no doubt that the one who trusts in wealth instead of trusting in God, will fall. However, the Hebrew opens the door for the verse to also mean that if you trust in your wealth it will fail. That wealth “falls,” and fails those who are rich, happens quite often in this life, and certainly will in the next. God will not be taking bribes on Judgment Day, when both the rich, and the influence of their wealth, will “fall” from its vaunted position. There is only one way to be truly blessed and secure in this life and the next, and that is to trust God.

Pro 11:30

**“takes away souls *from death*.”** The Hebrew phrase “takes away souls” is generally used of taking a life, that is, killing. But here in Proverbs 11:30, by irony, the meaning is exactly the opposite; the wise person “takes” or “captures” a soul from death. Wise and righteous people save lives in this life and lead people to everlasting life in the next (cf. Prov. 14:25).

It is the irony in this verse that would normally catch the attention of the reader and cause them to stop and ponder the meaning of the verse, and it is verses like this that, when translated literally, can be so confusing, especially to a new believer. It is easy to see how a person would be confused when the first stanza of the proverb says the righteous person is a tree of life but the second stanza says the wise person “takes away souls.” The mature believer gets the irony and sees how God uses that irony to emphasize that wise people save the lives of other people, both here and now, and forever. The REV translation makes the Hebrew text easier for the beginning Bible reader by adding italics to clarify the meaning of the verse.

Pro 11:31

**“The righteous person will be repaid on the earth.”** Proverbs 11:31 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God. An “ideal” proverb is one that, if everything on earth was godly and ideal, the proverb would be fulfilled as written. But because we live in a fallen world, not everything happens the way it would in an ideal world, and so the proverb does not always come to pass as written. In this case, neither the righteous person nor the wicked person always gets what they deserve in this life. There are a number of “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs (e.g., Prov. 11:31; 13:25; 15:6; 16:3, 7, 10; 18:3; 20:8; 21:1; 22:6; 25:3).

It was always God’s intention that people would get what they deserve in this life. However, because the Devil is the “ruler of the world,” and because there are evil people on earth, and because often believers fall short of doing what God says to do, often neither the righteous people or the wicked people get what they deserve in this life. Nevertheless, the promise in this proverb will be fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**Proverbs Chapter 12**

Pro 12:2

**“but a person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman, a husband, or a man opposed to an animal or God. Nevertheless, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

Pro 12:3

**“will not be established.”** This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or “demeaning; belittling.” In this case, the statement is made in the negative, “not be established” in a way that catches our attention because it is clear from the scope of Scripture that wickedness will “overthrow” or “destroy” a person (Ps. 37:38; 92:7; 101:8; 145:20).[[34]](#footnote-32167)

Pro 12:4

**“excellent.”** The Hebrew word is *chayil* (#02428 חַיִל), and it basically refers to strength. There are many kinds of strengths, and none is specifically mentioned in this context. The word *chayil* is used of physical strength (Ps. 33:17; Eccl. 12:3), including strength for battle (Ps. 18:39). “Strength” (*chayil*) can also refer to wealth (Job 20:18; Ezek. 28:5); strength of character (Gen. 47:6; Exod. 18:21, 25; 1 Chron. 26:7, 9, 30; Ruth 3:11), and sexual potency (Prov. 31:3). When a woman has strength of character, she is usually called “noble” or “virtuous.”

Because *chayil*, “strong” can refer to different kinds of strength, including physical strength, strength of character, and the strength of wealth, the English versions are divided as to how to translate this verse. Women, like men, have many different and even multiple strengths. English translations include “worthy” (ASV, NLT; cf. NAB); “virtuous” (RV, KJV, BBE, YLT); “capable” (CJB, HCSB, NJB); “diligent” (Douay-Rheims); “excellent” (ESV, NASB, NKJV); “a wife with strength of character” (GW); “noble” (NET); “noble character” (NIV); and “good” (NRSV, RSV).

There is a real sense in which an amplified Bible could say, “A strong, virtuous, excellent, diligent, capable wife of noble character is the crown of her husband,” because all those attributes can be reflected in the word *chayil*. Because the English word “excellent” can be understood in a multitude of ways, we went with “excellent” in the REV.

Pro 12:6

**“The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood.”** A beautiful personification. The words of the wicked have a life of their own, hiding in ambush until a time they can do harm. That the text says “lie in wait for blood” indicates that the words of the wicked can do very great harm.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20]

**“but the mouth of the upright will deliver them.”** There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

Pro 12:7

**“and will be no more.”** The wicked do not have everlasting life, so when they are overthrown in this life, they come to an end, which Revelation 20:14 tells us is death in the Lake of Fire.

Pro 12:8

**“A person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman, a husband, or a man opposed to an animal or God. Nevertheless, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

Pro 12:10

**“cares for.”** The Hebrew is literally, “knows the life of his animal,” but “knows” in this context means to care for or care about. The word “know” can mean to know or experience, but it can also have an idiomatic or pregnant sense and mean “to care about,” “to act lovingly toward.” Thus, Psalm 144:3 (YLT 1862/87/98) says, “what is man that Thou knowest him,” while the NIV(2011) translates that in a way that recognizes the idiom: “what are human beings that you care for them?” Similarly, Proverbs 12:10 (YLT) says, “The righteous man knoweth the life of his beast,” while the NIV(2011) has “The righteous care for the needs of their animals.”

[For more on “know” see commentary on Gen. 3:22. For information on other words that have an idiomatic sense, such as “remember,” see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

**“life.”** The Hebrew is *nephesh* (#05315 נָ֫פֶשׁ), which is technically “soul,” which is the life of the animal. This is just one more verse that clearly shows animals have a soul, just as humans do. When animals die, their soul does not go to heaven, and the same is true for people. When animals and people die, they are dead, in the ground. God will raise people from the grave, but not animals.

Pro 12:11

**“will be satisfied *with* food.”** Proverbs 12:11 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God that would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people. We do not. The Devil is the ruler of this world, and between bad weather, bad politics, wars, and evil people, a person who works his land sometimes goes hungry anyway. This promise will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“food.”** The Hebrew word is literally “bread,” which is used by metonymy for “food” in general because “bread” was the dominant food source.

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this case, a fool who pursues worthless things lacks “sense.”

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 12:12

**“desires.”** Or “covets.” This is the same Hebrew word as “covet” in the Ten Commandments.

Pro 12:13

**“will escape from.”** The literal Hebrew is “will go out from.” While the tone of “escape” is certainly true, and comes from the contrast with the first stanza, there is also a sense in which sometimes the righteous person will see the trouble and turn away from it early, and not really get caught up in it.

Pro 12:16

**“prudent**.” The Hebrew word is *arum* (#06175 עָרוּם), and it has both a positive and negative meaning. On the negative side, it means to be crafty or sly, and it is used to describe the Devil in Genesis 3:1. On the positive side, it means to be shrewd, sensible, or prudent. In this context, it means to be sensible or prudent.

**“dishonor.”** The Hebrew is *qalown* (#07036 קָלוֹן), which is shame, dishonor, humiliation. A prudent person does not display the fact that he has been dishonored or insulted. Also in this verse is the meaning that “dishonor” is put by the figure of speech Metonymy for that which causes it, i.e., an insult. A prudent person does not react with anger to an insult, whereas a fool becomes angry at once, and shows it.

Pro 12:17

**“speaks *what is* faithful.”** The Hebrew is more compact: “speaks faithfulness,” but that is not as clear in English. The person who speaks faithful things, which in this context means what is faithful to God and to what he has been taught, will speak “righteousness,” the things that are right and make people righteous in the sight of God. The person who turns away from God and what he has been taught will speak unrighteousness; that which is unrighteous in the sight of God.

Pro 12:18

**“speaks recklessly.”** There are many verses in the Bible that talk about how important it is to control what we say. There are many ways to speak recklessly: we can say the wrong thing, or say the right thing but at the wrong time or place. A person does not have to have the intention to hurt people with their words in order to deeply wound someone. It takes diligent effort to control one’s mouth, and also a humble attitude about life. It is basically impossible for a self-centered person to control his mouth because he frames all of life in terms of himself and how he feels.

In contrast to speaking recklessly, the tongue of the wise is healing. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if we are really being wise because we can tend to see ourselves in a good light. A good way to check to see if we are being wise is to notice if the people around us are being blessed and healed by what we say, and they will usually tell us if they are. The tongue of the wise is healing, and if people around us cannot testify to blessings and healing when they are with us, then there is a good probability we are not being wise, no matter how good we feel about what we say. Of course, sometimes wise words do hurt. But they don’t produce permanent harm. Reproof and godly rebuke hurt for a short time, but produce great gain and healing in the end. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

Pro 12:21

**“No disaster.”** Proverbs 12:21 is one of the “ideal” promises in the Word of God. (See commentary on Prov. 19:5).

**“Will come upon**.” The Hebrew verb is *anah* (#0579 אָנַה), and in the qal aspect of the Hebrew verb it means “to meet or encounter.” However, in this verse, it is in the pual aspect of the verb, the causal aspect, and it means “to be sent” or “to be allowed to meet.”[[35]](#footnote-14998)

The point of the proverb is not that the righteous are immune to “disaster.” Proverbs has many verses showing the righteous can suffer (Prov. 18:5; 24:15; 28:10). And other books like Job show it very clearly as well. Job was a righteous man who lost his children, his wealth, his health, and the respect of his friends. The point of this verse is that God is always good, and He never sends disaster upon the righteous.

The point does need to be made, however, that in the general context of Proverbs, righteous people do well and wicked people do badly, and there is certainly an overtone of that in this verse.

Pro 12:23

**“prudent.”** See commentary on Proverbs 12:16.

**“proclaims.”** The Hebrew is *qara* (#07121 קָרָא), to cry out, to call out loud and clear. The heart of fools is self-centered and foolish. It neither cares for those it may hurt by spreading information nor realizes it damages itself and its reputation.

Pro 12:24

**“slack.”** The Hebrew word is *remiyah* (#07423 רְמִיָּה), and means slackness; sluggish, lax, negligent, and careless behavior. It occurs 4 times in Proverbs; Proverbs 10:4, 12:24, 27; and 19:15.

[For more information, see commentary on Prov. 10:4.]

Pro 12:25

**“person’s.”** The word “person’s” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man. Nevertheless, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

**“weighs it down.”** More literally, “makes it bow down,” but not out of respect but out of pressure.

Pro 12:26

**“causes them to wander astray.”** The primary meaning of the phrase is that the road (“the way”) of the wicked leads the wicked people themselves astray, and then, of course, they lead the people who follow them to wander astray also.

Pro 12:27

**“lazy person.”** The Hebrew word is *remiyah* (#07423 רְמִיָּה), and means slackness; sluggish, lax, negligent, and careless behavior. It occurs 4 times in Proverbs: Proverbs 10:4, 12:24, 27; and 19:15, and is translated “slack” the other three times.

[For more information, see commentary on Prov. 10:4.]

Pro 12:28

**“the journey of *that* road.”** The Hebrew is more literally: “that road’s journey.” We have to understand that as meaning the journey on that road. The person who walks on the “righteous road” will not end in death.

**Proverbs Chapter 13**

Pro 13:1

**“listen to rebuke.”** The mocking fool does not listen to the rebukes that are given to him. This sometimes involves his not listening, but the verse may be also stating a deeper fact than just that. Many times the fool will sit and listen to what others tell him, but just does not “hear” it. The problem can be with his attitude, his preconceived ideas, due to demons, or perhaps for other reasons. This was the case when Jesus confronted the religious leaders. They simply could not “hear” him (John 8:43). This is why prayer is important in working with people. God knows the heart of each person and can give us accurate direction in how to help people, or whether to walk away.

Pro 13:4

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

**“fully satisfied.”** The literal Hebrew is “to be made fat.”

Pro 13:5

**“become a stench.”** This is a graphic and idiomatic way to say that wicked people will be hated.[[36]](#footnote-10368) Wicked people stink to the righteous. Interestingly, righteous people stink to the wicked (2 Cor. 2:16).

Pro 13:6

**“wickedness overthrows a sinner.”** The last phase in the Hebrew text literally reads: “wickedness “overthrows” sin,” or “wickedness overthrows a sin offering.” The Hebrew word *chatta’ah* (#02403 חַטָּאָה) can mean either “sin” or “sin offering.” This is an amphibologia, a double entendre; both meanings are valid and important. If the Hebrew is understood as “sin,” the verse is a metonymy of effect for the one who sins, i.e., the sinner. Wickedness perverts and overthrows the sinner and causes his ruin and eventual everlasting death. However, wickedness also overturns and ruins the sin offering. When we purposely sin, our prayers and sacrificial offerings are ignored by God, and can even be an abomination to Him. It is clear in both the Old Testament and New Testament that if a person lives in disregard of God and His commands, that person will not receive the blessings of God (cf. Deut. 31:16-18; Prov. 15:8; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:1-9; 59:1-8; 66:1-4; Jer. 7:21-29; 14:10-12; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 3:9-12; 6:6-8; Rom. 2:13-16; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Pro 13:8

**“does not hear.”** The Hebrew can also be translated “does not listen to.”

**“*threatening* rebuke.”** The Hebrew reads, “to rebuke,” which is confusing to commentators. In this context, the idea of the rebuke seems to be that the poor person owes some kind of payment and is being rebuked by the creditor, almost certainly along with some kind of threat if there is no payment made. It does not seem to be a threat of extortion; the poor person has nothing to extort. Many English versions only have “threat,” but that is a nuance to make the verse supposedly make more sense in English. But “rebuke” is in the Hebrew text, and so we include that and get “threatening rebuke” from the context.

Pro 13:9

**“will go out.”** Wicked people will die here on earth, then experience everlasting death in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15). Although many English versions nuance the verb to “will be extinguished,” or “will be put out,” that is an interpretation, not a translation. The Hebrew verb is simply to “go out” (cf. NAB, NASB, NET, Rotherham).

Pro 13:11

**“little by little.”** The literal Hebrew is “by hand,” which is an idiom for “little by little” or “over time.” There are a few people who have “get rich quick” schemes that work, but the vast majority of those schemes fail. The way to acquire wealth is by living a disciplined lifestyle and accumulating little by little over time. People who do that rarely lose. For example, people who buy lottery tickets usually lose twice: they don’t win the lottery, and they don’t have the wealth they could have had if they had wisely invested all the money they spent on lottery tickets over the years. The key to acquiring wealth is simple but difficult. Spend less than you make and do it for a long time, and invest your savings wisely.

Pro 13:13

**“a word.”** There is much discussion among scholars about whether or not the “word” in this verse refers to a divine commandment (the Word of God) or to a wise word from the sages. It likely includes both meanings. Most people who say it refers to a word from the sages say the context supports that view, but Proverbs changes context often from verse to verse. It would be just as true to say that Proverbs 13:13 refers to the Word of God and Proverbs 13:14 builds on that and adds the importance of the wisdom of men. That the Hebrew text does not read “the Word” but rather “a word” does not diminish from the fact that the “word” can include an inspired Word from God. Jesus taught us that man lives by “every word” that comes from the mouth of God. The fact is that people who despise wise instruction and also the Word of God come to ruin. For commentary on “word” being the inspired word, see Waltke.[[37]](#footnote-14806)

**“the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.”** The Bible is very clear that God rewards people who worship and obey Him. Although many times people get rewarded on earth for what they do for God, sometimes they do not. However, there is a day of judgment coming, and at that time God will reward everyone who has obeyed Him.

It is worth noting that there is another possible way to understand Proverbs 13:13, but it seems less likely. Nevertheless, some scholars think that is the correct meaning of the text. So, for example, the NASB95 reads, “The one who despises the word will be in debt to it.” The Hebrew is *chabal* (#02254 חָבַל) and is in the niphal aspect of the verb, which is related to a pledge. The Holladay Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon has “he is forced to give a pledge.” This could then be one of the obscure sayings of the wise (Prov. 1:6), and it takes knowledge of the scope of Scripture to understand it. B. Waltke says the Hebrew text reads, “will become a debtor to it.”[[38]](#footnote-25970) In that way of understanding the verse, God gives His word, and even people who despise what God says are still in debt to it, after all, they are not God, God is God, their creator whether they recognize that or not.

Humans are created by God and have a moral obligation to serve Him. Beyond that, humans have entered into covenants with God. Adam made a covenant with God that we know very little about (Hos. 6:7), but it apparently covers all mankind. Israel entered into a specific covenant with God referred to as the “Old Covenant,” which is better known as the “Old Testament,” and it applied to all Israel even if they were born long after the covenant was made. Christians entered into a binding agreement with God when they confessed that Jesus Christ was their Lord and God promised them salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

Just because a person rejects God does not mean that he is free from his obligation to Him. We humans are “bound by pledge” to God. Paul recognized that God had committed to him the knowledge of the Administration of the Grace of God, and said, “Indeed, how terrible it will be for me if I do not proclaim the good news” because even if he was unwilling to do it, the Administration had still been committed to him and he was responsible for carrying out the will of God (1 Cor. 9:16-17).

The whole concept of “sin” and “evil” is founded upon the idea that there is good behavior and bad behavior, and it is God who determines what is good and what is evil. No human can say, “I reject God’s order and reject the concept of sin,” and then simply be free of God’s moral and civil laws. There will be a Judgment Day, and on that day people who have rejected God will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up.

Proverbs 13:13 could be stating that just because someone does not want to obey God does not mean that God will not hold him responsible for his actions. On the other hand, the humble person who fears God and obeys the commandment will be rewarded, which is exactly what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:17.

Pro 13:14

**“instruction.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 13:15

**“never changes.”** The Hebrew word is *eythan* (#0386 אֵיתָן), and it means perpetual, constant, ever-flowing, or enduring. However, that is considered to be a difficult reading by most translators and commentators, who amend the Hebrew text to fit with the Septuagint, and thus amend the Hebrew to read something such as “is hard” or “is destruction.” Usually, *eythan* refers to things that last, such as the life of the righteous, but that does not mean that every use of *eythan* has to have that meaning. While it is always possible that the Masoretic Hebrew text got corrupted, there is no need to believe that is the case here just because the reading is difficult. In the first stanza, we see that good judgment brings favor, but what about the way of the wicked and the unfaithful?

Dozens of verses testify that the wicked and unfaithful will come to ruin, but too often good and godly people ignore that fact, and waste their time on them, thinking that ungodly people will change. Of course, we always hope for the best for the ungodly, and pray that ungodly people will repent and believe God, but the wise person sets up reasonable boundaries and knows when to stop trying to help someone who is not beginning to make good decisions on their own. For example, the New Testament tells us to try to work with and correct a divisive person twice, and then move on (Titus 3:10-11). That may seem harsh, but our life on this planet is limited, and we must strive to put our time and energy where it will do the most good. When we have good judgment, we get favor, but if we don’t realize that the behavior of most ungodly people is unchanging, we will constantly waste our lives chasing the dream that someday that ungodly person will change. The wise thing to do is to set godly boundaries for dealing with people and pray for wisdom as to when to move on from someone who is unchanging. That can be difficult, but true godliness is often difficult. God’s Word says that generally the wicked will not change, and life has proved that out. Jesus taught us that the road to destruction is broad and many travel on it (Matt. 7:13), and we do not need to be the constant traveling companions of those people.

Pro 13:17

**“faithful.”** The noun is plural in Hebrew, literally, “faithfulnesses.” This is the plural of emphasis, meaning great or consistent faithfulness.

Pro 13:21

**“reward.”** The Hebrew verb is *shalam* (#07999 שָׁלַם), and in the piel aspect, as it is here, it means to be rewarded, repaid, recompensed. We chose “reward” because although salvation is not by works but by trusting God (having “faith”), believers will be rewarded for the good works they do for God. Also, however, because the reward is reward for work done, it can be considered a payment. God will reward or repay believers for the work they have done for Him. Many times, knowing that fact gives believers the mental fortitude to keep on obeying God in the face of great trials or temptations. The wise believer looks for an everlasting reward, not a temporal pleasure here on earth.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20, “wisdom.” For more information on the rewards believers will receive for obeying God, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

Pro 13:22

**“will provide an inheritance.”** The Hebrew verb is in the hiphil aspect and is causal. A very literal translation could be that “a good person will cause his children’s children to inherit,” but saying “provide an inheritance” makes the point well.

A good and godly person realizes that the Devil, the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), works aggressively to place the ungodly in positions of wealth and power, and to disempower the godly. That is one reason that governments seem to have so many ungodly people in positions of power, and why so many wealthy people are ungodly and promote ungodly causes. The wise, good, and godly person knows that his godly children and grandchildren are fighting both the fallen nature of the world and also spiritual forces to get ahead in life, and may well need help to succeed. The good person is more than willing to give that help.

Like all proverbs, this proverb is often applicable, but not universally applicable. It is not helpful to give much, if any, to the unwise, because it does not help them and it wastes resources that could be better used. On the other hand, many people just need a boost to get ahead and stay ahead, and the wise person looks for that kind of person to help. A good man prepares to give others a boost in life, and also knows that often one of the best ways to help is to begin to help while he is still alive, and so he gives money or property along with coaching and training in how to wisely handle wealth. Jesus illustrated that point in his parables in which a rich man gave different amounts of money to his servants and noted what they did with what he gave them, and then gave more to the ones who were wise with what they had already been given (Matt. 25:14-29).

**“to his children’s children.”** This verse does not mean that a good person does not leave an inheritance to his children but skips over them and leaves it to his grandchildren. It means he leaves enough wealth that his whole family, including his children and grandchildren, are helped along.

Unlike our modern culture, in the biblical times families generally lived together or very close together. A wise man worked diligently, lived righteously, and used his money and goods wisely so that he accumulated wealth. This took self-control, goal setting, and some self-denial, just as it does today. A person who spends lavishly will not accumulate wealth (Prov. 21:17). If the man was wise and self-controlled, when he died there was enough wealth to help not only his children, but his grandchildren as well. The reason that Proverbs 13:22 in the Hebrew text speaks specifically of a man leaving an inheritance is that in the biblical culture, women were not generally allowed to own property or to pass it down to others. However, in today’s culture, the verse applies to both men and women, and a wise woman provides for her children and grandchildren.

A wise and godly person realizes that the world is stacked against people who try to “make it on their own.” Although there are always some people who start with little or nothing and accumulate wealth, those people are relatively few. Far greater is the number of people who try hard to be successful, but the everyday expenses of life, taxes, and some unexpected expenses keep them under financial stress. Often, all people need to do well in life is a little outside help that allows them to get some basic needs paid for. A financial gift from a parent or grandparent is often all it takes to bring a person from just getting along to doing well in life. Also, that gift may not come as money, but in some other form such as providing education that allows a person to get a better job.

Pro 13:23

**“field.”** There is disagreement among the Hebrew scholars as to whether or not the field is unplowed and therefore fallow, or whether it is plowed and prepared for crops. The Hebrew is unclear, and so many versions, along with the REV, simply have “field.” It could be fallow or plowed, but in either case it could produce an abundance of food, but that abundance gets swept away by injustice. Many kinds of injustice can take away the abundance of the crop. Thieves could be one way the abundance is taken, but greedy landowners or greedy tax collectors are other ways.

**“carried away because of a lack of justice.”** God designed the earth to produce enough food to feed the people of the world, but the Devil has worked hard in many ways to make sure that people live in poverty. Unjust landlords or governments take away the profits of the worker, leaving him destitute and without the motivation to do what it takes to have future abundant harvests. Justice would say, “The farmer who labors must be the first to partake of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6), but what often happens is landowners or evil governments do not ensure that happening.

In our modern world, many people do not realize that God provided the earth, animals, and fish to provide for the needs of humans, and so they oppose hunting and fishing, and support taking huge tracts of land out of production “for conservation.” While land, animals, and fish can certainly be overhunted and/or abused, they can also be properly managed without being made unavailable to the public. Humans and animals are not equal and eating meat and fish is not “cruel.” God gave humans dominion over animals (Gen. 1:26), and gave animals to humans as food (Gen. 9:3). At the time God gave the animals as food to people, there were not many painless ways to hunt and kill an animal, so we can see that God is not opposed to hunting animals for food.

The Devil wants people to be hungry and malnourished, and one of the ways he promotes that agenda is by discouraging eating the animals God gave to people as food. In some societies eating meat is discouraged by some because it is considered wrong or cruel; in other societies, some food is considered too holy to eat, and in some societies, it is simply “unfashionable” to eat certain things that would otherwise be very good and health-promoting food.

Pro 13:24

**“desires discipline.”** While the REV has “desires discipline,” the Hebrew text is more graphic and idiomatic, and could be more literally translated, “searches [or “seeks”] him out for chastisement [or “discipline”]. The *HALOT*[[39]](#footnote-19429) lexicon has “searches him out for a beating” [entry under the word for “search,” not “discipline”].

The idea of the Hebrew text is that the parent who really loves a child understands that he must learn at an early age that bad behavior brings unwanted consequences. At a time when girls were regularly married by 14, and boys by 16, children were taught very early that being wise and doing things the right way avoided a lot of pain in life.

The Hebrew text saying, “searches him out for a beating,” would not be misunderstood in the biblical culture. There was no social security in the biblical world, and no “old folk’s homes” where the elderly could be taken care of. In their old age, or if they were hurt or disabled, parents were cared for by their children, which was one reason that children were so greatly loved and esteemed. No one living in the biblical era would think that a parent searching out a child for a beating would be child abuse, although that might be what someone today would think if we had that translation in the REV text.

Everyone in biblical times understood that children had to learn at an early age to be wise and make good decisions, and firm discipline helped ensure the children would be safe. There were no hospitals, no antibiotics, and no outpatient surgery centers. A child who was foolish and got what we today would think of as a minor injury could easily die or be crippled for life, so good parents diligently watched over their children to keep them safe and healthy and teach them wisdom.

Pro 13:25

**“of his appetite.”** In the Hebrew text, the word translated as “appetite” is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), which is often translated as “soul” but which has many different meanings and here refers to the person’s appetite.

[For more on “soul” and the meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words translated as “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**Proverbs Chapter 14**

Pro 14:1

**“*Lady* Wisdom.”** Given the context, “Wisdom” or “*Lady* Wisdom” is a very acceptable translation, particularly since it is juxtaposed with “Folly,” which is a noun (cf. BBE, NAB, NJB, RSV). The more literal Hebrew is “Wise of women” or “wisdom of women,” but “Wisdom of women has built her house” is awkward in English, although Darby’s translation reads that way. The Hebrew text clearly seems to be continuing the use of Wisdom and Folly as personifications. They represent the wise person and the foolish person, whether they are female or male.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

In this verse, the noun “women” is plural (as is the agreeing adjective, “wisdom”), and this is the plural of emphasis; in contrast, the verb “builds” is singular (it is plural in the Septuagint, but that seems to be an adjustment of the text). The plural noun is hard to translate into English, although some versions have attempted to catch the plural. For example, the ESV has, “the wisest of women.” But that translation distorts the text somewhat, because a person does not have to be “wisest” to build up their house, they just have to be “wise.” Also, the Hebrew text does not start with “the,” although it can often be legitimately supplied. To better catch the sense of the plural of emphasis, perhaps the translation, “Very wise women” would be good, but then that translation loses the personification in the verse, which is important to the context and scope. The point of the Hebrew is that “Lady Wisdom” is very wise, and builds her house.

We should pay close attention to the plural of emphasis in this verse—that the very wise person builds their house—because it shows the great importance God places on having one’s house and household peaceful, strong, and in good order, which can take a huge amount of effort and great vision and perseverance. If one’s household is in constant strife, the people are in debt or are in constant need of money, and the home is falling apart, it is unlikely the people in the home can be godly or at peace.

**“builds her house.”** This is a good example of “house” referring to the house, household, and extended household. The wise person does what is necessary to build up and secure their house and household. They use wisdom and sound counsel in making decisions, and don’t make decisions based on emotion. They promote peace among the people in the house and also make sure everyone is doing their part to make the household prosper.

**“Folly.”** The Hebrew noun is “foolishness,” or “Folly,” and is a personification.

**“tears it down with her hands.”** This phrase has the idiomatic use of the word “hands” meaning authority, power, or actions. Foolish people do not literally tear their house down with their hands, but they do so by their misuse of “authority” and/or “power,” i.e., what they do (and often, what they don’t do). Foolish people act on emotion and don’t make good financial decisions or good decisions with people. They don’t set good or godly boundaries for themselves or others. They alienate people and promote strife by what they say and do. Both their house and household end up in bad shape or destroyed.

Pro 14:2

**“integrity.”** Or “uprightness,” but in this case, a person who lives in uprightness lives in integrity.

**“shows contempt for him.”** This is an example of how words or phrases like “despise,” “show contempt,” and “hate,” can have a range of meanings from active hostility to neglecting and ignoring. Verses like this are why the wise person looks at how a person acts to determine where they stand with God. Jesus taught us that we will recognize people by their fruit, not by what they say (Matt. 7:16, 20). Ungodly people are liars. Also, much of the time ungodly people are so self-deceived that they do not even know they are wrong in what they say. The wise and godly person knows the Word of God well enough that he knows what loving and fearing God looks like, and is not fooled by someone who says they love God but by their actions declare they actually neglect, ignore, or even despise God.

Pro 14:3

**“prideful rod.”** The Hebrew text has the genitive phrase, “rod of pride,” which is a double entendre, because it can be a genitive of origin, a rod that comes from pride with which he strikes others, and it can be a genitive of relation, a rod that strikes him because of his pride. The point of the proverb is that unreasonable fools bring a rod to themselves, and to others, by their prideful talk.

**“lips.”** In this verse “lips” are personified, as if they take charge and protect the wise. The personification may have to do with the habit that godly people form through repeated practice. If a godly person repeatedly watches what he says, it can almost be as if his lips know what to say and what not to say.

The point of the stanza is that the wise person is watched over and protected when he is careful in what he says. The Bible has a huge amount of text about what is godly and proper to say, and the wise person heeds the Bible’s advice. Jesus said that on Judgment Day we will all give an account of what we have said (Matt. 12:36), and he was not just making idle threats—he was trying to get us to be serious about what we say (or email, or text) so we would be blessed and rewarded on that Day. When we do speak ungodly things, we should repent and confess our sin, and our sin will be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

Pro 14:4

**“the feeding trough is clean.”** The Hebrew text of this verse is an encouragement to think about how to get ahead in life even if it means more responsibility. Having an ox means more responsibility, but it also means a larger harvest.

A few translations follow the idea in the Septuagint, which is that where there are no oxen, the “stall” is clean, meaning that if you don’t have an ox then you don’t have to clean up after it; but if you want the strength of the ox then you have to deal with some mess. For example, the CJB reads, “Where there are no oxen, the stalls are clean; but much is produced by the strength of an ox.” The NLT reads, “Without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for a large harvest.”

The Septuagint translation makes sense, but so does the Hebrew text. Both teach a valuable lesson.

Pro 14:6

**“A mocker searches for wisdom but *finds* none.”** The mocker thinks of himself as wise, and wants more wisdom to make him even wiser. However, he does not recognize true wisdom when he sees it, so he never finds it.

Pro 14:7

**“the presence.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “from in front of,” but in the Hebrew culture, that expression would be taken idiomatically to mean “from his presence,” and not literally “from in front” of the person as if you could just move to his side and be fine.

**“will not know.”** The Hebrew is in the perfect tense, and thus more literally, “have not understood,” but the sense of the verse is future. So, it seems the verse is saying that a person who has no understanding will not gain knowledge by staying around foolish people. The Bible makes it clear in many places that who we choose to spend our time with affects how we think and act (1 Cor. 15:33).

