

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David,
king of Israel:

²For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,

³for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;

⁴to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the
young—

⁵let the wise also hear and gain in
learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,

⁶to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁸Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;

⁹for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck.

¹⁰My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.

¹¹If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in
wait for blood;

let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
¹²like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to
the Pit.

¹³We shall find all kinds of costly things;
we shall fill our houses with booty.

¹⁴Throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse"—

¹⁵my child, do not walk in their way,
keep your foot from their paths;

¹⁶for their feet run to evil,
and they hurry to shed blood.

¹⁷For in vain is the net baited
while the bird is looking on;

¹⁸yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves!
and set an ambush—for their own lives!

¹⁹Such is the end^a of all who are greedy for
gain;

^a Gk: Heb *are the ways*

1.1–7: Introduction. 1: *Solomon son of David, king of Israel*, King Solomon, successor to his father, David (see 1 Kings 1–11) ruled a united kingdom of Israel in the mid-tenth century BCE. He is famed for his wisdom (1 Kings 4) and his role as Temple builder (1 Kings 6). The latter role is not mentioned here, nor is there much mention of ritual activity in Proverbs. The attribution is probably pseudonymous, though Solomon may have coined some proverbs. His court is a possible setting for the collection of proverbial material and may have witnessed a time of cultural expansion and international connections. 2–6: The instructional purpose of the book; see the Introduction. The address is to the *simple* and the *young*, but also to the *wise* who never cease the learning process. 6: *A proverb* (see Introduction) . . . *figure*, an artistic saying or terse poem; *riddles*, enigmatic puzzles in brief, concentrated form that challenge the reader to find a solution. 7: The divine dimension. *Fear of the LORD*, i.e., reverence and awe, is a prerequisite for wisdom (9.10; 15.33; 31.30b; Job 28.28; Ps 111.10; Sir 1.14). A contrast is made here between God-fearers and *fools*, unlike the usual contrast between wise person and fool. Fools have no desire to learn: they are not just unintelligent, but their conduct is unethical.

1.8–19: Parental warning against the enticements of sinners. 8: *My child* (lit. "my son") could reflect the home educational situation or represent a student in a teacher/pupil relationship in a school setting. *Father* and *mother* have parallel teaching roles within the family, at least in the child's early years. The term *teaching* (Heb "torah") refers here not to law specifically (as frequently elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible) but to wisdom instruction. It is significant that the same term can refer to covenant law, which also contains ethical instruction (as in Deuteronomy). Sirach 24 identifies the two. 9: *Fair garland* and *pendants*, wisdom instruction is often associated with adornment (cf. the portrayal of Woman Wisdom as beautifully adorned and yet more valuable than costly jewels in ch 8). Here the metaphor means that the teaching should be an intimate part of one, as if worn on head and neck (cf. 3.22; 4.9; 6.21; 7.3; Job 31.35–36). 12: *Sheol . . . the Pit*, the abode of the dead (see also 5.5; 7.27; 9.18; 23.27; 27.30; 30.16). Cf. the depiction in Ugaritic mythology of Mot, the god of death, with a vast throat stretching from earth to heaven into which he swallows his victims whole and alive. 15: *Way . . . paths*, a frequently used image in Proverbs for a life course (e.g., 2.7–20; 3.6,17,23; 8.13,20; 11.5; 28.18). 16: Cf. Isa 59.7. 17–18: The citation of a popular proverb, using animal imagery: if a *bird* is watching, there is no use in setting a trap for it. Ironically, these wicked but stupid ambushers are both those who set the traps and those who fall into them.

it takes away the life of its
possessors.

²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she
speaks:
²² “How long, O simple ones, will you love
being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their
scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
²³ Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴ Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one
heeded,
²⁵ and because you have ignored all my
counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
²⁷ when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon
you.
²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will
not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not
find me.
²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰ would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their
way
and be sated with their own devices.
³² For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys
them;
³³ but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of
disaster.”

2 My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments
within you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to
understanding;
³ if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for
understanding;
⁴ if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden
treasures—
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the
LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and
understanding;
⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the
upright;
he is a shield to those who walk
blamelessly,

1.20–33: Wisdom personified as a prophet. Wisdom speaks out in *the street, the squares, the busiest corner* and *the city gates*, i.e., the hub of city social life where legal decisions were often made (cf. Ruth 4.1). This portrayal has many similarities to the prophetic role (v. 22, cf. Jer 4.14,21; v. 24, cf. Isa 65.2,12; 66.4; Jer 7.13,24–27), and contains a strong, reproofing tone (vv. 26–32). Listening and hearing are an important part of the pedagogical relationship in Proverbs. **22:** The *simple* (see 1.4) can learn if inclined to do so, but *scoffers* and *fools* are generally beyond hope of instruction (1.7; 15.12; 26.3). **23: Reproof** (Heb “*tokaḥat*”), also translated as “rebuke” and “admonition,” is a central part of wisdom instruction (e.g., 1.23,30; 3.11; 5.12; 12.1; 15.5,31–32; 29.1). **32–33:** The contrast between not listening to Wisdom and heeding her is drawn sharply in these verses: life or death, security or disaster.

