

# Proverbs

## 1

**Summary:** *Proverbs 1 establishes the purpose of the entire collection (vv1-7), issues a father's warning against the enticement of violent men (vv8-19), and then dramatically shifts voice as Woman Wisdom herself takes to the streets to deliver her first public speech (vv20-33). The chapter moves from private instruction to public confrontation.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The prologue (vv1-7) is not merely a preface but a thesis statement for the entire book. It names six overlapping goals — wisdom, discipline, discernment, prudence, knowledge, and discretion — all culminating in the declaration that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. This is not the end of an argument but its starting point. The most striking feature of the chapter is the personification of wisdom as a woman who shouts in public spaces — streets, squares, gateways. In the ancient Near East, the only women who called out to men in public were either mourners or prostitutes. By casting Wisdom as a woman crying out at the city gates, the text deliberately inverts the image of the seductive woman who will appear in chapters 5-7. The reader must choose which woman's voice to heed.*

**Translation Friction:** *The Hebrew reshit in verse 7 ('beginning') has been debated for centuries. Does it mean 'the starting point' (you begin with the fear of the LORD and then acquire knowledge) or 'the chief part' (the fear of the LORD is the essence, the first principle of knowledge)? Both readings have support. The word can mean either temporal beginning or supreme portion. The ambiguity may be deliberate — the fear of the LORD is both where you start and what matters most. Woman Wisdom's speech in vv20-33 is troublingly harsh: she promises to laugh at the disaster of those who ignored her. This does not fit easily into categories of divine compassion, but it reflects the absolute character of wisdom literature — choices have consequences, and Wisdom will not rescue those who chose Folly.*

**Connections:** *The 'fear of the LORD' formula (v7) is the architectural keystone of the entire wisdom corpus, appearing in Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10, and Ecclesiastes 12:13. The father-to-son instruction format (v8) matches Egyptian wisdom literature, particularly the Instruction of Amenemope and the Instruction of Ptahhotep, placing Proverbs in a broader ancient Near Eastern tradition. Woman Wisdom's public speech anticipates her major address in chapter 8, where she will claim to have been present at creation itself.*

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon, son of David,  
king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To know wisdom and discipline,  
to discern words of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To receive discipline that produces insight —  
righteousness, justice, and uprightness,

<sup>4</sup>To give shrewdness to the naive,  
knowledge and foresight to the young,

<sup>5</sup>Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and the discerning acquire guidance —

<sup>6</sup>to understand a proverb and a figure of speech,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.

<sup>7</sup>The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
wisdom and discipline, fools despise.

<sup>8</sup>Listen, my son, to your father's discipline,  
and do not abandon your mother's instruction.

<sup>9</sup>For they will be a garland of grace on your head  
and pendants around your neck.

<sup>10</sup>My son, if sinners entice you,  
do not consent.

<sup>11</sup>If they say, 'Come with us —  
let us lie in ambush for blood,  
let us lurk unseen for the innocent without cause,

<sup>12</sup>Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,  
whole, like those who descend to the pit —

<sup>13</sup>We will find every kind of precious wealth;  
we will fill our houses with plunder.'

<sup>14</sup>'Throw in your lot with us —  
we will all share one purse.'

<sup>15</sup>My son, do not walk on the road with them;  
hold back your foot from their path,

<sup>16</sup>for their feet run toward evil  
and they rush to shed blood.

<sup>17</sup>For in vain is a net spread  
in the sight of any bird.

<sup>18</sup>But these men lie in ambush for their own blood;  
they lurk in hiding for their own lives.

<sup>19</sup>Such are the paths of all who profit by violence —  
it takes the life of those who gain it.

<sup>20</sup>Wisdom cries aloud in the street;  
in the public squares she raises her voice.

<sup>21</sup>At the busiest corner she calls out;  
at the entrance of the gates, in the city,  
she speaks her words:

<sup>22</sup>'How long, you naive ones, will you love naivety?  
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge?

<sup>23</sup>Turn back at my reproof!  
Look — I will pour out my spirit on you;  
I will make my words known to you.

<sup>24</sup>Because I called and you refused,  
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention,

<sup>25</sup>and you ignored all my counsel  
and would not accept my reproof —

<sup>26</sup>then I in turn will laugh at your disaster;  
I will mock when your dread arrives,

<sup>27</sup>when your dread arrives like a storm  
and your disaster sweeps in like a whirlwind,  
when distress and anguish come upon you.

<sup>28</sup>Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;  
they will search for me urgently, but will not find me,

<sup>29</sup>because they hated knowledge  
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

<sup>30</sup>they would not accept my counsel;  
they spurned all my reproof.

<sup>31</sup>So they will eat the fruit of their own way  
and be gorged on their own schemes.

<sup>32</sup>For the waywardness of the naive will kill them,  
and the complacency of fools will destroy them.