Pro 14:8

**“road.”** The Hebrew is *derek* (#01870 דֶּרֶךְ), and it means “road, path, way, journey, manner, course of life.” The wise person understands his road, that is, the road he is traveling, his journey through life. The meaning of the Hebrew word *derek* (road) is broad enough to refer to both the immediate path he is walking on and his day-to-day activities, as well as the “journey” he is on and what are his long-term goals. The truly wise man looks for everlasting life and everlasting rewards, not just a “good life” on earth (cf. Moses; Heb. 11:24-26).

**“deceit.”** The Hebrew noun is *mirmah* (#04820 מִרְמָה), and it means deceit, fraud, trickery, treachery, disillusionment, disappointment. In this context, because of its parallel with the first stanza, the most apparent meaning is “self-deception.” The fool deceives himself. However, it is also true that the fool, both knowingly and unknowingly, deceives others.

Pro 14:9

**“guilt offering.”** The Hebrew word can mean “guilt” (Lev. 5:2), or a “guilt offering” (Lev. 5:6-7). The verse has an important double entendre. The fool mocks at both guilt, which he denies, and the guilt offering that would atone for his guilt, which he thinks is unnecessary. In the Old Testament, fools mocked at both their guilt and the guilt offering; today they mock Jesus, who offered himself for them. In the end, God will mock the mockers (Prov. 3:34) and they will bear their punishment (Prov. 9:12).

**“favor.”** The double entendre in the first stanza of “guilt” and “guilt offering” is reflected in the second stanza as well. The Hebrew word can refer to a “good understanding” of the way to reconciliation,[[40]](#footnote-15881) or it can mean “acceptance,” “favor,” in the sense that one who offers a sacrifice or asks for forgiveness gets acceptance from God. Thus, the verse can mean, as it is translated in the REV: “Fools mock at a guilt offering, but among the upright is favor [in that their guilt offering is accepted]. The verse can also mean: “Fools mock at guilt, but among the upright is good understanding [of their guilt. Which would lead to asking for forgiveness].

More fully expanded, Proverbs 14:9 means that the fool mocks at his guilt and the offering that would atone for it, while the upright have a good understanding of their guilt and their sacrifice and, humbly asking for forgiveness, are shown favor by God and accepted by Him.

Pro 14:10

**“its own bitterness.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “The heart knows the bitterness of its soul.” This is an instance where the word “soul” refers to the thing itself, and thus the translation “its own” bitterness is accurate. Other people may have similar experiences to the experiences we have as individuals, but in the final analysis, only the person and God and Jesus really know the depths of sorrow or the heights of joy in the person’s heart. That is why it is so important to have an intimate relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and to walk and talk with them on a daily and intimate basis.

Pro 14:12

**“There is a road *that seems* upright to a person.”** Humans have a sin nature, and that sin nature works to make people “feel,” think, and do things that are ungodly. The sin nature is one reason that everyone sins (Eccl. 7:20). The sin nature is why sometimes the road we take seems right to us but according to God, it leads to death. Within the Christian, the sin nature battles with the spirit nature so that the Christian cannot do all the good that they want to (Gal. 5:17; cf. Rom. 7:15-20). Often when people sin they say to themselves or to others, “That’s just the way I am.” That is the sin nature talking, and in one sense the person who says that is not wrong because that is the way they are in the flesh, but that does not excuse the person from battling against ungodly desires and working hard to follow God and obey Him. It is because of the sin nature that people need outside guidance from God. Our flesh is so tainted by sin that many times what “seems right” is ungodly and against His ways, just as Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 say. Jeremiah says the same thing: “Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). We need God’s Word to guide us in what is right and what is wrong. It is dangerous to simply “follow our heart” where it leads, because “the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jer. 17:9) because it is tainted by the sin nature.

**“to a person.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “to a man’s face.” People in the biblical era paid close attention to the expression on a person’s face and gleaned a lot of information from it. A person who thought the road he was traveling was upright would have a peaceful, contented, even joyful face; a face that reflected how he thought about his life. Also, however, “to the man’s face” can refer to being in front of, or “before” someone. So the proverb could be, “There is a road before a person that seems upright.” In any case, to say “seems upright to a man’s face” would not make sense in English because we do not well understand the custom and idiom involved, so it is clearer to say, “to a man,” which captures the essence of the verse.

**“road *leading to* death.”** This verse is identical to Proverbs 16:25, and the fact that the verse is repeated twice shows that it is a very important warning. The Hebrew text reads, “the ways of death” (or “the roads of death”). The NET text note correctly points out that this phrase is a genitive of destiny, and it refers to the “way,” or “road” (the Hebrew for “road” and “way” are the same) that leads to death. This verse is a stern warning to people who trust their own heart and ignore the clearly stated Word of God. The Devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and so he works aggressively to get people to trust themselves and not seek wise counsel from others or guidance from the Word of God. It is a common modern mantra to “trust your heart,” but the Bible says that the heart is deceitful and beyond cure (Jer. 17:9). There are times when we have to trust our instincts, our “gut feelings,” and our heart, because there is no clear guidance on something, but any time we can we should seek wise counsel and the wisdom of the Word.

The verse is progressive and shows that people have time to repent and change their ways if they are wise. A person starts out doing that which seems right to him even if it is sin in the eyes of God. But continuing to walk through life without checking one’s path with the Word of God and getting wise counsel leads to being on a road that ends in death on the Day of Judgment. Proverbs 21:2 shows us that although we may do that which seems right to us, it is God who decides what is right and what is wrong (see commentary on Prov. 21:2).

Pro 14:14

**“disloyal.”** The Hebrew word occurs only here in Proverbs in this context (the other two usages refer to physically moving an object; a boundary marker), and it refers to one who turns away or turns back. This is the only time the word refers to a personal attribute or action. A person who is disloyal in their heart is not just disloyal once or in a tough situation, but has the character trait of being disloyal. This is not a superficial trait, but one that permeates the core of the person’s being, down into the heart.

**“satisfied.”** The Hebrew word translated “satisfied” here in Proverbs 14:14 is *saba* (#07646 שָׂבַע), the same word that appears in Proverbs 1:31, which has a somewhat similar message. *Saba* refers to eating or drinking enough to be satisfied. However, it also has the negative meaning of eating to the point of being overfull and then getting sick or getting to the point the food is revolting, and in that sense, it is used for being repaid for what one has done, thus they will “get what their ways deserve” (NRSV). The context determines which meaning *saba* has, but in both Proverbs 1:31 and 14:14, both meanings apply (see commentary on Prov. 1:31).

The main message of the verse is that in the end, each person will get what they deserve. It can be challenging for the godly person to maintain a godly lifestyle and remain free of envy or anger at the success of the wicked, but we must constantly keep our eyes on the Hope, and persevere in obeying God, trusting that He will honor His promises, because He will. It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

An underlying message, but one that is clearly in the verse, is that those who are disloyal to God, their creator and very source of life, will generally be “satisfied” with the way they live and have no desire to change, repent, and serve God. Godly people should not expect that ungodly people will be dissatisfied with their way of life. Some may be, but most will be perfectly happy with their ungodly lifestyle and not want to change. That is one reason that much prayer and wisdom must be used when believers go to share their faith in Jesus Christ with others.

Pro 14:16

**“is cautious.”** The Hebrew word is often translated “fear,” and it is usually in phrases such as “fear God.” The overwhelming use of this word in Proverbs shows that the meaning of “fears” is usually “fears Yahweh,” meaning that because a person has both respect for Yahweh and fears the consequences of disobeying Him, he turns from evil. However, “Yahweh” is not included in the verse, and thus “fears” has a wider meaning. Evil has so many undesirable consequences that the wise person is cautious and turns away from it for that reason alone, apart from the consequences that God deals out. However, the consequences of disobeying God are serious and should be a deterrent to participating in evil.

**“overconfident.”** The Hebrew word is *batach* (#0982 בָּטַח), and means trust, confidence, feeling secure, being sure of oneself, and to feel safe and thus be careless. Waltke points out that when the participle is used in an absolute sense, as it is here, it refers to one who feels secure, and is confident, but is wrong.[[41]](#footnote-22086) The semantic range of the Hebrew text allows for many nuances of meaning, and so translators have captured the last phrase in different ways, saying the fool: “beareth himself insolently, and is confident” (ASV); “is reckless and careless” (ESV); “is arrogant and careless” (NASB); “is hotheaded and reckless” (NIV). The fool unwisely trusts himself or other ungodly advisors, like Rehoboam did (1 Kings 12:6-8), which resulted in disaster.

Proverbs 14:12 warns us that even when things seem right to us they may be “dead wrong,” and many Proverbs advise people to have a multitude of counselors and diligently seek wisdom. Proverbs 14:16 starts by saying that wise people turn away from evil, and that means that the person who desires to be godly must not only know what to do, but have the strength of character and courage to follow through and do what is right and necessary. God told Joshua that he would have to be courageous in order to lead Israel (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9, 18), and believers need courage to be godly. “Courage” does not mean having such great character that one has no fear, trepidation, or concerns, and so making tough decisions becomes easy; rather, “courage” is the ability to go through with doing something even if it is frightening, or involves grief or pain. Turning away from evil is simple, but not easy. It takes vision, character, and courage, and these are things that believers must take the time to develop within themselves.

**“turns away.”** Proverbs has a lot of verses about seeing evil and turning away from it (e.g., Prov. 22:3; 27:12. Also, see commentary on Prov. 3:7).

Pro 14:17

**“An easily angered person.”** The Hebrew uses a beautiful concrete idiom, “short of nostrils.” The people in the biblical times were astute students of behavior, and when a person is angry his face squinches and his nose flares, making him somewhat “short of nose.” A “short of nose” person is one who is angry or easily angered.

Anger is what psychologists understand as a secondary emotion, an emotion based on an underlying emotion. Although there is genuine righteous anger, which we see in both God and Jesus in the Bible, that is actually quite rare. Most of the time, a person who is angry is angry because they are afraid in some way, although that fear can be disguised in different ways, such as indignation.

A person who recognizes that their anger is based on fear can begin to effectively deal with their fear and become a much more peaceful person. When God says to “put away anger” (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8), He is not asking us to do something we cannot do. Given that, the person who stubbornly refuses to deal with their anger and the underlying fear that causes it will act, and continue to act, foolishly. Thus, Proverbs 29:22 says that an angry man stirs up strife and causes sin, and Proverbs 22:24 says not to be friends with an angry person; that friendship will only lead to trouble.

**“a schemer.”** The Hebrew is literally, “a man of schemes [or “devices”],” or “a person of schemes.”

Pro 14:18

**“The naïve inherit foolishness.”** The Hebrew word for naïve is *peti* (#06612 פֶּ֫תִי), and refers to the fool who is foolish because they are naïve, simple (simple-minded), ignorant or inexperienced (see commentary on Prov. 9:6), and they “inherit folly.” The word “inherits” is an ironic and almost harsh pun because we expect to inherit things that are a blessing to us. However, the naïve and ignorant person “inherits,” i.e., acquires for himself or gets given to him, “folly.” Folly, *ivveleth* (#0200 אִוֶּלֶת) is the foolishness of those who stubbornly resist God and godliness (see commentary on Prov. 1:7, “fools”). Those who are ignorant are repetitively faced with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, so that eventually they either gain wisdom and cease to be naïve fools, or they are no longer simply naïve and ignorant, but stubborn as well.

Pro 14:19

**“An evil person will bow down in the presence of good people.”** The ideal situation would be that this subservience of evil people would happen in this life, but that is often not the case. Thus, the verse has an eschatological aspect and looks to the future Day of Judgment and the Messianic Kingdom on earth. There are many evil people who are unsaved and will bow the knee on the Day of Judgment, but because they are not saved they will then be thrown into the Lake of Fire and be burned up; annihilated.

However, there are many people who are believers but who do not wholeheartedly obey God, and so they mix their godly belief with evil behavior. Those people will have lesser positions in the future kingdom and will serve those who have positions of greater authority in the Kingdom (cf. Ezek. 44:10-16).

[For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on earth.” For more on the annihilation of the wicked in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on people getting rewarded in the future in proportion to what they have done in this life, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Pro 14:20

**“hated.”** The Hebrew word “hate” has a large semantic range, and here can be everything from “be hostile to,” “be disgusted with,” and “ignore.”

[For more on “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

Pro 14:24

**“*the* foolishness of fools *is still* foolishness.”** This verse, though at first it seems almost nonsensical, is very profound. Folly is not relative. God is the one who defines truth, falsehood, wisdom, and folly. Man may not be aware of God’s truth, but it is still truth, and will be of infinite importance at the Judgment. Similarly, the foolishness of fools is still foolishness, no matter whether or not it is seen as such on this earth. The folly of many is now considered wise, but that will not always be the case; it is, after all, only folly.

Pro 14:25

**“lives.”** The Hebrew is literally “souls,” but this is a case where “soul” refers to the person’s life. This proverb certainly applies in many circumstances, but is certainly true in court, where evil people are not opposed to lying and having innocent people punished for things they did not do. If we worded the text, “saves souls,” the average reader might think this verse is about evangelism, but that is not the context.

Pro 14:26

**“he.”** The Hebrew can be “he” or “it.” God will be a shelter, but also a person’s strong confidence, their trust in God, is a shelter.

Pro 14:29

**“slow to get angry.”** The Hebrew uses a beautiful concrete idiom, “long of nostrils.” The people in biblical times were astute students of behavior, and when a person is angry his face squinches and his nose flares, making him somewhat “short of nose,” but a person who does not get angry quickly or easily does not squinch his face and is “long of nose.” The easily angered, short-nosed person is spoken of in Proverbs 14:17 (see commentary on Prov. 14:17). In contrast, Proverbs 14:29 mentions the person who is slow to anger and thus “long of nose.”

**“easily angered.”** The Hebrew text is more literally “hasty of spirit.” The Hebrew word “spirit,” *ruach* (#07307, רוּחַ), has a very large semantic range and can refer to a large number of things. In this case, it refers to the thoughts and emotions of the mind, in this context primarily being anger, something we can tell from the first stanza of the Proverb. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that “hasty of spirit” can refer to being hasty with our thoughts and emotions in many contexts. People who make quick and unwise emotional decisions also display foolishness, for example.

It is important in the study of God’s Word to become familiar with the large semantic range of *ruach*, spirit, because it includes things such as God in motion (“the spirit of God moved…”); wind; breath; the gift of holy spirit God put upon some people in the Old Testament; good spirit beings, evil spirit beings, the natural life of our fleshly bodies that is sometimes referred to as “soul”; the life force that will animate resurrected bodies in the future; and the activities of the mind including people’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.

[For more on the usages of *ruach*, spirit, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“displays.”** The Hebrew word means to exalt or lift up, but the point is that folly is lifted up for all to see. It is displayed.

Pro 14:31

**“taunts.”** The Hebrew verb *charaph* (#02778 חָרַף) is in the piel aspect, thus “taunts” is a good translation. A person who oppresses the poor “taunts,” “reproaches,” “speaks against,” or “shows contempt for” (NIV) his creator, God. The mention of God as creator in this verse is to emphasize that all humans have been created by God and for one human to oppress another is to deny that fact by one’s actions, and thus taunt God. It is not wise to taunt God, on the Day of Judgment no one will be able to stand against His will and avoid the consequences of his actions in life.

The person who shows favor to the needy glorifies God by stating through his actions that no one person is better than another. Each person is created by God and loved by God and helping others in need demonstrates that fact.

Pro 14:32

**“in his *own* blamelessness.”** This seems clearly to be a place where the Hebrew text was corrupted, because it reads, “in his death.” But that reading is contrary to the message in Proverbs and indeed contrary to the teaching in the Word of God. Godly people don’t take refuge in death, they try to stay alive and serve God. The Septuagint and Syriac read “in his integrity [or innocence, or blamelessness]” and many scholars and English versions support that reading. Especially in light of the first stanza in which an evil person is cast down by his own evil, the righteous person can take refuge in his blamelessness.

Some English versions that keep the reading “death” as per the Hebrew text try to rescue the message by altering it somewhat, thus the NET has that the righteous have a refuge even in the threat of death; or the KJV says that the righteous have “hope” in death, but neither of those are what the Hebrew text actually says. Versions that recognize the Hebrew text was likely altered and thus say something akin to blamelessness or integrity include the BBE, NAB, NJB, NRSV, Rotherham, and RSV. To switch the Hebrew text from “in his integrity” to “in his death,” two consonants in the Hebrew word must be switched. The Hebrew *bmtw* must be changed to *btmw*, and many scholars feel the switch was unintentionally made in the transmission of the text.

Pro 14:33

**“Wisdom rests in the heart of the one who has understanding.”** The woman, Wisdom, comes to rest, or is, in the heart of a person with understanding. The one with understanding will obtain Wisdom.

**“and *even* among fools she makes herself known​”** What the verse is saying, in harmony with the rest of Proverbs, is that wisdom will not be known by fools, but there is a caveat: wisdom reveals herself among fools, after all, everyone can learn what to do and what to avoid by watching what fools do and what happens to them.

Wisdom makes herself known even among fools although the fools themselves may never recognize her. Many wise people become wise by seeing the trouble and destruction that fools bring on themselves by their foolishness. In fact, some of the most profound lessons we learn in life come from seeing other people make mistakes rather than by making them ourselves.

Pro 14:35

**“acts shamefully.”** The Hebrew verb is *bosh* (#0954 בּושׁ), to be ashamed, dishonored, or disappointed, but it is in the hiphil aspect, the causal aspect, so in this case the text is saying that the servant acts in such a way he causes himself shame. Thus the verse could have been translated that the king is angry with the servant who “causes himself shame,” or brings shame on himself. Many times we do foolish things that bring shame or disgrace upon ourselves. We must strive to be like the servant in the first stanza of the verse who has great insight and thus makes good decisions.

**Proverbs Chapter 15**

Pro 15:2

**“The tongue of the wise produces good knowledge​.”** The Hebrew text reads something like, “The tongue of the wise makes good knowledge.” However, exactly what that means is disputed, and has led to the diverse number of translations. The last stanza of the verse, a clear contrast to the first, seems to clarify that while the wise speak “good knowledge,” knowledge that is helpful and a blessing, fools pour out folly, i.e., morally insolent speech that causes harm.

Pro 15:3

**“watching.”** We must be careful not to read too much into this verse. God watches us, and wants to help and bless, but He does not “control” the evil and the good.

Pro 15:4

**“A healing tongue is a tree of life.”** In the biblical culture, people understood that the “tree of life” was a tree that gave and sustained life, and that is exactly what healing words do; they give and sustain life. The wise person knows that and knows the value of speaking kind and healing words. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21). The healing “tongue” is a metonymy for the words spoken by the tongue, and “is a tree of life” is a metaphor, comparing healing words to the tree of life—a tree that gives and sustains life. Without the metonymy, the verse might read, “Healing words give and sustain life.”

**“but perversion in it.”** That is, perversion in the tongue—the words that are spoken—breaks a person’s spirit. Perverse and hurtful words can damage or destroy a person’s attitude and will.

Pro 15:7

**“spread knowledge.”** The Hebrew word “spread,” perhaps even better, “scatter” is an agricultural metaphor making the comparison between the wise person who spreads or scatters knowledge like seeds, and the farmer who scatters seed on the ground to produce a crop.

Pro 15:8

**“is an abomination.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are an abomination to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. This verse is similar to Proverbs 21:27.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“*brings* his favor.”** The Hebrew word for “favor” is *ratzon* (#07522 רָצוֹן), and refers to favor, delight, pleasure, or acceptance. Thus the verse can be saying that the prayer of the upright is God’s delight, or that the prayer of the upright brings God’s favor. Although both translations are true to the text, when we examine the scope of Scripture it is clear that people pray, and God urges us to pray, to bring His favor and help accomplish His work on earth. James tells us that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16). Elijah prayed and it did not rain, and then he prayed again and it rained. Job prayed for his friends and God forgave them (Job 42:8). Although God is no doubt delighted with the prayers of the upright, the message throughout the Scripture is that they bring His favor, and there is no reason not to represent that fact in the text here.

Pro 15:9

**“The road of the wicked person is an abomination.”** The way of life (the “road”) that wicked people choose is an abomination to Yahweh, and will have severe consequences, as we see in the next verse (Prov. 15:10).

**“eagerly pursues.”** The word pursues, *radap* (#07291 רָדַף) is in the piel aspect and it intensified, thus “eagerly pursues.”

Pro 15:10

**“the path.”** The “path” in Proverbs, sometimes called “the road,” or “the way,” refers to the godly path, the right path, the wise path. This is well understood, so Jesus could refer to himself, saying, “I am the way” (the “road”) without qualifying it by saying, “I am the right road,” or “I am the road to God.” People understood what he meant.

Pro 15:11

**“human hearts.”** The Hebrew reads more literally, “the hearts of the sons of man [or mankind].”

Pro 15:12

**“will not love *anyone* who reproves him.”** The essence seems to be that the mocker, the one who mocks or scoffs at wisdom and godliness, avoids company where he may be reproved.

Pro 15:14

**“the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.”** The meaning of the phrase “the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness” is that fools “eat” or “feed on” folly. They relish it and “eat it up.” Folly satisfies the soul of foolish people, and it also provides fodder for their continued foolish behavior and speech. The fool gets energy from the folly of others. The Hebrew word translated as “feeds” can also mean “shepherds,” and thus Proverbs 15:14 uses the image of sheep grazing to portray the fool “grazing” on folly.

Pro 15:15

**“banquet.”** The Hebrew word can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine.

Pro 15:16

**“turmoil.”** The Hebrew word is *mahumah* (#04103 מְהוּמָה), and it means “turmoil, confusion, disturbance, panic, dismay, trouble.” *Mahumah* is often associated with the turmoil and panic of war or divine judgment. The *NIDOTTE* lists one definition as “the confusion of war.”[[42]](#footnote-10571) Thus, in this verse, there is a subtle overtone that where there is a lot of money there is not just “trouble,” i.e., ordinary problems, but there is often conflict and fighting, and that is certainly the case in history and everyday life. Also, fighting especially accompanies wealth when it is gained in ungodly ways.

It is better to have a little with godliness—the fear of God—than to have great treasure and the fighting and conflict that often go with it. On Judgment Day, this life will seem to have been very short indeed, and godliness will be greatly rewarded whereas material wealth will be worthless—it really is not worth being in continual fights over. Ezekiel 7:19 says, “Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Yahweh. They will not *be able to* satisfy their souls nor fill their bellies *with their wealth*, indeed, it has been the stumbling block of their iniquity.”

Pro 15:18

**“hot-tempered person.”** The more literal Hebrew is “man of rage.” The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, nevertheless, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context because there are both hot-tempered men and angry women and they both stir up strife (for more on *iysh*, see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

**“dispute.”** The Hebrew word translated “dispute” is *rib* (#07379 רִיב pronounced reeb), and it has a wide semantic range, including strife, controversy, dispute, quarrel, accusation, lawsuit, etc. In this verse, *rib* has a range of meanings because people who are slow to get angry and seek peace find ways to settle arguments of all kinds and even lawsuits.

[For more on *rib*, see commentary on Hos. 4:1, “lawsuit.”]

Pro 15:19

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 15:21

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word translated “sense” is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is more literally, “heart.” *Leb* occurs over 800 times in the Old Testament, and it has an extensive semantic range—a very large number of different meanings—and often combines a number of meanings into one use. The Hebrew language and culture ascribe physical, mental, and moral functions to the heart, as well as control over the physical body. Actually, *leb* has so many meanings that saying it means “heart” is too restrictive. The only truly accurate way to translate many of the words in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts is to understand their full scope of meanings and then translate them according to the context. The full range of meanings of *leb* includes, but is not limited to, heart, inner man, mind, will, thinking, reflection, inclination, resolution, understanding, good sense, and in some contexts, it can also refer to the seat of passion and emotion.

Also, scholars have shown that the word “heart” is basically used the same way in both Hebrew and biblical Greek. Thus, *kardia* (#2588 καρδία), the New Testament Greek word for “heart,” is generally used the same way as the Hebrew word *leb* instead of having the more purely Greek meaning for “heart” that we find in Greek literature. Thus, it is generally true that if we understand the Hebrew use of “heart,” then we can understand “heart” in the New Testament as well.

The word “heart” often referred to the center or “core” of something, or something considered “deep,” which is why Scripture speaks of “the heart of the sea” (Ps. 46:2 NASB), “the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40 NASB), and “the heart of the heavens” (Deut. 4:11 NASB). The “hidden person of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4 NASB) is the inner person, their deep and core character. When the Bible says that God tests the “heart,” He is testing what is deep inside of a person, as revealed through thoughts, plans, and actions. When Jesus spoke of the things that come out of people’s “heart,” in that context, he was speaking of what came from deep within them (Matt. 15:18-19; Mark 7:20-23), not just what they happened to be thinking about at the time.

The student of the Bible must also learn to think of the heart as the center of rational thought rather than the seat of emotion. The modern world thinks of the heart as being the seat of the emotions rather than thoughts. For example, if we today say a person’s artwork has “heart,” we mean it communicates feeling or passion. If we say that the gift a person gave did not have “heart,” we mean the person did not care enough to choose an appropriate gift. If we say an athlete lost a game because he “lacked heart,” we generally mean that he lacked the conviction and passion to win, not that he did not think through his strategy correctly. In contrast, in the biblical culture, the “heart” generally referred to the seat of a person’s rational life and was associated with thinking, planning, and reasoning. The emotional life was often connected to the gut and expressed by words such as “bowels,” “kidneys,” “belly,” “womb,” etc. For example “bowels of compassion” refers to feelings or emotions of compassion (Col. 3:12; 1 John 3:17).

The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. So “heart” sometimes refers to just thoughts and attitudes, and not necessarily deeply seated ones. Thus, when Genesis 6:5 (NASB) speaks of “the thoughts of his heart,” it simply refers to what he was thinking. When Joseph’s brothers told their father, Jacob, that Joseph was alive and ruling Egypt, the Hebrew text says Jacob’s “heart became numb” (Gen. 45:26), but it means he could not think. Some versions catch the sense of the Hebrew by saying Jacob was “stunned” (HCSB, NASB, NLT). When Pharaoh “hardened his heart” and would not let Israel go, he “made up his mind” against God and Moses (Exod. 8:15). To “walk in the imagination of your heart” (Deut. 29:19) was to walk by what you thought and concluded.

Because in Hebrew, “heart” refers more to the actions of the mind than the emotions, there are times when, if the Hebrew *leb* was more literally translated as “heart,” it would give English readers the wrong impression. There are many examples of this. One occurs in the book of Job, when God asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job” (Job 1:8). The Hebrew text is more literally, “Have you set your heart on my servant Job?” But that translation would give the wrong impression to an English reader. When we today “set our heart” on something, we really focus on it, but that is not the meaning in Job. God was not asking Satan if he had focused on Job, but rather if he had even noticed him or thought about him (the CJB, NAB, and NLT are versions that have “noticed”).

Another example is that sometimes the literal Hebrew text says that people who do foolish things “lack heart.” Proverbs 6:32; 9:4 and 9:16 say that a man who commits adultery with a woman, or who is being lured to do so, “lacks heart,” But the text is not saying that a man who commits adultery lacks conviction or passion (he may in fact have a lot of passion and emotion in that situation), it is saying he lacks thinking about the situation, and thus “lacks sense” or “lacks good sense” (cf. CJB, HCSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NJB).

Still another example is Deuteronomy 29:4. In that verse, the literal Hebrew has Moses telling the Israelites that they did not have “a heart to know,” which in modern English means that they did not have the care, focus, or passion to learn. But in the Hebrew culture, the phrase referred to “a mind that understands” (cf. HCSB, NET, NIV, NLT). At that particular time, the Israelites were not mentally prepared to understand all the things that God had done for them, rather much in the same way that Jesus told the apostles at the Last Supper that there were things they were not mentally prepared to know at that time (John 16:12). In time, Israel could learn what God was doing and what they needed to know if they took the time to learn. Another place where the Hebrew word “heart” means “mind” is Isaiah 32:4, which speaks of the wonderful blessings and even healings in the future Kingdom of Christ, including the healing of all mental disease: “The mind of the rash will understand knowledge.”

Understanding the biblical usage of “heart” has many practical applications. One is that we can properly understand some verses that may have been unclear to us. Also, if we understand what “heart” means, we are not nearly as likely to import an erroneous meaning into the text and be in error about what the Bible is saying. Understanding the biblical use of “heart” even helps us understand how to be saved. For example, Romans 10:9 (NASB) says that in order to be born again a person must “believe in [their] heart that God raised him [Jesus] from the dead.” In that context, to “believe in the heart” is to believe something in the depth of your mind and thoughts, or as we would say in colloquial English, to “really believe it.” Knowing that can give us great confidence in our salvation. We may not be sure of what it means to “believe in our hearts” and therefore may not be sure if we really do believe “in our heart,” but we can know if we “really believe” that Jesus rose from the dead or if we doubt it. And once we are sure we believe God raised Jesus, then we should be confident we are saved and the peace of God, which passes understanding, can truly rule in our hearts.

[For more on heart, see commentary on Prov. 4:23, “issues.” For more on the bowels, kidneys, etc., referring to the seat of one’s emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23.]

**“person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

Pro 15:23

**“A person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman. However, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

Pro 15:24

**“upward.”** The idea of “upward” in this context does not mean “uphill” in the sense of having to struggle more and more in life, but rather “upward” in the sense of toward God and His blessings, including honor, success, and a higher status in life.

Pro 15:25

**“Yahweh will tear down the house of the proud.”** The proud, although they may be rich and powerful, will have all they have worked for torn down by Yahweh, while the widow, who was so unable to defend herself and her land, will be protected, for Yahweh will “establish” her border. In the ancient Near East, before surveys were accurate, a widow (or another poor or defenseless person) would have her boundary marked in the standard way, by piles of stones at the corners or bends. Unscrupulous and powerful neighbors would move the stones to increase their land, stealing hers. Nevertheless, eventually, such proud people will have what they have built through unrighteousness torn down, while Yahweh, as any just king would, will establish her boundary and make sure she has everything she deserves.

Pro 15:26

**“Evil thoughts are an abomination to Yahweh.”** Proverbs 15:26 is one of the many biblical passages that exhort believers to control their thoughts, which will result in them controlling their mouths. In Matthew 12:36, Jesus says, “And I say to you, that for every careless word that people speak, they will give an account of it on the Day of Judgment.” The way to control your mouth is to control your thoughts. The word the REV translates as “thoughts” can also mean “plans” or “intentions,” and those can be included in the wider meaning of the verse. Thus evil thoughts, intentions, and plans are all an abomination to Yahweh.

Proverbs 15:26 can also be translated as “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to Yahweh.” However, although the Hebrew text can be translated that way, and some English versions do translate the verse that way, that translation does not fit together with the last part of the verse as it is rendered in the REV and other translations (e.g. ASV, BBE, CEB, Douay-Rheims, JPS, NASB, NJB, NLT, NRSV).

Pro 15:28

**“The heart of a righteous person considers how to answer.”** It often happens that people answer questions or give their opinions before they have taken the time to think about the situation and what to say or not say. “Righteous” people, that is, people who think and speak rightly and in a godly fashion, consider what they should say before they speak. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

Pro 15:29

**“Yahweh is far from the wicked.”** The second half of the verse shows how Yahweh is far from the wicked: He does not hear their prayers and thus does not answer them, but the righteous people who obey God have their prayers heard. There are a number of verses that say God does not answer the prayers of the wicked (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; and James 4:3).

[For more on God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or honoring their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“he hears the prayer of the righteous.”** The word “prayer” is singular while the word “righteous” is plural. God hears every prayer that a righteous person prays. This is an idiomatic sense of “hears,” and it means more than just that He hears the prayer, but that He hears it and pays attention to it.