2.1–22: The advantages of following wisdom. This poem of 22 lines (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet) expresses the benefits of following wisdom in contrast to succumbing to the enticements of a “strange woman” (see v. 16n.) who is *loose*. The conditional aspect of reaping wisdom’s rewards is stressed by the key-word “if” and a strong note of warning is sounded. **2: Heart** denotes not only the seat of the emotions but also the rational center of a person (i.e., the mind; see 4.23). **4:** Wisdom is often compared to *silver* or treasure or other precious metals (3.14–16; 8.10–11,19; Job 28.15–19); the inference is that both are hard to find (hence *hidden treasures*; contrast 8.1–5 where wisdom’s treasures are openly offered). **5: Fear of the LORD**, see 1.7n. **6:** Wisdom comes directly from the mouth of God (cf. Sir 24.3). Wis 7.25 makes the close identification of wisdom with God

⁸ guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful
ones.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness
and justice
and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your
soul;
¹¹ prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.
¹² It will save you from the way of evil,
from those who speak perversely,
¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
¹⁵ those whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.

¹⁶ You will be saved from the loose^a woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth
words,
¹⁷ who forsakes the partner of her youth
and forgets her sacred covenant;
¹⁸ for her way^b leads down to death,
and her paths to the shades;
¹⁹ those who go to her never come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

²⁰ Therefore walk in the way of the good,
and keep to the paths of the just.
²¹ For the upright will abide in the land,
and the innocent will remain in it;
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the
land,

and the treacherous will be rooted out
of it.
3 My child, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my
commandments;
² for length of days and years of life
and abundant welfare they will give
you.

³ Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake
you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ So you will find favor and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
⁸ It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.

⁹ Honor the LORD with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your
produce;
¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with
plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with
wine.

^a Heb *strange*
^b Cn: Heb *house*

into a metaphysical claim. **8:** *Paths* and *way* (see 1.15n.), a major theme of chs 1–9 is the choice between the path of wisdom, and hence of life, or the path of the loose woman that leads to death (see final summary in vv. 20–22). *Paths of justice* denotes the righteous behavior God requires. **9:** Here the qualities listed in 1.3 are reiterated and associated with *every good path* (i.e., a range of moral options one might take). **16:** *Loose*, Heb “*zarah*” (lit. “strange, foreign”); see 5.1–23n.; 7.5; 22.14. *Adulteress*, Heb “*nokriyyah*” (lit. “alien” or possibly “foreign” woman); see 5.20; 6.24; 7.5; 23.27. These are parallel terms for the same woman who is essentially “other” and clearly threatens marital life. **17:** *Sacred covenant* (lit. “covenant of her God”) refers to marriage (cf. Mal 2.10–16). **18:** *The shades*, the dead. **19:** *Never come back*, the route to death is a one-way ticket (Job 7.9).

3.1–12: Instruction in the fear of the LORD. **2:** *Length of days and years of life*, longevity is a gift of wisdom (3.18; 8.25; 9.11). **3:** Wisdom’s values are to be worn around the *neck* as an amulet or ornament (cf. Deut 6.6–9 in reference to the commandments of God), i.e., intimately and personally appropriated and written *on the tablet of your heart*, i.e., memorized and internalized; cf. 3.22; 6.20–21; 7.3. **5:** *Do not rely on your own insight*, not an anti-intellectual admonition but a warning against arrogance. **7b:** See 1.7n. **8:** In addition to being associated with life (3.2n.) wisdom is also linked with health and healing (4.22; 12.18). **9–10:** *First fruits*, see Ex 23.19; Deut 26.1–11. This is one of the few references in Proverbs to ritual practices (see also 7.14n.). Honoring God in this

¹¹ My child, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
¹² for the LORD reproves the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.

¹³ Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
¹⁴ for her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare
with her.

¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold
of her;
those who hold her fast are called
happy.

¹⁹ The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the
heavens;
²⁰ by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.
²¹ My child, do not let these escape from
your sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence,
²² and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.

²³ Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.
²⁴ If you sit down,^a you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be
sweet.

²⁵ Do not be afraid of sudden panic,
or of the storm that strikes the wicked;
²⁶ for the LORD will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being
caught.

²⁷ Do not withhold good from those to
whom it is due,^b
when it is in your power to do it.
²⁸ Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and
come again,
tomorrow I will give it"—when you
have it with you.

²⁹ Do not plan harm against your
neighbor
who lives trustingly beside you.
³⁰ Do not quarrel with anyone without
cause,
when no harm has been done to you.
³¹ Do not envy the violent
and do not choose any of their ways;
³² for the perverse are an abomination to
the LORD,
but the upright are in his confidence.