<sup>33</sup>But whoever listens to me will dwell secure  
and be at ease, without fear of harm.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Mashal (plural meshalim, 'proverbs') means far more than a pithy saying. The root m-sh-l means 'to rule, to compare, to represent.' A mashal is a statement that governs — it captures reality in compressed form and exercises authority over the hearer's understanding. The attribution to Solomon draws on the tradition of 1 Kings 4:32, which credits him with three thousand proverbs.
2. Musar is rendered 'discipline' rather than 'instruction' to preserve its sharp edge. The word derives from yasar ('to chastise, to correct, to discipline') and often appears in contexts of physical correction (Proverbs 13:24, 22:15). Wisdom in Proverbs is not acquired without cost — it requires the submission of the learner to correction that may be painful.
3. The triad tsedeq, mishpat, and mesharim ('righteousness, justice, and uprightness') is not a random list but a comprehensive description of right living. Tsedeq is conformity to God's standard; mishpat is the just application of that standard in community; mesharim (from yashar, 'straight, upright') is the personal integrity that connects the two. Together they define the moral outcome that wisdom produces.
4. The peti ('naive, simple, gullible') is not stupid but untested — a person whose character is still open, still formable. The word comes from patah ('to be open, to be enticed') and describes someone who can be led in either direction. Proverbs does not write off the naive; it targets them as the primary audience. The ormah ('shrewdness, craftiness') given to the naive is the same word used of the serpent in Genesis 3:1 — it is morally neutral cunning, the capacity to navigate deception without being deceived.
5. The shift from the naive (v4) to the already wise (v5) reveals a key principle: wisdom is never finished. The chakham ('wise person') still needs to hear and add learning. Tachbulot ('guidance, steering, strategy') originally referred to the ropes used to steer a ship — wisdom is navigational skill, the ability to direct one's course through complex situations.
6. Melitsah ('figure of speech, satire, enigmatic saying') and chidot ('riddles, puzzles') indicate that wisdom literature deliberately obscures as much as it reveals. The wise do not hand answers to the learner; they pose problems that require active engagement. The hearer must work to understand — and the working is itself part of the formation.
7. The fear of the LORD is not one topic among many in Proverbs — it is the epistemological foundation. Without it, the book's other instructions become merely practical advice. With it, every proverb becomes an expression of divine order. The identical formula appears in 9:10, forming an inclusio around the book's first major section.
7. The placement of 'wisdom and discipline, fools despise' at the verse's end — with the verb last — creates emphasis through word order. The Hebrew ear hears chokmah and musar first, then the devastating bazu ('despise'). What fools reject is named before the rejection itself, as if to say: look at what they are throwing away.
8. The shift to direct address — 'my son' (beni) — signals the beginning of the first instructional unit. The parallelism between father's musar and mother's torah elevates the mother's teaching to equal authority with the father's. In Israelite pedagogy, both parents transmitted wisdom. The mother's torah is instruction in the fullest sense — not a lesser, domestic variant but authoritative teaching.
9. The imagery of ornamental jewelry applied to parental teaching transforms discipline from burden into adornment. The livyat chen ('garland of grace, wreath of favor') and anaqim ('pendants, necklaces') are publicly visible — wisdom's fruit is not hidden but displayed. In the ancient Near East, such ornaments also signaled social standing and honor.
10. The verb yefattukha ('entice you') is from patah, the same root behind peti ('naive') in verse 4. The naive are those open to enticement; sinners exploit that openness. The father's command is blunt: al tove ('do not consent, do not go along'). No negotiation, no partial engagement — a clean refusal.
11. The father now gives the sinners' actual speech — a recruitment pitch. The verbs eerevah ('let us ambush') and nitspenah ('let us hide, lurk') are cohortative, expressing eager intention. The target is the naqi ('innocent, clean') — someone who has done nothing to provoke attack. The word chinnam ('without cause, for nothing, gratuitously') intensifies the evil: this is violence for its own sake.
12. The sinners compare themselves to Sheol — the grave, the realm of the dead — which swallows people whole. The imagery is deliberately monstrous: they see themselves as death itself, consuming victims who are chayyim ('alive') and temimim ('whole, blameless'). The boast reveals the predatory nature of the invitation. Sheol in Hebrew thought was insatiable (Proverbs 27:20, Isaiah 5:14), and so are those who pattern their lives after it.
13. The pitch moves from thrill to profit. Hon yaqar ('precious wealth') and shalal ('plunder, spoil') reveal the economic motive beneath the violence. The promise to fill houses with plunder is an inversion of the wisdom promise — wisdom fills a house with good things (Proverbs 24:4), but the violent fill theirs with stolen goods.
14. The final enticement is belonging: throw your goral ('lot, share, portion') in with ours. The shared kis ('purse, bag') offers community and equal distribution. The gang promises what family and wisdom also promise — identity, provision, solidarity — but through violence rather than virtue. The counterfeit is compelling precisely because it mimics the real thing.
15. The father's response is physical: restrain your ragel ('foot') from their netivah ('path, track'). The language of walking and paths runs throughout Proverbs — life is a journey, and the critical choice is which road to take. The imperative mena ('hold back, withhold, restrain') implies that the pull is real; without active resistance, the feet will follow.

16. The verbs yarutsu ('run') and yimaharu ('hasten, rush') convey eagerness — the violent are not reluctant participants but enthusiastic ones. Isaiah 59:7 quotes this verse nearly verbatim in an indictment of Israel, and Paul cites it in Romans 3:15 as evidence of universal human depravity.
17. The father inserts a proverb within his instruction: a bird that sees the net avoids it. The implication is devastating — these sinners are less perceptive than birds. They set a trap that will catch themselves, and they cannot see it. The resheth ('net') they spread for others becomes their own snare (v18).
18. The identical verbs from verse 11 — arav ('ambush') and tsaphan ('lurk') — return, but with a devastating twist. In verse 11 the sinners lay ambush for others; in verse 18 they ambush themselves. The irony is total: violence is self-consuming. The nafshotam ('their own lives, their own souls') they destroy are their own.
19. The word batsa ('unjust gain, profit by violence') appears throughout the prophetic corpus as a key indictment of corrupt leaders (Jeremiah 6:13, Ezekiel 22:27, Habakkuk 2:9). Its presence here connects the father's private instruction to the public concerns of prophecy — personal greed and social injustice are the same sin at different scales.
20. The plural form chokmot has generated much discussion. Some see it as a plural of majesty (like Elohim), others as an abstract plural, others as a Canaanite feminine ending. Regardless of grammar, the effect is to present Wisdom as a figure of public authority — a voice that cannot be ignored or confined to a single setting.
21. The city gate (sha'ar) was the center of legal, commercial, and social life in ancient Israelite cities. Elders judged cases there, merchants conducted business, and news was exchanged. By placing Wisdom at the gate's entrance, the text positions her at the crossroads of public life — every decision made in the city passes through her hearing.
22. Wisdom's speech opens with ad matay ('how long?'), the same phrase used in lament psalms to address God (Psalm 13:1-2). Here Wisdom uses it to address the foolish — she laments over them. Three categories appear: petayim ('the naive,' who are reachable but undirected), letsim ('scoffers,' who mock what they do not understand), and kesilim ('fools,' who are morally obstinate). Each group is defined by what it loves or hates: the naive love their openness, scoffers love their mockery, and fools hate knowledge itself.
23. Wisdom offers her ruach ('spirit, breath, wind') — an astonishing claim. The verb abi'ah ('I will pour out, I will cause to bubble forth') suggests abundance, even excess. Wisdom is not rationing herself. The offer is lavish and conditional only on turning (shuvu, 'turn back, repent'). The same root sh-u-v that defines prophetic repentance defines the response Wisdom demands.
24. The verbs shift to past tense — Wisdom has already been calling. The refusal is not a single event but a pattern. Natiti yadi ('I stretched out my hand') is a gesture of offering, even pleading. The word maqshiv ('one who pays attention, one who listens carefully') from qashav emphasizes that what was lacking was not access to Wisdom but attentiveness to her.
25. The verb tifre'u ('you let loose, you neglected, you let go') is the same word used for Pharaoh 'letting' Israel go (Exodus 5:4) and for undoing restraint. They released Wisdom's counsel — let it slip through their fingers — and refused her tokhachat ('reproof, correction, argument').
26. This is among the most unsettling verses in wisdom literature. Wisdom does not merely warn; she promises to laugh (eshchaq) and mock (el'ag) when calamity strikes. The language mirrors the scoffers' own behavior — they mocked wisdom, and now wisdom will mock them. The reversal is exact and merciless. This is not cruelty but the inherent logic of rejection: the one you mocked will not rescue you.
27. The storm imagery (sho'ah, 'devastation, storm' and sufah, 'whirlwind, tempest') conveys suddenness and overwhelming force. The pairing tsarah ve-tsuqah ('distress and anguish') is a rhyming pair in Hebrew that underscores the completeness of the suffering. The fools thought they were free; the storm reveals they were exposed.
28. The verbs yiqra'uneni ('they will call on me') and yeshacharuneni ('they will seek me early, diligently') echo the language of prayer — the fools will seek Wisdom the way a desperate person seeks God. But the answer will be silence. The verb shachar ('to seek early, to seek eagerly') implies dawn-time seeking, the most urgent and devoted kind of search. Even this will be too late.
29. The reason for Wisdom's silence is stated plainly: they hated knowledge and did not choose (bacharu, from bachar) the fear of the LORD. The verb bachar ('to choose, to select, to prefer') makes clear that the fear of the LORD is a decision, not a feeling. It must be chosen — and it was not.
30. The verb na'atsu ('they spurned, they treated with contempt') is stronger than mere rejection — it is active contempt, the deliberate disparagement of what Wisdom offered. The word appears in descriptions of Israel's rejection of God's covenant (Numbers 14:23, Deuteronomy 32:19).
31. The agricultural metaphor returns: actions are seeds, consequences are fruit, and the harvest must be consumed. The verb yisba'u ('they will be satisfied, stuffed, gorged') often describes pleasant fullness, but here it is ironic — they will be filled to overflowing with the consequences of their own mo'atsot ('plans, schemes, counsels'). They rejected Wisdom's counsel; they will be force-fed their own.
32. The irony of meshuvah ('turning away') is sharp: turning is exactly what Wisdom invited in verse 23 (tashuvu, 'turn back'). The same capacity — the ability to change direction — saves or destroys depending on which way one turns.
33. Wisdom's speech ends not with threat but with promise. The one who shome'a li ('listens to me, obeys me') will yishkan betach ('dwell in security'). The verb shakan ('to dwell, to settle, to tabernacle') evokes permanence — this is not temporary refuge but settled habitation. Sha'anani ('at ease, tranquil, undisturbed') is the positive version of the shalvah ('complacency') that destroys fools in verse 32. The same ease that kills the fool blesses the wise — the difference is not the comfort itself but whether it is grounded in wisdom or ignorance.

