

“cleverness” (HALOT 886 s.v. 1) refers to a shrewd plan of action, viewed positively or negatively. It is used negatively of planned deception (Josh 9:4) and premeditated murder (Exod 21:14). The related adjective described the serpent as “shrewd, crafty, cunning” (Gen 3:1);

it describes cunning plans (Job 5:12) and deception (Job 15:5). The related verb describes a wicked concocted plan (Ps 83:4). The term is used positively of a morally prudent lifestyle (Prov 8:5, 12; 15:5; 19:25). There is no virtue for simpletons to be unaware in this world; they need to be wise as serpents. Proverbs provide a morally shrewd plan for life.

A *Heb* “the naive” or “simpleton.” The substantival adjective פֶּתִי (*peti*) means “simple; open-minded” in the sense of being open and easily influenced by either wisdom or folly (BDB 834 s.v.; HALOT 989 s.v. 1 פֶּתִי). The simpleton is easily enticed and misled (Prov 1:32; 7:7; 9:6; 22:3; 27:12); believes everything, including bad counsel (Prov 14:15); lacks moral prudence (Prov 8:5; 19:25); needs discernment (Prov 21:11); but is capable of learning (Prov 9:4, 16). The related verb means “to be wide open; open-minded; enticed, deceived” (BDB 834). The term describes one easily persuaded and gullible, open to any influence, good or bad (cf. NLT “the simple-minded”). This is the “wide-eyed youth” who is headed for trouble unless he listens to the counsel of wisdom.

B *Heb* “knowledge and purpose.” The noun דָּעַת (*da’at*, “knowledge”) may be nuanced “discernment” here (HALOT 229 s.v. 1 דָּעַת). The nouns דָּעַת וְהָקָדָם (*da’at um’zimmah*, “discernment and purpose”) form a hendiadys (two nouns joined with *vav* to describe the same thing). The first noun functions adjectivally and the second functions as a noun: “discerning plan.” This parallels “a shrewd plan for the morally naive” or “a discerning plan for the young person.”

C *Heb* The noun מְזִמָּה (*m’zimmah*) may mean (1) “plan” or (2) “discretion” (BDB 273 s.v.; HALOT 566 s.v.). It describes the ability to make plans or formulate the best course of action for gaining a goal (C. H. Toy, *Proverbs* [ICC], 7). The related verb זָמַם (*zamam*) means “to plan; to devise” (BDB 273 s.v.; HALOT 272 s.v. 1 זָמַם; e.g., Gen 11:6). Here the nouns “knowledge and plan” (דָּעַת וְהָקָדָם, *da’at um’zimmah*) form a hendiadys: knowledge of how to form and carry out a morally wise plan for life.

D *Heb* “young man” or “youth.” The term sometimes applies to an assistant, or servant, or someone in training for a higher position.

SN As this second clause does not begin with “and” in Hebrew, it may be understood as an expansion what it means to impart shrewdness.

E *Heb* The term “also” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation since the audience has shifted from the young and inexperienced to those already having some wisdom. As

the morally naive,^A a discerning^B plan^C to the young person.^D (Let the wise also^E hear^F and gain^G instruction, and let the discerning^H acquire guidance!)

⁶ To discern^I the meaning of^K a proverb and a parable,^L the sayings of the wise^M and their riddles.^N

Introduction to the Theme of the Book

⁷ Fearing the LORD^O is the beginning^P of discernment,^Q but^R fools^S have

such v. 5 functions as a parenthesis in the purpose statements of 1:1–7. The book is not just for beginners; even the wise can become wiser.

F *Heb* The verb יָשַׁעַת (*yishma’*) functions as a jussive (rather than an imperfect, “he will hear”) as supported in conjunction with the following jussive יִשְׁעֹסֶף (*y’syosef*, “Let him add” or “so that he may add”). **G** *Heb* “add.” Or “increase” in insight. The Hiphil verb יִשְׁעֹסֶף (*y’syosef*) is a jussive rather than an imperfect as the final short vowel (*segol*) and accent on the first syllable shows (BDB 415 s.v. יִשְׁעֹסֶף Hiphil).

H *Heb* The Niphal substantival participle נָבוֹן (*navon*, “discerning”), rather than the noun, is used to describe a person who is habitually characterized by discernment. 1:5 forms a striking contrast to 1:4—there was the simpleton and the youth, here the wise and discerning. Both need this book.