^a Gk: Heb *lie down*

^b Heb *from its owners*

way leads to future plentiful harvests. 11–12: Suffering is understood here as a sign of God's discipline (Deut 8.5; Ps 94.12–13), a sentiment echoed by the friends of Job (e.g., Job 5.17–18).

3.13–20: A description of Wisdom. 13: *Happy are those* is a characteristic wisdom formula (8.34; 20.7; 28.14; 29.18; 31.28; Ps 1.1) often called a beatitude (cf. Mt 5.3–11; Lk 6.20–23). Beattitudes extol a virtue or experience by exclaiming how fortunate its possessor is. 14–15: Cf. Job 28.15–19 and see 2.4n. Wisdom transcends all attempts at comparison. 16: The imagery echoes that of the Egyptian goddess Ma'at, who represents right order. She was portrayed with the symbols of life in one hand and of wealth and prestige in the other. 18: *Tree of life*, a symbol of longevity and well-being, but also a source of eternal life in Gen 2.9; 3.22, from which humans are barred. It is also an Egyptian motif, associated with the sycamore tree. 19–20: This is the first association of wisdom with creation, expanded in 8.22–31. It shows the integral part that wisdom played in the divine creative act. *The deeps* represent the subterranean waters of chaos over which God has ultimate control (cf. Ps 29.10); the *dew*, the moisture from above that continues to sustain the earth.

3.21–35: An admonition, six prohibitions and three aphorisms on the fate of righteous and wicked. 22: Cf. v. 3n. 23–26: Along with life (v. 2n.) and health (v. 8n.), security is one of the benefits of wisdom (e.g., 2.11–12; 4.12; 10.25). 25: *Do not* is the language of prohibition, used six times in succession here in short, proverbial-type sentences. *Sudden panic* is usually associated with unexpected disaster (cf. 1.26–27). 27–28: The language suggests that the issue concerns loans and their repayment (cf. 6.1–5; 11.24). 31: Envy of *the violent* may spring from their seeming prosperity. 32: *Abomination to the LORD* has a special meaning in Proverbs in reference of moral offenses that God finds loathsome, often concerning falsity in speech, thought, or words.

³³ The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the abode of the righteous.

³⁴ Toward the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he shows favor.

³⁵ The wise will inherit honor,
but stubborn fools, disgrace.

4 Listen, children, to a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain^a
insight;

² for I give you good precepts:
do not forsake my teaching.

³ When I was a son with my father,
tender, and my mother's favorite,

⁴ he taught me, and said to me,
"Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.

⁵ Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget,
nor turn away
from the words of my mouth.

⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.

⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get
wisdom,
and whatever else you get, get insight.

⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.

⁹ She will place on your head a fair garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful
crown."

¹⁰ Hear, my child, and accept my words,
that the years of your life may be many.

¹¹ I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of
uprightness.

¹² When you walk, your step will not be
hampered;

and if you run, you will not stumble.

¹³ Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
guard her, for she is your life.

¹⁴ Do not enter the path of the wicked,
and do not walk in the way of evildoers.

¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it;
turn away from it and pass on.

¹⁶ For they cannot sleep unless they have
done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they
have made someone stumble.

¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.

¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the
light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until
full day.

¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep
darkness;
they do not know what they stumble
over.

²⁰ My child, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.

²¹ Do not let them escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.

²² For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

²⁴ Put away from you crooked speech,
and put devious talk far from you.

²⁵ Let your eyes look directly forward,
and your gaze be straight before you.

²⁶ Keep straight the path of your feet,
and all your ways will be sure.

²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left;
turn your foot away from evil.

^a Heb *know*

4.1–9: Get wisdom, get insight. The father's instruction is now emphasized, and he recalls his instruction from his own father (v. 3). The message passed down from generation to generation remains the same: "Get wisdom, get insight" (vv. 5,7). **6–8: Love . . . embrace** suggests the metaphor of wisdom as the beloved wife (cf. 5.15–20; 7.4; 31.20–31). **9:** See 1.9n.

4.10–27: The two paths. The father's instruction continues with the image of two alternate paths: that of wisdom/righteousness or that of the wicked. It is a common image in the book (1.15–6; 2.7–20; 3.6,17,23; 5.5,21; 6.23; 7.25; 8.13,20,32; 9.6; 10.9; 11.5; 16.17; 28.6). **18–19:** In keeping with the binary way of understanding reality common in Proverbs, the ways of righteous and wicked are compared to light and dark. **24: Crooked speech** is the dark side of Proverbs' emphasis on proper speech and speech ethics. **25–27:** What is *straight* is an image of righteousness and correct conduct. The contrast between crooked and straight is a fundamental metaphor in the wisdom tradition (cf. 8.8–9).