## 2

**Summary:** *Proverbs 2 is a single, carefully structured conditional sentence spanning the entire chapter: 'If you seek wisdom (vv1-4), then you will understand the fear of the LORD (vv5-8), then you will understand righteousness (vv9-11), then wisdom will deliver you from the evil man (vv12-15) and from the forbidden woman (vv16-19), so that you may walk in the way of the good (vv20-22).' It is the most architecturally unified chapter in the book.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The entire chapter is one extended 'if-then' construction — the longest conditional sentence in the Hebrew Bible. The protasis ('if') runs through verses 1-4 with five escalating verbs of seeking: receive, treasure, incline, apply, cry out, seek, search. The effort required to find wisdom is compared to mining for silver and searching for hidden treasure (v4). Wisdom is not lying on the surface; it must be excavated. The two threats from which wisdom delivers — the evil man (vv12-15) and the strange woman (vv16-19) — will dominate chapters 5-7. Here they receive their first introduction as twin dangers that can only be navigated by someone who has done the hard work of verses 1-4.*

**Translation Friction:** *The ishah zarah ('strange woman, foreign woman') of verse 16 has been interpreted as a literal adulteress, as a personification of Folly (the counterpart to Woman Wisdom), as a reference to foreign women who lead Israelites into idolatry, or as all three simultaneously. The ambiguity is likely intentional — the 'forbidden woman' represents every alluring path that leads away from wisdom and covenant faithfulness. The chapter's conditional structure also raises a question: is wisdom earned by human effort (vv1-4) or given by God (vv6)? The answer appears to be both — seeking is required, but what is found is a divine gift.*

**Connections:** *The mining metaphor in verse 4 connects to Job 28, which asks 'Where shall wisdom be found?' and describes mining operations that probe the earth's depths. The 'paths of the upright' language (v13, v20) echoes Psalm 1's two-ways theology. The 'strange woman' introduction anticipates the extended warnings in chapters 5, 6:20-35, and 7. The promise that God 'stores up sound wisdom for the upright' (v7) uses the same verb (tsaphan, 'to hide, to store') that describes treasure in verse 4 — God hides wisdom the way one hides treasure, and the seeker must dig.*

<sup>1</sup>My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure my commands within you,  
  
<sup>2</sup>inclining your ear to wisdom  
and turning your heart toward understanding,  
  
<sup>3</sup>yes, if you call out for insight  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
  
<sup>4</sup>if you seek her like silver  
and search for her like hidden treasure —  
  
<sup>5</sup>then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and discover the knowledge of God.  
  
<sup>6</sup>For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
  
<sup>7</sup>He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.

<sup>8</sup>He guards the paths of justice  
and watches over the way of His faithful ones.

<sup>9</sup>Then you will understand righteousness and justice  
and uprightness — every good path.

<sup>10</sup>For when wisdom enters your heart  
and knowledge becomes sweet to your soul,

<sup>11</sup>discretion will guard you,  
understanding will watch over you,

<sup>12</sup>to deliver you from the way of the evil man,  
from the person who speaks perversity,

<sup>13</sup>who abandon paths of uprightness  
to walk in ways of darkness,

<sup>14</sup>who rejoice in doing evil  
and delight in the perversity of wickedness,

<sup>15</sup>whose paths are crooked  
and who are devious in their ways.

<sup>16</sup>to deliver you from the forbidden woman,  
from the outsider whose words are smooth,

<sup>17</sup>who abandons the companion of her youth  
and forgets the covenant of her God —

<sup>18</sup>For her house sinks down to death,  
and her paths lead to the shades.

<sup>19</sup>None who go to her return,  
nor do they reach the paths of life.

<sup>20</sup>So that you may walk in the way of the good  
and keep to the paths of the righteous.

<sup>21</sup>For the upright will inhabit the land,  
and the blameless will remain in it.

<sup>22</sup>But the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
and the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The massive conditional begins. The verb *tiqqach* ('receive, take, accept') requires active appropriation — not passive hearing but deliberate taking. The second verb *titspon* ('treasure, store up, hide') from *tsaphan* describes the careful concealment of something valuable. Commands are not merely obeyed; they are guarded as personal treasure.
2. The body itself must participate: the ear (*ozen*) must be inclined and the heart (*lev*) must be turned. In Hebrew anthropology, the heart is not the seat of emotion but of intellect and will. Turning the heart toward *tevunah* ('understanding, insight') means directing the entire decision-making apparatus toward wisdom.