I *Heb* The noun תִּקְחָלָה (*takhbulah*, “direction; counsel”) refers to moral guidance (BDB 287 s.v.). It is related to חָכָל (*khovel*, “sailor”), חָבַל (*khibel*, “mast”) and חֶבֶל (*khevel*, “rope; cord”), so BDB suggests it originally meant directing a ship by pulling ropes on the mast. It is used in a concrete sense of God directing the path of clouds (Job 37:12) and in a figurative sense of moral guidance (Prov 11:14; 20:18; 24:6). Here it refers to the ability to steer a right course through life (A. Cohen, *Proverbs*, 2).

J *Heb* The infinitive construct with ל (*lamed*) means “to discern” and introduces the fifth purpose of the book. It focuses on the benefits of proverbs from the perspective of the reader. By studying proverbs the reader will discern the hermeneutical key to understanding more and more proverbs.

K *Heb* The phrase “the meaning of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is implied; it is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity.

L *Heb* The noun מְלִיצָה (*m’litsah*) means “allusive expression; enigma” in general, and “proverb, parable” in particular (BDB 539; HALOT 590). The related noun מְלִיצִים (*melits*) means “interpreter” (Gen 42:23). The related Arabic root means “to turn aside,” so this Hebrew term might refer to a saying that has a “hidden meaning” to its words; see H. N. Richardson, “Some Notes on מְלִיצָה and Its Derivatives,” *VT* 5 (1955): 163–79.

M *Heb* This line functions in apposition to the preceding, further explaining the phrase “a proverb and a parable.”

N *Heb* The noun חִידָה (*khidah*, “riddle”) designates enigmatic sayings whose meaning is obscure or hidden, such as a riddle (Num 12:8; Judg 14:12, 19), allegory (Ezek

sayings of the wise often take the form of riddles that must be discerned).

O *Heb* “fear of the LORD.” In this expression (יִרְאָה יְהוָה, *yir’at y’ehvah*) “the LORD” functions as an objective genitive. He is the object of fear and wonder. The term יִרְאָה (*yir’ah*) comes from the root יָרָא (*yare’*), the common root for fear in the OT which has a basic three-fold range of meanings: (1) “be in dread or terror” (Deut 1:29; Jonah 1:10), (2) “to stand in awe” (1 Kgs 3:28), (3) “to reverse; to respect” (Lev 19:3). With the LORD as the object, it captures the tension of shrinking back in fear and drawing close in awe and adoration. Both categories of meaning appear in Exod 20:20 (where the LORD descended upon Sinai amidst geophysical convulsions). Moses encouraged the Israelites to not be afraid of God striking them dead for no reason (“Do not fear!”) but informed the people that the LORD revealed himself in such a terrifying manner to scare them from sinning (“God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him in you so that you do not sin”). The fear of the LORD is expressed in reverential submission to his will—the characteristic of true worship. The fear of the LORD is the foundation for wisdom (9:10) and the discipline leading to wisdom (15:33). It is expressed in hatred of evil (8:13) and avoidance of sin (16:6), and so results in prolonged life (10:27; 19:23).

P *Heb* The noun ראשִׁית (*re’shit*) has a two-fold range of meaning (BDB 912 s.v.): (1) “beginning” = first step in a course of action (e.g., Ps 111:10; Prov 17:14; Mic 1:13) or (2) “chief thing” as the principal aspect of something (e.g., Prov 4:7). So fearing the LORD is either (1) the first step in acquiring moral knowledge or (2) the most important aspect of moral knowledge. The first option is preferred because 1:2–6 focuses on the acquisition of wisdom.

Q *Heb* “knowledge.” The noun דָּעַת (*da’at*, “knowledge”) refers to experiential knowledge, not just cognitive knowledge, including the intellectual assimilation and practical application (BDB 394). It is also used in v. 4 with the nuance “discernment” and the variation of this motto in Prov 9:10 substitutes חִכְמָה (*khokhmah*, “wisdom, moral skill”) at this point.

R *Heb* The conjunction “but” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is implied by the antithetical parallelism. It is supplied in the translation for clarity. Note, however that the Hebrew word order is “wisdom and instruction—fools have despised.” Without a conjunction the clash or contrast is held poetically until the end.