Pro 15:30

**“Bright eyes make the heart glad.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the light of the eyes.” The light of the eyes is that which someone sees that is a wonderful sight to him or her. Physiologically, this verse shows us a great deal about the workings of the body. Seeing things that are a blessing and light up the eyes also makes the heart rejoice, and good news “makes fat,” or adds health and strength to a person’s bones.

**“fattens the bones.”** The use of “fattens” or “makes fat” here is the common use of “fat” for “healthy, prosperous.” Also, “bones” is literal, because when we feel good it affects our whole body, even our bones, but it is also a synecdoche of the part where the “bones” are the “part,” but the deeper meaning of the verse is that good news makes the whole body healthy. It would be natural for “bones” to be put for the whole body because the bones are the very foundation of the body, and if they are not healthy, the body is not healthy.

[For more on bones and health, see commentary on Prov. 17:22.]

Pro 15:31

**“life-giving reproof.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the reproof of life,” which is a genitive of relation, the reproof that relates to life, i.e., by giving it. This verse has both a temporal and eternal interpretation. Those who listen to reproof will become wise and be associated with them, and as they are learning will not be shunned by the wise. Also, because they will be saved, they will dwell eternally among the wise.

Pro 15:32

**“discipline.”** See note on Proverbs 1:2 in ICC.[[43]](#footnote-18351)

**“*good* sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart.

This is a very encouraging verse because it shows us that people who are naïve, inexperienced, or foolish, can gain good sense if they will listen to instruction and reproof. This verse should be taken to heart by parents because in our modern world, too many parents shy away from setting godly standards for their children and then not reproving the children if they fail to keep the standards. Many parents are more interested in making their children their friends than making their children godly humans, so they mistakenly fail to reprove them. Young, foolish, naïve, and inexperienced people need to be taught, reproved, and corrected to be godly. People who are charged with leading and developing others, such as parents or bosses in the workplace, cannot be afraid to reprove others, which of course is to be done in a way that is appropriate to the situation and the people involved.

Pro 15:33

**“the instruction of Wisdom.”** The Hebrew can be read at least two different ways. It can be understood as an attributive genitive (“wise instruction”) or a genitive of source/origin (“instruction that comes from wisdom”). The verb “instruction” is in the construct state, and is juxtaposed with wisdom, literally “instruction of wisdom.” So does it mean that the fear of Yahweh is the instruction that comes from Wisdom, or that the fear of the Lord is the instruction that produces wisdom, or that the instruction is characterized as containing wisdom? It is likely both, an amphibologia (double meaning) in which both meanings are true.

Living day to day in the fear of God certainly gives wisdom, but it is also true that wisdom, gained through practical experience, will instruct one to live in the fear of Yahweh. When we read the verse as “instruction that comes from Wisdom,” then we see Wisdom as a personification, which is a common motif in the Book of Proverbs.

[For more on personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**Proverbs Chapter 16**

Pro 16:1

**“plans of the heart.”** Proverbs 16:1 is one of the Proverbs that is not universally applicable, but is applicable to people who are living a godly lifestyle. Thus it is one of the “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, setting forth the ideal situation, not the situation that always happens here on earth. There are a number of “ideal” proverbs like this in Proverbs (see commentary on Prov. 19:5).

The Hebrew word “plans” is *maarak* (#04633 מַעֲרָךְ), and it refers to an arrangement, plan, preparation. In this context, it conveys placing things in careful order or setting them next to each other for comparison, as we do when making plans. The “plans of the heart” are a person’s internal thoughts and intentions, which are devised according to the person’s will and desires.

The plans “of the heart” that people make eventually come out in what they say (Matt. 12:34; 15:18; Mark 7:14-23; Luke 6:45), but godly people want and intend to say things that are godly and agree with the written Word and God’s heart for mankind. Given that, the “answer of the tongue” they are seeking ultimately comes from God. This Proverb does not imply that a person’s response is outside of the speaker’s free will as if what the person said was somehow controlled by God; rather it is saying that a proper answer can only be found in the wisdom that God gives. The proverb does not discourage human planning but cautions that a person should not be self-reliant or overly confident in their own understanding and abilities but plan and speak in a way that reflects the wisdom of God (cf. Prov. 3:5-7). Doing that requires seeking wisdom and making the effort to be godly in thought and action. This proverb invites the willing reader to actively seek God in how he might devise godly plans and how to speak in such a way that those plans are articulated in a loving and godly way so they will eventually come to fruition and be put into action.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

**“of the heart.”** Biblically, the “heart” can refer to the mind, the thinking, the core of one’s inner life, and much more. Here it means the plans a person forms in his mind or the depths of his mind, or in the core of his inner self.

[For more on “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

**“tongue.”** The use of “tongue” is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, putting the part for the whole, where the part, the tongue, is put for the whole, i.e., the whole person. The answer the person gives is from Yahweh because wisdom and godliness are from Yahweh.

[See figure of speech “synecdoche.”]

Pro 16:2

**“person.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “man,” *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ pronounced “eesh”), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman, a husband, or a man opposed to an animal or God. However, *iysh* can also refer more generally to a person or human being, inclusive of both men and women.

[For more on the meaning of *iysh*, see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one.”]

**“motives.”** The Hebrew text reads “spirits,” and this is one of the good examples of when “spirit” can mean thoughts, attitudes, or emotions. The NASB has “motives,” which is certainly one of the meanings, but it is important that the student of the Bible learn about the flexible use of “spirit” and begin to think of it that way, because Yahweh also weighs whether a person has holy spirit or demon spirits that work in him.

Pro 16:3

**“plans.”** The Hebrew word is *machashabah* (#04284 מַחֲשָׁבָה), and it can refer to a person’s thoughts, or what he thinks about, that is “plans.” In this context, it seems “plans” fits best, as most modern versions say as well.

**“will be established.”** This is one of the “ideal” verses in the Bible that is often true but not always true. This promise would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people, but we do not. The Devil is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19), and there are many evil people, so the plans of godly people are often foiled. This promise will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

[For more on ideal proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

Pro 16:4

**“Yahweh made everything with an answer to it​.”** The Hebrew word translated “answer” is *ma’aneh* (#04617 מַעֲנֶה), and in this context, it means “an answer, a response.” Here in Proverbs 16:4, “answer” is continuing the line of thinking that occurred three verses earlier in Proverbs 16:1, which says that ultimately, “answers” come from God. In some contexts, the Hebrew word *ma’aneh* can mean “purpose,” which is why some translations read “purpose” (cf. HCSB, ESV, NASB), but based on the flow of context from Proverbs 16:1 we do not believe *ma’aneh* should be translated as “purpose” here in Proverbs 16:4. Also, God’s “answer” does not refer to a response to a question, but rather describes His planned course of action to deal justly with the words and deeds of His created beings.

God designed everything in such a manner that His ultimate plans and purposes for His creation will be fulfilled. Part of God’s plan and purpose was that His created beings were to be righteous and loving to both Him and to each other. However, the only way to do that was to give people, as well as angels and demons, free will so that they could make the choice to either love Him or reject Him. One way that God balanced His own plans and purposes with people’s free will decisions to obey or disobey Him was that He built both the principle of justice and a Day of Judgment into His plans. Thus, God has indeed designed a proper “answer” for everything in creation, be it good or evil. Bruce Waltke summed up the situation when he wrote, “The LORD brings every word and deed to its appropriate “answer” at the time of Judgment.”[[44]](#footnote-21849)

Many theologians and translators are Calvinistic in their thinking, and so while they assert that God creates all things for His own plans and purposes, they do not include genuine free will as part of God’s plans and purposes. Instead, they believe that God makes both good and evil; good people so He can bless them and wicked people so He can destroy them. Furthermore, that belief is then embedded into many English translations. That is why many English translations say that God made the wicked “for” a day of disaster. But God did not make the wicked for a day of disaster, instead, God planned that the wicked would be “answered” for their wickedness by disaster, i.e., people who choose to be wicked will experience disaster as the consequence of their wicked thoughts and actions.

We assert that Proverbs 16:4 is not propounding divine causality. It is not saying that God makes everything on earth—both good and evil—for His purpose, including making evil things just so he can destroy them, as if He were a child who constructs a castle of building blocks just so he can knock them down. Rather, Proverbs 16:4 fits into the general scope of Scripture in portraying God as a loving, righteous God, who allows people to make their own free will decisions while stating that He has an answer for whatever choice people make.

So people can love God or hate God, but He has woven into His plans a Day of Judgment when all creation will receive His “answer” for their words and deeds, including an “answer” that will be given to the wicked. Then, after all has been answered on the Day of Judgment, God’s creation in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21-22) will be righteous and obedient. It is also important to note that the answer each being gets on Judgment Day should not be a surprise to them because God has stated the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience in His Word. [For more on why Calvinism and predestination are not biblical, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination”].

**“a day of evil.”** The word we translate “evil” is the common Hebrew word for “evil,” which is *ra* (#07451 רַע), which means “evil,” but has a semantic range that also includes calamity, disaster, injury, misfortune, distress, and misery. The phrase “a day of evil” can refer to any day of disaster or calamity. In fact, Proverbs primarily addresses the present life of the reader in the sense that there is a retribution and justice to be expected for wickedness now—even though often no truly righteous retribution seems to occur in this life. But Proverbs 16:4 certainly also has an ultimate reference to the Day of Judgment as the day of disaster, injury, and misery for the wicked.

The Day of Judgment is not “evil,” in the sense that it is bad or wrong. Instead, it is an evil day for the wicked, because God’s judgment will be disastrous for them with much distress and misery. The Lord Jesus said there would be “sobbing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 24:51). In summary, Proverbs 16:4 says that God has made sure that there is a godly answer for everything that people do, and even wicked people, who sometimes seem to get away with doing so much evil on earth, will receive an answer from God.

Pro 16:5

**“be assured, he will not go unpunished.”** The Hebrew text uses a custom that would not clearly communicate the meaning of the verse. It more literally reads, “hand to hand he will not go unpunished.” This phrase illustrates the ancient custom of striking hands or shaking hands to seal an agreement (cf. Prov. 11:15, 21). In the USA today a “gentleman’s agreement” is still sealed with just a handshake. The point of the proverb is that even if evil, arrogant people agree to support each other and shake hands on it, they will not avoid being punished. They will suffer the consequences of their actions in this life or the next life, and even perhaps both.

Pro 16:6

**“covenant loyalty and faithfulness.”** This same phrase occurs in Proverbs 3:3.

Pro 16:7

**“person’s.”** The word “person’s” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ ), which most literally refers to a man. Nevertheless, it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12).

Pro 16:8

**“Better is a little.”** What is conspicuous about this verse is what it does not say. The world is so upside down that the righteous can live without being blessed by God with abundance, while Yahweh allows the unjust to get and enjoy great revenue. Although Yahweh seems to be absent, we can rest assured He will eventually bring justice and equity to the earth.

Pro 16:9

**“way.”** This is the Hebrew word *derek* (#01870 דֶּרֶךְ), referring to a road, not just a small path or “way,” but in this verse, the term “way” reads much better than “road.” See commentary on Proverbs 2:20.

**“but Yahweh prepares his steps.”** This proverb is very similar to Proverbs 16:1 in that it is an “ideal proverb,” expressing what happens in the life of a truly godly person. It is not a universal proverb in that it is not what happens in the life of ungodly people who reject God. There are a number of “ideal proverbs” like this in Proverbs (cf. Prov. 11:31; 13:25; 15:6; 16:1, 3, 7, 10; 18:3; 20:8; 21:1; 22:6). The book of Proverbs has many different kinds of proverbs, and some are universal and apply to everyone, while others, such as Proverbs 16:1 and 16:9, are written with the godly, humble, and obedient people in mind, to help them understand what happens in their life.

The godly person “devises” or plans what he will do in life, but he is working to please God and live a godly life, so God is directing and guiding him in what he is planning, which is why Yahweh can “prepare his steps.” Yahweh does not control the person, but the godly person actively seeks the wisdom and guidance of God in living his life, so God is actively preparing the person’s steps.

Yahweh prepares the steps of the godly person in many different ways. For one thing, the godly person makes a diligent effort to think and act in a godly manner; a manner that conforms to God’s Word and His character, such as the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). God also prepares a person’s steps by direct guidance and by bringing wise counselors into the person’s life. Also, God works behind the scenes such that the person who is seeking to be godly learns from examples in the world around him. In the end, the godly person will find that he makes plans concerning the life he desires to live, but he finds as he lives day to day that God has prepared that road for him.

[For more on how we plan but God helps us, see commentary on Prov. 16:1.]

Although the REV translation says “steps,” the Hebrew is singular, “step.” However, it is a collective noun, so we would say “steps” in English.

Pro 16:10

**“A verdict is on the lips of the king.”** This is one of the “ideal” verses in Proverbs. It is not speaking of every king, and especially not an evil king. The verse itself shows us that this proverb has to be speaking about a godly king. This verse, like many other verses in the Bible, anticipates the Messiah as the true godly king. Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated as “verdict” is used elsewhere in the Bible of divination. Thus in this verse, the “verdict” is an “inspired verdict,” a verdict that comes from God.

Pro 16:11

**“weights.”** The Hebrew is literally “stones.” For most of history, the weights used by merchants for their scales were stones. Metal was too rare or expensive. The merchants most often had a sack of some kind to carry the stones in. Occasionally they would carry them in the folds of their garment if their weight and number were small.

**“are established by him.”** The literal is that the stones in the bag are “his work.” The “bag” is the bag that the merchant would carry that had varying weights in it, and it was God who set the standard weights and measures so trade could be equitably carried out. The NLT is more of a paraphrase than a strict translation, but it gets the sense of the verse: “The LORD demands accurate scales and balances; he sets the standards for fairness.” Saying the weights in the bag are the work of Yahweh is a way of saying that He set the standard measures, and He expects people to be honest in their trade. From the standard that God established, the Levites and the king were responsible for ensuring that merchants had accurate weights and measures, but that proved to be an almost impossible task. Since the weights at this time were almost always made of stone, the temptation was great to chip a little off when you were selling something so you did not have to sell so much, and to get a slightly heavier weight when you were buying something so you got a little more for your money.

Pro 16:12

**“It *is* an abomination for kings to commit wickedness.”** The Hebrew preposition before “kings” can be “to” or “for.” This is where the Hebrew is much better than the English. It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, because the throne will never be established. The king will never win the support of the people. This is what happened to Rehoboam, and his kingdom fell apart (1 Kings 12:1-24). However, it is also an abomination to kings when people in the kingdom are wicked, because God will not bless a wicked nation. The verse could have been expanded in English to read, “It is an abomination to, and for, kings to commit wickedness.”

Pro 16:13

**“*with* integrity.”** The Hebrew word can also mean the one who speaks “upright things.”

Pro 16:14

**“person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

**“pacify *the anger*.”** The Hebrew reads, “pacify it,” but then “it” might be ambiguous to some; in Hebrew it can only refer to the anger.

Pro 16:15

**“spring rain.”** The “former rain” (sometimes called the “early rain”) is the rain that falls in October and November, after the dry months of May-September and it softens the ground for plowing and planting, and waters the seed as it starts growing. The planting of grains is done in what is autumn and early winter to us (similar to our “winter wheat”). The grains grow slowly over the winter months, and as the ground warms up in March and April the spring rains, or “latter” rains fall (sometimes called the “later” or “late” rains), watering the crops and bringing them into full fruit. The former and latter rains are mentioned in many verses (Deut. 11:14; Job 29:23; Jer. 3:3; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1). Having the favor of the king is a great blessing, resulting in fruit in one’s life, just as the spring rain, or “latter rain,” brings fruit to the farmer.

[For more on the latter rains, see commentary on James 5:7.]

Pro 16:17

**“life.”** The Hebrew is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), usually translated “soul.” *Nephesh*, “soul,” has a broad range of meanings, including the person himself and his life, the physical life force of humans and animals, our thoughts, attitudes, and emotions, and more. In this verse, “life,” or “soul” refers to our physical life, but also to our thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.

When we carefully guard the road we take, that is, the way of life we live, we are watching over both our physical life and our emotional life, and ensuring our being blessed and successful in this life and also having everlasting life and rewards from God in our next life. There are many pressures and pleasures that tempt us to leave our godly way of life, the godly road we are walking on, and turn aside to sin. But although sin and ungodliness may seem “good,” “joyful” or somehow “profitable” at first, they always have a bitter end, and Proverbs has a lot of verses stating that (for example: Prov. 1:32; 2:18-19, 22; 3:33; 5:4-5, 22; 6:15, 29; 8:36; 10:13-18; 11:5).

There is another reason that guarding our “road” keeps watch over our life. The way we live and the habits we form as we engage in godly activities day after day, keep watch over our “soul,” our physical and mental life. The wise person guards his road, his way of life, and the good habits he has formed, because they help keep watch over him. Often in times of personal distress it is the “road” one has carefully guarded and the habits one has carefully developed that almost take over and help safeguard one’s life and keep it from spinning out of control.

The wise person jealously guards his godly way of life because he knows it leads to God’s blessings and helps him stay godly in difficult times.

[For more on the uses of “soul” nephesh, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Pro 16:18

**“spirit.”** This is a good example of the word “spirit” referring to a person’s attitude.

**“stumbling.”** The Hebrew literally reads, “stumbling,” but this is an example of the figure of speech tapeinosis, or “belittling,” where something is purposely made lesser in impact to catch our attention. The person does not just “stumble,” there is a calamity, a disaster, but the word “stumbling” grabs our attention and forces us to say, “Is that all?” Then we realize the true impact of the verse: a puffed-up spirit, an arrogant attitude, goes before disaster.

[See word study on “tapeinosis.”]

Pro 16:19

**“poor.”** Many times in the Bible, the word “poor” means “humble,” but the second stanza of the verse shows that in this case, it means to not have much in the way of money or material things.

Pro 16:20

A humble truth-seeker will pay attention to and comprehend the words (Hebrew reads “a word”) of the prophets and sages, and thus be led to the God who inspired those words. He will then come to trust God and be blessed. The first stanza of this proverb can also, but less likely, be translated, “He who is prudent in speech finds good.” However, the more natural parallel between the first stanza and the second places “comprehends” parallel with “trusts.”

Pro 16:21

**“with a wise heart.”** The Hebrew is literally, “wise of heart.”

**“and the sweetness of *his* lips will increase persuasiveness.”** It has been studied and proven that speaking kindly to people to make a point is more effective than trying by volume and force of words to get your point across. No one wants to be bullied, and people bristle against it. People who learn to make their points kindly and courteously are more effective than people who do not learn or apply that skill. Often people who feel “yelled at” become hard and unyielding (Prov. 18:19), but a gentle answer can quiet rage (Prov. 15:1) such that communication becomes much more effective. The Bible says believers should be kind, and that includes the way we speak to others. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

**“lips”** This is a metonymy for what is spoken by the lips.

[See word study on “metonymy.”]

Pro 16:22

**“but the teaching of fools is foolishness.”** The Hebrew word for “fools” here is *evil* (#0191 אֱוִיל). The term *evil* generally refers to a person who is foolish because they are unreasonable and stuck in foolishness, as Proverbs 27:22 (NASB) indicates: “Though you pound a fool [*evil*] in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his folly will not depart from him.

To best understand Proverbs, it is important to know that there are five different Hebrew words that are translated “fool” in different English versions, yet there are some distinct differences between them and it is usually worth differentiating them. There is the naïve person [*pethe* #06612 פְּתִי], which is often translated as “simple,” “naïve,” or “inexperienced.” There is the *evil*, and the *kecil* [#03684 כְּסִיל], and these have so much in common that most scholars simply treat them as synonyms, although one teacher has distinguished them as the “unreasonable fool” and the “stubborn fool.”[[45]](#footnote-22131) There is the *lutz* [#03887 לוּץ], the mocking fool, or more simply, “mocker,” and there is the *nabal* [#05036) נָבָל], the “godless fool” or sometimes the “committed fool.” It is the *nabal* who says in his heart there is no God (Ps. 14:1), and so we have generally translated it “godless person” in the REV. Here in Proverbs 16:22, the subject is the *evil*, the unreasonable or stubborn fool.

One can tell from reading the wide variety of ways that Proverbs 16:22 has been translated that scholars are not in agreement as to the primary meaning of the verse. Many scholars believe that the sense of the stanza is that it is foolishness to try to instruct a fool because he or she has no desire to learn. That certainly seems to be supported by many verses that use the term *evil* for “fool” (cf. Ps. 107:17; Prov. 1:7; 12:15; 14:3, 9; 15:5; 20:3; 24:7; 27:22; 29:9; Isa. 35:8; Hos. 9:7).

Another interpretation is that the verse is saying that instruction that comes to a fool does so through his own folly. That interpretation agrees with our common modern saying, “A person learns from his mistakes.” Although that may be true of the simple or naïve fool, the *pethi*, that does not seem to be the case with the unreasonable fools, the fools designated by the term *evil*.

Other scholars believe that the verse is saying that when fools instruct or discipline others, what they teach is foolishness. That is certainly true, and we see that in our schools and colleges today. For example, many atheist teachers teach that God does not exist, which is certainly foolish teaching. However, the scholars who argue against that interpretation of this verse say that when the context is fools, the Hebrew word “instruction,” (or “discipline” #04148, *muwcar*) always refers to the instruction that is given to them, not the instruction they give to others (Prov. 1:7; 15:5). But that argument is not as watertight as it may seem, because there are only two examples and the context of both is very clear, not like Proverbs 16:22 which can mean a couple different things. Also, it is sometimes the case in Proverbs, as in the rest of the Bible, that a word or phrase will have a different meaning in one verse than it does elsewhere, and therefore the context, scope, and applicability are more important final determiners of meaning than the other uses of a word.

Actually, there is no reason to limit the meaning of this verse to just one interpretation. We believe that this verse is an amphibologia, that is, a single statement that has more than one true meaning. We believe this verse is one of the riddles of the wise (Prov. 1:6). It seems that the thought of the whole verse is that a person who has good judgment (which in Proverbs comes from God) has a source of guidance and strength that brings to him “life” in all its fullness, while fools do not have good judgment, so they pour out folly as “instruction.” Furthermore, trying to teach them good judgment doesn’t work because they have no heart to learn; in fact, they don’t even learn from their own mistakes—they just go on having poor judgment.

Part of the failure of our educational system today is failure to acknowledge the different kinds of fools in the world and admit that some people are unreasonable, stubborn, or godless fools who simply refuse to learn. Those people are allowed to stay in class and disrupt learning for everyone else instead of being disciplined in some effective way that stops them from keeping the other students from learning.

Pro 16:24

**“Pleasant words”** (*ōmer nō’am*) literally means “delightful speech,” which refers to words that are favorable, agreeable, and kind. Such “pleasant words” are said to be a “honeycomb.” The Hebrew words translated “honeycomb” (*tsūp debash*) more literally mean simply “liquid honey.” They refer to honey in its raw, natural form with its delicious palatable taste and medicinal value. This metaphor draws a vivid image of words or speech that are agreeable and satisfying to the hearer. However, the idea of “pleasant words” is not to be taken in the sense of someone performing lip service to feed someone’s ego or to flatter them, but rather it refers to words that bring nourishment and soothing to the individual.

The exact nature of the words is not specified but their effects are described as being “sweet to the soul” and “healing to the bones.” This double predicate indicates two distinct effects that “pleasant words” have upon the hearer. “Soul” (*nephesh*) refers to the person’s mind, emotions, and life. “Bones” is put as a synecdoche of the part (the part put for the whole) for either the person’s innermost being or their whole being. Thus, the effect of “pleasant words” is that they are like the drippings of the honeycomb, enlivening the soul and uplifting the entire person.

This proverb might bring to mind the record in 1 Samuel 14:27 when Jonathan dipped his staff into the honeycomb and tasted the sweetness of the honey. At once he became refreshed and it says “his eyes brightened,” meaning he was invigorated with a renewed energy. It is this sort of effect that the proverb is describing that “pleasant words” deliver to those who hear them.

**“healing to the bones.”** The Bible has a lot to say about how what we hear and what we think affects our body and can heal it. See commentary on Proverbs 17:22.

Pro 16:25

**“There is a road.”** This proverb is identical to Proverbs 14:12.

[For more information, see commentary on Prov. 14:12.]

Pro 16:26

**“appetite.”** The Hebrew word is *nephesh* (#05315 נָ֫פֶשׁ), which has many meanings. The basic meaning is soul, the life of the person or animal. It is used as “soul,” or “person,” or the products of the soul such as appetites, emotions, passions, or desires. A good Hebrew lexicon will give a full meaning of *nephesh*.

[For more on “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“labors…urges.”** The Hebrew has both of these verbs in the past tense. The idea is that the appetite has, and continues to, urge people on to work.

**“mouth.”** The word “mouth” here is a metonymy for “hunger,” but “mouth” makes the point very graphically.

Pro 16:27

**“A person of Belial.”** The Hebrew for “Belial” is *beliya`al* (#01100 בְּלִיַּ֫עַל).

[For more on men of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12.]

**“digs up evil.”** The Hebrew reads “digs evil,” but we would say, “digs up evil.” Some have suggested that this refers to digging a pit for others to fall into, but that meaning does not fit the second stanza of the verse well. Although people of Belial certainly dig traps to catch people, the idea of the verse more clearly seems to be that those wicked people “dig up” stuff on people, using “dig” for “search for” as in Job 3:21, and then they spread it around and their words burn and destroy like fire.

Pro 16:30

**“The one who winks his eyes devises perversions; the one who purses his lips brings evil to pass.”** This is a common understanding of what this Proverb is saying, and it refers to evil people who signal to others in ways that are not obvious, and the silent communication helps them bring evil to pass. This is most likely what the verse is saying, because evil people have always used silent signals to communicate to others. Although righteous people sometimes use silent signals, righteous people can generally say what they need to say openly; there is no need for secrecy. In contrast, evil people need to keep their motives and actions hidden and so they need the silent signals.

However, the meaning of the text is not obvious, because the word translated “winks” means “to shut,” and the word translated “purses” means to squeeze or pinch the lips as well as to purse them as if making a silent kiss. Thus, some scholars prefer a translation that is like, “He closes his eyes to plot evil; he bites his lips to bring evil to pass.” That translation would reflect the determination of the evil person, who closes his eyes to focus on his evil plan and bites his lip in determination to bring it to pass.

Pro 16:32

**“slow to get angry.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “long of nose.” This idiom also occurs in Proverbs 14:29 (see commentary on Prov. 14:29). The opposite, a person who is quick to anger is said to be “short of nose,” and that idiom occurs in Proverbs 14:17.

Pro 16:33

**“lap.”** The “lap” actually refers to the fold, or “pocket” made in the garment that is about where the lap is. People wore long outer garments and tied them up by a belt or sash, and it was common to tie the garment in such a way that it had a pocket where different things, for example, money, could be put. The “lot” was usually actually at least a couple, and sometimes more, stones or items that were different but felt the same to the hand. In making decisions, the stones would be “cast” (or placed) into the pocket, and then one drawn out that would make the decision. The High Priest set a great example for this because he had the Urim and Thummim inside a pocket in his breastplate that were used in making decisions (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65).

To understand this Proverb correctly, we must understand that it is written from the greater perspective of Proverbs, which is that the one casting the lot is a righteous person with good intent, so God can help with making the decision. This verse is not a “stand-alone,” apart from the scope of Proverbs; it is not saying that any chance throw of the dice is God’s decision. The way a lot, or dice, or other forms of divination work, the result can be by chance, from God, or influenced by Satan and demons.

We see Satan involved in divination all the time; in fact, many ungodly forms of decision-making, including casting lots for ungodly purposes, were influenced by invisible demonic forces. The ancients believed that invisible spiritual powers guided the “lot” or other means of divination, and they were certainly correct in that. Thus, what looked like chance was actually controlled by spirits, or God. In fact, witches and people involved with the occult have used divination for millennia because it is a good way that Satan can be involved in decision-making without having to come out into the open. So, for example, the wicked Haman cast lots to pick a date to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:7).

[For more on the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

**Proverbs Chapter 17**

Pro 17:2

**“servant will rule over a shameful son.”** Proverbs 17:2 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God. It was always God’s intention that people would get what they deserve in this life, and that is expressed in verses such as this one. This verse would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people, but because there are evil people and the Devil is the ruler of the world, people do not always get what they deserve.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5. For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Pro 17:4

**“liar.”** The Hebrew text is literally “a lie,” not “a liar,” and “a lie” could be a metonymy, in which the “lie” refers to the one who speaks the lie, i.e., “the liar.” Or the word “lie” could be a personification, in which the “lie” is portrayed as a person and is said to listen to a “destructive tongue.” Sometimes when it comes to non-literal statements and figures of speech, the text could be several figures (like Proverbs 17:4 could be a metonymy or a personification), and neither is “the right one”; the meaning of the verse is clear using either figure, and getting the correct meaning of the text is what is important. A liar listens to other liars and evil people because they support his behavior and lifestyle. The English proverb fits well here: “Birds of a feather flock together.” Evil people and liars hang out together. In Proverbs 15-19, the sage advises his youthful son not to hang out with evil people.

Pro 17:7

**“Eloquent​ speech *is* not fitting.”** “Eloquent” is the Hebrew word *yether* (#03499 יֶ֫תֶר), and here it refers to excellence of speech.[[46]](#footnote-26299) A godless fool (Ps. 14:1) may speak very well, but what he says will lead many people to destruction. The literal is “lip,” and is the same as “lip” in the last half of the verse, but “Eloquent lip” is not smooth in English.

**“godless person.”** The Hebrew noun translated “godless person” is *nabal* (#05036 נָבָל), the term for the godless fool. Many godless people are well-educated and sound very eloquent and knowledgeable when they speak, but they are leading people down the path of destruction. God’s people must compare what anyone says to the Word of God, no matter how well-spoken. Beyond that, godly people must look at the fruit of a person’s life to determine the truth of their character and what they are saying.

[See Appendix 14: “Fool & Foolish.”]

Pro 17:8

**“bribe.”** The Hebrew is *shachad* (#07810 שֹׁ֫חַד), and it has two meanings, “gift” and “bribe.” In this context, it is clearly a bribe.

**“magic stone.”** The Hebrew reads “a stone of favor,” i.e., a stone that brings the favor, or grace, of the one to whom it is presented. The Hebrew word *chen* (#02580 חֵן) is favor, agreeableness; or charm and grace in the sense of pleasant, agreeable qualities, as we speak of someone being charming and having social grace. The Hebrew is hard to translate. A very literal reading of the stanza would be, “A bribe is a stone of favor to its owner.” In other words, the owner of a bribe is overconfident and believes that his bribe will work the way he intends it to, which sadly, much of the time, is true. Because the person who uses bribes thinks they work all the time, “like magic,” the translation “magic stone” seems to capture the sense of the Hebrew text and some modern translations use that phrase (HCSB, ESV, NRSV, RSV). Another common translation is “charm,” but saying a bribe is a “charm” to its owner did not seem to carry the sense of the text as clearly as “magic stone.”

Pro 17:10

**“a rebuke.”** The Hebrew noun is singular, not plural, making the contrast between “a single rebuke” and “100 lashes” very stark. The fool is not just acting foolish, he is convinced he is right in what he thinks and does, so 100 lashes do not drive his foolishness from him. They may make him bitter, and he may not repeat his action because he is afraid of consequences, but he remains a fool.