3. The seeking intensifies from passive receiving (v1) to active calling. The verb *tiqra* ('you call out, you cry') and the phrase *titten qolekha* ('you give your voice, you raise your voice') describe urgent vocalization — the seeker of wisdom is not quiet but vocal, not reserved but desperate. The same verbs described Woman Wisdom's public speech in 1:20-21; now the student mirrors her intensity.
4. The silver/treasure metaphor connects directly to Job 28:1-11, where the search for wisdom is compared at length to mining operations. Both texts insist that wisdom's value exceeds precious metals and that finding it requires extraordinary effort. The irony is that after all this human effort, verse 6 will reveal that wisdom ultimately comes from God's mouth.
5. The 'then' (*az*) marks the transition from condition to consequence. The reward of seeking is not mere information but understanding of *yirat YHWH* ('the fear of the LORD') — the very foundation announced in 1:7. The parallel term *da'at Elohim* ('knowledge of God') elevates the outcome beyond wisdom-as-skill to wisdom-as-relationship. To find wisdom is to find God.
6. The phrase 'from His mouth' anticipates the identification of wisdom with God's spoken word. In later Jewish interpretation, this verse became foundational for the concept of Torah as divine wisdom — what comes from God's mouth is instruction, and instruction is wisdom. The verse resolves the tension between seeking and receiving: both are necessary.
7. The verb *yitspon* ('He stores up, He hides in reserve') is the same verb the student used in verse 1 (*titspon*, 'treasure'). God and the student are doing the same thing — treasuring wisdom. *Tushiyyah* ('sound wisdom, effective counsel, resourcefulness') is a distinctive wisdom term that implies practical effectiveness, not merely theoretical knowledge. God is also *magen* ('shield') — wisdom provides defensive protection for those who walk in *tom* ('integrity, wholeness, blamelessness').
8. God acts as guardian of two things: *orchot mishpat* ('paths of justice') — the established routes of right judgment — and *derekh chasidav* ('the way of His faithful ones'). The *chasid* (from *chesed*, 'faithful love') is the person who lives in covenant loyalty. God does not merely provide wisdom and withdraw; He actively guards the path of those who walk in it.
9. The second 'then' (*az*) introduces the ethical consequence: the wisdom-seeker will discern *tsedeq* ('righteousness'), *mishpat* ('justice'), *mesharim* ('uprightness'), and *kol ma'gal tov* ('every good path'). The word *ma'gal* ('track, path, course') refers to a wagon track — a groove worn by repeated use. The good paths are not unknown; they are well-traveled routes that the wise have walked before.
10. Wisdom does not remain external instruction but *tavo* ('enters, comes into') the *lev* ('heart, mind'). Knowledge becomes *na'am* ('pleasant, sweet, delightful') to the *nefesh* ('soul, self, life'). The transformation is interior — wisdom moves from what you hear to what you are. The verb *na'am* ('to be pleasant') describes the subjective experience: the wise person does not merely accept knowledge as duty but finds it genuinely delightful.
11. *Mezimmah* ('discretion, foresight, planning') and *tevunah* ('understanding') are now personified as guards. The verbs *tishmor* ('will guard') and *tintserakkah* ('will watch over you, will preserve you') cast wisdom's attributes as active protectors. The one who sought wisdom (vv1-4) is now guarded by wisdom — the seeker has become the guarded.
12. The first threat: the *derekh ra* ('evil way') embodied in a man who speaks *tahpukhot* ('perversities, things turned upside down'). The root *h-p-kh* means 'to turn, to overturn' — perverted speech inverts reality, calling evil good and good evil. Wisdom protects not by avoiding such people but by seeing through their inversions.
13. The evil are defined by a deliberate turn: they *ha'ozvim* ('abandon, forsake') *orchot yosher* ('paths of uprightness, straight ways') to walk in *darkhe choshekh* ('ways of darkness'). The verb *azav* ('to abandon') implies prior acquaintance — they knew the straight path before they left it. Their evil is not ignorance but apostasy.
14. The *hassmechim* ('those who rejoice') and *yagilu* ('they exult') describe pleasure taken in evil — not reluctant sin but enthusiastic wickedness. The same vocabulary of joy (*samach, gil*) that the Psalms use for worship before God, these men apply to perversion. Their delight is a grotesque mirror of the wise person's delight in wisdom (v10).
15. The adjectives *iqqeshim* ('crooked, twisted') and *nelozim* ('devious, turning aside') contrast sharply with the *yosher* ('uprightness, straightness') of verse 13. The entire vocabulary of these verses operates on the metaphor of straight versus crooked roads — moral life is navigational, and the evil have taken every wrong turn available.
16. We render *zarah* as 'forbidden' rather than 'strange' to capture the prohibition implicit in the Hebrew. She is not merely unfamiliar but off-limits — her strangeness is a marker of danger, not mere foreignness. The term carries overtones of both sexual and covenantal transgression.
17. The forbidden woman has her own backstory of betrayal: she *ha'ozevet* ('abandons') the *alluf ne'ureiha* ('companion/husband of her youth') and *shakhechah* ('has forgotten') the *berit Eloheiha* ('covenant of her God'). The *alluf* ('companion, intimate friend, chief') likely refers to her husband. Her infidelity is simultaneously marital and covenantal — she has broken faith with both her husband and her God. The verb *shakhach* ('to forget') implies not memory failure but willful disregard.
18. The geography of the forbidden woman is vertical: her house *shachah* ('sinks, inclines, bows down') toward *mavet* ('death'), and her paths lead to the *refa'im* ('the shades, the dead, the inhabitants of the underworld'). The *refa'im* are the diminished dead of Sheol — those who have lost vitality and dwell in shadow. Her house is not a destination but a descent. Every step toward her is a step downward.
19. The finality is absolute: *kol ba'eiha lo yeshuvun* ('all who enter her do not return'). The verb *shuv* ('return') that could have saved them (cf. 1:23) is now denied — the descent is irreversible. They also *lo yassigu orchot chayyim* ('do not attain the paths of life'). The *orchot chayyim* ('paths of life') are the opposite of the forbidden woman's paths to death. The young man who enters her house has left the intersection where life and death diverge and has passed the point of no return.

20. The positive purpose emerges: wisdom's protection from the evil man and the forbidden woman exists lema'an ('so that, in order that') you can walk the derekh tovim ('way of good people'). The righteous path is not merely the absence of evil but its own positive reality — a road with company, a way walked by the tsaddiqim ('righteous ones').
21. The promise of dwelling in the erets ('land') echoes the covenantal promise to Abraham and the Deuteronomic theology of land as blessing. The yesharim ('upright') yishkenu ('will dwell, will inhabit') and the temimim ('blameless, whole') yivvateru ('will remain, will be left'). Possession of the land is not a political promise but a moral one — those aligned with God's order will endure.
22. The chapter ends with the counter-destiny: resha'im ('the wicked') yikkaretu ('will be cut off') and bogdim ('the treacherous, the faithless') yissechu ('will be torn out, uprooted'). The verb karath ('to cut off') is the language of covenant severance — the same verb used for making (literally 'cutting') a covenant is used for being cut off from its blessings. The bogdim (from bagad, 'to deal treacherously') are covenant-breakers, those who betray trust. Their removal from the land mirrors the forbidden woman's descent to death — both end in exclusion from life's blessings.