S *Heb* The term אָוִיל (*evil*, “fool”) refers to a person characterized by moral folly (BDB 17 s.v.). Fools lack understanding

17:2), perplexing moral problem (Pss 49:5; 78:2), perplexing question (1 Kgs 10:1 = 2 Chr 9:1) or ambiguous saying (Dan 8:23); see BDB 295 s.v. and HALOT 309 s.v. If this is related to Arabic *hadda* (“to turn aside, avoid”), it refers to sayings whose meanings are obscure. The

(10:21), do not store up knowledge (10:14), fail to attain wisdom (24:7), and refuse correction (15:5; 27:22). They are arrogant (26:5), talk loosely (14:3) and are contentious (20:3). They might have mental intelligence but they are morally foolish. In sum, they are stubborn and “thick-brained” (J. H. Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 6).

A *Heb* The verb בָּזָה (*bazah*, “despise”) means to treat things of value with contempt, as if they were worthless (BDB 102 s.v.). The classic example is Esau who despised his birthright and sold it for lentil stew (Gen 25:34). The perfect verb places the life that fools have lived in contrast with the beginning of moral knowledge. Here is the way of wisdom; fools have gone a different way. Now by implication—what is your choice? The translation of the perfect verb depends on whether the verb’s root is stative or dynamic. Stative verbs (verbs that describe a state) may be present time in the perfect and so can have gnomic force (cf. KJV, NASB, ESV, NIV). Dynamic verbs (verbs that describe actions) in the Hebrew perfect form are past or perfective. They may describe a past action which is prototypical of ongoing behavior. This type of root does not have a morphological test to distinguish if it is stative or dynamic. But the meaning “to treat with” despite suggests that it is dynamic, making the perfective translation “have despised” preferred.

B *Heb* “wisdom and instruction fools have despised.” Placing “wisdom and moral instruction” first makes this the focus. The reader is not asked to think primarily about the nature of fools but about the choice regarding wisdom. The pair of terms echoes v. 2a, perhaps forming an inclusio.

C *Heb* The imperative שְׁמַע (*sh’mac’*, “Listen!”) forms an urgent exhortation which expects immediate compliance with parental instruction.

D *Heb* “my son.” It is likely that collections of proverbs grew up in the royal courts and were designed for the training of the youthful prince. But once the collection was included in the canon, the term “son” would be expanded to mean a disciple, for all the people were to learn wisdom when young. It would not be limited to sons alone but would include daughters—as the expression “the children of (בְּנֵי, *b’ne*) Israel” (including males and females) clearly shows. Several passages in the Mishnah and Talmud record instructions to teach daughters the Mosaic law so that they will be righteous and avoid sin as well. The translation “my child,” although not entirely satisfactory, will be used here.

E *Heb* “training” or “discipline.” See note on 1:2.

F *Heb* “of.” The noun אָבִיךָ (*avikha*, “of your father”) may be classified as a genitive of source.

despised^A wisdom and moral instruction.^B Listen,^C my child,^D to the instruction^E from^F your father, and do not forsake the teaching^G from^H your mother.^I For they will be like^J an elegant^K garland^L on^M your head, and like^N pendants^O around^P your neck.

Admonition to Avoid Easy but Unjust Riches

¹⁰ My child, if sinners^P try to entice^Q you, do not consent!^R If they say, “Come with us! We will^S lie in wait^T to shed blood;^U we will ambush^V an innocent person^W capriciously.^X We will swallow them alive^Y like Sheol,^Z those full of vigor^A like those going down to the Pit.

G *Heb* “instruction.” In Proverbs the noun תּוֹרָה (*torah*) often means “instruction” or “moral direction” rather than “law” (BDB 435 s.v. 1.a). It is related to יָרָה (*yarah*, “to point [or, show] the way” in the Hiphil (BDB 435). Instruction attempts to point a person in the right direction (e.g., Gen 46:28).

H *Heb* “of.” The noun אִמְקָהָ (*immekha*, “of your mother”) may be classified as a genitive of source.

I *Heb* The comparative “like” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is implied by the metaphor; it is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity.