Pro 17:11

**“A rebellious person seeks evil.”** The text can also be translated, “An evil man seeks only rebellion.” Scholars argue for both positions. Keil and Delitzsch point out that the rebellious man seeking only after evil is a much more natural connection than the evil man seeking only rebellion.[[47]](#footnote-13176)

**“messenger.”** The Hebrew is *malak* (#04397 מַלְאָך), and means, ”a messenger,” either human or divine. We call divine messengers, “angels,” and *mal’ak* occurs almost 200 times in the Old Testament, about half the time being translated “angel” (Gen. 19:1; 24:7), and the other half “messenger,” referring to a human messenger (Num. 21:21; Josh. 6:17). The Greek word *angelos* (#32 ἄγγελος) also means “messenger” and is also translated both “angel” (Matt. 1:20; 13:41), and “messenger” (Luke 7:24; James 2:25). Angels are the messengers of God, who do his bidding in heaven and on earth. Although it may seem helpful to translate human messengers as “messengers” and divine messengers as “angels,” Proverbs 17:12 is a verse where that would cause problems. The rebellious person will have cruel “messengers,” sent against him, both human messengers and spirit messengers.

Rebellion in the heart of a man opens him up to demonic attack and affliction. We could translate the verse, “a cruel angel will be sent against him,” and that would be valid, but it would exclude human messengers. Sometimes it is human messengers who squash rebellion. For example, after David died, his son Adonijah began to set himself up to rebel against Solomon, but Solomon recognized the situation and sent Benaiah, a leader of his guard, to execute Adonijah (1 Kings 2:13-25). Rebellious people open themselves up to harsh and sometimes deadly attacks by both human and divine messengers: people, angels, or demons.

[For more information on evil and ungodly behavior opening a person up to demonic attacks, see commentary on Prov. 13:21.]

Pro 17:12

**“person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

Pro 17:13

**“evil will not depart.”** Although this could be a general principle, that a person who repays evil for good will have problems, it could also be a reference to the fact that doing evil invites “Evil,” that is, evil demons, into one’s house, i.e., into one’s life.

[For more on “evil” being an actual demon, see commentary on Prov. 13:21, “Evil pursues.”]

Pro 17:14

**“letting water out.”** The reference is to breaching a dam or anything else that retains a lot of water. Once the water starts flowing, it is difficult or impossible to stop, and the break usually becomes worse and worse, allowing more and more water to flow. Some versions go with the meaning of the verse, and say, “The beginning of strife is *like* breaching a dam” or something similar.

Pro 17:16

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart.

The fool may have money to “buy wisdom,” which he might do by going to a school, paying for a tutor, purchasing books, or traveling to gain knowledge, but it is all to no avail because he does not have the *leb*, the common sense and understanding to translate that knowledge into godly thinking and action. The difficulty of bringing the Hebrew word *leb* into English in this context is revealed by the various ways translators have translated it, including “understanding” (ASV); “sense” (DBY, ESV, NASB); “doesn’t have a mind to grasp anything” (GW); cf. NRSV, RSV); “no intention of acquiring wisdom” (NET); “no heart for learning” (NLT); and “the desire is not there” (NJB).

There are many reasons a fool might not have the sense to gain true godly wisdom. He may have assumptions on which he has built his lifestyle that are wrong but that he is unwilling to examine honestly. He may be stubborn and not willing to change his ways. He may begin to realize that if he acquires wisdom and begins to live a godly life it will require some giving and sacrifice on his part, and he may be unwilling to do that. It can be almost impossible for genuine fools to change (Prov. 17:10; 19:29; 26:3), so the Bible warns us to stay away from those people (Prov. 14:7; 17:12).

Pro 17:18

**“shakes hands.”** The Hebrew is more literally something like, “striking hands,” but it refers to a custom that was either the same as our handshake or similar to it. The custom occurs here as well as in Proverbs 6:1 and 17:18.

[For more on the custom of shaking hands, see commentary on Prov. 6:1.]

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this context, *leb*, “heart” refers to the activity of the mind that includes good judgment, which is why we translated it “sense” (cf. BBE, CJB, HCSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, Rotherham, RSV).

People who make unwise agreements lack good sense. While it sometimes can be very hard to say “No,” to people who want help, an unwise agreement is still an unwise agreement even if it is difficult to decline getting involved. The wise person does not make unwise agreements, which is why this verse, and others like it, are in Proverbs (cf. Prov. 6:1-5).

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

**“solemn pledge.”** The Hebrew emphasizes the seriousness of the pledge by the figure of speech polyptoton. The Hebrew reads, “pledges a pledge.” The translation “solemn pledge” catches the sense of the text, and the emphasis of the Hebrew text could also be picked up by the translation that the person, “pledges, yes, pledges” in the presence of his neighbor.

[For more on polyptoton and the form of translation that uses “yes,” see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Far too often people do not think through the agreements they make, or they get pressured into making agreements that they know are unwise or even one that they just do not feel good about making. Our natural human desire to please people and/or to avoid conflict often means we agree to things we really do not want to agree to. Wise believers draw inner strength from the Lord and do the right thing, including saying “No” to unwise decisions, even though they know some people will be upset by their actions.

Pro 17:19

**“the one who exalts his doorway seeks disaster.”** In this case, the King James Version, which reads “exalteth,” seems to be more on point according to the biblical culture than the modern versions that read something such as, “builds a high gate.” Proverbs 17:19 involves a custom that is not easy for Westerners to understand. In the West, it is generally considered a mark of dignity and respectability to make one’s home as attractive as possible. Yards are neatly kept, landscaping is carefully tended, and in general, the outside of a home is tastefully painted and made as beautiful as possible. That was not at all the case in the biblical culture; in fact, it was just the opposite.

In the East, the government and authorities were almost always the enemy. They had ultimate authority and were very often unscrupulous. It was wise in the biblical culture to disguise one’s assets as best as possible. There was no advantage to showing off one’s wealth or possessions (which is also why even the women were closely shielded). Revealing one’s wealth only invited thieves from the lower classes and envy and trouble from those in positions of authority.

Thus, with rare exceptions, Eastern houses, no matter how wealthy the owners, were made of rough and undecorated materials: rocks, mud bricks, and wood. Nothing on the outside was decorated or presented in such a way that it revealed what was inside. Furthermore, biblical houses had no lawns or gardens outside them. The Law of Moses allowed anyone passing by to take a fruit or vegetable and eat it, so there was no reason to keep a fruit tree outside the house, it would quickly be picked clean (Deut. 23:24-25). This is why Jesus would have eaten from the fig tree he passed on the road if it had had figs (Matt. 21:19). If a person had land, he would grow his fruits and vegetables in fields outside the village or city.

Larger houses had a courtyard where some flowers, vegetables, or a fruit tree might be grown and where people could sit in the shade and enjoy the outdoors, but that courtyard was invisible to those on the outside. Larger homes also often had a kind of foyer at the door so that people could be allowed to enter through the outer door into a sheltered area but still not see what was in the house behind the second door. Privacy was very carefully protected, and to be allowed to enter a house was a gesture of great hospitality and trust.

The word “destruction” in the verse is the Hebrew *sheber* (#07667 שָׁ֫בֶר), and means a breaking, fracture, crushing, breach, crash, ruin, shattering, or destruction. Therefore, some versions say, “broken bones,” instead of “destruction,” but destruction or ruin is almost certainly the reading. The Hebrew word translated “exalts” is *gabah* (#01361 גּבהּ), and it means to be exalted, to be lifted up, to be high, or to be arrogant or haughty. The stanza could also be translated something like, “The one who adorns his doorway,” or “The one who beautifies his doorway.”

Despite the number of modern translations that speak of making the door high, that is not as clear or accurate as “exalts his door.” Why would a high door invite destruction? It is, after all, built into the wall and would never be as high as the wall itself. Of course, if a person built a high, fancy door to attract attention, he would be building a “high” door, but more to the point of the verse he would be “exalting” his door (we could almost translate the verse, “he who makes his door haughty seeks destruction”). If a person were to be so audacious as to “exalt” his door and make it “haughty,” enlarging it, decorating it, and using it to demonstrate his wealth and position, he would only be inviting his own ruin.

When the second stanza of this proverb is understood properly we can see that it fits with the general theme of the first stanza. The person who loves “transgression”—loves to break laws and overstep personal and social boundaries—will get into many fights and eventually bring his own ruin. The person who builds a “haughty” door on his house also will eventually bring his own ruin. There is a great lesson in this Proverb about living wisely and not being the cause of needless problems and strife. This verse also teaches the lesson that there are times when it is a good thing not to “stand out of the crowd” and be noticed by others. The wise person knows when to attract attention and when not to be noticed.

[For more on houses in biblical times, see commentary on Isa. 22:1.]

Pro 17:20

**“will not find good​.”** In the phrase “will not find good,” the word “find” is used idiomatically to mean “experience.” A person with a twisted heart does not search for good, so of course they would never “find” it. The point of the proverb is that a person with a twisted heart will never experience good. The “good” primarily refers to tangible prosperity, so the NIV and NRSV say, “do not prosper.” The phrase “will not find good” also refers to the fact that those whose heart is twisted do not see the good in good things. Good things can happen to them but they are so dark and twisted they don’t recognize the good as good, in fact, they may see it as evil.

Pro 17:21

**“no joy.”** This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, “understatement.” The statement is true, but it is understated, and as such is an understated way of saying the father of a godless fool will have loads of trouble.

[See word study on “tapeinosis.”]

Pro 17:22

**“bones.”** Although Proverbs 17:22 is somewhat literal in that a broken spirit, that is “broken” emotions and attitudes, can affect a person’s bones, it is also likely true that “bones” is a metonymy for other parts of the body as well. It is well-known that broken emotions and attitudes such as depression, anxiety, or a negative attitude can cause all kinds of physical problems, while in contrast, a cheerful heart can cure many bodily ailments.

In the biblical world, “wet bones” or “fat bones” were considered healthy, while dry bones were sick or even dead (Ezek. 37:1-4). Trusting in God and not in one’s own understanding will be a “refreshing drink to your bones” (Prov. 3:8). The Bible has a lot to say about what we hear and how we think affects our “bones” and our health (Prov. 3:8; 15:30; 16:24; 17:22).

Pro 17:24

**“Wisdom is with the one who understands​.”** Servants stood before their masters and mistresses, waiting to serve and help (cf. 1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 3:14; 5:16; cf. also Gen. 18:8, 22; Judg. 3:19; 1 Kings 12:8). Wisdom here is pictured as the ready and willing servant to those who have understanding.

**“but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.”** The thoughts and attention of the fool are on distant, unseen, and unattainable goals, meanwhile, he overlooks Wisdom, which would be willing to serve him well.

Pro 17:25

**“the woman.”** This is expressed in the text by the verb “bore” being third-person feminine singular. A more literal translation would be “to her who bore him.”

Pro 17:26

**“to issue a fine.”** The Hebrew word is *`anash* (#06064 עָנַשׁ), and it is in the qal aspect of the verb, so it means to issue or impose a fine (cf. NRSV). Here it is used as a synecdoche of the part for “punishment” in general.

**“to beat.”** The Law of Moses allowed guilty men to be flogged. Jeremiah was an example of a righteous man who was flogged by ungodly rulers (Jer. 20:2).

Pro 17:27

**“has *attained* knowledge.”** The Hebrew literally reads, “knows knowledge,” but this is idiomatic.

**Proverbs Chapter 18**

Pro 18:2

**“understanding.”** The Hebrew word is *tabun* (#08394 תָּבוּן ) (fem., *tebunah*).

**“expressing his own mind.”** In the Hebrew culture and idiom, “heart” referred to the seat of thinking and knowing, not the seat of emotion like it does in today’s English culture. This verse is not saying that a fool “expresses his heart” in the modern sense of the phrase, which is to express the deep feelings and emotions inside you. In this context, it simply means to speak what is on one’s mind. This phrase has been translated as “airing his own opinion” (NIV); “revealing his own mind” (NASB). The point is that the fool is not interested in understanding what others think, he is interested in telling others what he thinks.

[For more on the Hebrew word “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

Pro 18:5

**“show favoritism.”** The Hebrew is “lift up the face,” which is an idiom of acceptance and therefore in this context partiality. The sense of the verse is achieved, but without the important reference to the face, by saying that it is not good to show partiality to the wicked.

**“wicked…righteous.”** Although the Hebrew words are “wicked” and “righteous,” in a legal context, which this is, as we can see from the word “judgment,” often “wicked” means “guilty,” and “righteous” means “innocent.” That is why some of the English versions are translated that way. For example, the NLT reads: “It is not right to acquit the guilty or deny justice to the innocent.” While that translation is certainly true, it seems that the more literal translations, “wicked” and “righteous” are more widely applicable and are true also, which is why most English versions such as the REV translate that way.

**“deprive.”** When a wicked person is shown favoritism, it deprives the righteous of justice.

Pro 18:6

**“lips…mouth.”** Lips and mouth are put by metonymy for what is spoken by them, or they can be seen as the figure personification, as if the lips and mouth act on their own volition. A fool has no self-control and says whatever is on his mind, and that gets him into trouble.

Pro 18:7

**“to his soul.”** Here, “soul” has the simple meaning of the person himself. His lips are a snare to him. Thus the first and second stanzas are saying much the same thing.

[For more on the uses of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Pro 18:8

**“one’s innermost being.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “the inner rooms of the belly” (or “body,” “womb”). It is due to the sin nature of mankind that people are so quick to believe anything bad about people or a situation. It is also due to the sin nature of mankind that people often exaggerate how bad a person or situation is. Believers must use great self-control when speaking so that they speak the truth about a situation and only what benefits the other person; some “truth” does not need to be spoken. Furthermore, every believer must be on guard against others lying or exaggerating the facts of a situation. One of the Ten Commandments is, “You must not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). Exaggerating what someone has done wrong, or lying about them even if it is “the way you see it,” is a very serious sin in the eyes of God. Each human being is created in the image of God, and if we unjustly attack another person we attack God’s creation and offend Him, whereas we are supposed to be loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Pro 18:10

**“secure.”** The Hebrew word is *sagab* (#07682 שָׂגַב), and it literally means “to be lifted up,” to be high, to be inaccessibly high, and in some contexts (but not here) “to be exalted.” The word picture being drawn in this verse is that the name of Yahweh is a strong tower and those that run to it are high above the spears and arrows of the enemy and are safe and secure.

Pro 18:12

**“puffed up.”** The Hebrew gives a more literal but perhaps less clear word picture: “the heart of man is high before disaster.”

Pro 18:14

**“person’s.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

Pro 18:16

**“gift.”** The Hebrew word is *mattan* (#04976 מַתָּן) and means a gift, offering, or present. In the context, it is a gift given to curry favor, and that is the way it is used in Proverbs. It is used of gifts given for selfish reasons, including gaining an advantage over others. In this case, people with “gifts” gain entry to the rich and powerful, especially those in government whom they would otherwise not get to see, and that gives them a distinct advantage over the poor who cannot afford such gifts. It is in effect a bribe, but translating it “bribe” is going too far. A bribe is always considered wrong, while the gift here may or may not be immoral or illegal, even though it is given with the purpose of currying favor.

**“creates opportunity.”** The Hebrew word is literally, “enlarges,” or “makes wide” for him. Thus the gift enlarges his possibilities, it creates opportunity for him.

**“leads.”** The Hebrew word is *nachah* (#05148 נָחָה) and means “to lead,” or “to guide.” This is the figure of speech personification. The gift, or bribe, is now seen as a guide that leads the person forward on the path he desires to walk on but with which he is unfamiliar.

Pro 18:18

**“lots.”** The Hebrew is singular, and a more literal but much less easily understood translation would be, “The lot removes quarrels (or ‘contentions’).” The custom behind this verse is that often when a choice needed to be made, “lots,” which were often stone or bone, were cast. Or they were put into a bag or the folds of someone’s garment, and then a “lot” was drawn which decided the “winner,” and the dispute was over or the decision made. It was believed that God would ensure that the lot was won by the right person. The apostles chose a replacement for Judas by lot (Acts 1:23-26).

Pro 18:19

**“*is harder to win*.”** The Hebrew is very difficult and this is one of the generally accepted ways to translate the text (cf. HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV). However, it is also possible that the Hebrew is more like the translation done by Michael Fox in the Anchor Bible: “An offended brother is like a fortified city, and quarrels are like the bar of a palace.”[[48]](#footnote-30304) In that case, if an offended brother is like a fortified city then he would be hard to win over, but another meaning, perhaps even a double meaning, becomes possible: the brother is like a fortified city in that he has shut his brother out; the quarrel has caused him to close and bar his gate and he is not interested in a friendly relationship with his brother anymore.

We live in an emotionally undisciplined time when people say very hurtful and often exaggerated or untrue things. This is not only ungodly and sin, it can result in damaging personal relationships for years if not for life. The Bible warns us to put away anger, bitterness, and defaming speech (Eph. 4:31), and it is wise to obey God in that matter. It will make a difference in this life and the next.

**“the barred *gate* of a castle.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the bar of a castle,” but that is unclear to most English readers who do not understand that “the bar of a castle” is the bar that goes across the inside of the gates and keeps them from being opened. When Samson tore the gates off the Philistine city of Gaza and carried them away, he took them “bar and all” and carried them away (Judg. 16:3). Contentions are like the barred gate of a city; they can make being “open” to each other difficult and even sometimes impossible.

Pro 18:20

**“person’s.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

Pro 18:21

**“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”** There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power that words have to hurt or to heal. As we can see here in Proverbs 18:21, death and life are in the power of the tongue, and there are many other verses about the power of the words we speak (e.g., Prov. 10:11, 20, 21; 12:6, 18; 15:4, 28; 16:21; 25:11; 25:12; Eph. 4:29). Our personal communication is of great concern to God. What comes out of our mouth often comes right from our heart (Matt. 12:34-37; Mark 7:14-23). God is very clear that we should watch what we say very carefully (Ps. 17:3; 39:1; Prov. 13:3; 21:23; Eccl. 5:2; Eph. 5:4; Col. 3:8). We are not to speak just to justify ourselves, but the standard we use is, “Does it benefit the hearer in some way?” What we say is to be helpful in building the other person up. Fools have no understanding of that, so they just blurt out whatever is on their mind (Prov. 18:2).

Ungodly people have no desire to know or obey God so they constantly use ungodly, hurtful language, especially when they are upset or hurt, and often in texts and emails (this is sometimes referred to as “keyboard courage”). Since most people on earth are unsaved, there is a general atmosphere in the world that what you say does not matter, it is how you feel that matters, so just say what you feel. But that is not wise! Listen to Christ: “And I say to you, that for every careless word that people speak, they will give an account of it on the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be declared righteous, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). We Christians need to obey God and control what we say to people (Eph. 4:29). How we feel is not more important than how God commands us to behave.

The phrase, “in the power of” in Proverbs 18:21 is an idiom and is literally “in the hand of,” which refers to power or authority.

**“and those who love it will eat of its fruit.”** In the second part of Proverbs 18:21, when the text says, those who love “it,” the “it” refers to the tongue. The “tongue” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the words the tongue speaks, because the tongue is able to deliver words of death or life. Those who love “it” are people who enjoy the power that their words bring, and they use their tongue in a way that achieves their desired objectives. These objectives can be positive (i.e., giving life), or negative (i.e., producing death). But the proverb is also asserting that in a reciprocal way, the person speaking will reap the reward or consequence of their words. An interesting fact about speaking is that the effect the words have on the hearer is also the effect that the words have on the speaker. The speaker who speaks words of life also gets life as a consequence of what they say, while the one who speaks words of death reaps the consequence of death from what they say.

Pro 18:24

**“person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

**Proverbs Chapter 19**

Pro 19:1

**“fool.”** The Masoretic text reads, “and is a fool,” but it is possible that this reading came about as a scribal error. There are some Hebrew manuscripts that read “rich,” such as the Syriac and the Targums.[[49]](#footnote-21261)

Pro 19:2

**“desire.”** The Hebrew text reads *nephesh* (#05315 נָ֫פֶשׁ), which is the soul, and the products thereof, such as attitude, appetite, etc. This is a case where it is important for the translator to help the English reader, who tends to think “person” when he reads “soul.” Although it is not good for a “soul,” a person, to be without knowledge, that is not the force of the verse, which can be determined by the second half of the proverb. If the verse were to read, for example, “a soul without knowledge is not good; And he who makes haste with his feet misses the way,” what would be the connection between the soul without knowledge and the one who is in a hurry? The proverb, as a whole, would not make sense. The first part of the verse refers to “desire,” a product of the soul, without knowledge, and that desire often is accompanied by haste, but the ignorance causes the person to miss the correct way to accomplish his goal.

**“makes haste with his feet sins**.” This is not a “general statement of truth,” but one that is specific to the context. Lots of people do things quickly without sinning. However, the person who has a desire and then acts quickly to fulfill it without getting informed about the situation frequently makes a mistake.

Pro 19:3

**“way.”** The Hebrew word means “road,” referring to one’s way of life and path that they walk in it. Foolishness can ruin a person’s life.

**“subverts.”** The idea is that the foolishness of the fool self-sabotages what he is trying to accomplish. It overturns his efforts.

**“but.”** This is a proverb that is only understood properly if the Hebrew *vav* (וְ) that begins the second stanza is translated as “yet” or “but,” and not “and.” Fools ruin their own life, but do they blame themselves? No, they rage against Yahweh, whom they think should make their lives easy.

Pro 19:5

**“will not escape.”** This is one of the “ideal” statements in Proverbs, a statement that should be true on earth, but often isn’t, and hence has an eschatological overtone: it will be fully fulfilled in the future. It was always God’s intention that people would get what they deserve in this life, and that is expressed in many verses in Proverbs and the rest of the Bible. There are many prophecies and promises that would be fulfilled here on earth if our societies were ideal and godly, but since we are sinful people and live in a fallen world in which the Devil is the ruler of the world, our societies are not godly and ideal, and so many promises are not fulfilled now. They will be fulfilled on the Day of Judgment and/or in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when Jesus reigns as king over the earth and there is righteousness and justice for everyone. These verses are “proverbs” because they are ideal and many of them are accurate more than they are wrong (Prov. 19:5 is an example of that). On the other hand, some of them are ideal statements that are not as true here on earth as we would like them to be. For example, Proverbs 3:10 says that the person who gives their firstfruits (tithes) will be very prosperous, but that does not happen that often here on earth but will certainly be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom.

There are many “ideal” prophecies like this in the Word of God (cf. Prov. 1:33; 3:10; 4:10; 10:24; 11:25, 31; 12:11, 21; 16:3; 17:2; 19:5, 23; 21:28; 22:6; 25:3; 28:27; 29:25; Matt. 6:33).

Proverbs 19:5 is about false witnesses, and part of the reason that there are as many false witnesses as there are in our court systems is that we ignore God’s directive on what to do when one is caught. God said the punishment that was to be given to a false witness was that he was to receive the punishment that the person who was falsely accused would have gotten had the perjury not been discovered (Deut. 19:16-19). Therefore, a person who lied in a murder trial would be executed, while a person who lied in a trial about theft would be fined or beaten. God created humans and loves them, and He very much wants for us to have safe and just societies, and we ignore His commands to our detriment.

[For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6. For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when there will be justice on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Pro 19:6

**“entreat the favor.”** The Hebrew literally reads “to make the face pleasant.”

**“the person who gives gifts”** The Hebrew text is literally, “a man of gifts,” which is a type of genitive of production, a man who produces, or gives, gifts.” The word “man” in this context is cultural, and refers to a man or woman.

Pro 19:7

**“hate.”** The word “hate” in the Bible does not always have the meaning it has in English, an intense feeling of animosity, anger, and hostility toward a person, group, or object. In Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large range of meanings. Here the word “hate” is used in the sense of “being disgusted or repulsed by” to the end that you would avoid your family. It is especially the case that often someone is poor because they are lazy or too arrogant to take advice, and those kinds of people generally are disgusting to, and avoided by, others.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Proverbs 1:22, “hate.”]

***“but*** **they do not *respond*.”** The masculine plural “they” agrees with the masculine plural “words.” The poor man chases his friend with words, but they are not convincing and do not win over his friend. We have to ask why this poor person is hated (or “held in contempt”) by his brothers and friends. It is often the case that poor people are poor because they have made bad decisions or are lazy, unfocused, etc.

It is noteworthy that this verse never condemns the brothers, or the friend who distances himself from the poor person. Proverbs has verses that encourage and support people giving to the poor (cf. Prov. 19:17), so it is most likely that this verse is talking about the kind of poor person who is lazy, constantly makes bad decisions, and/or does not want to control his spending (cf. Prov. 21:17). This poor person has been helped out by his family and friends many times before but without any lasting results; he just continually needs more. Most often in those cases, the poor person cannot see that they are at fault and so they constantly pursue people with words, trying to get money from them. They then get angry with the people who finally make the decision not to support them.

To be prosperous and successful, wise people must realize that poor people like the poor man in this verse can be a very real drain on one’s time, mental energy, and physical resources. The wise person is generous to the poor but knows when he has given enough and can say “No” when it is appropriate. Furthermore, because the poor person will almost always try to make the person with resources feel guilty about not giving more, the wise person has thought and prayed about the situation and is mentally equipped to understand it spiritually, mentally, and physically, and make the sometimes hard decision to say “No” without feeling guilty about it.

Pro 19:8

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this context, *leb*, “heart” refers to the activity of the mind that includes good sense.

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

**“good.”** The Hebrew could be translated as “a good thing,” and while that is certainly correct, it may be too restrictive in English, because the verse is certainly referring to more than just good “things,” but good in general. The old adage says, “The best things in life aren’t things,” and that certainly applies here, although the text also says that the discerning person will have good “things” as well.

Pro 19:9

**“tells.”** Perhaps more literally, “breathes out” but the Hebrew also means “tells.”

Pro 19:10

**“Luxury is not fitting for a fool.”** Luxury is not fitting for a fool for a number of reasons. He does not deserve it, he will certainly flaunt it, and he will not use his influence rightly. His increased influence will only be used to spread his foolishness. The Devil knows this, and works hard to get wealth and influence into the hands of fools.

Pro 19:11

**“slow to anger.”** The Hebrew literally reads, “makes long his nose.” The idiom might be understood better as “makes long [relaxes] his nose.” A person who is angry squinches up his face, so that his nose is short. As he relaxes, his nose becomes long again. Ancient people were extremely sensitive to facial expressions, and those expressions are recorded as idioms in the Word of God.

Pro 19:12

**“grass.”** The Hebrew word *eseb* (#06212 עֵשֶׂב), translated “grass” is hard to bring into English. It was the general word for the weeds that naturally grew in any field. The biblical world did not have “grass” as we know it today, that is, large areas of lawn with grass like fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. It just had areas of weeds. Sometimes those weeds were long and thick, like a weedy field today. In other places people’s grazing animals, i.e., their sheep, goats, and cows, kept the weeds eaten down, but they were still just weeds. But translating the verse into English as “the dew upon the weeds” gives the wrong impression. To the modern English reader a “weed” is a bad thing, and that is certainly not the intended meaning of the verse. The weeds of the field were a blessing because they were the natural food that sustained the grazing animals, as well as providing some things, like mustard seed, that people could use. So even though “grass” may give the reader the wrong impression, it still seems to be the best choice for an English translation, which is why almost all English versions read “grass.” In most places, the Greek word *chortos* (#5528 χόρτος cf. Mark 6:39) means the same thing.

Pro 19:13

**“constant.”** The Hebrew translated as “constant” is *tarad* (#02956 טָרַד), and Holladay gives the meaning as “drip steadily” in Proverbs 19:13 and 27:15.[[50]](#footnote-26603) Waltke renders the last stanza: “and a wife’s quarrellings are a leaky roof that drips constantly.”[[51]](#footnote-27240) There are many things in life that are annoying, so the constantly leaking roof is deliberately chosen for effect. Home is supposed to be a place of refuge and rest, and so when it is a place of constant annoyance it is especially hard to endure.

**“constant drip.”** The Hebrew word translated as “leaking” is *deleph* (#01812 דֶּ֫לֶף), and as Holladay points out, the meaning in proverbs is “leaky roof.”[[52]](#footnote-32402) The same word is used in Proverbs 27:15, translated as “constant dripping,” referring to a leaking roof. Leaky roofs were a big problem in the biblical culture because the roofs were generally flat and made of beams covered, sometimes sparsely, with boards or large sticks, which were in turn covered by clay that may or may not have been mixed with chaff, then flattened and baked by the sun. These clay roofs often grew weeds (called “grass” in biblical lingo), which did not do well in hot weather because first, no one would water it, and second, there was certainly not a lot of depth of soil. Thus, Psalm 129:6 (ESV) says: “Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up.”

Pro 19:15

**“idle.”** The Hebrew word is *remiyah* (#07423 רְמִיָּה), and means slackness; sluggish, lax, negligent, and careless behavior. It occurs 4 times in Proverbs: Proverbs 10:4, 12:24, 27; and 19:15.

[For more information, see commentary on Prov. 10:4.]

Pro 19:17

**“he will repay.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that on the Day of Judgment, people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (e.g., Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; 44:10-16; Matt. 16:27; Luke 9:26; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8, 17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:3-6; 1 John 2:28).

Here in Proverbs 19:17, the word translated as “repay” is the Hebrew word *shalam* (#07999 שָׁלַם), and in this context, it means “to be repaid or rewarded.” Yahweh will bless those who are generous to the poor (Prov. 11:17; 14:21; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27) but will stand against those who oppress them (Prov. 21:13; 22:22-23).

[For more on being repaid on Judgment Day, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Pro 19:18

**“for there is.”** Although many versions treat the Hebrew as a temporal phrase, “Discipline…while there is hope,” the Hebrew text does not seem to support that interpretation.[[53]](#footnote-15781) Furthermore, the Hebrew word *muth* (#04191 מוּת), death, is in the hiphil aspect, which is a causative action in the active voice, “to put to death.” There are times when children are such a disappointment that parents give up on them, and in the OT culture a child who was ruining the family could be executed (Deut. 21:18-21). Here is an exhortation to parents not to give up on even unruly children, but to exert an effort to discipline them and bring them back to a right path.

**“do not be intent.”** The Hebrew contains an idiom, and literally reads, “lift up your soul.” To lift up the soul to something is to desire it or to aspire to it. No parent would desire for their child to die. Thus, this verse is a type of hyperbole in which if a parent does not have the godly love and resolve to discipline a child, it is as if the parent were wanting the child to die. A child who is not disciplined will become a fool and a disgrace (Prov. 22:15; 29:15).

**“on causing his death.”** The Hebrew reads more literally, “to kill him,” but that is easily misunderstood, perhaps leading to the thought that the father purposely kills his son. The Hebrew infinitive is translated with a causal force to show that the father’s lack of disciplining his son leads to the son’s death.

Pro 19:19

**“The person with great anger.”** Different versions have tried different English words to catch the sense of the Hebrew, including “hot-tempered” (NIV), “violent-tempered” (NRSV), and “hothead.”[[54]](#footnote-28378) A person who breaks into anger and wrath when things do not go his way will continue to be that way, no matter how many apologies he makes after he has calmed down, and no matter how much he says it will not happen again. There needs to be some genuine transformation, which takes great effort and almost always outside intervention and counseling.

**“will bear the penalty.”** Here, a “penalty” is being used by the figure of speech synecdoche for all kinds of punishment. This is the way to “wake up” an angry person. Let them bear the penalty of their action. Bailing them out of the problem they have created does not help.

**“surely, if.”** The Hebrew can be “for if; indeed if; surely if,” etc. Here, “surely if” catches the sense of the verse.[[55]](#footnote-28551)

**“you will have to do it again.”** This seems to be the sense of the Hebrew text, as shown in the versions. However, the Hebrew text may have more meaning as well, because the word translated “again” in most versions also means “to add.” Thus, the Tanakh translation by the Jewish Publication Society ends the stanza with “you will only make it worse” (i.e., by bailing the person out and not letting him pay the penalty, you only make the situation worse). Many counselors would concur with that, and thus the Hebrew of this proverb is a beautiful double entendre. The “helper” will have to help again, and by helping actually only makes the situation worse.