### 3

**Summary:** *Proverbs 3 is a sustained father-to-son exhortation structured in paired commands and promises. The first half (vv1-12) urges trust in the LORD over self-reliance, culminating in a theology of divine discipline. The central section (vv13-20) erupts into a hymn praising wisdom's incomparable value — she is more precious than rubies, she holds life and wealth in her hands, and she was the instrument through which God founded the earth. The final section (vv21-35) returns to practical instruction: guard sound wisdom, do not withhold good from your neighbor, and do not envy the violent.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 5-6 ('Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding') is among the most quoted passages in all of Scripture. Its original context is not generic piety but a specific contrast: the son is being offered two epistemological foundations — his own understanding (binah) or the LORD's direction. The command to trust with 'all your heart' (kol libbeka) is not emotional sentimentality but total cognitive commitment. The hymn to wisdom in vv13-20 is remarkable for its cosmological claims: wisdom was the means by which God established the heavens and the earth (vv19-20). This anticipates the great speech of chapter 8 and positions wisdom not as a human achievement but as a divine attribute embedded in the structure of creation.*

**Translation Friction:** *The promise that honoring the LORD with firstfruits will result in overflowing barns (vv9-10) raises the prosperity-gospel question that haunts all wisdom literature. Is this a guaranteed transaction? The rest of the biblical canon — particularly Job, Ecclesiastes, and the lament psalms — will complicate this retributive theology severely. The divine discipline passage (vv11-12) quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6 sits uncomfortably in modern sensibilities that resist the idea of God inflicting suffering as correction. The Hebrew text is clear: the LORD rebukes and disciplines those He loves, as a father does a son in whom he delights.*

**Connections:** *Proverbs 3:5-6 is echoed in Jeremiah 9:23-24 (do not boast in your own wisdom). The divine discipline teaching (vv11-12) is quoted directly in Hebrews 12:5-6 and forms the theological basis for the New Testament's understanding of suffering as formation. The cosmological wisdom hymn (vv19-20) connects to Psalm 104, Job 38, and Proverbs 8:22-31, all of which describe God's creative acts in wisdom. The 'tree of life' image (v18) recalls Genesis 2-3 and reappears in Revelation 22:2.*

<sup>1</sup>My son, do not forget my instruction,  
and let your heart guard my commands,

<sup>2</sup>for length of days and years of life  
and well-being they will add to you.

<sup>3</sup>Do not let faithful love and truthfulness abandon you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.

<sup>4</sup>So you will find favor and good repute  
in the eyes of God and of people.

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and do not lean on your own understanding.

<sup>6</sup>In all your ways know Him,  
and He will make your paths straight.

<sup>7</sup>Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

<sup>8</sup>It will be healing for your body  
and refreshment for your bones.

<sup>9</sup>Honor the LORD with your wealth  
and with the firstfruits of all your produce,

<sup>10</sup>and your barns will be filled to overflowing  
and your vats will burst with new wine.

<sup>11</sup>My son, do not reject the LORD's discipline,  
and do not loathe His correction,

<sup>12</sup>for the LORD corrects the one He loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

<sup>13</sup>How fortunate is the person who finds wisdom,  
the one who obtains understanding!

<sup>14</sup>For her profit is better than the profit of silver,  
and her yield surpasses fine gold.

<sup>15</sup>She is more precious than corals,  
and nothing you desire can compare with her.

<sup>16</sup>Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honor.

<sup>17</sup>Her ways are ways of delight,  
and all her paths are peace.

<sup>18</sup>She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,  
and those who hold her fast are called fortunate.

<sup>19</sup>By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations;  
by understanding He established the heavens.

<sup>20</sup>By His knowledge the deep waters broke open,  
and the skies drip down dew.

<sup>21</sup>My son, do not let these slip from your sight;  
preserve sound wisdom and foresight,

<sup>22</sup>and they will be life for your soul  
and grace for your neck.

<sup>23</sup>Then you will walk your way in safety,  
and your foot will not stumble.

<sup>24</sup>When you lie down, you will not be afraid;  
you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet.

<sup>25</sup>Do not fear sudden disaster  
or the ruin of the wicked when it comes,

<sup>26</sup>for the LORD will be your confidence,  
and He will keep your foot from the snare.

<sup>27</sup>Do not withhold good from those who deserve it  
when it is in your power to act.

<sup>28</sup>Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go and come back;  
tomorrow I will give it' — when you have it with you.

<sup>29</sup>Do not plot harm against your neighbor  
while he lives trustingly beside you.

<sup>30</sup>Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,  
if they have done you no harm.

<sup>31</sup>Do not envy the violent man,  
and do not choose any of his ways,

<sup>32</sup>for the devious are detestable to the LORD,  
but His intimate counsel is with the upright.

<sup>33</sup>The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,  
but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.

<sup>34</sup>Toward the scoffers He is scornful,  
but to the humble He gives grace.

<sup>35</sup>The wise will inherit honor,  
but fools carry away shame.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Torati ('my instruction') is the father's personal torah — not the Mosaic Law but the authoritative teaching of a parent. The verb tishkach ('forget') is more than memory failure; in Hebrew to forget is to disregard, to treat as irrelevant. The heart (lev) must yittsor ('guard, keep, preserve') the commands — active retention, not passive recall.
2. The promised benefits — *orekh yamim* ('length of days'), *shenot chayyim* ('years of life'), and *shalom* ('peace, wholeness, well-being') — represent the full wisdom package: long life and comprehensive flourishing. *Shalom* is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of completeness.