J *Heb* “a garland of grace.” The word כֶּהֱן (*khen*, “grace”) refers to qualities that make a person pleasant and agreeable, e.g., a gracious and charming person (BDB 336 s.v.). The metaphor compares the teachings that produce these qualities to an attractive wreath.

K *Heb* The noun לִיָּיָה (*liyayah*, “wreath; garland”) refers to a headdress and appears only twice in the OT (Prov 1:9; 4:9; BDB 531 s.v.; HALOT 524 s.v.).

L *Heb* “for.”

M *Heb* The comparative “like” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is implied by the metaphor; it is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity.

N *Heb* Cf. KJV, ASV “chains”; NIV “a chain”; but this English term could suggest a prisoner’s chain to the modern reader rather than adornment.

O *Heb* “for.”

P *Heb* The term חָטָא (*khatta*) is the common word for “sinner” in the OT. Because the related verb is used once of sling throwers who miss the mark (Judg 20:16), the idea of sin is often explained as “missing the moral mark” (BDB 306–8 s.v.). But the term should not be restricted to simply falling short of the moral ideal. Its basic meaning is to do wrongly. For a slinger or an archer that would mean missing the mark, but in the arena of morality and relationships, behaving wrongly refers to committing an offense or sinning, doing what is wrong. Here it involves the conscious intent to harm, referring to a gang of robbers.

Q *Heb* The Piel stem of the verb פָּתָה (*patah*) means “to persuade, entice” (BDB 834 s.v. 1 פָּתָה; see, e.g., Judg 14:15; 16:5; Prov 16:29; Hos 2:16). In this context, the imperfect form פִּתְּחָה (*y’fattukha*)

considers the process of offering persuasion rather than the result of someone being persuaded and may be nuanced modally: “(if) they attempt to persuade you.”

R *Heb* The MT reads the root אָוָה (*avah*, “to be willing; to consent”). Some medieval Hebrew MSS read the root בָּוָה (*bo’*, “to go”): “do not go with them.” The majority of Hebrew MSS and the versions support the MT reading, which is the less common word and so the more likely original reading.

S *Heb* The cohortative verb (אָוָה; *ne’er vah*) could indicate exhortation (“Let us lie in wait!”), resolve (“We will lie in wait!”), or purpose (“so that we may lie in wait”). Regardless of classification the verse indicates both invitation and intention.

T *Heb* The verb אָוָה (*avah*, “to lie in wait”) is used for planning murder (Deut 19:11), kidnapping (Judg 21:20), or seduction (Prov 23:28).

U *Heb* “for blood.” The term דָּם (*dam*, “blood”) functions as a metonymy of effect for “blood shed violently” through murder (HALOT 224 s.v. 4).

V *Heb* “lie in hiding.”

W *Heb* The term “innocent” (נָקִי, *naqi*) intimates that the person to be attacked is harmless.

X *Heb* “without cause” (so KJV, NASB); NCV “just for fun.” The term חִנָּם (*khinnam*, “without cause”) emphasizes that the planned attack is completely unwarranted.

Y *Heb* “life.” The noun חַיִּים (*khayyim*, “life”) functions as an adverbial accusative of manner: “alive.” The noun is a plural of state, where the plural morpheme is used for the abstract concept (“life” not “lives”).

Z *Heb* The noun שְׁאוֹל (*she’ol*) can mean (1) “death,” cf. NCV; (2) “the grave,” cf. KJV, NIV, NLT (3) “Sheol” as the realm of departed spirits, cf. NAB “the nether world,” and (4) “extreme danger.” Here it is parallel to the noun מוֹד (*vor*, “the Pit”) so it is the grave or more likely “Sheol” (cf. ASV, NRSV). Elsewhere Sheol is personified as having an insatiable appetite and swallowing people alive as they descend to their death (e.g., Num 16:30, 33; Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5). The grave is often personified similarly in ancient Near Eastern literature, e.g., in Ugaritic mythological texts Mot (= “death”) is referred to as “the great swallower.”

A *Heb* “and whole.” The *vav* (ו) is asseverative or appositional (“even”); it is omitted in the translation for the sake of style and smoothness. The substantival adjective תָּמִים (*tamim*, “whole; perfect; blameless”) is an adverbial accusative describing the condition and state of the object. Used in parallel to חַיִּים (*khayyim*, “alive”), it must mean “full of health” (BDB 1071 s.v.).