Pro 19:21

**“will stand.”** The Hebrew word is *qum* (#06965 קוּם), and it means to stand, to rise, be fulfilled, etc. In this context it means to stand, that is, to be fulfilled.[[56]](#footnote-18554) The JPS Tanakh reads, “it is the LORD’s plan that is accomplished.” We humans make many plans, and some of them come to pass and some of them do not. However, the plans of Yahweh will stand, and as such, will also come to pass. That is why we can have confidence in our future everlasting life.

Pro 19:22

**“his loyalty.”** The text of the first line is difficult to translate as there is a Hebrew homonym *chesed* (#02617 חֶסֶד ) that can have more than one coherent meaning in the verse, hence the vastly different English translations. *Chesed* can mean either “loyalty,” referring to covenant loyalty, which is loyalty to and based on the Sinai covenant (cf. Prov. 3:3; 14:22), “loving kindness” (cf. Prov. 11:17). But it can also carry a rare meaning of “disgrace/shame” (cf. Prov. 14:34; 25:10; Lev. 20:17).

Pro 19:23

**“sleep satisfied through the night.”** Proverbs 19:23 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God. It was always God’s intention that people would get what they deserve in this life, and that is expressed in verses such as this one. This verse would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people, but people do not always get what they deserve.

[For more on the “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

**“visited by evil.”** To not be “visited” by evil means that the person will not experience evil.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Pro 19:24

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one”

Pro 19:25

**“strike.”** The Hebrew verb is *nakah* (#05221 נָכָה), and it is a hiphil (causative) imperfect (uncompleted action), so “strike” here does not refer to a single blow. At the very least it refers to a beating, which may involve many blows or lashes. It may be more than one beating, as the behavior of the fool demands. This verse never says the mocker will change his thinking, and this verse is not about changing a mocker even though usually even a mocker will not repeat the thing that caused him to be beaten just so he avoids getting beaten again. However, when the mocker is beaten, the simple learn. And learn they must, or society goes into a downward spiral, with each generation being more foolish, godless, and cruel than the last. Corporal punishment such as flogging may seem cruel to some, but the Word of God sets it forth as an important part of having a godly society.

Pro 19:27

**“cease.”** This verse is satire. The word “cease” is an imperative in Hebrew, Thus, “Stop!” The father is instructing his son by using satire, or irony. He is elevating the value of listening to instruction by telling his son to stop listening, to stray from knowledge. The Hebrew is more literally: “Stop listening to instruction!, my son, to stray from the words of knowledge.” The satire is meant to catch the attention of the reader: “Is he serious? Why would he instruct his son that way? Oh, he’s using satire.”

[For more on satire and the way Proverbs is written, see commentary on Prov. 1:6, “obscure expression.”]

Pro 19:28

**“ungodly witness.”** The Hebrew literally says, “a witness of Belial,” which refers to someone who is in league with Belial, the Devil. Other renderings of the Hebrew word *beliya`al* (#01100 בְּלִיַּ֫עַל), which is transliterated as “Belial,” can be a “worthless witness,” “corrupt witness,” “crooked witness,” or something similar.

[For more on “Belial,” see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12.]

**“devours.”** The Hebrew verb is *bala* (#01104 בָּלַע), and means to swallow down, but in the piel aspect (the intensive form of the verb) it is intensified and means to gulp down or devour greedily. This proverb has several interpretations. The wicked gulp down their lies [and the lies of others] as if they were tasty morsels, they do not choke on their lies. These people can look you in the eye and lie in a way that no one would ever suspect it. Also, “wickedness” is put by the figure metonymy for all the food and other good things that criminals get as a result of lying and winning (cf. Prov. 4:17; Job 20:12). Also, by gulping down wickedness, they seem to make it disappear. Good liars are now called “spin doctors,” who make good seem evil and evil seem good. That kind of thing has been going on for millennia (cf. Isa. 5:20-24).

Pro 19:29

**“Judgments.”** The word “judgments” is put by metonymy for the punishments that are the just consequences that mockers receive for their evil actions. The Bible could simply say, “Punishments have been prepared,” and while that would be true, it would not reveal to the reader that we have a righteous and just God who does not punish anyone without due cause and due process. God prepared “judgments” for people who defy Him, and punishment will come as a result of a just judgment for evil and ungodly behavior.

**“prepared.”** The Hebrew verb is *kun* (#03559 כּוּן), and it means “to be established, to be steadfast, to be sure, to be completed, to be arranged, to be permanent, to be ready, to be made ready, to be prepared, to be stable.” The verb occurs 20 times in Proverbs, and the dominant meaning is “to be established.” “Prepared” or “established” is the meaning here. Wise people “prepare” and establish punishments for mockers, and a society should have a set of equitable laws with punishments that fit certain crimes. More serious is that God has prepared and established punishments for people who mock and defy Him, and evil people will not escape God’s justice. Waltke notes that “punishments are part of God’s fixed, immutable, eternal order,”[[57]](#footnote-29027) and that fits with the scope of Scripture.

Jesus made it clear that people who did not take their life and godliness seriously were wicked (Matt. 25:26). God did not create us so we could disobey Him or choose our own lifestyle without consequence. People have a moral obligation to obey God, and to mature in the Lord (Heb. 5:12; the Greek word often translated “ought” refers to a moral obligation). An important part of God’s “established” justice is that some of it is remedial, designed to train, correct, and instruct; and some of it is retributive, a just punishment for a given crime. The ultimate example of God’s retributive justice is Gehenna. No one “learns” in Gehenna. It is retributive justice in its purest form; an equitable punishment for a life of sin. The death penalty is mankind’s purest form of retributive justice. Some people are so hardened in their foolishness that they will not reform their thinking. They are punished for their crimes in a just manner and also so that others will learn.

The death penalty was established by God and is important if we are to have a godly society.

[See, John Schoenheit, *The Death Penalty: Godly or Ungodly*.]

**Proverbs Chapter 20**

Pro 20:1

**“beer.”** The Hebrew word is *shekar* (#07941 שֵׁכָר), and it refers to beer (*NIDOTTE*).[[58]](#footnote-29802) The people in the Old Testament could not distill alcohol like we can today, but they could and did drink beer. (There is an excellent article on the subject of beer in the Bible in the *Biblical Archaeological Review* magazine).[[59]](#footnote-20186)

Pro 20:2

**“does wrong to his *own* life.”** The semantic range of these words allows for the translation that many take: “forfeits his own life.” Sinning, or erring, against one’s own soul, especially by angering the king, may involve losing one’s life. Although this verse speaks only of a “king,” it has a very broad application. If we anger those who have authority over us, such as a parent, boss, guard, military commander, etc., we only cause problems for ourselves.

Pro 20:3

**“will quarrel.”** The Hebrew word is *gala* (#01566 גָּלַע), and means to ‘break out,” which in this context is to break out into a quarrel or fight, which we can cover just by saying “quarrel.” The verb is imperfect (incomplete action) and in the hithpael aspect, which is intensive. Thus, in this context, it is not so much that the fool is quick to enter a quarrel that already exists as he is to start one. Thus, Waltke translates this as: “every fool starts a quarrel.”[[60]](#footnote-19097) Fools have very little self-control, so they quarrel and fight when they are offended.

Pro 20:4

**“in the proper season*.”*** The Hebrew is more literally, “in winter,”[[61]](#footnote-13164) although some lexicons say, “harvest time,”[[62]](#footnote-15070) both those meanings would give the wrong impression if translated into English. To us, no one would plow in “winter,” and the grain harvest ended in June but in the biblical culture plowing did not start until the former rains in October. The coming of the rains signaled the start of late fall or early winter, but the ground was so hard from being baked in the sun from April to October that people had to wait for the rain before they could plow, and then they plowed in the rainy season. It would be acceptable, and clarify the meaning for modern readers, to add some italics to the verse and say: “in the proper season, *when it rains.*” If a man was so lazy he would not plow in the rainy season, he would have no food at harvest. See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 20:6

**“but a faithful man, who can find?”** There are many people who will say they are your friend, but a truly faithful friend who has your best interests at heart can be hard to find. When the text says, “who can find,” it is not saying that such a faithful friend cannot be found, but rather that it can be difficult to find such a friend. A truly faithful friend is not someone who never disagrees with you, but one who takes a genuine interest in you being a godly person and so not only is a good supporter when you are doing well, but an honest critic when you need outside advice to do the right thing.

Pro 20:10

**“Unequal weights and unequal measures.”** Unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag or had measuring cups of slightly different sizes that only they could easily tell apart so that they bought a lot and sold a little. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16).

[For more on trading using honest balances, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

Pro 20:13

**“food.”** The Hebrew word is literally “bread,” which is used by metonymy for “food” in general because “bread” was the dominant food.

Pro 20:15

**“gems.”** The Hebrew is actually “coral.” For a better understanding of the translation “gems,” see commentary on Proverbs 31:10.

Pro 20:16

**“Take his garment.”** Proverbs 20:16 is almost identical to Proverbs 27:13.

**“given security.”** Guaranteeing a loan for another person who cannot afford to guarantee the loan himself is so risky that it is like the loan has been defaulted already. Thus, if a person guarantees a loan, often using his overcoat as security, the person who gave the loan should just take the coat at the start.

Pro 20:19

**“gossip.”** The Hebrew word can refer to a gossip or a slanderer. Here, “gossip” is the better fit (see commentary on Prov. 11:13).

**“speaks loosely.”** The Hebrew can mean one whose intent is “to entice or tempt” others, but it can also mean “to talk carelessly,” in the sense of naïve gossiping. But it could also carry a sense of both meanings together. A gossip or a person with loose lips can get a person into a lot of trouble (see REV commentary on Prov. 22:3).

Pro 20:22

**“I will repay evil!”** Cf. Proverbs 24:29, which is a similar proverb.

Pro 20:23

**“Unequal weights.”** The Hebrew text literally says, “a stone and a stone” are an abomination to Yahweh. That would be clear to people reading Proverbs at the time it was written. At that time, most of the weights that merchants used in buying and selling were made of stone, not metal, and unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag that only they could easily tell apart so that they bought a lot and sold a little. Thus, for example, a merchant may have had two supposedly five-shekel weights in his bag, but they were actually a little different in weight even though they looked the same and felt the same to the untrained hand. But the merchant could tell them apart and he would buy with the heavier weight to buy more, and sell with the lighter weight to sell less. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16).

[For more on trading using honest balances, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

**“are not good.”** This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, “understatement.” False scales are not just “not good,” like unequal weights they are an abomination to God.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

Pro 20:24

**“A person’s steps are *directed* by Yahweh.”** This verse is not saying God controls what we do. It is saying that in every person’s life there will be many points of decision, and God directs us to places or puts us in situations where we can be most effective for Him. The godly person recognizes the hand of God on his life and willingly decides to follow the paths the Lord opens before him. As we walk with God, we find ourselves in many situations that we could not or would not have planned for. In that sense, we cannot understand the “way,” the road, God lays out for us. It develops as we walk it.

[For a better understanding of this proverb and why it is worded the way it is, see commentaries on Prov. 16:1 and 16:9.]

Pro 20:25

**“inquire about it.”** The Hebrew here shows that after making his vows, the man inquires about them, that is, he asks himself and perhaps others about them, and then reconsiders his vows. From God’s perspective, vows are to be made in all seriousness after careful consideration. They are not to be made hastily and then simply undone if they are somehow inconvenient.

Pro 20:26

**“A wise king separates out the wicked, and he rolls the *threshing* wheel over them.”** Anyone who lived in the culture of the Old Testament would realize at once that grain was harvested and gathered, then it was threshed, then it was winnowed (which was to separate the wheat from the chaff), so this verse at first glance could be thought to be backward, but that is not the case at all. Instead, there is a very profound meaning in the verse.

In the culture of the times, at harvest the grain was cut, and then placed in huge piles on the threshing floor. Then a threshing instrument was applied to the grain so that the heads of grain were separated from the stalk. The threshing instrument could be as simple as a stick that pounded the grain, or an animal could be led back and forth over the grain (hence the saying, “Do not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain”), or a “threshing sled” or cart could be dragged or rolled over the grain. Once the grain was threshed and separated from the stalks, the mixed piles of stalks and grain were winnowed during a light wind. The winnowing was done by throwing the mixture of stalk and grain high into the air. The wind carried the stalks to the side of the threshing floor, and the chaff, the small pieces of broken stalk, even further to the side, but the small round grain fell more straight down.

As the winnowing was done over and over, eventually only mostly grain would be left, which then had to be sifted in a grain sieve. That would normally end the process, and the grain would be ground for flour. But in this proverb, the wicked are compared to grain that the king winnows (implying he has already threshed it), but the king is not satisfied. He believes there is still some wickedness left in his kingdom and brings the threshing wheel over them again. That the threshing wheel “returns” over the wicked is not well understood, or well represented in most versions, which makes the verse confusing and backward. The point of the parable is that wise rulers (and thus also wise people) make sure that wicked people are removed from their kingdom, their business, or whatever they are doing, and that means going over and over the people present to weed out evil.

Pro 20:27

**“innermost being.”** The literal is more like “all the chambers of the body.” It was believed that the body had many rooms or chambers in it. See commentary on Proverbs 18:8.

Pro 20:30

**“Blows that wound cleanse away evil.”** This verse is about corporal punishment. Wicked people were beaten as punishment, and that was often enough to reform them (cf. Deut. 25:2-3). Children were also strictly disciplined in the biblical culture, and one reason for that was that life was so dangerous (Prov. 13:24).

**“innermost being.”** See commentary on Proverbs 18:8.

**Proverbs Chapter 21**

Pro 21:1

**“water canals.”** The Hebrew word can also mean “streams,” like the streams of water that flow from a spring. However, in this case the word more likely means “canals” or “channels” and compares Yahweh to a farmer or landowner who channels the water running across his land as it pleases him.

**“he turns it wherever he delights.”** This sentence cannot be understood apart from the whole Word of God, which makes it clear that people have free will. God cannot just “turn our hearts” if we do not want them turned. Thus this verse speaks to the fact that we must look to God for guidance and be willing to allow Him to direct us.

There are dozens of places in the Bible where kings disobey God and do horrific things. There is a long list of the kings of Israel and Judah of whom it is specifically stated that they “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” Solomon was one (1 Kings 11:6). So were Nadab (1 Kings 15:25-26), Baasha (1 Kings 15:33-34), Ahab (1 Kings 16:30), Ahaziah king of Israel (1 Kings 22:51-52), Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16-18), Ahaziah king of Judah (2 Kings 8:26-27), Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:1-2), Jehoash (2 Kings 13:10-11), Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-24), Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8-9), Menahem (2 Kings 15:17-18), Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:23-24), Pekah (2 Kings 15:27-28), Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1-2), Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-2; 2 Chron. 33:1-2), Amon (2 Kings 21:19-20; 2 Chron. 33:21-22), Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31-32), Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:36-37; 2 Chron. 36:5), Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8-9; 2 Chron. 36:9), and Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:18-19; 2 Chron. 36:11-12; Jer. 52:1-2).

If God was making those kings do evil and turning their hearts away from Him, then He would be fighting against Himself because He also commands us to come to Him, obey His Word, and live righteous lives. God is not the author of confusion, and a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. The very definition of “evil in God’s sight” is that it refers to thoughts and actions that are contrary to the will of God. But if God is the cause behind a king’s (or any person’s) evil thoughts and actions, then the person would not be doing that which was “evil in the sight of the Lord,” he would be doing the will of God—what God wanted him to do; and by definition, obeying the will of God is not doing evil.

So we see that Proverbs 21:1 is a true “proverb” in that it speaks of something that is ideally true or sometimes true, but it does not refer to a universal truth—something that is always true. It is similar to many of the proverbs in the Bible; for example, Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,” yet we know there are good parents whose children turned away from God. Proverbs are generally true, but not always true. God can direct a king’s heart, and our hearts, if we are open to His guidance.

Pro 21:2

**“Every person’s road is right in his *own* eyes, but Yahweh examines the hearts.”** It is natural for people to think that what they do is right. The Hebrew word “road” and the phrase “right in his own eyes” are idiomatic and mean, “what a person does is right to him,” or “seems right to him.” So the verse could be more colloquially worded as, “Every road a man decides to take seems right to him, but Yahweh weighs the heart.”

The fact that a person thinks that what he is doing is right does not make it right. Obeying God is right and disobeying God is wrong no matter how we think or feel about what we do. God is our Creator and Judge. If a person has an evil or unclean heart, then his thoughts and actions will be ungodly even though he does not realize it. That is why the Bible commands us in James 4:8: “purify your hearts, you double-minded!” Furthermore, we must guard our hearts against becoming evil, because the heart is always changing: “More than everything else you watch over, guard your heart, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). If a person’s heart is so wrong that he never comes to God and gets saved, then he falls into the category of Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way that leads to death” (see commentary on Prov. 14:12).

The fact that our hearts can be ungodly and we may not be aware of it is why it is imperative that we enlist wise and honest counselors to help us stay on track with God (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 24:6). In the law of the United States, “ignorance of the law is no excuse,” and the same is true for the law of God. The Word of God contains God’s commands to us, and we are responsible for obeying Him even if we have not taken the time to learn what those commands are. That is why Jesus said, “the one who did not know [the will of God] but did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few *stripes*” (Luke 12:48), in contrast to the one who knew the will of God but ignored it who will be beaten with many stripes (Luke 12:47). We should want to receive a full reward in the next life, but we can lose it if we disobey knowingly or unknowingly (2 John 1:8). The Word of God is freely available to most people, and the wise take the time to learn it.

Pro 21:3

**“righteousness and justice.”** Living a righteous and just life takes humility and discipline. Life is not fair or nice, and the godly suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12), yet they are required to bear up under it without becoming resentful or bitter. Being “religious” and offering external things like prayers and sacrifices does not require clean, godly hearts; that is clear from the many ungodly priests of Israel who did the duties of the Temple. Jesus compared the religious leaders of his time to whitewashed tombs that appeared clean on the outside but inside were full of dead people’s bones and were full of uncleanness (Matt. 23:27). There are many verses in the Bible that are much stronger than this one about God not accepting the sacrifices of the wicked. Proverbs 21:27, later in this chapter, is one of them.

[For more information about God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or accepting their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Pro 21:4

**“arrogant heart.”** See commentary on Proverbs 28:25.

**“the lamp of the wicked.”** The Hebrew literally reads, “the lamp of the wicked,” and the verse reads “Haughty eyes, and a proud heart—the lamp of the wicked—is sin.” However, that is sufficiently unclear in English to call for the addition of the italics to bring out more clearly the meaning of the verse: “the lamp *that guides* the wicked.” The genitive phrase is a genitive of relation, and in the biblical culture people used lamps so they could see and be guided in what they did, so the “lamp of the wicked” can be understood to mean the “lamp that guides the wicked.” The point is that, for the wicked, it is their own haughty eyes and proud heart that provides the light that they walk by, not the Word of God or the truth. Thus the proverb is saying that just as a person uses a lamp in a dark room to guide himself, the wicked are guided in what they do by their proud hearts and haughty eyes. But their proud hearts and haughty eyes do not perceive life as it really is, and they are sin in the eyes of God.

This verse explains why wicked people so often misread other people’s motivations and/or don’t get facts correct. They cannot see the world by the light of truth, instead, they see the world by the light of their own arrogance and pride. When dealing with a proud and arrogant person do not expect them to understand or correctly assess your motives or actions; evil people will see evil in you even though it is not there, but you will usually not be able to convince them of that.

Pro 21:6

**“who seek death.”** People who seek to “get ahead” and lie to get treasures of money and power think that they will be well off for their efforts. They won’t, although they do not know it, they are only seeking their own everlasting death. The truly wealthy may be poor in this life, but God will fulfill His promise of everlasting rewards to those who are godly and faithful to Him.

Pro 21:7

**“the violence of the wicked will drag them away because they refused to act with justice.”** Wicked people use violence to get what they want: they bully people and use their power, money, and influence to get their way; they are not concerned about being fair or just to others. The fact that they “refuse to act with justice” builds in our minds the mental picture of all the people they took advantage of in life who pleaded with them for justice but were simply dragged out of their way. On the Day of Judgment, they will be treated as they treated others: their own Violence, here personified as their executioner, will drag them away to the justice they deserve.

Pro 21:8

**“the road of a guilty person.”** This verse makes its point by having us picture two roads (the word “way” and “road” or “path” are the same in Hebrew). The road of the guilty person is crooked. The guilty are always changing their story and adjusting who they are. In contrast, the pure are “straight.” They walk a straight path in who they are and what they do.

**“works.”** In the Hebrew text “works” is singular, “work,” but it refers to his work as a collective noun, so “works” expresses the thought well in English.

Pro 21:9

**“the corner of a rooftop.”** This proverb is sometimes taught as if it is just a disparagement of women and how emotional, contentious, or nagging they can be. While there can be people who are contentious like that, and it is best to retreat from them, knowing the heart of our Father God, we can also see this verse as good advice from our heavenly Father about how to preserve and improve a marriage or relationship in difficult times. The man going to the roof for a while likely happened more often than we might think. Houses had flat roofs, and when the weather was nice it was common to relax and even sleep on the roof. Some roofs even had a little room built on them (2 Kings 4:10). Even if the husband felt he was chased to the corner of the housetop, he still had space to get calm which was better than being attacked or being in a fight in the house.

If the woman of the house was being contentious, as the proverb says, or if the couple was having a hard time communicating without a lot of hurtful words and actions, it is quite likely that the man of the house would go to the roof to create some space between the couple. It is often the case when a couple is having serious trouble that it is good for them to have some time apart, and that is exactly what the proverb says, that it is “better” to live on the roof than to continue to live in the tension in the house. Culture dictated why the man would be the one to go onto the roof: women were generally not subjected to public view and also the work of the women, including the cooking and the care of the children, would be done inside the house, so she couldn’t really leave it.

The Bible never says how long the man would stay on the roof, and it seems clear he is not making the roof a permanent residence but rather giving some time for the contention to cease. Couples are usually able to work out how and when to get back together and in that culture, there was a lot of family support and advice for both the men and the women that would help them through difficult times.

Pro 21:10

**“desires.”** The Hebrew word *avah* (#0183 אָוַה) is very strong, and should be understood as a strong desire, a greedy desire, something longed for, sighed after, or craved. The wicked person longs so badly for what they want that they have no thought for the wants, needs, or rights of others. They have no mercy or pity for them.

Pro 21:11

**“he accepts knowledge.”** The Hebrew is ambiguous as to who the “he” is, the naïve one or the wise one. Actually, it applies to both of them, because a naïve person can learn if he wants to when he hears a wise person being taught. The verb “accepts” is in the active voice and thus indicates active listening and learning. Learning is not a passive action as if we could just sit back, do nothing, and learn. We have to actively accept the knowledge.

Pro 21:12

**“A righteous person.”** The Hebrew text reads, “A righteous,” using the adjective “righteous” as a substantive, describing something righteous, for example, “a righteous person.” There are scholars who believe that the phrase refers to God, and thus the right way to translate the substantive is by supplying the word “One” and understanding the phrase as if it started with the definite article: “The Righteous One.”[[63]](#footnote-31702) They assert that it is God who keeps an eye on the activities of mankind and has the power to bring wicked people to ruin. That is true, and although many wicked people seem to escape being ruined in this life, no one will escape the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, God is not usually referred to by simply the adjective “righteous” without the definite article, whereas people are referred to simply as “a righteous [one]” many times in Proverbs. However, strictly speaking, “Righteous One” could refer to a person or to God.

However, many scholars believe that if the verse were referring to God, the definite article “the” would have been supplied in the text, and it would have said “the righteous” instead of “a righteous,”[[64]](#footnote-26248) or the phrase would have been written differently. God expects rulers and those in power to protect good and godly people and find ways to get rid of, or limit, the influence of, evil people. Righteous people do not let evil go unnoticed or unchecked. The righteous “keep an eye on”[[65]](#footnote-30011) the wicked with a view to bringing their wickedness to an end.

**“ruin.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “evil,” thus, “bringing the wicked to evil,” but the idea is the ruin of the wicked.

Pro 21:14

**“subdues.”** The verse is about bribes; the second stanza is very clear about that, but the first stanza also clearly implies it. The Hebrew word translated “subdues” can mean to pacify, soothe, or subdue, but it can also mean “to avert.” Thus a bribe can both avert anger before the one expecting the bribe gets angry, or it can pacify a person who is already angry. This verse is not encouraging bribery in any way, but it is showing that bribes do work and therefore present a danger in any culture. The fallen nature of man is such that if bribes become the norm in a culture it is very hard to root them out and reestablish an honest society. Leaders are to be people who hate bribes (Exod. 18:21), and they should work very hard to discourage them and prosecute the people who take them and thus pervert justice and honest business. God tells us not to take bribes (Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19). Anyone who took a bribe in a judicial setting that resulted in shedding innocent blood was cursed (Deut. 27:25).

**“secret bribe.”** The Hebrew reads, “a bribe in the bosom,” but that is not clear to the English reader. The biblical custom was that people wore long robes and cloaks, and tied them up with a sash or belt in a way that created folds in which things could be hidden. So one person could slip a bribe to another person who would then hide it in the fold of his garment.

Pro 21:15

**“terror.”** The Hebrew word can also mean “ruin” or “destruction,” and those also sometimes apply. People who thrive on sin and preying on others are terrified when justice is done and they see their own punishment coming, and/or they also see their own ruin because they will lose their source of wealth and even the wealth and influence they have will be destroyed.

Pro 21:16

**“dead.”** The Hebrew is “Rephaim,” who were a branch group of the Nephilim (see commentaries on Gen. 6:2 and 6:4). The Rephaim were not saved so were dead, without life. Unsaved people will be thrown in the Lake of Fire and be consumed, at which point they become like the Rephaim—totally dead; annihilated.

Given the horrible consequences of leaving the path of wisdom and living a life of sin, this verse is strong encouragement for people to do what it takes to remain obedient to God.

Pro 21:17

**“not become rich.”** The phrase “will not become rich” is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or “understatement.” The truth is understated for emphasis. The person who loves pleasure will spend their money on all kinds of things that bring them pleasure but that they don’t need to spend their money on and they will eventually end up poor. The second stanza contains that same idea. The person who loves wine and oil will “not become rich,” that is, they will become poor, as the first stanza says.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

One of the fruit of the spirit is self-control, and self-control is essential to long-term success in life. For example, if you want to have money to retire, you have to save regularly for a long time instead of spending all that you make on things you want and “need.” If you want your physical body to stay in shape, you have to exercise regularly year after year. If you want to lose weight, you have to eat properly and exercise over a long period of time. The Devil wants people poor and sick, so “the world” puts its emphasis on “now.” For example, “Buy it now even if you don’t have the money—just use credit.” The wise Christian knows the value of self-discipline and acting wisely, and the Bible has a number of verses on the subject (cf. Prov. 5:23; 6:6-11; 21:20; 23:20-21).

Pro 21:23

**“guards his life.”** The Hebrew verb translated as “guards” is the same as “watches over” in the first phrase.

**“trouble.”** The Hebrew is plural, “troubles,” but we would more naturally say “trouble” as a collective noun.

Pro 21:24

**“The presumptuous and proud person—“Mocker” is his name.”** The adjectives “presumptuous” and “proud” are likely describing a class of people who carry these characteristics and are given the name “Mocker,” as the Hebrew word translated “name” is singular in the text.

**“acts with arrogant presumptuousness.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “in the wrath of pride.” Pride results in arrogant presumptuousness and wrath.

Pro 21:25

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 21:27

**“is an abomination.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are an abomination to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. This verse has similarities with Proverbs 15:8.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Pro 21:28

**“will *be able to* continue speaking.”** In other words, while the false witness will perish and so not be able to talk, a person who listens will live, and thus be able to continue speaking and bearing witness to the truth. Alternatively, the proverb can also be referring to the words that are spoken by the “false witness” as something which will not last, but the words spoken by the one who listens will continue to endure.

**Proverbs Chapter 22**

Pro 22:2

**“The rich and the poor.”** The words “rich” and “poor” are both singular in the Hebrew text, but the sense of the verse is more that they are collective singulars referring to all the people who make up each category respectively.

**“have this in common.”** The literal Hebrew is that the rich and poor “meet together.” Although this is likely a figurative way of saying that both of them are connected together as creations of God. The rich and poor often did meet together in the ancient world; the cities were small and personal encounters, and all those encounters entailed, would have been common, so it was important in them living in a way that pleased God to think through how they would handle those encounters.

Pro 22:3

**“A prudent person sees evil and hides.”** Proverbs 22:3 and Proverbs 27:12 are nearly identical. The doubling of the proverb emphasizes the lesson it teaches. Life is difficult enough without getting into unnecessary trouble. The wise person knows the Word and heart of God, and recognizes evil and diligently avoids it. In contrast, the naïve person knowingly or unknowingly participates in evil and suffers for it. There are many proverbs that pick up this general theme but express it somewhat differently. For example, Proverbs 14:16 says the wise person is cautious, but the naïve person is overconfident, and that gets them into trouble. Proverbs 20:19 warns people not to get involved with a gossip. A wise person would see the problems a gossip could cause, but a naïve person does not and gets in trouble.

**“are punished.”** The Hebrew word is *anash* (#06064 עָנַשׁ), and it means to be punished, or to be fined (cf. HCSB, KJV, NASB1995, YLT). In this instance it is a synecdoche of the species, where a fine or punishment is a specific penalty put for the more general penalty: they will pay the penalty or “suffer for it.” Some modern versions simply omit the synecdoche for ease of reading. For example, the NIV84 says, “but the simple keep going and suffer for it” (the NIV2011 says, “pay the penalty”). The NLT, a more paraphrased version, reads, “The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.”

There are times in life when it is wise not to confront evil, but instead to avoid it. It takes experience and walking by the spirit of God to consistently make the right decision as to what to do. There are clearly times when evil should be confronted and dealt with, and there are other times when it is best to avoid evil; to hide from it and “fly below the radar” as we say. Proverbs has a lot of verses about seeing evil and turning away from it (e.g., Prov. 14:16; 27:12. Also, see commentary on Prov. 3:7).

Pro 22:5

**“road.”** The Hebrew word *derek* (“road”) figuratively refers to a person’s “way of life.” See commentary on Proverbs 1:15.

Pro 22:6

**“he will not turn aside from it.”** Proverbs 22:6 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God. It was always God’s intention that if a child is brought up well, they would stay on that godly path. However, children are humans with free will, and they make their own choices. Thus, although it is a general principle that children raised in a godly way will grow up to live godly lives, that is not always the case. This is one of the “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, setting forth the general and ideal situation, but a situation that is not always true.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

Pro 22:9

**“generous person.”** The Hebrew text is a Semitic idiom, and reads, “he who has a good eye will be blessed.” In this case, we can tell from the idiom and the last phrase in the verse that a “good eye” is a generous eye. The meaning of the verse is captured by the NET: “A generous person will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.”

In the biblical culture, the “eye” revealed a lot about the person’s character—more than it does today. People today often express themselves and their feelings by their clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, and things like tattoos, and often those distract from, or overpower, the look on a person’s face or in their eye. In the biblical culture clothing and styles were much more standard than today, so people were much more sensitive to the look on a person’s face and in their eye than they are today, and “face” and “eye” are often used to describe a person’s character or mood. For example, Proverbs 6:17 speaks of the person with a “haughty eye.” Leah is described as having “tender” or “weak” eyes (Gen. 29:17). Intense intimacy was expressed by “eye to eye” (Num. 14:14); and God told Israel not to let their “eye” pity their enemies (Deut. 7:16; cf. Deut. 13:8).

The “good” eye was generous, and here in Proverbs, the word “good” is the Hebrew *tov* (#02896 טוֹב) and it included a broad semantic range depending on the context, including things such as “good, pleasant, kind, agreeable, happy, prosperous, valuable, generous, and useful.” In this context, the person with a “good” eye was generous and shared his substance with the poor.