3. Chesed ve-emet ('faithful love and truthfulness') is a hendiadys — two words expressing one concept: reliable, covenant faithfulness. The instruction to bind them on the neck and write them on the heart's tablet echoes Deuteronomy 6:8-9 and anticipates Jeremiah 31:33, where God promises to write the new covenant on Israel's heart. The physical imagery (binding, writing) insists that these are not abstract values but embodied practices.
4. Chen ('favor, grace, charm') and sekhel tov ('good understanding, good judgment, good repute') are the public rewards of faithful love and truthfulness. The dual audience — be-eyne Elohim ve-adam ('in the eyes of God and of humanity') — means that genuine covenant character wins approval both vertically and horizontally.
5. The word binah ('understanding') is deliberately chosen. The book has urged the son to seek binah (2:2-3), and now it warns him not to lean on it. The apparent contradiction is the point: pursue understanding passionately, but never mistake your understanding for God's. The wisest posture is to be deeply knowledgeable and deeply humble about what you know.
6. The verb da'ehu ('know Him') is not merely 'acknowledge' but the deep, relational knowing that yada implies throughout Scripture. Be-khol derakhekha ('in all your ways') means in every sphere of life, every decision, every path. The promise — yeyyasher orchotekha ('He will make straight your paths') — uses yashar ('to be straight, to make level'). God does not merely point the way; He straightens the road itself. The crooked paths of the wicked (2:15) are contrasted with the straightened paths of the trusting.
7. The warning against being chakham be-eynekha ('wise in your own eyes') continues the theme of verse 5. Self-assessed wisdom is the most dangerous kind — it forecloses the possibility of correction. The antidote is twofold: fear the LORD (yere et YHWH) and sur mera ('turn from evil'). The second is the practical expression of the first.
8. The benefits are physical: rifu't ('healing, health') for the shor ('navel, body, flesh') and shiquy ('drink, moisture, refreshment') for the atsamot ('bones'). Hebrew thought does not separate body and spirit — what is good for the soul is good for the body. Wisdom heals the whole person.
9. The verb kabbed ('honor, give weight to') applied to the LORD means to treat Him as the heaviest reality in your economic life. The instruction to give from hon ('wealth, substance') and from reshit kol tevu'atekha ('the firstfruits of all your produce') reflects the Deuteronomic firstfruits offering — the first and best portion goes to God before the farmer knows how the rest of the harvest will turn out. Giving firstfruits is an act of trust.
10. The promise of full asamim ('barns, granaries') and overflowing yeqavim ('wine vats') represents agricultural abundance. The verb yifrotsu ('will burst, will break through') suggests excess beyond containment. This is wisdom literature's retributive principle at its most optimistic — generosity to God produces abundance from God. The rest of Scripture will nuance this significantly.
11. After the promise of abundance comes the reality of discipline. The verb tim'as ('reject, refuse, despise') and taqots ('loathe, feel disgust, be weary of') describe two responses to suffering: outright rejection and slow-burning resentment. Neither is acceptable. The LORD's musar ('discipline') and tokhachto ('His correction, His reproof') are not punishment but formation — the same musar that opens the book in 1:2 now comes directly from God.
12. The verb ratsah ('delights') is the same verb used for God's acceptance of sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4). The son whom God disciplines is the son God has accepted — discipline is evidence of inclusion, not rejection. This reframes all suffering within the covenant: it may hurt, but it comes from a Father who is pleased with you.
13. Ashre ('how fortunate') opens a new section — a hymn to wisdom that runs through verse 20. The same exclamation that opens the Psalter (Psalm 1:1) now celebrates the person who matsa chokmah ('has found wisdom'). The verb yafiq ('brings forth, draws out, obtains') suggests that understanding (tevnah) is not merely stumbled upon but extracted through effort, like water from a well.
14. The commercial metaphor compares wisdom's sachrah ('trade-profit, merchandise') to silver and her tevu'atah ('yield, income, produce') to charutz ('fine gold, pure gold'). The language of trade runs throughout Proverbs — wisdom is an investment with returns that exceed all precious metals.
15. Peninim ('corals' or 'pearls' or 'rubies' — the exact identification is uncertain) represents the highest category of precious material. The claim that kol chafatsekha ('all your desires, all your delights') cannot equal wisdom eliminates every rival. Job 28:18 makes the identical comparison, and the 'woman of strength' in Proverbs 31:10 is also valued above peninim.
16. Wisdom is personified as a woman extending both hands: the right (yeminah) holds orekh yamim ('length of days') and the left (semo'lah) holds osher ve-khavod ('riches and honor'). The two hands offer comprehensive blessing — long life and prosperous life. In Egyptian art, the goddess Ma'at (order/truth) is similarly depicted with life in one hand and wealth in the other, suggesting a shared ancient Near Eastern tradition.
17. Darkheiha darkhe no'am ('her ways are ways of pleasantness, delight'). The word no'am ('pleasantness, sweetness, beauty') describes the subjective experience of walking wisdom's road — it is not grim duty but genuine delight. Ve-khol netivoteiha shalom ('and all her paths are peace/wholeness') uses shalom in its fullest sense: completeness, harmony, well-being. Every path wisdom offers leads to flourishing.
18. The 'tree of life' identification is one of the most theologically loaded images in Proverbs. It suggests that the way back to Eden runs through wisdom — that the knowledge Adam and Eve seized in violation of God's command is now offered freely to those who fear the LORD. Wisdom restores what transgression destroyed.
19. The hymn climaxes with a cosmological claim: YHWH be-chokmah yasad erets ('the LORD by wisdom founded the earth'). The verb yasad ('to found, to establish, to lay a foundation') describes the earth's creation as an architectural act — God built the world on a foundation, and that foundation was wisdom. The parallel — konen shamayim bitvunah ('He established the heavens by understanding') — uses konen ('to establish, to set firmly') for the heavens. Wisdom is not merely a human virtue but a divine instrument of creation.

20. God's da'at ('knowledge') is the agent by which tehomot ('the deeps, the primordial waters') nivqa'u ('were split open, burst forth'). This recalls both Genesis 1 (the separation of waters) and Genesis 7:11 (the fountains of the great deep breaking open in the flood). The shechaqim ('clouds, skies') yir'afu ('drip, drop') tal ('dew'). Creation and ongoing provision are both acts of divine wisdom.
21. The father resumes direct instruction after the hymn. The verb yaluzu ('slip away, depart, turn aside') warns against letting wisdom drift out of view. Tushiyyah ('sound wisdom, effective counsel') and mezimmah ('foresight, discretion, planning') are the practical applications of the cosmic wisdom just celebrated.
22. Chayyim ('life') for the nefesh ('soul, self') and chen ('grace, charm, favor') for the gargerot ('neck, throat'). The ornamental imagery from 1:9 returns — wisdom adorns as it protects.
23. The betach ('safety, security') that wisdom provides is here physical: your foot (raglekha) will not tiggof ('stumble, strike against'). The imagery is of a traveler walking confidently on a clear path — the contrast to the crooked, dark ways of the wicked in chapter 2.
24. The peace extends into the night: no fear at bedtime, and sleep itself will be arevah ('sweet, pleasant, agreeable'). In the ancient world, night was a time of genuine danger — from bandits, animals, and spiritual threats. Freedom from nocturnal fear is a significant promise.
25. Pachad pit'om ('sudden terror, unexpected disaster') and sho'at resha'im ('the ruin/devastation of the wicked') describe two kinds of calamity: random and moral. The wise person need fear neither, because the LORD is their confidence (v26).
26. YHWH yihyeh be-khislekha ('the LORD will be your confidence'). The word kesel ('confidence, trust, loins, folly') is used here in its positive sense — the LORD Himself becomes the foundation of your security. He will also guard your foot from being lakhed ('captured, caught, ensnared'). The snare imagery connects to the forbidden woman whose house descends to death (2:18-19).
27. The shift from theological reflection to practical ethics. The verb timna ('withhold, hold back, restrain') applied to tov ('good') makes the obligation clear: if you can do good and choose not to, you have done wrong. The phrase bihyot le-el yadkha ('when it is in the power of your hand') limits the obligation to actual capacity — you are responsible for the good you can do, not the good you cannot.
28. The specific application of verse 27: delayed generosity when the resources are already available. The re'a ('neighbor, companion, fellow') asks and receives a dismissal — lekh vashuv ('go and return') — when the needed thing is already ittakh ('with you, in your possession'). Proverbs treats delayed generosity as a form of cruelty.
29. The verb tacharosh ('devise, plot, plow') combined with ra'ah ('evil, harm') describes premeditated malice. The betrayal is amplified by the neighbor's trust: hu yoshev lavetach ittakh ('he dwells in security with you'). To harm someone who trusts you is to violate the fundamental social covenant that makes community possible.
30. Tariv ('contend, quarrel, bring a lawsuit against') combined with chinnam ('without cause, for nothing, gratuitously') — the same word that described the sinners' gratuitous violence in 1:11. Unprovoked conflict is a form of the same evil. The condition im lo gemalekha ra'ah ('if he has not repaid you evil') implies that grievance may sometimes justify confrontation — but only when there is actual cause.
31. The ish chamas ('man of violence') is someone who succeeds through force. The verb teqanne ('envy, be jealous of') acknowledges the temptation: the violent may prosper, and their prosperity invites imitation. The command not to choose (tivchar) his ways echoes 1:15 — every path begins with a choice.
32. The naloz ('crooked, devious person') is a to'avat YHWH ('an abomination to the LORD') — a term of absolute moral revulsion. In contrast, the yesharim ('upright ones') share God's sod ('intimate counsel, secret counsel, inner circle'). The sod is not merely a secret but a circle of trusted confidants. God shares His deepest counsel with the upright — they are His inner circle.
33. The me'erat YHWH ('curse of the LORD') in the wicked person's house and the berakhah on the neveh tsaddiqim ('dwelling of the righteous') create a stark household contrast. The word neveh ('dwelling, pasture, habitation') evokes a settled, peaceful homestead. The blessing and curse are not arbitrary but flow from the moral character of the inhabitants.
34. God mirrors back what He receives: la-letsim hu yalits ('to the scoffers He scoffs') — the same root l-ts-ts used for the scoffers' behavior is applied to God's response. But la-anavim yitten chen ('to the humble He gives grace'). This verse is quoted in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' The anavim ('humble, lowly, afflicted') are not merely modest but those who have been brought low and know their dependence on God.
35. The chapter ends with the final contrast: chakhamim ('the wise') yinchalu kavod ('will inherit honor, glory') while kesilim ('fools') merim qalon ('lift up, carry away, are exalted in — shame, disgrace'). The verb merim can mean either 'carry away' or 'are exalted' — the irony is that fools are 'promoted' to disgrace. Their advancement is their humiliation.

## 4

**Summary:** *Proverbs 4 contains three distinct father-to-son speeches. The first (vv1-9) recalls the father's own education by his father, creating a three-generation chain of wisdom transmission: grandfather to father to son. The second (vv10-19) contrasts the path of the wise with the path of the wicked using the most vivid light-and-darkness imagery in the book. The third (vv20-27) turns inward, demanding that the son guard his heart above all else, because from it flow the springs of life.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The three-generation chain of instruction in verses 1-9 is unique in Proverbs. The father says, 'When I was a son with my father, he taught me' — and then quotes his own father's words. The reader hears not one voice but two, layered together across time. Wisdom is not invented by each generation but received from the previous one and transmitted to the next. The path imagery in verses 10-19 reaches its apex in verse 18: 'The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, growing brighter until full day.' This is one of the most beautiful sentences in the Hebrew Bible — and its force comes from the contrast with verse 19, where the way of the wicked is 'deep darkness' in which they cannot even see what makes them stumble. Verse 23 — 'Above all else, guard your heart, for from it flow the springs of life' — is the single most important anthropological statement in Proverbs. The heart (lev) is the command center of the entire person, and its protection is the non-negotiable priority.*

**Translation Friction:** *The idealized picture of wisdom transmission — father to son to grandson, smooth and unbroken — does not match the reality of most families, either in ancient Israel or today. Many of the Psalms and prophetic texts acknowledge that the chain breaks, that parents fail, and that children rebel. Proverbs 4 presents the ideal without acknowledging the fractures, which is characteristic of wisdom literature's tendency toward clean patterns. The command to guard the heart (v23) also raises the question of how one guards something that is, according to Jeremiah 17:9, 'deceitful above all things and beyond cure.' The tension between Proverbs' confidence in human moral agency and Jeremiah's suspicion of the human heart is never fully resolved within the Old Testament.*

**Connections:** *The three-generation instruction chain connects to Deuteronomy 6:7 ('teach them diligently to your children') and Psalm 78:1-8, which describes the deliberate transmission of God's acts across generations. The light-of-dawn image (v18) is echoed in Isaiah 58:8 ('your light will break forth like the dawn') and 2 Samuel 23:4 (David's last words about a righteous ruler). The heart-guarding command (v23) anticipates Jesus' teaching that what comes out of the heart defiles a person (Mark 7:20-23) and Paul's instruction to guard what has been entrusted (2 Timothy 1:14).*

<sup>1</sup>Listen, sons, to a father's discipline,  
and pay attention, so you may gain understanding.

<sup>2</sup>For I give you sound teaching;  
do not abandon my instruction.

<sup>3</sup>For I was a son to my father,  
tender and precious in my mother's sight.

<sup>4</sup>He taught me and said to me,  
'Let your heart hold fast to my words.  
Keep my commands and live.

<sup>5</sup>Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding!  
Do not forget, and do not turn from the words of my mouth.

<sup>6</sup>Do not abandon her, and she will protect you;  
love her, and she will guard you.

<sup>7</sup>The beginning of wisdom: acquire wisdom!  
And with all you acquire, acquire understanding.

<sup>8</sup>Cherish her, and she will lift you up;  
she will honor you when you embrace her.

<sup>9</sup>She will set a garland of grace on your head;  
a crown of splendor she will bestow on you.'

<sup>10</sup>Listen, my son, and receive my words,  
and the years of your life will be many.

<sup>11</sup>I have directed you in the way of wisdom;  
I have guided you along straight paths.

<sup>12</sup>When you walk, your stride will not be hindered;  
and when you run, you will not stumble.

<sup>13</sup>Hold fast to discipline — do not let go!  
Guard her, for she is your life.

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

<sup>15</sup>Avoid it — do not travel on it;  
turn away from it and pass on.

<sup>16</sup>For they cannot sleep unless they have done harm;  
their sleep is stolen unless they have made someone stumble.

<sup>17</sup>For wickedness is the bread they eat  
and drink the wine of violence.

<sup>18</sup>But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
shining brighter and brighter until full day.

<sup>19</sup>The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know what makes them stumble.

<sup>20</sup>My son, pay attention to my words;  
incline your ear to my sayings.

<sup>21</sup>Do not let them slip from your eyes;  
keep them deep within your heart.

<sup>22</sup>For they are life to those who find them  
and healing for the whole body.