Just as your eye was “good” if you were generous, it was “evil” if you were selfish and stingy. The meaning of the idiom of the “evil eye” changed over time, and today if someone gives you the “evil eye” it means he wishes harm to come to you. However, that was not the meaning of the idiom in biblical times. Biblically, the person with the “evil eye” was selfish and stingy, as we see from its use in the Bible. Proverbs 28:22 says, “A greedy man [“a man with an evil eye”] rushes after wealth, and doesn’t know that poverty will come upon him.”

Jesus taught about both generous and selfish people, but used a different idiom concerning generosity. He said that if your eye was “single” (another idiom meaning “generous”), your whole body would be full of light, but if your eye was “evil” (meaning you were stingy and selfish), your whole body would be full of darkness (Matt. 6:22; Luke 11:34).

[For more on the “evil eye” see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Pro 22:13

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 22:16

**“gives to the rich.”** In this context, the one who gives to the rich is buying influence and favor. Thus, what the person is giving is actually a kind of bribe, even if it is legally done.

Pro 22:26

**“shake hands.”** The Hebrew is more literally something like, “striking hands,” but it refers to a custom that was either the same as our handshake or similar to it. The custom occurs here as well as in Proverbs 6:1 and 17:18.

Although it is not specifically stated in this verse, the scope and context of Scripture make it clear that this verse is speaking about not making unwise agreements. It is not saying not to make agreements at all, although there is a sense in which putting up security for someone else’s loan is always risky, no matter who the person is. Many people in the Bible make agreements, in fact, a covenant is an agreement. Also, other verses in Proverbs that speak of shaking hands make it clear that the agreement is an unwise one (cf. Prov. 6:1-5 and 17:18).

[For more on the custom of shaking hands, see commentary on Prov. 6:1.]

**Proverbs Chapter 23**

Pro 23:1

**“who.”** The Hebrew can read “who is before you” (ASV, CJB, DBY, RV, NAB) or “what is before you” (HCSB, ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV). The native Hebrew reader would instantly see both readings, and the English text could be conflated to read, “carefully discern who and what are before you.” Roland Murphy says that the author may have indeed meant both “who” and “what.”[[66]](#footnote-10009) The Young’s Literal Translation may be doing a good job of taking in the whole picture by saying, “that which is before you.” We went with “who” because we felt that the person was more important than the food.

This verse has a very wide application. In the biblical culture, a “ruler” had great power to help or hurt, and so people would take great care to discern what kind of person he was so they could get the most advantage out of eating with him. But in today’s world, lots of people have the power or influence to be a blessing or make things difficult for someone. It could be a boss at work, a teacher, the chair of a committee, etc. In fact, in today’s world of social media when almost anyone can influence hundreds and perhaps thousands of people, it is a wise thing to do to “carefully discern” who you are with and the kind of person they are.

Pro 23:2

**“put a knife in your throat.”** This is a hyperbole, an exaggeration, much the same as when Jesus said, “And if your eye causes you to fall away, pluck it out and throw it away from you” (Matt. 18:9). Michael Fox catches the meaning of the phrase: “A startling metaphor for self-control. Slit your throat, as it were, rather than giving in to hunger.”[[67]](#footnote-23826) Many English translations water down the hyperbole by having something like, “put a knife to your throat,” but the Hebrew text is “in your throat.”

Self-control is vital to living a godly Christian life and is a hallmark of serious believers. One of the fruits of the spirit is “self-control” (Gal. 5:23). The sinner and the carnal Christian give in to their fleshly desires and do not curb their emotions or their appetites. This was foretold long ago: “In the last time there will be mockers, walking after their own ungodly desires” (Jude 1:18). Following our flesh and the desires that naturally arise within us from our sin nature will result in “the works of the flesh,” such as “sexual immorality, unrestrained behavior, hostility, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envyings, drunkenness, and things like these” (from Gal. 5:20-21).

Wise believers carefully guard their godly way of life (Prov. 16:17). They guard the truth they have been taught (Prov. 4:13), guard their “soul,” that is, their thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (Prov. 22:5), and they watch what they say (Prov. 13:3). The Devil’s goal is to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), so it is no surprise that there is very little mention of self-control in the world today. In fact, the world teaches the opposite of the Bible’s godly advice and tells people to do whatever they feel like doing. Wise believers know that that advice is from the Devil and will eventually steal their peace and joy on earth and also keep them from being rewarded in their next life, in the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

**“greedy appetite.”** The Hebrew is an idiom, very literally, “*baal* of a *nephesh*.” In the Hebrew, “*baal*” can refer to the god Baal, or have the literal meaning of the word “*baal*,” which is “lord” or “owner,” and sometimes “husband” since in the biblical culture the husband was considered the lord of the wife. The top god of the Canaanites was “Baal,” literally, “lord,” but in the English versions the Hebrew word “*baal*” is transliterated as “Baal” rather than translated as “lord” when it is used as the proper name of the god. However, in contexts like this one, “*baal*” means “lord” or “owner.”

The word *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), has a wide range of meanings, including the person himself; the invisible life force inside people and animals that we call “soul”; the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions of a person; or a person’s desire or appetite. This is one of the places where *nephesh* refers to the desires and appetites of a person. So the idiomatic phrase, “lord of an appetite,” is someone with a great appetite, or very likely in this context, someone with a greedy appetite, eating much more than he needs or would normally take. That makes sense in this context because the man is eating with a ruler (Prov. 23:1), so the food set before him would be much better than the food he would ordinarily eat, thus presenting a great temptation for the man to stuff himself. Believers will occasionally be faced with situations when there is a temptation to take more than we should, such as at a wedding where free drinks are being offered or a banquet where the food is excellent and abundant, and we need to carefully guard our godly way of life and exercise self-control in those situations, indeed, in every situation.

[For more on the meaning of *nephesh*, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Pro 23:4

**“Do not wear yourself out by attempting to get rich.”** This is a general principle that occurs throughout the Word of God. Although there is nothing wrong in trying to better one’s circumstances in life, making being wealthy the focus of one’s life is a mistake. There are so many uncontrollable factors that can prevent a person from getting wealthy, and so much chance that one’s best efforts will not result in wealth, that wealth is not a good target for a person’s efforts. Even at best, it only lasts the few short years of this life. God says not to make wealth our goal (Prov. 23:4; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:8-10; Heb. 13:5). Jesus tells us not to build up treasure on earth, but to build it up for the future life (Matt. 6:18-21).

Also, the context of Proverbs 23:4 is being with wealthy people and with stingy people who therefore are likely wealthy (Prov. 23:1, 6). Often when one is with wealthy people there is a temptation to compromise one’s principles and get into ungodly situations that will result in everlasting consequences. That is why Proverbs 23:2, 3, and 23:6 warn against what the wealthy are serving—it often comes with a cost. But in the end, there is nothing more valuable than living in obedience to God.

**“cease from *relying upon* your *own* understanding.”** There are two major ways that Proverbs 23:4 has been understood. The most common way is that people should not trust their own understanding about material wealth, i.e., people should not think that if they work tirelessly they will become rich and that being rich brings safety, freedom, friends, and fun. However, wealth gained by constant toil has many hidden costs, often including one’s health and alienation from friends and family. Furthermore, as the proverb says, many people who have big plans for being wealthy never see those plans materialize. Understanding Proverbs 23:4 this way also fits with Proverbs 3:5-6, which says not to lean on one’s own understanding.

The other way to understand Proverbs 23:4 is less common but is the translation in some Bibles. For example, the ESV reads, “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.” According to this translation, a person should rely on their understanding of life—that working tirelessly to acquire wealth is a vain pursuit—and so they should know better and stop focusing on trying to get rich. However, although the Hebrew text could be understood that way, it seems the less likely meaning of the verse because if a person had enough wisdom to know that money does not fix everything and will not last (as depicted in v. 5), he or she would not strive to become wealthy to begin with. This second way to view Proverbs 23:4 requires dissociating the idea presented in Proverbs 3:5 about refraining from trusting in one’s own understanding and viewing it in a more positive light where one’s own understanding possesses a degree of wisdom. The emphasis in Proverbs is that we must acquire knowledge and understanding from Yahweh because we do not have it in ourselves. Therefore, this second way to understand the verse assumes that the person has somehow acquired some degree of wisdom already. And that interpretation seems less probable given the overall premise in Proverbs that our own understanding is deficient and faulty.

Pro 23:6

**“who is stingy.”** The Hebrew text reads, “a man with an evil eye.” The “evil eye” is a Semitic idiom for being greedy, stingy, and selfish. The greedy, selfish man says to you, “Eat all you want,” but they don’t really mean it. They are closely watching to see how much they are going to have to give up or pay. Biblically, an evil eye is greedy or stingy; while a “good eye,” or a “single eye,” is generous.

[For more on idioms involving the good eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9. For more on the idiom of the evil eye, see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Pro 23:8

**“wasted.”** The Hebrew word is *shachat* (#07843 שָׁחַת), and it means “to ruin, spoil, wipe out.” In this context, “wasted” seems to be the best sense of the word in English.[[68]](#footnote-21506) *HALOT* has “ineffective,” which would yield a meaning such as, “your pleasant words have been ineffective.”[[69]](#footnote-23204)

Pro 23:9

**“have contempt for.”** The Hebrew word is *buz* (#0936 בּוּז pronounced booze), and it means “to despise, to have contempt for, to count as insignificant. All those meanings are important and applicable in this context. There are some fools who will actually “hate” any wise words people speak to them, but most fools just have contempt for them or think they are meaningless and insignificant.

[For more information, see commentary on Prov. 23:22, “show contempt for.”]

Pro 23:10

**“ancient.”** The Hebrew word translated as “ancient” is often translated as “eternal,” but it does not always mean that. There are other verses where the Hebrew word does not mean “eternal” but means “ancient” (Prov. 23:10 and 22:28 are good examples where עוֹלָ֑ם does not mean “eternal”).

Pro 23:16

**“inward parts.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “kidneys,” and when the Bible mentions “kidneys” it refers to the emotional life.

[For more on “kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.” For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

Pro 23:18

**“your hope.”** This is the figure of speech metonymy, where “hope” is put for what a person is hoping for, or expecting. There is a future, so what a believer hopes for will come to pass, it will not be “cut off” and thus not happen.

Godly and righteous people should have a solid hope for a lot of wonderful things. Instead of envying sinners (Prov. 23:17), who heap up material goods in this life but lose it all—and their life too—on the Day of Judgment, God promises those who love Him a wonderful future. Hebrews 11:9-10 says Abraham lived in a tent but looked for a city built by God. Moses gave up the wealth of Egypt for a greater reward in the future (Heb. 11:24-26). Many people have suffered greatly rather than deny God because they kept their eye on the “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:25).

Christians can wholeheartedly serve God now even if it causes some trouble in this life because they not only look forward to living forever with Christ on a wonderful recreated earth and being rewarded for their efforts, but also to having new bodies that are like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

[For more on Christ’s wonderful future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on being rewarded for doing good works, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Pro 23:21

**“the drunkard and the glutton will become impoverished.”** The undisciplined person will become poor (see commentary on Prov. 21:17).

**“drowsiness wears rags.”** This seems to be a difficult reading in the Hebrew only because of the figure of speech personification that is involved. The noun “rags” is the object of the verb, “to wear” or to “put on.” In this verse, the addict and the glutton are not just called “drowsy,” or “sleepy,” instead they are included in the personification of “Mr. Drowsy” who is a drunk and glutton and as a result “wears rags.” The personification adds emphasis and allows the line to be short and punchy.

Some versions try to make the line easier for the English reader by including an ellipsis, thus, the NASB has, “drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags,” but there is no need for the ellipsis, the meaning and seriousness of the verse should be clear to the thoughtful reader.

A person does not have to be an all-out drunk or addict to spend too much money on drugs and alcohol and get into financial trouble and “wear rags.” Alcohol and drugs (even if they are legal) are expensive and the wise Christian keeps his spending in check (Prov. 10:15; 21:17). Too many people waste or destroy their lives as addicts or drunks. While many people can handle social drinking, many others cannot. It is foolish to allow alcohol or drugs to ruin one’s life on earth and everlasting life too. Anyone who is being overcome and defeated by alcohol or drugs should seek help and make every possible effort to defeat those evils.

Pro 23:22

**“show contempt for.”** The Hebrew word is *buz* (#0936 בּוּז pronounced booze), and it means “to despise, to have contempt for, to count as insignificant. There is no good way to bring all those meanings into English except to do some kind of amplified version, yet all those meanings are important and applicable in this context.

Pro 23:23

**“Get truth.”** The Hebrew word “get” is *qanah* (#07069 קָנָה), and it is the basic word for “get,” and means “get, acquire, obtain.” Juxtaposed with the word “sell” in the phrase, it can be seen to mean “buy,” but there are specific words for “buy” that are not used here, so we stayed with “get.” There are ways to “get” truth that do not involve “buying” it.

The Hebrew word we translate as “truth” is *emeth* (#0571 אֱמֶת), which does mean “truth,” but in many contexts, it has the meaning of faithfulness or covenant loyalty. Although that is likely not its primary meaning in this verse, it certainly is an undertone in the verse. Thus, as well as speaking of “truth,” the verse speaks of one’s personal integrity, a person’s faithfulness and loyalty. We “get” integrity and loyalty in part by how we live and in part by association, the family and friends we choose to be with. But we can “sell” it, or in our vernacular, “sell out” our integrity by ungodly and immoral behavior. The Devil knows the value of truth and integrity, and so he is constantly tempting people to sell those things in exchange for worldly power, pleasure, and personal gain (cf. Prov. 1:10-14; 9:13-17). The wise person knows that any worldly power or pleasure will quickly end, whereas godliness, although it requires discipline and self-control, is profitable for eternity, and in the next life, there will be abundant and lasting joy.

This verse is a wonderful guide on how to live: get truth and personal integrity and don’t sell those out. And while we are getting, get wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

Pro 23:24

**“rejoice exceedingly.”** The Hebrew text has the figure of speech polyptoton, basically, “rejoice with joy.” The figure points to great joy.

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**Proverbs Chapter 24**

Pro 24:3

**“a house is built.”** In this context, the “house” is both the physical house and the “household,” which are both built and established by wisdom. To better understand Proverbs 24:3, it helps to know that houses in biblical times (and many houses in modern times in the Middle East) were often added to and modified. This was much easier in biblical times than it is today. To modify a house today means modifying the plumbing, the electric, and much more, whereas modifying a house in biblical times was usually simply adding some walls or adding another story. Life is a lot easier if one moves forward in life purposely and with wisdom, rather than letting things “just happen.”

Pro 24:7

**“he does not open his mouth at the *city* gate.”** In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, it was the custom that the elders of a city would sit at the city gate so they could learn what was going on in the city and so they could give advice and judge disputes. Most cities had only one gate, and so everyone who went in or out of the city would have to pass through that gate. Furthermore, there was usually an open space just inside the gate so there was plenty of room for people to gather. The elders who sat at the gate were generally older, mature men who were the powerful men of the city. As elders and often acting as judges, they were supposed to be godly and wise, which is why “Wisdom” could be found at the city gates (cf. Prov. 1:20-21). Sitting at the city gate with the elders would not be fitting for a fool who could not give good and godly advice.

[For more on the elders at the gate, see the REV commentary on Ruth 4:11.]

Pro 24:9

**“foolish plan.”** The Hebrew text has the genitive, “plans (or ‘schemes’) of folly.” This is a beautiful double entendre. The genitive can be a genitive of relation, “the schemes that involve folly” (cf. ESV, NASB, NKJV), or a genitive of origin, “the schemes that come from folly.”[[70]](#footnote-11700) We have trouble bringing both concepts into English in one line except by just leaving the genitive in place as the NIV does. We need to be aware of the close relationship between foolishness and sin. Schemes that come from a foolish heart, and those that involve “foolishness” (which is related to the “stubborn fool,” the *kesiyl* (#03684 כְּסִיל), are not “just fun,” they are sin, as this verse says.

[See Appendix 14: “Fool and Foolish.”]

Pro 24:12

**“will he not repay a person according to his work.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12).

[For more on rewards in the future and people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Pro 24:15

**“like the wicked against the dwelling place.”** This proverb is referring to assaulting (destroying; plundering) the property and possessions of a righteous person. The “wicked” and the “righteous” are likely collective singulars here.

Pro 24:18

**“and he turns away his anger from him.”** As written, the verse would be saying that if your enemy falls, ostensibly because he was evil (Prov. 24:16), if you rejoice at it (Prov. 24:17), which Yahweh also considers evil, then your evil is as great as your enemy’s evil, so Yahweh will not continue to be angry at your enemy seeing you are as bad as he is.

Some commentators and rabbis say that the words “to you” should be mentally added to the text, such that it would read, “and he turns away his anger from him *to you*.”[[71]](#footnote-15510) That could also be the case, but it is not the way the text reads.

Pro 24:20

**“no future.”** The evil person will not have everlasting life.

**“lamp of the wicked will be put out.”** This is an idiom, meaning the evil person will die. The wicked will die in the Lake of Fire. They will not live forever in torment, as many people teach, but will burn up in the flames and be annihilated.

[For more information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Pro 24:23

**“To show favoritism in judgment is not good.”** This is similar to Proverbs 28:21.

Pro 24:24

**“wicked…righteous.”** “Wicked” and “righteous” are the lexical meanings of the Hebrew words, and the proverb is true as it is worded. However, it is also true that in a legal context, which might include this verse, the word “wicked” means “guilty,” and the word “righteous” means “innocent.” In that case, the proverb would be like the NIV translation, “Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent’…”

**“peoples.”** The Hebrew word refers to people groups, not just like any old collection of individual people. Thus the meaning of “peoples” is very close to the meaning of “nations.” This proverb shows the widespread damage that calling wicked people “righteous” does. Wicked people do great harm, and the one who ignores that harm or exacerbates it by calling the wicked person “righteous” is partly responsible for the harm the wicked person does.

Pro 24:25

**“it will go well.”** Although the Hebrew is more literally, “it will be a delight,” that refers to the blessing that will come from God on the ones who do the right thing and rebuke those who deserve it. This is what is being restated in parallel in the second line, which mentions “a good blessing.” The Proverb is not saying that the one being rebuked will be delighted, or that it will always be a delightful thing to rebuke someone even if they need it; after all, the one being rebuked may reject the rebuke and attack the rebuker.

Pro 24:26

**“with a straight answer.”** A straight and honest answer is friendly and intimate, like a kiss on the lips. This proverb shows that it is not just in our modern times that it is difficult to get an honest answer. It has always been difficult to get a straight and honest answer from people, and this can be true for a number of reasons. Certainly, there are dishonest people who do not want to tell the truth because they are involved in immoral or illegal dealings. But often a “friend” does not want to give an honest answer because they don’t want to take the risk of hurting anyone’s feelings or damaging the relationship.

Pro 24:29

**“I will repay the man according to his *evil* work.”** Proverbs 24:29 is similar to Proverbs 20:22.

Pro 24:30

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

**“sense.”** The Hebrew word is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart,” but this is one of those cases where that translation would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so things that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. In this context, *leb*, “heart” refers to the activity of the mind that includes good sense.

A lazy person lacks good sense because he does not do those things that would sustain his life, allow him to be in a position to help others, and build up rewards in the next life. The Bible says we are to work so that we can give to others (Eph. 4:28), not just do what we have to in life so we “just get by.” Even when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden they were to work it and “keep” it (or, watch over it; guard it. Gen. 2:15). God created people to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and that is a sacred duty.

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.”]

Pro 24:32

**“I learned *this* lesson.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “I took this teaching.”

**Proverbs Chapter 25**

Pro 25:1

**“copied.”** The Hebrew word translated as “copied” is *ataq* (#06275 עָתַק), and its basic meaning is “move on further,” and thus “copy, transmit.”[[72]](#footnote-10626) If someone preserves what is written by copying it, or copies it to give it to others, then the scribe is moving the manuscript further along. Some English Bibles read “copied” and some read “transcribed.” Technically, a “transcribed” manuscript was written down as someone dictated what to write, while a “copied” manuscript was one person writing down what he read on an earlier manuscript. We don’t know the exact process the men of Hezekiah used to produce this section of Proverbs, but it was most likely partially copied and partially transcribed. Since “copied” has the wider range of meanings, “copied” seems to be the best choice for the REV.

Pro 25:3

**“so the hearts of kings are unsearchable.”** This is one of the “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs. Ideally, the “kings” are the kings of Israel from the Davidic line, and they are godly and wise. Their wisdom and the guidance they get from God make their hearts “unsearchable.” Unfortunately, not all kings, and not even all the kings descended from David, were godly or guided by God, so the proverb does not apply to every king.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs in Proverbs, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

**“unsearchable.”** The Hebrew text has two words and thus is actually closer to “not searchable,” and the word that could have been translated as “searchable” is the same word as is translated “search out” in Proverbs 25:2. So as a couplet, Proverbs 25:2 and 25:3 are saying, “the glory of kings to ‘search out’ a matter”...but the hearts of kings cannot be “searched out” because they are so deep and full of wisdom.

Pro 25:4

**“and a vessel comes out for the refiner**.” This proverb is stretching the facts to make a point. Of course, when you remove the dross from silver, “a vessel” does not come out. Instead, the silver is now ready for the silversmith. But the proverb is making the point that once the impurity is removed from the silver, the “vessel” almost appears on its own, automatically and quickly. That same thing is true of kingdoms, as the last part of the proverb says: “remove the wicked person from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness” (Prov. 25:5). If the wicked people are removed from the presence of the king, then his throne will be established quickly; almost automatically.

This proverb has a wide application because wicked people stop great things from happening in all organizations; in government, business, the Church, education, and more. Wicked people are prideful and selfish, and will not “go away” on their own. They have to be dealt with (Prov. 20:26).

Pro 25:6

**“stand among great people.”** This means, don’t start out by standing (or taking a place) where the great men are, wait to be invited up to that place.

Pro 25:7

**“up…lower.”** In a gathering, the “highest” person in power or rank would occupy the upmost seat or place, with the next highest next to him, then the next highest. The “lowest” place would be for the least honorable guest. Every banquet or festive occasion would have a host or guest of honor, and the seat closest to that person would be the “highest,” while the seat furthest away would be the lowest. It was always best to take a lower seat and have the host say, “Come up,” than to take a high seat and have the host move you down lower. So “Come up,” does not refer to up in height, but “up” closer to the most important person at the gathering (cf. Luke 14:10).

**“What your eyes have seen.”** This phrase almost certainly belongs together with the first line in Proverbs 25:8. This is supported by almost all the commentators (cf. Bruce Waltke; Roland Murphy; Crawford Toy; and William McKane) and also by many modern versions (cf. CJB, ESV, JPS, NAB, NIV, and more). It is also supported by the Septuagint. Thus, the full verse is: “What your eyes have seen, do not go out to argue *about* too hastily.”

This is an important verse when considering self-control and taking the time to get the facts of a situation before getting involved. It often happens that when a person hears or sees even a little bit of an argument, he immediately gets involved and takes a side in the argument. The wise person takes the time to gather facts before getting involved in a dispute.

Pro 25:8

**“do not go out.”** This phrase goes with the last stanza in Proverbs 25:7. The full verse is: “What your eyes have seen, do not go out to argue *your dispute* too hastily.”

**“in the end.”** The “end” is the end of the dispute, after you have lost your case. This is not referring to the eschatological end, the Day of the Lord.

Pro 25:10

**“your bad reputation.”** Or “the bad report about you.”

Pro 25:11

**“apples.”** Many of the sources concur that the fruit was likely an apricot, not an apple, and frankly, the evidence seems to support that “apricot” is correct. Nevertheless, some sources do support the translation “apples” against “apricots.” Due to the confusion on the issue, and the antiquity of the translation “apples,” that is what we used in the REV.

[For more information, see Harold N. Moldenke and Alma L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, Dover Publications, NY, 1952, p. 185-187. Winfred Walker, *All the Plants of the Bible*, Harper and Brothers, NY, 1957, p. 22. Committee on Translations of the United Bible Societies, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, New York, 1980, p. 92-93. Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, Cambridge University Press, NY, p. 70.]

**“is a word spoken at the *proper* moment.”** Proverbs 25:11 is one of the verses that speaks of the power of words that are properly spoken at the right time. The Hebrew text can be understood as saying, “at the proper moment” or as saying, “in the right way.” Both the right time and the right way are important, and the Hebrew text “kills two birds with one stone” by being worded in such a way that it can mean either or both things.

Sometimes the “right words” are spoken in the wrong way or at the wrong time and they lose their power and can even be offensive. The godly person knows the power of words, but also knows how important it is to speak those words in the right way at the right time and place. It can take great love and restraint for us not to blurt out what we think, but to restrain ourselves and wait for the proper time and place to speak. Fools don’t use restraint, “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in expressing his own mind” (Prov. 18:2). Wise people want their words to be effective, so they use restraint and speak at appropriate times. There are many verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, about the power of words to hurt or heal (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

Pro 25:12

**“earring.”** The Hebrew word simply means “ring,” but it was used of earrings, nose rings, and finger rings. Generally, both men and women wore finger rings, women wore nose rings because they could be easily seen, and some men wore earrings. Women did not generally wear earrings because their hair and often their head covering covered them up so no one could see them, so they generally wore nose rings. The Hebrew word does not tell us what kind of ring Proverbs 25:12 is speaking of, but the culture would support that it was an earring, and especially so because the second stanza mentions the ear. The proverb is making the point that having a listening ear is beautiful, like having an earring of gold.

**“is a wise person reproving a listening ear.”** It can be exceedingly difficult to reprove someone, and it can often result in hurt feelings and even broken friendships. The wise person knows that reproof needs to be given in the right way—kindly—and at the right time—generally when the person is in a mental position to hear what is being said—and in the right circumstances. But the wise person is not just speaking into any ear, they are speaking into a “listening ear,” which can be a rare thing. The listening ear is “ornamented,” if you will, as if with a gold earring, by the wise man’s words of reproof. The person who rejects reproof never gets the ornament of gold—those wise words.

Words have the power to hurt or heal, and the Bible has a lot to say about speaking in a godly fashion (see commentary on Prov. 18:21).

Pro 25:13

**“a faithful messenger.”** The faithful messenger is faithful to deliver the message and not forget about it, and also faithful to deliver the message correctly and not get the intent or details wrong. Many times in life we need to rely on others, and believers should make a diligent effort to be a person who can be relied on (see commentary on Prov. 25:19).

**“masters.”** The people who send a messenger can be something like a king and his advisors, a council of elders, or a military group of commanders, but in any case, in this verse, it refers to more than one person sending the messenger. If the messenger is faithful, he refreshes the souls of those who sent him.

Pro 25:17

**“hate.”** The word “hate” in the Bible does not always have the meaning it has in English, an intense feeling of animosity, anger, and hostility toward a person, group, or object. In Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large range of meanings. Here the word “hate” is used in the sense of “being disgusted or repulsed by” to the end that you would avoid your neighbor.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

Pro 25:26

**“Like a spring *that has been* trampled *in* and *like* a ruined fountain.”** Water in the ancient Near East was very important, and knowing where a spring or cistern was, and then having that water be drinkable, could mean the difference between life and death. Sometimes an uncaring herdsman would let his animals trample in the water or ruin it in other ways, and the weary traveler who arrived at that spring would find it undrinkable, which was more than just a disappointment, it was dangerous and even life-threatening. Similarly, people who are usually righteous but then give in to evil are a disappointment and in certain situations can be even life-threatening.

**“is a righteous person who wavers.”** There is a war between Good and Evil that has been raging on earth since the Fall of Adam and Eve, and every person participates in that war on one side or the other whether they want to or not. Evil is strong, and it takes a diligent effort and much sacrifice for good to prevail on earth. Righteous people depend on other righteous people in many ways, and it is very hurtful on many levels when a righteous person is not fully committed to their righteousness but gives in when pressured by the presence of a “wicked” person. We should also be aware that in this open context, the “wicked” person could be genuinely evil, or someone who just does not want to obey God and perhaps “just wants to have fun,” but it is ungodly fun. In this context, the “wicked” person is one who is not committed to righteous behavior (see commentary on Prov. 25:19).

Pro 25:28

**“emotions.”** The Hebrew word is *ruach* (#07307 רוּחַ) and is often translated as “spirit.” Although the Hebrew word *ruach* has been translated as “emotions,” the *ruach*, (“spirit”) can also refer to thoughts and attitudes, and all of those—emotions, thoughts, and attitudes—need to be controlled if one is to live a blessed life. A city without a wall was open to attack by the enemy, and people who do not have control over their emotions become subject to those emotions in many destructive ways. For example, a person who cannot control their anger can end up hurting someone and being in serious legal trouble or drive away all their friends, while someone who cannot set personal boundaries but gets caught up in feelings of guilt and shame can get bullied and manipulated into doing all kinds of things that are personally harmful to them.

**Proverbs Chapter 26**

Pro 26:2

**“an undeserved curse fails to arrive.”** Curses can be very powerful and effective, and both God and the Devil’s people use curses to bring to pass a desired effect. It was common in the ancient world to curse an enemy so harm would come to them. However, righteous people who live godly lives do not need to be afraid of curses. Goliath cursed David, but with no effect (1 Sam. 17:43).

Pro 26:4

Proverbs 26:4-5 make a revealing couplet. They contradict each other, and for good reason. There is no good way to deal with a fool. If you answer him according to his folly, you will be seen to be a fool, like him. On the other hand, if you answer a fool according to his folly, he will think himself wise, like yourself. It is impossible to reason with a fool. They are convinced in their own mind. Proverbs exhorts people to get away from fools (Prov. 14:7).

Pro 26:5

See commentary on Proverbs 26:4.

Pro 26:6

**“One who cuts off *his own* feet.”** This proverb warns about trusting a fool to do important work. If you chop off your own feet, you cannot deliver a message, but that is in effect what happens when you give the message to a fool—it will not arrive. And even if it does arrive, it will be so mangled that it will cause harm instead of being helpful. Also, the meaning of the phrase “drinks violence” is that the person who has sent the fool is hurting himself. The phrase is referring to what happens to the person who sends a message via a fool: the message gets lost or misinterpreted and that leads to violence for the one who sent the fool. Sending a message via a fool is a self-destructive action and the sender becomes the injured party when the fool turns out to be unreliable.

Pro 26:7

**“dangle *uselessly*.”** The legs of a lame person dangle uselessly, they carry no “weight” (authority), and are unable to carry him where he wants to go. Similarly, if a fool does speak a proverb, trying to act wise, it “dangles” uselessly from his lips. It has no authority, because the speaker has no authority. Furthermore, it was likely spoken inappropriately. In any case, like the lame leg, a proverb spoken by a fool will not get him where he intended to go; it will not have the meaning or impact that he wanted it to have.

Pro 26:8

**“entangles a stone in a sling.”** This Proverb involves a custom that we must know in order to understand the verse. The Hebrew word “entangles,” more literally, “ties,” is *tseror* (#06872 צְרוֹר), and it means to tie up or bind up. The purpose of a sling was to throw a stone, so who would ever tie a stone in a sling? The answer is no one would do that on purpose. The oriental sling consisted of a diamond-shaped or rectangular “cup” (a shallow pouch), with two cords attached to it, one on each end. The cords were usually made of yarn or leather. To get ready to sling a stone, the slinger placed a rock in the pouch and held the two cords between his fingers so that the cords hung down toward the ground, parallel to each other. To throw the stone from the pouch, the slinger swung the loaded sling around in a circular motion, and at the right time (which was learned by practice), let go of one of the cords. This allowed the rock to come out of the pouch and travel toward the target. The great key to slinging accurately is to be able to swing the sling around in its circular motion while moving the wrist in such a way that the cords remain parallel to each other. If the cords stay parallel and are not tangled or twisted, the stone will release smoothly and cleanly from the pouch. Novice slingers sometimes do not get the wrist motion correct, and as the sling is swung around, the two cords begin to twist around each other instead of staying parallel. Then, when the slinger releases one of the cords, instead of a quick and clean release, the cords have to unravel, making the stone release late. Since the sling is going in a circular motion, when the sling releases late the stone is released in the wrong direction. This can be devastating in war. At best, the slinger would simply miss the enemy, but at worst, the stone would release so late that it would hit a fellow soldier. The Proverb is powerful and picturesque to someone who understands slinging. A slinger who is not paying attention and twists his cords, binding the stone in the sling, will hit the wrong person with the stone. So too, the person who gives honor to a fool has “hit the wrong person.” The fool does not deserve the honor.

There is another possible interpretation of Proverbs 26:8 that has been put forward, and that is that a person places a stone in a sling, making it dangerous in battle, and in the same way, if a person gives honor to a fool it elevates him and thus allows him to be dangerous to others. Although that interpretation may be possible, it seems less likely given the common meaning of “bind” (translated “entangles” in the REV).

Pro 26:9

**“a thorn that goes into the hand.”** As a drunk stumbles around and gets a thorn in his hand, thus hurting and embarrassing himself, so too a fool cannot grasp the proper sense and application of a proverb and ends up making a fool of himself with it.

There are some commentators and translators that nuance the verb “to go up,” and interpret it as meaning that the drunk picks up a thornbush (instead of a “thorn;” the Hebrew can mean either one), and then hurts others with it. According to that interpretation, the drunk hurts others with the thornbush and the fool hurts people with his proverb (cf. CJB, HCSB, NAB, NIV, NLT; and Bruce Waltke.[[73]](#footnote-15801) Although that might be true, it is stretching the Hebrew meaning of the verb, and it is not necessary to do that since understanding the verse as saying that the drunk and the fool are both hurt by what they do makes good sense.

Pro 26:10

**“*Like* an archer who wounds everyone.”** This verse has been called the most obscure verse in Proverbs,[[74]](#footnote-20644) and the immense differences in the translations of it give evidence for that assessment.

**YLT**: Great *is* the Former of all, And He is rewarding a fool, And is rewarding transgressors.

**Bullinger**: A master [workman] formeth all things aright: but he that hireth a fool, hireth a transgressor [who will spoil the work].

**NRSV**: Like an archer who wounds everybody is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.

**NIV**: Like an archer who wounds at random is he who hires a fool or any passer-by.

The newer research in Hebrew has pretty well shown that the first part of the verse refers to an archer who wounds people in the same way that the first part of verse 9 refers to a drunk who hurts people. The second stanza of the verse is much less clear, however. Our translation, along with the ASV, NASB, and NIV, follows our understanding of the Hebrew text. The idea of a drunkard in some translations (ESV, NRSV, NJB) comes from the Targum and Syriac, not the Hebrew text. Although it is possible that those versions preserve the meaning of the text, given the immediate context of drunkards and their violent behavior, we felt it better to stick with the Hebrew text, since it made sense also.

Pro 26:13

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 26:14

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 26:15

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 26:16

**“lazy.”** See commentary on Proverbs 6:6, “lazy one.”

Pro 26:18

**“death.”** The word “death” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for things that cause death, such as the arrows.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Pro 26:22

**“innermost being.”** See commentary on Proverbs 18:8.

Pro 26:23

**“silver dross.”** Some scholars argue from the Ugaritic that this should be translated as “silver glaze,” but many other scholars disagree. There is no necessary reason to change the Hebrew text. The point of the verse is that just as a clay vessel covered in silver dross is made to look valuable but is deceptive, so are smooth lips that conceal a wicked heart.

**“smooth.”** The Hebrew text reads “burning,” but the Septuagint reads “smooth” and the difference in Hebrew between “smooth” and “burning” is a single pen downstroke to change a “*daleth*” into a “*chet*.” There are other references to “smooth” lips (or smooth talk) in the book of Proverbs (cf. Prov. 5:3; 26:28; 2:16; 7:5, 21; 28:23; 29:5), but no other to “burning lips.” Also, “smooth” lips are known in the culture to be deceptive, but the phrase “burning lips” is unusual and the meaning is not easily discerned.

Pro 26:24

**“A person who hates.”** Some versions, commentators, and lexicons[[75]](#footnote-14605) see this phrase as meaning, “an enemy” (cf. Douay-Rheims, NAB, NIV, NRSV). People who hate others, and enemies, often disguise the truth by lying.

**“disguises himself with his lips.”** This is a beautiful word picture. We are used to people disguising themselves with a mask or wig, but the most common disguise is disguise by lying. Jesus taught the same basic truth and told us to beware of people who “come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are destructive, greedy wolves” (Matt. 7:15). The best way to find out the true character of a person is to look for the fruit in their lives (Matt. 7:16, 20). Another important way to see through people’s lies is to rely on others; what they see and hear. Abraham Lincoln said: “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.” In a group of people, usually someone will see through the lie-disguise and know the truth. Proverbs 26:26 says, “*Though his* hatred is covered by deception, his evil will be exposed in *the midst of* the congregation.” Learning the truth about people and life is part of the value of having a “congregation” of godly friends.

**“harbors deceit.”** The literal Hebrew is “places deceit,” but in this context, it means to harbor deceit.

Pro 26:26

**“in the midst of the congregation.”** It can be difficult to tell if someone is lying. One thing a person can do to tell if a person is lying is look at the fruit in their lives (Matt. 7:16, 20). However, another important way to see through people’s lies is to rely on others; what they see and hear. Abraham Lincoln said: “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.” In a group of people, usually someone will see through the lie-disguise and know the truth. Proverbs 26:26 is a verse that shows that a “congregation” of people will see things that an individual may miss, and they will expose the liar. Learning the truth about people and life is part of the value of having a “congregation” of godly friends.

Pro 26:27

**“The person who digs a pit will fall into it.”** The context and scope of Scripture show us that the person digging a pit and rolling the stone is doing so with an evil intent. It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

**Proverbs Chapter 27**

Pro 27:3

**“vexation by a fool.”** This is the figure of speech amphibologia, one thing is stated but has two meanings.[[76]](#footnote-32190) The verse can and does mean both the provocation that a fool causes to someone else, and what happens when a fool is provoked—he causes such a scene, lashing out, yelling, accusing, etc.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

Pro 27:6

**“one who hates *you*.”** In this context, although “one who hates you” is literal, it is referring to an enemy. Thus, the *HALOT*[[77]](#footnote-13710) has “enemy” for this verse, and almost all the English versions do, as well as commentators such as Michael Fox, Bruce Waltke, Robert Alter, and Richard Clifford. Nevertheless, the literal is “one who hates,” and that is true.

Pro 27:7

**“A satisfied soul tramples on a honeycomb.”** The picture is graphic. The verse does not say how the honeycomb got on the ground; someone may have dropped it, or a swarm of bees could have built a honeycomb close to the ground (cf. Judg. 14:8-9). In any case, the person who is already full does not care about the honeycomb and “tramples” it underfoot; he spurns and rejects it. In contrast, when a person is truly hungry, even things that are bitter-tasting are sweet to him. It is a blessing to have almost any food.

While Proverbs 27:7 is certainly literally true, it is teaching a much larger truth. To a person who is satisfied with life, i.e., satisfied with their job, their money, their health, their family, their living situation, etc., even things that we would ordinarily consider “great opportunities” do not interest them. But to the person who needs a job or money or a place to live, even something that is not very satisfactory is a cause of rejoicing.

Pro 27:8

**“a person who wanders from his place.”** For a bird, the bird’s nest is a place of safety and security, as well as family and responsibilities. It is where the bird “belongs” and where it will live and function best. A bird who wanders from the nest (and “wander” has the implication of more permanent wandering, not just “going out for a short walk”) is not only leaving safety and security, it is leaving where it was designed by God to best fit into life and where it functions the most effectively for itself and others.

Similarly, a person who “wanders” from their place is leaving a good measure of safety and security, and also leaving behind the responsibilities they have to God and others, and wanders away for any of a number of reasons—perhaps to find something they don’t have or fill some void they can’t seem to fill.

To understand the fullness of this proverb it is important to realize that, although many English versions say “wanders from home,” the actual Hebrew is “wanders from his place,” and the “place” can be physical, such as a home, or it can be metaphorical for what the person is being called by God to be and do at any given point in life. A person who ignores or abandons what they are called to do for the Lord and who wanders off to somehow find a more satisfying life is like a bird wandering from its nest: things will generally not end well.

Proverbs 27:8 points out that each person has a place in God’s world, with gifts and talents and responsibilities that go with those talents. and people are most blessed and satisfied when they are doing the will of God. But many people get “lost” and can’t seem to find where they fit in. We learn from the scope of Scripture that to help with that situation God has called pastors and helpers who are gifted at helping people find where they fit in for the Lord.

Pro 27:9

**“one’s own counsel.”** The Hebrew text reads, the “counsel of the soul.” The Hebrew word *min* can be taken in two different ways. One is as a comparative statement (“better than”), the other is as a source (“comes from”). The English versions are divided on how to understand the phrase. For example, the CSB renders the proverb: “and the sweetness of a friend is better than self-counsel” (cf. JPS, NJB). On the other hand, the NET reads, “likewise the sweetness of one’s friend from sincere counsel” (cf. CEB, ESV, KJV, NASB).

The versions are divided for good reason: the Hebrew text can be read either way, and both readings are true. That makes Proverbs 27:9 the figure of speech *amphibologia*, a figure in which one thing is said but it means two things both of which are true. It is true that having the sweet counsel of a friend is better than just trusting that you yourself are right. Many verses talk about the necessity of having good counsel to make plans succeed (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6) versus trusting one’s own heart in what seems right (Prov. 16:25). Of course, the verse presupposes that a person will have a friend who loves him and will be honest with him. But sadly, many people do not cultivate that kind of friendship with others. A good church leader recognizes the pressures in the world that separate people and works to make his or her church a place where genuine friendships can develop.

It is also true that the “sincere” counsel of a friend is sweet, and that sincere counsel makes the heart glad, just as incense and oil do.

Pro 27:12

**“A prudent person sees evil *and* hides.”** Proverbs 27:12 and Proverbs 22:3 are nearly identical (see the REV commentary on Prov. 22:3).

Pro 27:13

**“give security.”** Proverbs 27:13 is almost identical to Proverbs 20:16. See commentary on Prov. 20:16.

Pro 27:14

**“to him.”** The pronoun is ambiguous. Is the loud blessing in the morning counted as a curse to the one who is speaking the blessing, or is the one who is “blessed” with a loud voice counting the blessing to be a curse? Both explanations apply and both seem to be true.

Pro 27:15

**“A constant dripping on a day of steady rain.”** The Hebrew words are the same, and in the same order as Proverbs 19:13, (*deleph*, #01812, דֶּלֶף*; tarad*, #02956, טָרַד). See commentary on Proverbs 19:13.

Pro 27:16

**“restrain her.”** The Hebrew is *tsaphan* (#06845 צָפַן), to hide. However, the reading “hide her” is difficult for most people, and in this context, the word can have the meaning “restrain her,” that is, restrain her to stop her nagging and complaining (a few English versions do have “hide,” cf. Geneva Bible, KJV, NAB, NET, Rotherham, YLT). However, the meaning of the Hebrew word is “to hide,” and is extended to mean “to restrain.” Anyone who lives in a neighborhood where the houses are close together knows the embarrassment of having a heated argument in the house that the whole neighborhood can hear, and that is especially the case in nice weather when the windows are open. But in the biblical world, every window was always more or less open because there were no glass windows, so a man with a nagging wife was constantly embarrassed. Thus, the husband wished he could hide his wife in a place where she could not be seen or heard, but since such a place was impossible to find in the tightly packed biblical villages and towns, hiding a nagging wife was like trying to hide the sound of the wind or to grasp oil; it could not be done.

Beyond the simple fact that one cannot hide the sound of the wind or grasp oil, there may be important subtle undertones that explain why wind and oil were used as comparisons to the nagging wife. The woman was a constant nag, and a constantly howling wind is a storm; thus, while the home was supposed to be a shelter from the storm, instead the storm was inside the house. Also, fragrant oil was often worn as a perfume by women and was meant to gladden the heart and enhance one’s sexuality and sensuality (Prov. 27:9; Song 1:12; 4:13-14), but in this case, the oil was wasted and ineffective because the woman was like oil that could not be grasped—and even grasped “in his right hand.” Biblically, the right hand was the hand of blessing. Thus the phrase seems to be intimating that if the man could grasp the “oil” it would be blessed, but alas, it could not even be grasped for a blessing. By her ungodly behavior, the woman wasted the blessing that could have been hers.[[78]](#footnote-11767)

Part of the meaning of Proverbs 27:16, written about women but also applicable to men, is that people are certain ways, and they will only change if they want to change. If a man marries a contentious woman (or vice versa), then he will not be happy and he cannot force her to change. Although marriages in the biblical world were usually arranged, it was still important for the parents or the person to make a good choice about who would be a good spouse.

[For more on the right hand being the hand of blessing, see commentary on Prov. 3:16 and Matt. 25:33.]

Pro 27:18

**“master.”** The Hebrew is “lord,” or “master,” and is used of the owner of a slave. The Hebrew word is a grammatic plural here and is often referred to as an “honorific plural,” meaning the word is plural in form but singular in meaning.

Pro 27:19

**“As the surface of the water reflects a face.”** The Hebrew poetry in this proverb is short and difficult to understand. It literally reads, “As water the face to the face, so the heart of a person to a person.” The point of the verse seems to be that water accurately reflects a person’s face, and the heart of a person accurately reflects who a person really is. The NET seems to get the sense well and translates the verse, “As in water a face is reflected as a face, so a person’s heart reflects the person.”

Scholars debate whether the heart reflects the person themself, or someone else’s heart, but the face in the water is the face of the one looking, and similarly, it seems that the heart of a person reflects that person’s heart. Looking into one’s own heart is being paralleled with the way a person can look at the surface of the water to see themselves. Looking at the heart does not reveal the physical appearance of the person, like water does, but rather it reveals the character, desires, and moral virtues of the person. Such self-awareness gives a person a better understanding of who they are to enable them to grow in making wise and godly choices. In this context, the “person” is the “real self,” the “inner self,” that makes decisions and choices that affect and direct the heart, and indeed, the whole person.

This proverb is making a different point than what Christ said when he made the statement, “the things that proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart” (Matt. 15:18; cf. Matt. 12:34). Proverbs is saying that the heart reflects the person, while Christ was pointing out that what comes from the mouth reflects the heart.

The Bible says different things in different places, and by reading and studying all of them we can get a basic picture of the way God created us human. The “person,” the “real you” is the “you” that can talk to yourself. It is the invisible self that thinks and plans, and has desires and aspirations, and that has deep emotions and feels great joy in some circumstances but great pain in other circumstances, and that makes decisions about what to do. Paul referred to it as the “inner self” (cf. Rom. 7:22-23; Eph. 3:16 and 2 Cor. 4:16. In Romans 7:22-23, which is one long sentence, what he calls his “inner self” in the first part of the sentence he calls “my mind” in the last part of the sentence. It is very difficult to define or quantify the inner self, the “real you.” It does not reside in any single part of the body, but is intrinsically connected to the whole body.

What we learn from different verses is that the inner self, the real you, speaks to and influences the whole body. Among the parts of the body that are most influenced is the “heart,” which in biblical times was understood to be the core and seat of the thought life (the emotional life was thought to be dominated by the “guts,” primarily the bowels and kidneys). According to Proverbs 27:19, the heart reflects the “person,” the “inner self,” the “real you.” That makes sense because it is the inner self that is always thinking, making decisions, acting and reacting, etc. So the heart reflects the person, the “real you,” and then the heart directly influences what comes out of the mouth. It is possible that the Bible says what the mouth speaks comes from the heart and not the “inner self” because often our inner self is in conflict with how we behave, which is why Paul writes, “I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Often what we say and do comes out of our heart, but is not the way we—the real inner self—would want to speak and act if we were not so influenced by sin.

[For more on the inner self, see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:16.]

Pro 27:20

**“nor are the eyes of a person ever satisfied.”** This is a proverb that is generally true, but not always true of every person. Most people want more than they have. The fallen nature of humankind drives them to desire things that they don’t have, which is why the tenth commandment of the Ten Commandments is not to covet (Exod. 20:17). Wanting more includes lust, greed, a desire for more power or influence, etc. The wise believer knows that while it is commendable to want to improve one’s circumstances if they are not good, wanting too much can be harmful (Eccl. 5:13). It is good for a person to be content with what they have. Paul wrote that godliness with contentment was a great gain, whereas a love of money was a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

Pro 27:21

**“*tested* by the praise he receives.”** Refining pots and gold furnaces test metals, remove impurities, and reveal the quality of the metal. Similarly, people are tested by the praise they receive. The literal Hebrew is difficult in English and reads, “A refining pot [is] for silver and a furnace [is] for the gold, but a man by the mouth of his praise.” The exact meaning of the last phrase of the verse is unclear because it can mean two different things. In our view, the two meanings are purposeful and are the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre), where one thing is said but two different things, both true, are meant.

One of the meanings is that a man is tested by the praise he receives, and most translations support that meaning. A man is tested by the praise he receives because the way he reacts to it reveals his heart. Some commentators point out that “a man is tested by the praise he receives” can also mean that the praise a man receives from others (or lack of it), i.e., the public opinion about him, reveals the kind of person he is. While that explanation may be part of what “a man is tested by the praise he receives” means, because public opinion can be so unreliable it is unlikely that that is a primary meaning of the verse.

Michael Fox agrees with the interpretation that a person is tested by the praise he receives and translates the last phrase of the verse, “a man *is tested* by the mouth of him who praises him.”[[79]](#footnote-28476) The Rabbis generally agree with this interpretation.[[80]](#footnote-24296) The Complete Jewish Bible reads “a person [is tested] by [his reaction to] praise” (cf. NAB, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT).

The second meaning of the verse is that a man is tested by what he praises. This interpretation is well-covered by Bruce Waltke.[[81]](#footnote-20422) Waltke points out that the phrase “by the mouth of” is used not only literally, but also in both Hebrew and cognate Semitic languages as an idiom for “according to.” That idiomatic use would make the verse read that a man is tested according to his praise, in other words, by what he praises. Waltke writes that in this verse “the person is tested by the praise he gives and/or receives,” and adds: “Musicians praise their composers; literate people praise their authors; sports fans praise their heroes; and the godly praise the Lord. Likewise, the immoral praise the adulterer and adulteress, and the covetous praise the rich (Ps. 49:18).” We know foolish people honor fools (Prov. 26:8). Waltke himself translated the verse in a more neutral way that could include both meanings: “a person is tested according to his praise,” but *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* translates the last phrase in the verse as, “a man, [is to be tried] by what he praiseth.”

In conclusion, the Hebrew text can mean both that a person is tested by the praise he receives and also by what he praises. The way a person reacts to praise reveals what is in his heart, and it also tests the quality of the heart and whether or not it will be changed and corrupted by praise. Also, what a person praises tests the heart and reveals what is in it, because we praise what we value and admire. If we are going to know what is in the hearts of other people, we have to pay attention to how they react to being praised, and also to what they praise.

Pro 27:22

**“his foolishness will not depart from him.”** This verse is not saying that fools cannot change their ways, because they can. However, it is making the point that there is no way to change them from the outside. There is no discipline or consequence that somehow guarantees a fool will change. We can do what we can to help them see that their ways are harmful to themselves and others, and pray for them, but ultimately they must make the decision to change and then follow up and act on their decision.

**Proverbs Chapter 28**

Pro 28:1

**“righteous are confident like a lion.”** This seems to be the basic meaning of the text, but reading the Hebrew that way is difficult because the word “righteous” is plural, while the word “lion” and the verb “confident” are singular, and thus it seems like the words should go together thusly: “the righteous are like a confident lion.”

In any case, the text shows us that wicked people are often so afraid of the consequences of their actions, or so guilty about what they have done, that rather than living a peaceful life like the righteous can do, they flee even when no one is pursuing them.

Pro 28:3

**“A poor man who oppresses the weak.”** Ordinarily in Proverbs the poor person is oppressed, but here the poor man is the oppressor. Thus, although this proverb seems to go against the flow of the other verses in Proverbs about the poor, what is portrayed in this proverb is something we often see in real life. For example, among the poor and homeless, it is quite common for a stronger homeless person to beat up and take the food, money, jacket, shoes, etc., of a weaker homeless person. The stronger person then becomes like a pounding rain: cold, heartless, and destructive, leaving only misery and hopelessness behind. The poor no doubt cry out about such oppression, but are ignored; but not by God who hears them. The oppressors are too selfish and ignorant to know that on the Day of Judgment and afterward, they too will cry out and be ignored (Prov. 21:13).

Pro 28:4

**“Law.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 28:7

**“the Law.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 28:9

**“the Law.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

**“even his prayer is an abomination.”** Many verses say that if a person is evil, unrepentant, or ungodly, God will not hear his prayers (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7). Sadly, this is often ignored by stubborn and hard-hearted people who think they are righteous in the sight of God and who therefore pelt Him with prayers that He does not hear. If we are caught up in sin, it is good to pray for God’s help, but that needs to be combined with a genuine effort to overcome sin and become more godly in our walk.

Pro 28:10

**“onto an evil road.”** The Hebrew uses the word “road” idiomatically for “way of life.”

**“will fall into his *own* pit.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

Pro 28:12

**“When the righteous triumph.”** The Hebrew word translated “triumph” is more literally “rejoice.” The idea is that the righteous triumph, and so they rejoice. The Hebrew text is a metonymy of effect, where the effect, rejoicing, is put for the cause of the rejoicing, which is success or triumph.

**“when the wicked rise up, people conceal themselves.”** When wicked people rule, the actions of righteous people often draw attention and bring persecution and trouble. So often when the leaders or governments are evil, righteous people “hide,” that is, they do not engage in obvious righteous acts or acts of worship, instead they “fly beneath the radar” so to speak. However, often they engage in undercover acts of civil disobedience. Hiding, lying, and acts of civil disobedience will be much more how godly people will have to live as we approach the Last Days, a time when the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). Proverbs 28:12 is similar to Proverbs 28:28, but the word “conceal” is different than the word “hide” in verse 28, and actually here means more like “people must be sought out,” meaning that they hide and must be looked for.

[For more on lying and civil disobedience, see commentary on Exod. 1:19.]

Pro 28:14

**“who trembles *before God* continually.”** The idiom of trembling before God refers to having a reverent respect for God due to who He is and what He can do. The person who loves and respects God is not “hot and cold” towards Him, but holds Him in respect continually.

Pro 28:15

**“poor.”** The Hebrew word that is translated as “poor” has a semantic range that includes, “poor,” “helpless,” “powerless,” “weak” and “insignificant.” Frankly, all of those meanings fit, giving the proverb a wide range of meanings and possible translations.

Pro 28:19

**“food.”** The Hebrew word is literally “bread,” which is used by metonymy for “food” in general because “bread” was the dominant food.

Pro 28:22

**“a stingy person.”** The Hebrew text uses the Semitic idiom about the “evil eye” and says, “A man with an evil eye.” The idiomatic phrase about a person having an “evil eye” referred to the person being stingy, selfish, and greedy. The meaning of the idiom of the “evil eye” changed over time, and today if someone gives you the “evil eye” it means he wishes harm to come to you. However, that was not the meaning of the idiom in biblical times.

Here in Proverbs 28:22, the man with the evil eye is stingy and greedy, and so he rushes after wealth. Sadly, he does not know that that is the path to poverty, either in this life or the next. In Deuteronomy 15:9, the man with an “evil eye” was stingy so he would not lend anything to the needy if it was close to the seventh year, the year of release, when people did not have to pay him back. In Deuteronomy 28:54, a man who is in a difficult situation may not even be generous toward his family, but have an evil eye concerning them and be stingy and not help them, and similarly, Proverbs 23:6 warns not to eat the food of a stingy man, a man with an evil eye, because he is always worried about how much it costs him.

In the New Testament, Jesus taught that a person who had an evil eye and thus was stingy, greedy, and selfish, was full of darkness (Matt. 6:23; Luke 11:34). In fact, the person who is stingy and greedy is not even happy if others get ahead a little (Matt. 20:15). Jesus made it clear that having an evil eye and being greedy and selfish was a heart issue (Mark 7:22-23).

In contrast to an “evil eye,” which was selfish and stingy, a person with a “good eye” (Prov. 22:9), or a “single eye” (Matt. 6:22), was generous.

[For more on the “good eye,” see commentary on Prov. 22:9.]

Pro 28:25

**“A greedy soul stirs up strife.”** The Hebrew is more literally a “wide soul” (*rahab nephesh)* where “wide” is *rahab* and *nephesh* refers to a person and/or the person’s appetites. The Hebrew word *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), has a wide semantic range, and the exact meaning is closely tied to the context. As Bruce Waltke points out, “*Rahab* with concrete nouns denotes breath or width…but in construct with psychosomatic words it denotes unrestraint, immodesty: with *nephesh* an unrestrained appetite (see Prov. 28:25; cf. Ps. 101:5); with *leb* [“heart”], of unrestrained thoughts, ambitions, plans, and so on. This heart, recognizes no boundaries to curb its aspirations, behaves as if it were God.”[[82]](#footnote-29978) Waltke later writes about Proverbs 28:25 and says, “the unrestrained appetite (*rehab-nephesh*, lit. “wide of appetite”...stirs up strife. ...The greedy person’s insatiable appetite brings them into conflict with others, for he transgresses social boundaries. Not content with his portion, he becomes disruptive and destructive, and those whose person and property he violates fight back. This is how wars are started.”[[83]](#footnote-15565)

**“prosperous.”** The literal Hebrew is “fat.”

Pro 28:26

**“He who trusts in his own heart—he is a fool.”** This verse shows the need for each person to have trusted advisors who will reprove and correct him. Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) warns us: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” We cannot always trust our judgment, so we surround ourselves with trusted advisors and loved ones, who can give us advice and counsel. Surely it is true that there is safety in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14).

Pro 28:27

**“will not *be in* need.”** Proverbs 28:27 is one of the many “ideal” promises in the Word of God. It was always God’s intention that people would get what they deserve in this life, and that is expressed in verses such as this one. This verse would be fulfilled here on earth today if we lived in a godly world with godly people, but people do not always get what they deserve. Many people who give to the poor end up in need themselves later in life.

[For more on “ideal” proverbs like this, see the REV commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

Pro 28:28

**“When the wicked rise up, people hide themselves.”** See commentary on Proverbs 28:12.

**Proverbs Chapter 29**

Pro 29:2

**“groan.”** The problems and pain that wicked rulers cause are very real, and in those times the people who are ruled over groan from pain and burden. In the countries like the USA that allow people to elect their rulers, it is important to elect rulers who value personal choice and freedom, instead of those who think that the government can run someone’s life better than they themselves can.

Pro 29:5

**“spreads a net for his feet.”** The Hebrew is ambiguous as to who the “his” refers to. It can be interpreted to refer to either the one who spreads the net or the one for whom the net was intended, or both. Flattery entraps both those who speak it and those who are deceived by it.

Pro 29:7

**“legal claim.”** The Hebrew word is *din* (#01779 דִּין), and it usually means “judgment,” but it can also mean “legal suit, strife,” or “cause,” or “rights, legal rights, legal claim.” The *HALOT*[[84]](#footnote-14658) has “legal claim” for Proverbs 29:7. Every human has certain rights, and when those rights are violated, a person then has certain legal claims. Righteous people are sensitive to the legal rights and legal claims of the poor, in part because they know that God never shows favoritism when it comes to people, and that God is the Judge of all people. On the other hand, wicked people oppress the poor and take advantage of them. They do not keep God’s Day of Judgment in mind, to their own temporal and everlasting detriment.

Pro 29:9

**“person.”** The word “person” (twice in this verse) is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman. But it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

**“disputes.”** The usual meaning of “disputes” is to have a controversy in court, although sometimes the word means more of a dispute in general.

**“rages or laughs.”** The fool is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12:15), and when challenged may either try to bludgeon you with words (Prov. 12:16; 27:3), or, as this verse says, may try to just “laugh you off,” as if what you said was ridiculous. In either case, the fool can make quite a scene (Prov. 27:3), and it is unlikely the case (or the courtroom) will come to a peaceful settlement.

Pro 29:13

**“have this in common.”** Literally, “meet together” (see commentary on Prov. 22:2).

**“Yahweh gives light to the eyes of them both.”** This refers primarily to creating them and giving them life (see commentary on Prov. 22:2).

Pro 29:17

**“rest.”** The Hebrew word means “rest,” and can refer to rest, comfort, peace of mind.

Pro 29:18

**“Law.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8.

Pro 29:20

**“a person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, a male in contrast to a woman. But it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

Pro 29:24

**“he is put under oath *to testify*.”** This is a great example of a verse that cannot be understood without understanding the scope of Scripture and the culture of the time. The reference is to testifying in a courtroom, and this verse is tied to the following verse, Proverbs 29:25, which says that being afraid of people brings “a snare” into one’s life.

The context and vocabulary in Proverbs 29:24 tell us that the person being called to testify in court as a witness has partnered with a thief, who has now been caught and is on trial. In the trial, there was generally understood to be some kind of oath or “oath-curse” for people to tell the truth (Lev. 5:1). Here in Proverbs 29:24, the witness hears the “oath,” but refuses to speak. The witness has some kind of partnership or understanding with the thief, and he is afraid, but that fear is about to bring a snare into his life. The Hebrew word translated “oath” is *alah* (#0423 אָלָה), and it means both “oath” and “curse.” The reason for the two meanings of *alah* is understandable in the culture because many of the “oaths” were more accurately “oath-curses,” that is, the oath and the curse were bound up together into one statement.

For example, after Elijah killed the prophets of Baal in Jezebel’s kingdom, she said, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I don’t make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!” (1 Kings 19:2). In other words, Jezebel was making an oath-curse and saying she would kill Elijah by the next day, and if not the gods could do the same to her and worse. The king of Israel said the same kind of thing about Elisha when there was a famine in Samaria that he blamed on Elisha (2 Kings 6:31). When David’s son Adonijah, who was Solomon’s rival, asked to have David’s last concubine, Abishag, Solomon said the same thing about Adonijah (1 Kings 2:23), and then did in fact execute him (1 Kings 2:25).

When a person was called to testify in court the oath or oath-curse was spoken, and even if there wasn’t one, there was a general understanding from the Mosaic Law that if a person lied in court and was caught he too would receive the punishment that the criminal himself received (Lev. 5:1; Deut. 19:16-19). Although Deuteronomy is specifically about someone who lies about another to incriminate him, everyone understood that the Mosaic Law, the “Torah,” was given for “instruction” (“Torah” means “instruction,” not “law”), and the Torah gave general instruction for guidance, and thus the regulations about false testimony in court applied for both lying in court to incriminate someone and lying in court to cover for someone else’s sin.

Proverbs 29:24-25 teaches a powerful lesson. People who enter into relationships with evil people “hate their own soul;” they ruin their lives. People involved in evil usually get more and more deeply involved and end up living in genuine fear for their lives and welfare. The pressure and fear can be so great that they lie in court, as the person in Proverbs 29:24 does. The way out of the trouble and mental anguish is to trust God and obey Him. That does not mean that there will not be serious consequences in this life, because sometimes there still are, but it does mean that in the end there will be protection and even being exalted by God. Romans 8:18 tells us that the sufferings of this life are not comparable with the glory we will experience in the next life.

Pro 29:25

**“protected.”** The Hebrew word is *sagab* (#07682 שָׂגַב), and it more literally means, “to be set on high,” or “to be set or placed high, high up.” It also has the meaning of “to be exalted.” As we will see, both “protected” and “exalted” are important meanings in this verse. The idea of being “set in a high place,” meaning safe or “protected,”[[85]](#footnote-12000) comes from the military metaphor of being put in a high place that is inaccessible to the enemy and therefore safe. While fearing man brings “a snare,” i.e., trouble upon trouble, trusting God leads to ultimate protection, safety, and exaltation.

This verse parallels Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 10:28 that we should not be afraid of people, but rather should fear God. The worst any human can do to us is kill our body. But God will raise the righteous people from the dead and give them better bodies and everlasting life. In contrast, God can and will destroy the unrighteous people in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, so He is the one we should really fear and trust.

People who are afraid of other people do things they should not do, or do not do things they should do, and their lives are just one snare and trouble after another. This verse is tied to the previous verse, Prov. 29:24, in which a person is so afraid of other people that he will not testify in court and tell the truth, which under Old Testament law could even result in his death, depending on the particular case. The way to rid oneself of fear of others is to trust God. That does not mean that troubles in this life will disappear, but they will certainly be lessened, especially mentally, and furthermore, God is the ultimate deliverer. Even if godly people are killed, if they have trusted God and gotten saved, they will be “protected” in the end. More than that, however, because of their obedience to God, they will also be “exalted” by God and given rewards for their obedience. The Hebrew word means both “protected” and “exalted,” and thus is an amphibologia, a double entendre, and the native Hebrew reader sees both meanings when he reads the verse. The REV has “protected” due to the context and the use of “snare” in the first stanza.

Pro 29:26

**“attention.”** The Hebrew word is “face,” and in this context, it means “attention,”[[86]](#footnote-31628) or “favor.” People seek the attention and favor of human rulers, but true justice for people comes from God. Of course, that “justice” can be desired or unwanted depending on how godly the person is. The wicked don’t want justice, they want the attention of the ruler so they can get what they desire in life, while the righteous crave God’s justice on earth and sometimes get it here, but will certainly see it done in the next life.

Pro 29:27

**“dishonest person.”** The word “person” is *iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ), which most literally refers to a man, but it can also be used to refer to men and women, and it makes sense to translate it in a gender-neutral way in this context (see commentary on Prov. 2:12, “the one”).

**“wicked person.”** The word “wicked” is a singular adjective, and we added “person” to clarify that fact.

**Proverbs Chapter 30**

Pro 30:1

**“The declaration of *this* man.”** The Hebrew text reads, “the declaration of the man,” but the man is Agur, so the reading “this man,” i.e., the man who spoke “the words” in the first stanza of the verse.

Pro 30:4

**“What is his name.”** Proverbs 30:4 begins with a series of four rhetorical questions, each beginning with “who,” making the figure of speech anaphora, which is designed to catch our attention. The One who can do the things listed, such as gather the wind in his fists and bind the waters in his clothing, is God. The basic thrust of the text, as is determined by Proverbs 30:2-3, is the difference between God, who has wisdom, and humans who do not have inherent wisdom but must learn from God (for example, Agur, son of Yakeh; Prov. 30:1). The name of God is Yahweh.

The text then asks “what is the name of his son,” and the first and most obvious answer from the Old Testament is that it is Israel. Bruce Waltke writes: “The answer to, ‘What is the name of his son?’ must be based on the lexical foundation that in Proverbs ‘son’ always elsewhere refers to the son whom the father teaches (see 1:8). In the Old Testament, the Lord brought Israel into existence and named his firstborn (cf. Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 32:5-6, 18-19; Isa. 43:6; 45:11; 63:16; 64:8[7]; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:20; Hos. 11:1). The LXX [the Septuagint] reads ‘his son’ as plural, ‘his children,’ apparently interpreting ‘his son’ as ‘the children of Israel.” This is also the interpretation in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni.”[[87]](#footnote-29641)

Pro 30:5

**“refined.”** The Hebrew word translated as “refined” is *tzaraf* (#06884 צָרַף), and it generally means refined by heat; by smelting.[[88]](#footnote-20673) Proverbs 30:5 is quite similar in meaning to Psalm 12:6. Although we generally think of every word in the Bible as being pure and from God, many of the spiritual things of God cannot be completely represented in any human language, so the words as they come from God to humans have to be refined so that they are pure as possible in the receptor language.

Pro 30:7

**“I ask from you.”** The “you” changes to God here. This is the only prayer in Proverbs.

Pro 30:8

**“provide to me my portion of bread.”** This is very similar in meaning to the line in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us day by day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3; cf. Matt. 6:11). It seems very likely that Jesus was using this line from the only prayer in Proverbs (see commentary on Prov. 30:7) as a basis for the line he spoke in his prayer. Thus, the idea of praying to God to have enough in life, but not too much, is both the wisdom of the Old Testament and the wisdom of the New Testament.

Pro 30:10

**“slander.”** The Hebrew word can also mean “criticize, disparage.”​

**“found guilty.”** The Hebrew word is *asham* (#0816 אָשַׁם), and it means to be guilty. But that guilt extended to having to pay or suffer the consequences for what you had done, which is why some versions translate it something like “and you have to pay the penalty.” However, the more literal meaning of the word is “be held guilty.”

Pro 30:11

**“generation.”** The Hebrew word *dor* (#01755 דּוֹר) means “generation,” and that is its meaning here. A “generation” can sometimes mean all the people alive at a certain time, or what we more commonly think of as a “generation,” people of a certain age range that are alive at a certain time, just as we here in the USA refer to people being of the “Baby Boomer Generation,” “Generation X,” or “the Millennial Generation.” In certain contexts, *dor* can refer to a kind of people, and a number of translations go with that idea (cf. CJB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). However, both the Bible and history reveal to us that certain generations have very specific characteristics, and seems to be what God is trying to tell us here. Also, knowing that helps us understand the Bible, world history, and even our own circumstances. We must also understand, however, that although we today live in a very global world, where everyone is connected, in biblical times and likely today as well, a “generation” was not only specific in time, but in place. Just because the Israelite generation that left Egypt was ungodly did not mean that the American Indians alive at that same time were too. They would not be considered the same “generation.”

The Bible makes it clear that different generations had different characteristics, but of course, we must remember that not every person in a generation follows the pattern of the generation. Although a generation will have a general characteristic, individuals in the generation will always differ somewhat. For example, there will always be believers in an unbelieving generation. The generation at the time of the Flood was wicked (Gen. 7:1). The generation of Israelites who left Egypt was unbelieving and evil (Num. 32:13; Deut. 1:35). The generation that conquered the Promised Land generally believed God, but the next generation that came along after Joshua’s time did not (Judg. 2:10). European and American history also reveals the trend that generations distinctly differ. One generation might experience a great revival or hunger for God, and then the next generation have much less interest in God.

Given the scope of what God reveals about generations, Proverbs 30:11-14 is not just telling us something that we all know—that some kinds of people are godly and some kinds are evil, but rather it is giving us a picture of how history develops, with some generations being distinctly more godly than other generations, and some generations being very wicked. It is also possible that this section of Scripture about this very ungodly generation is ultimately pointing to the generation that will be alive on earth after the Rapture of the Church, when the people’s love will grow cold and the earth will experience great tribulation. At that time there will indeed be a generation that acts like Proverbs 30:11-14 portrays.

Pro 30:12

**“generation.”** See commentary on Proverbs 30:11, “generation.”

**“excrement.”** The Hebrew word is *tsoah* (#06675 צוֹאָה), and it means excrement or filth. In this context, it most literally means “excrement,” referring to our human bodily waste, as we can see from verses such as 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12, combined with the fact that the “generation” includes both men and women (in Isa. 4:4 *tsoah* refers to menstrual blood; in Isa. 28:8 it refers to vomit). Further evidence that in this verse *tsoah* refers to human excrement is that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 250 BC, translated *tsoah* as *exodos*, “a going out,” which in this context would refer to excrement.

In biblical times there was no really effective way to cleanse oneself after going to the bathroom. Toilet paper and similar products did not exist, nor did sinks with running water, nor did truly effective soap. Often a person just had to use his or her hand to clean up and then wipe off their hand in the best way possible in their circumstances, and this was the dominant reason that people only ate with their right hand, and cleaned themselves with their left hand (see commentary on Matt. 25:33). When a person with an unclean hand touched his body and clothes, he became much more unclean and covered by excrement than he was aware of. Thus often, just as Proverbs 30:12 says, people who thought they were pure in God’s eyes actually were unwashed and unclean from their excrement.

A number of versions think “excrement” is a hyperbole to exaggerate the impurity that people have before God, and translate the verse a little less extreme, using “filth” or a similar word. While the use of “excrement” in Proverbs 30:12 may be somewhat exaggerated for emphasis, it is also true that in God’s eyes, people who are pure in their own eyes but not pure in the sight of God are not just “filthy” in the sense that it would be nice if they took a bath, they have excrement on them and are in dire need of God’s cleansing to be pure and holy in His sight. Of course, the way to be washed in the sight of God is to live a righteous life, and when we sin, repent and confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

Pro 30:13

**“generation.”** See commentary on Proverbs 30:11, “generation.”

Pro 30:14

**“generation.”** See commentary on Proverbs 30:11, “generation.”

Pro 30:15

**“leech.”** The Hebrew word is *aluqah* (#05936 עֲלוּקָה), and although it only occurs this one time in the Bible, it is quite clear from the Aramaic, Arabic, and Ethiopic cognate words that it refers to the horseleech; also the Septuagint and Vulgate read “horseleech.” The horseleech has two suckers, which are almost certainly the “two daughters” that Proverbs 30:15 speaks about who say, “Give. Give.” However, scientifically, only one of the two suckers sucks blood, the other is used by the leech to hold on to the host animal.

There are different species of leeches, but Proverbs 30:15 almost certainly refers to the variety of leech referred to as the “horseleech.” That is why many older versions read “horseleech” (cf. ASV, English Revised Version, Geneva Bible, KJV). The horseleech was commonly found in Palestine and gets its name from the fact that it attached itself in the noses and mouths of horses that came to drink (it would also attach to humans who put their face in the water). They have such a powerful bite that they are not used in medicine to draw blood, whereas other leeches are used to draw blood.

Pro 30:16

**“the barren womb.”** The Hebrew reads, “the closed womb” but in this context, it is referring to a woman who has never had a baby, not to someone who has naturally stopped having children.

Pro 30:17

**“An eye.”** This verse specifically mentions the eye, which is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, where a part is put for the whole. In this case, the part, the eye, is put for the whole person who mocks and disobeys. The eye is likely being emphasized because for unrighteous people, the eye was associated with being haughty or prideful (Prov. 30:13), with greed (Prov. 23:5-6; 28:22), and with evil doings (Prov. 6:13; 10:10). The evil person has a greedy eye, but his desire will not be fulfilled, instead, his lamp will go out in a time of darkness (Prov. 20:20). Proverbs is about defiant and rebellious children who have contempt for their parents. They reject their family and hence are rejected by their family, so they die in disgrace and have no one to bury them or put them in a family tomb. Like King Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:19; 36:30), their dead bodies will lie unburied on the ground until they are eaten by carrion birds and other animals.

[See figure of speech “synecdoche.”]

**“ravens of the valley.”** This phrase has the subtle overtone that besides being completely rejected by his family and mankind, perhaps this person who rejected his family turned out to be a criminal. Ravens are found all over Israel, in fact, over Europe and parts of Asia as well; they don’t roost or live only in “the valley,” so the fact that they are referred to as “ravens of the valley” has a specific meaning. In this context, the valley was a river valley or wadi, which sometimes referred to a valley with a perennial stream, but more often was a valley that only had water in it during the rainy season. These wadis often were quite deep with steep sides and harbored wild animals and dangerous men, and it is one of these that is called the “valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4). It would not be uncommon to throw an unwanted dead body into one of these wadis, where it would not pollute the farmland and would soon be devoured by animals and carrion birds.

For example, the valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem was infamous because of the people who were killed there (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31-32; 32:35). It became the garbage dump of Jerusalem in New Testament times and was known by the Greek word “Gehenna,” a Hellenized form of the Hebrew *ge Hinnom*, the “valley of Hinnom.” All kinds of garbage, dead animals, and perhaps even some dead bodies were thrown in Gehenna.

[For more on Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22, “Gehenna.”]

**“the offspring of a vulture.”** The Hebrew word we translate “vulture” is *nesher* (#05404 נֶשֶׁר), and it was used to refer to both eagles and vultures. In this case, the verse shows us the translation should be “vulture.” The phrase “the offspring of a vulture” is more literally in Hebrew, “the sons of a vulture,” which is an idiomatic way of saying vultures (some commentators think it refers to young vultures, but the Hebrew does not demand that interpretation).

Although some versions, especially older ones such as the King James (1611), ASV (1901), and Rotherham (1902) read “eagles,” the bird being referred to is a vulture. Vultures are well-known for eating dead bodies, and the fact that this verse shows them coming as a group, as “the sons of a vulture,” is typical vulture behavior. In contrast, eagles are usually loners when it comes to eating.

The picture being painted in the text is of a person who rejected his father and mother and thus was rejected by his family. So when he died, perhaps even as a criminal (see commentary on “ravens” in this verse), he was not even buried but was being picked at and eaten by a group of vultures. In a culture when family tombs and burial plots were common and it was a great curse to not be buried, most people believed (falsely, but it was a very universal belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus, this verse was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

Pro 30:20

**“way.”** The Hebrew is “way” or “road.” ​

Pro 30:31

**“rooster.”** The identity of this animal is debated. However, it is very likely a rooster. The Septuagint indicates that, and chickens were long domesticated by that time and appear in ancient pictographs, seals, and drawings. While there have not been a lot of chicken bones found at many archaeological sites in Israel, the town of Marasha in Israel has yielded a large number of chicken bones, indicating they were eaten as food. By Roman times chickens were kept and eaten throughout the empire.

**“a king when his army is with him.”** The meaning of the Hebrew text is uncertain, and there have been many suggestions as to what the original text says.

Pro 30:33

**“the churning of the nose.”** “Churning” (wringing and pressing) milk, a nose, and anger, is a fitting analogy. The conclusion, “so the churning of anger brings forth strife,” is the great lesson of Proverbs 30:33. When a situation becomes heated and people start to become angry, that is the time for people to back off and let the situation cool off. Sadly, human nature being what it is, typically people get angry and then do not back off but instead press in until the conflict becomes a huge fight, often with quite serious consequences. The wise person knows both when and how to back out of a heated situation.

The idea of “churning” the nose, wringing the nose, is not seen much today, but it used to be somewhat common. A person grabs the nose of another and twists and squeezes it. This used to be seen in older films, such as those of The Three Stooges.

**Proverbs Chapter 31**

Pro 31:10

**“excellent wife.”** For more on the translation “excellent,” see commentary on Proverbs 12:4, “excellent.”

There has been much discussion by scholars about who the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 refers to, and there are two major opinions about it. One is that since the Hebrew text of the first 30 chapters of Proverbs is very predominantly male-oriented, the last section of Proverbs refers to the ideal wife. The second opinion is that starting in Proverbs 1:20 and going throughout the book, wisdom (and understanding, discretion, and discernment) and folly have been personified as women, while the people they are trying to influence are men. In that light, it makes sense that Proverbs 31:10-31 is simply continuing that flow of thought and portraying the ideal wife as the embodiment of Wisdom.

We see value in both opinions. We see that Proverbs 31 is portraying an ideal wife in the sense that an ideal wife (and the ideal woman) should strive to be as much like the woman in Proverbs 31 as her circumstances and culture allow. Nevertheless, there are problems with trying to make all of Proverbs 31:10-31 fit with a literal “wise wife.” As Roland Murphy writes, “Who could achieve in many lifetimes what she achieves in these verses.”[[89]](#footnote-27512) Furthermore, there are several things mentioned in Proverbs 31 that would not be “ideal” for a woman in the biblical culture. These include going out into the world and trading (Prov. 31:11); buying and selling land (Prov. 31:16), and tying her clothes up around her waist, something men usually did if they were about to do some strenuous work (Prov. 31:17).

Thus, we see how and why Proverbs 31 portrays Wisdom as a wife, and that the lessons in the section generally apply to both men and women. In the same way that the Hebrew text of Proverbs 1:4 is specifically addressed to the “young man,” but many versions read “youth” or “young person” because the lessons apply to women also, in Proverbs 31 the ideal wife is an embodiment of wisdom and the lessons apply to both men and women.

Wisdom and Folly are personified as women throughout Proverbs, and the personification is designed to make a point and also to make the text easy to understand. When Lady Wisdom calls out to the naïve men and invites them to come to her house and eat her food and live (Prov. 9:1-6), and the adulteress Lady Folly calls out to the naïve men and invites them to come to her house and eat secret bread and drink stolen waters, that is, have sex (Prov. 9:13-18), we are not to assume that all wise and foolish people are women and all naïve people are men. These are personifications and general portraits that allow us to see wisdom and folly in action, and show us the value in being wise rather than foolish. Nevertheless, in Proverbs 9, as in Proverbs 31, we do see that there is also a “real” aspect to the personification. The reason the personification and story in Proverbs 9 works so well is that there are a lot of naïve and foolish young men who will ignore the invitation of Wisdom and go visit a prostitute or an adulteress who is boisterous, pushy, glamorous, and offers sex.

Another piece of evidence that supports the position that the wife in Proverbs 31 is a continuation of the personification of Wisdom throughout Proverbs, a piece of evidence that is not mentioned by a large number of commentators, is that there is a very strong connection between what the wife in Proverbs 31 does and what Wisdom does earlier in Proverbs. For example, the wife is worth more than gems (Prov. 31:10), and Wisdom is worth more than gems (Prov. 3:15; 8:11). The wife does her husband good and not evil (Prov. 31:12), while Wisdom helps us find a good way of life (Prov. 2:9-10) and hates evil (Prov. 8:12-13). The wife profits the household and is like the “ships of a merchant,” while Wisdom also brings in profit (Prov. 3:14). The wife gets food and provides it for her household (Prov. 31:14-15), while Wisdom also procures and provides food (Prov. 9:1-2). The wife has jobs for her female servants (Prov. 31:15), and Wisdom has jobs for her female servants (Prov. 9:3). The wife deals well and has “fruit” (profit) from her labor (Prov. 31:16), while Wisdom has “fruit” that is better than gold (Prov. 8:19). The wife girds herself with strength (Prov. 31:17), while a wise person has strength (Prov. 24:5). The wife perceives her “gain” (profit from trading) is good (Prov. 31:18), and Wisdom’s gain is better than silver (Prov. 3:14). The wife laughs at the future, revealing her playful nature (Prov. 31:25), while Wisdom laughed and played when God was making the earth (Prov. 8:30-31). The wife watches over her household (Prov. 31:27) just as Wisdom and her female attendants (e.g., “discernment” “understanding” and “discretion;” see commentary on Prov. 1:20) watch and guard us (Prov. 2:10-11). Given all that, we can see why T. McCreesh concludes, “chapter 31 is the book’s final masterful portrait of Wisdom.”[[90]](#footnote-12606)

Another thing that is worth noting in comparing the wife in Proverbs 31 to Wisdom is that there is a pun about “wisdom” in the Hebrew text of Proverbs 31:27. The Hebrew says, “she keeps watch” but the exact Hebrew word is *tsophia* (צוֹפִיָּה), a form of the verb that occurs only here in the entire Hebrew Bible and that is pronounced almost exactly like *sophia*, the Greek word for “wisdom.” Sometimes language puns happen accidentally, and that cannot be completely ruled out here, nevertheless, the fact that this Hebrew verb occurs only here in the entire Bible, combined with the fact that all of Proverbs has been about wisdom and this is the closing section of the book of Proverbs, is quite good evidence that this was not an accident but a divinely constructed pun. So the verse clearly seems to have a sort of “hidden meaning” along with the more obvious meaning, one that says, “‘wisdom’ is the way of her household.” It makes sense that the way of Wisdom’s household would be wisdom.

We conclude that Proverbs 31:10-31 is a portrait of Lady Wisdom, as embodied in a strong woman. Women can and should try to emulate Wisdom, and men can learn from her as well.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20, “wisdom.”]

**“gems.”** The Hebrew word *paniyn* (#06443 פָּנִין) is traditionally translated “rubies,” but it seems that cannot be correct. Rubies were not known in the Middle East until much later than the time Proverbs was written. The most likely candidate for the word is “coral.” There is a very beautiful orange-red coral in the Mediterranean Sea that grows too deep to be gathered until modern times, so it was very rare and only occasionally washed up on the shore. So in biblical times, the coral was rare and therefore very valuable. Now it is just another coral, and although it is beautiful, it does not have much value.

The fact that the value of coral has changed dramatically causes a problem for translators because in biblical times Proverbs could say “coral” and everyone understood it would be like saying “diamonds” or “rubies” today. But those gems did not exist in the biblical period as we know them now, so introducing them causes a historical anachronism and error. On the other hand, literally translating the Hebrew and saying “coral” causes a different type of error, because in today’s language, you would be implying that, at her best, Wisdom (Prov. 3:15), and the virtuous woman (Prov. 31:10), were not worth very much.

The best compromise seems to be to translate the Hebrew word *paniyn* as “gems,” “jewels,” or some other more neutral word that gets across the meaning of a precious stone or gem without specifying the exact gem.

This problem that happens with the value of items from culture to culture and throughout time shows up in a number of places in the Bible. For example, at the time of Christ, the pearl was the apex gem in the culture due to its rarity, and until the invention of cultured pearls and then the scuba tank, pearls were always very expensive and highly valued. But now they are not nearly as valuable as they once were.

[For more on pearls in the biblical culture, see commentary on Matt. 13:45.]

Pro 31:11

**“no lack of gain.”** The Hebrew word translated “gain” is *shalal* (#07998 שָׁלָל), and it means spoil (as in the spoils of war), plunder, booty, prey. It refers to the spoils or booty won in war. There are some lexicons that claim that the word should simply be “gain” in this verse, but there does not seem to be good lexical support for that; it seems clear that “gain” refers to the gain she won in the daily wars of life.

The picture being painted in the Hebrew text in Proverbs 31:11 is the husband having the riches he needs to be peaceful and comfortable because his wife goes out and fights the battles in life necessary to procure a living, and brings the spoils or plunder she has won back to the household. This is one of the verses in Proverbs 31 that shows us that the wise wife of Proverbs 31 refers to both men and women, just as Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly throughout Proverbs refer to both men and women (other verses that are typically male behavior are Prov. 31:16-17).

Women would not typically be portrayed as going out of the house into the world and fighting the wars of life that brought prosperity to the household. It was the common cultural understanding that the women’s domain was inside the walls of the house while the man’s domain was outside the house. Going and fighting the worldly wars that brought success to the household was the job of the man of the house, and the wise man fights and wins those wars for his family and brings home the spoils of war.

[For more on the woman in Proverbs 31 referring to both men and women, see commentary on Prov. 31:10.]

Pro 31:12

**“She brings him good.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “she does him good,” but in American English, that phrase is used to refer to what a woman does for a man that improves him. Thus, “she does him good” might be used of a wife who helps her husband have a social life. However, Proverbs 31:12 is not primarily about the wife improving her husband in a personal sense, but rather that she brings him good in the sense of bringing good things to the household, including to her husband. In this context, the word “good” is not used of moral good, but rather of material good (i.e., money, things, and such as that).

Pro 31:15

**“She gets up while it is still night.”** People who get a lot done do not “sleep in” just because they can; they feel a purpose in their life and get up and get about doing it. Jesus got up in the dark and went to a place alone to pray (Mark 1:35).

**“and tasks for her female servants.”** The meaning of the Hebrew word *choq* (#02706 חֹק) is debated. It can mean “tasks” or “orders,” as some versions take it (cf. ASV, CJB, DBY, NJB, NLT, NRSV), or it can mean “portions” of food, as other versions take it (cf. CSB, ESV, JPS Tanakh 1917, NAB, NASB). The Hebrew-English lexicons list “tasks” or “orders,”[[91]](#footnote-27484) or it can mean a “portion” of food.[[92]](#footnote-25315) The main support for a “portion” of food is that it fits the parallelism in the verse, and it is the usage of *choq* in Proverbs 30:8. The main support for “tasks” is that in the biblical culture, the lady of the house would not get up and prepare food for her female slaves; it would be a slave who would prepare food for her.[[93]](#footnote-32236) It would be possible, however, for the lady of the house to get up and direct her female slaves in the preparation and serving of breakfast, making sure that each woman got her fair share of the food. So the meaning that the author had in mind in this verse is uncertain; It is also possible that both “tasks” and “portions” of food could be meant here, that the lady of the house got up and oversaw her household, making sure the servants got fed and had their daily tasks assigned.

Pro 31:17

**“wraps her waist.”** The Hebrew is often translated, “girds her loins.” To “gird” is to wrap with a flexible band, like a belt or sash, and the loins are the hips and small of the back, the strong muscles that connect the upper and lower parts of the body. Effectively, to “gird the loins” is to wrap the waist. This is one of the verses in Proverbs 31 that is good evidence that the section is not just about women, but that the wife embodies Wisdom and the lessons apply to both men and women, because women did not tie up their clothing in the biblical culture.

“Girding up the loins” is an idiom, and it is difficult to translate. It comes from the biblical culture in which standard outer garb for men was a long, ankle-length robe (the woman’s outer robe was longer than the man’s, even sometimes touching the ground). The robe provided warmth and shelter from the elements, and it sometimes was used as a person’s blanket at night (cf. Exod. 22:27). Merchants would pull up the robe at the waist, tuck it in, and create a kind of pocket they could keep things in, and bribes were often hidden in the fold of the garment (see commentary on Prov. 21:4). But the long robe would get in the way when a man needed to fight, move fast or work hard, so he would gather it up and tie it at the waist so it would be short and out of the way. In contrast, a woman in the biblical culture would never “gird up her loins” by gathering up her garment so that her legs were exposed. However, if we understand the idiom was used to refer to people being prepared for action (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:13), then we can see how an idiom that was used of male behavior could also apply to women.

[For more on Proverbs 31:10-31 applying to both women and men, see commentary on Prov. 31:10.]

Pro 31:21

**“scarlet.”** Wool took dye very well, and Bruce Waltke[[94]](#footnote-17844) suggests that the color scarlet is a metonymy for what was dyed scarlet, which is wool. Although some versions have “double garments,” the Masoretic text has “scarlet,” which is the more difficult reading and therefore much more likely original.

Pro 31:22

**“coverings.”** The Hebrew noun translated “coverings” is *marbad* (#04765 מַרְבָד), and it refers to different kinds of coverings. In Proverbs 7:16, *marbad* is used of covers put on a couch. It could also refer to covers for a bed or even for a personal covering; some kind of wrap against the weather or cold.

**“for herself.”** This is the only place in Proverbs 31 where the text mentions the woman doing something for herself. She enjoys having a nicely decorated home and personal attire and makes it happen.

**“fine linen and purple.”** Often fine linen came out of Egypt, while purple cloth comes from the north, from Phoenicia. So the text implies that the woman engaged in trade to enrich herself and her household.

**“purple.”** Purple dye was rare and very expensive, so this excellent wife works hard to see that she is well dressed for the position she holds in society (see commentary on 2 Chron. 3:14).

Pro 31:26

**“instruction.”** See commentary on Proverbs 1:8. “Instruction about covenant faithfulness” is an objective genitive.[[95]](#footnote-18137)

Pro 31:31

**“let her works praise her at the *city* gates.”** The city gates were where the elders of the city sat to oversee the affairs of the city and act as judges when necessary. The husband of the godly woman sits with the elders at the gates (Prov. 31:23). Also, there is a possibility that some of the elders are wearing garments that she made (Prov. 31:24).

[For more on the elders sitting at the city gates, see commentary on Ruth 4:11.]

1. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23518)
2. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15360)
3. Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27971)
4. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31764)
5. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30937)
6. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-31096)
7. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*; *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14331)
8. Cp. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* [AB], 134-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-13717)
9. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29243)
10. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* [AB]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19958)
11. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-25160)
12. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, s.v. “synecdoche.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16650)
13. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14040)
14. M. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* [AB]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17626)
15. Cp. Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 302n7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24373)
16. B. Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 304n37. [↑](#footnote-ref-17011)
17. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*; *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15496)
18. C. H. Toy, *Proverbs* [ICC], 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-20083)
19. M. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* [AB]. [↑](#footnote-ref-11274)
20. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30802)
21. E. Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15285)
22. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27867)
23. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 390, 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-23446)
24. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 437-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-18452)
25. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*, 199-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-19275)
26. B. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs* [NICOT], 1:429n30. [↑](#footnote-ref-28384)
27. See Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 6:153-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-31186)
28. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-32100)
29. Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-19049)
30. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11597)
31. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26862)
32. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26619)
33. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*; Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11339)
34. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, s.v. “tapeinosis,” 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-32167)
35. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14998)
36. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10368)
37. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 563-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-14806)
38. Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 564. [↑](#footnote-ref-25970)
39. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19429)
40. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15881)
41. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* [NICOT], 595. [↑](#footnote-ref-22086)
42. William A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., *New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis: Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10571)
43. C. H. Toy, *Proverbs* [ICC], 4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-18351)
44. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21849)
45. Cp. Joel Freeman, *Kingdom Zoology*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-22131)
46. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 16-31* [NICOT], 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-26299)
47. Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*, 6:360-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-13176)
48. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 644. [↑](#footnote-ref-30304)
49. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 647-48; Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21261)
50. W. Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-26603)
51. Cp. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-27240)
52. W. Holladay, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-32402)
53. Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-15781)
54. Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-28378)
55. Cp. Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-28551)
56. Cp. *Brown-Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 114-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-18554)
57. Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-29027)
58. W. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29802)
59. Michael Homan, “Did the Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?,” Biblical Archaeological Review, Sept./Oct. 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-20186)
60. Waltke, *The book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-19097)
61. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*; Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13164)
62. Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15070)
63. Cp. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 177-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-31702)
64. Cp. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 684-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-26248)
65. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30011)
66. Roland Murphy, *Proverbs* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10009)
67. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 720. [↑](#footnote-ref-23826)
68. Cp. VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21506)
69. Koehler and Baumgartner,  *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23204)
70. Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-11700)
71. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 751. [↑](#footnote-ref-15510)
72. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10626)
73. Waltke, *Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-15801)
74. Daniel C. Snell, *Vetus Testamentum* (1991), 41:350-356. [↑](#footnote-ref-20644)
75. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14605)
76. Cp. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 804, “amphibologia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32190)
77. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13710)
78. Cp. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 383-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-11767)
79. Michael Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* [AB], 813-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-28476)
80. Ginsburg, *Mishlei/Proverbs*, ArtScroll Tanach Series. [↑](#footnote-ref-24296)
81. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 15-31* [NICOT], 387. [↑](#footnote-ref-20422)
82. Waltke, *Proverbs 15-31* [↑](#footnote-ref-29978)
83. Waltke, *Proverbs*, 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-15565)
84. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14658)
85. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12000)
86. Cp. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31628)
87. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* [NICOT], 473-474. [↑](#footnote-ref-29641)
88. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20673)
89. Roland Murphy, *Proverbs* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-27512)
90. Quoted in R. Murphy, *Proverbs* [WBC], 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-12606)
91. Cp. *HALOT*; *TDOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27484)
92. Cp. *NIDOTTE*; *TWOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25315)
93. See D. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* [NAC], 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-32236)
94. Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 512n85, 530. [↑](#footnote-ref-17844)
95. See Waltke, *Proverbs* [NICOT], 532. [↑](#footnote-ref-18137)