**23** Above all that you guard, guard your heart,  
for from it flow the springs of life.

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

**25** Let your eyes look straight ahead,  
and your gaze be fixed directly before you.

**26** Make level the path for your feet,  
and all your ways will be sure.

**27** Do not turn to the right or to the left;  
remove your foot from evil.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The plural *banim* ('sons, children') expands the audience beyond the single 'my son' of previous chapters. *Musar av* ('discipline of a father') is presented as a category of knowledge worth having. The verb *haqshivu* ('pay attention, listen carefully') from *qashav* demands focused hearing, not mere auditory reception.
2. *Leqach tov* ('good teaching, sound learning') and *torati* ('my instruction') are offered as reliable, tested goods. The verb *ta'azovu* ('abandon, forsake') warns against the apostasy that begins not with dramatic rebellion but with gradual neglect.
3. The father reveals his own backstory: he too was *rakh* ('tender, soft, young, vulnerable') and *yachid* ('only one, beloved, precious') before his mother. The shift to autobiography creates intimacy — the father is not a distant authority but someone who once sat where the son sits now, receiving instruction from his own parents.
4. Now the grandfather speaks through the father's memory. The imperative *vecheyeh* ('and live!') is stark — obedience to wisdom is not optional enrichment but the condition of survival. The verb *yitmakh* ('hold fast, support, sustain') describes the heart gripping the father's words like a hand gripping a lifeline.
5. The doubled imperative *qeneh* ('acquire, buy, purchase') treats wisdom and *binah* ('understanding') as commodities to be pursued and bought at any price. The verb *qanah* implies exchange — you must give something up to get wisdom. The grandfather's voice continues with urgency: forget nothing, deviate from nothing.
6. Wisdom (feminine in Hebrew) is again personified as a woman deserving loyalty. The reciprocal structure is important: do not abandon her — she will protect you; love her — she will guard you. The relationship between the wise person and wisdom mirrors a covenant bond: faithfulness produces protection.
7. The apparent circularity of 'the beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom' is not tautology but insistence. Wisdom begins with the resolve to seek it. Without that initial commitment, no amount of intelligence or opportunity will produce wisdom. The choice precedes the achievement.
8. The verb *salselehah* ('cherish, exalt, esteem highly') is rare and may derive from *salal* ('to heap up, to lift'). The imagery of embracing (*techabbeqannah*) wisdom continues the marital metaphor — wisdom is a partner to be held close, and she reciprocates with honor (*tekhhabedkha*, 'she will honor you, give you weight').
9. The grandfather's quoted speech ends with the image of wisdom crowning the faithful student. The *livyat chen* ('garland of grace') from 1:9 returns, now joined by *ateret tif'eret* ('crown of splendor, glorious crown'). Wisdom's reward is public honor — the crown is visible to the community.
10. The second speech begins with a return to the singular 'my son.' The promise of *shenot chayyim* ('years of life') connects back to 3:2 — long life is the consistent reward of heeding wisdom.
11. The father claims to have *horetikha* ('directed you, instructed you') — from *yarah*, the same root as *torah*. He has also *hidrakhttikha* ('led you, caused you to walk') in *ma'gele yosher* ('tracks of uprightness'). The *ma'gal* ('track, rut') is a worn path — the father has placed the son on well-established routes, not experimental ones.
12. Two speeds of travel — walking and running — are both covered by wisdom's protection. The verb *yetsar* ('be constricted, narrowed, hindered') describes a path too tight for normal movement. Wisdom clears the way so that even at full speed (*taruts*, 'you run'), there is no stumbling (*tikhashel*).
13. The imperative *hachazeg* ('hold fast, grip tightly') combined with *al teref* ('do not let go, do not relax your grip') conveys desperate urgency. The reason is absolute: *ki hi chayekha* ('for she is your life'). Discipline is not supplementary to life; it is life itself. Without it, the son dies.

14. The negative commands mirror the positive ones: just as the son was guided onto straight paths (v11), he must now refuse the orach resha'im ('path of the wicked') and derekh ra'im ('way of evil men'). The verb te'asher ('step forward, walk, proceed') is from the same root as ashre ('fortunate') — there is no fortune on this road.
15. Four imperatives in rapid succession: pera'ehu ('avoid it, let it alone'), al ta'avor bo ('do not pass through it'), seteh me'alav ('turn aside from it'), and avor ('pass on, go your way'). The staccato commands convey urgency — do not linger near this road, do not even slow down to look at it.
16. The wicked suffer from an inverted insomnia: they cannot rest until they have done evil. Their shnatam ('their sleep') is nigzelah ('robbed, stolen') unless they have caused someone to yakhshilu ('stumble, fall'). Evil has become their sedative. The verse diagnoses a condition — addiction to malice — that makes the wicked perpetual threats to others.
17. Wickedness and violence have become their daily sustenance — lechem resha ('bread of wickedness') and yen chamasim ('wine of violence'). The food metaphor implies that evil nourishes them the way bread and wine nourish the body. They feed on harm. The imagery inverts the normal provision of God, who gives bread and wine as blessings.
18. The phrase 'light of dawn' rather than 'shining light' preserves the temporal metaphor — this is not a spotlight but a sunrise, a process that unfolds over time. The righteous life is not static but dynamic, not a fixed state but a trajectory.
19. The contrast is devastating. Against the crescendo of dawn light stands afelah ('deep darkness, thick gloom') — not ordinary night but impenetrable blackness. The final clause is the most damning: lo yade'u bammeh yikkashelu ('they do not know what they stumble over'). The wicked do not merely fall; they fall without understanding why. Their ignorance of their own destruction is total. The darkness is not just around them but inside them.
20. The third speech begins with familiar imperative language: haqshivah ('pay attention') and hat oznekha ('incline your ear'). The body must cooperate — ears must be physically turned toward the speaker.
21. The words must not yallizu ('slip away, depart') from the eyes and must be kept betokh levavekha ('in the midst of your heart, at the center of your inner life'). The dual retention — visual and internal — means both constant attention and deep internalization.
22. The father's words are chayyim ('life') and marpe ('healing, remedy, cure') for all flesh. The claim is holistic: wisdom heals the entire person, body included. The connection between right living and physical health runs throughout Proverbs, reflecting the Hebrew integration of moral and physical well-being.
23. We render mikkol mishmar as 'above all that you guard' to preserve the comparative force of the Hebrew — the son is not told to guard his heart instead of other things but more than other things. The heart is the highest-priority asset in the wise person's security system.
23. The lev in Hebrew encompasses intellect, will, emotion, and moral judgment — it is the entire inner person. English 'heart' tends toward emotion only, which is too narrow. The Hebrew command is to guard the command center, not just the feelings.
24. From the heart (v23) to the mouth (v24): iqqeshut peh ('crookedness of mouth') and lezut sefatayim ('deviousness of lips') are the first expressions of a corrupted heart. The progression from heart to speech to eyes to feet (vv23-27) traces the outward flow of life from its source.
25. From speech to sight: the eyes (eynekha) must look lenokhach ('straight ahead, to what is in front') and the eyelids (af'appekha, used poetically for the gaze) must yayshiru ('be straight, be directed') negdekha ('before you, in front of you'). The command is for focused, undistracted vision — no sideways glances at the paths of the wicked.
26. The verb palles ('make level, weigh, ponder, prepare') has construction overtones — prepare the road before you walk it. The ma'gal raglekha ('track of your feet') must be leveled in advance. The result: kol derakhekha yikkonu ('all your ways will be established, firm, sure'). Deliberate preparation produces stable paths.
27. The chapter ends with the Deuteronomic formula: al tet yamin usmol ('do not turn right or left') — the identical instruction given to Israel regarding the Law (Deuteronomy 5:32, 17:11, 28:14) and to Joshua (Joshua 1:7). The son is to walk wisdom's path with the same unwavering directness demanded of Israel at Sinai. The final imperative — haser raglekha mera ('remove your foot from evil') — is physical: take your foot off that path. Now.

## 5

**Summary:** *Proverbs 5 is the first extended warning against the forbidden woman (ishah zarah), whom chapter 2 introduced briefly. The father warns his son that her lips drip honey but her end is bitter as wormwood (vv1-6). He commands the son to stay far from her door (vv7-14), then pivots dramatically to a celebration of marital love: 'Drink water from your own cistern' (vv15-20). The chapter closes with the theological declaration that God sees all paths and that the wicked are trapped by their own sins (vv21-23).*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The chapter's most striking feature is its pivot from warning to celebration. After fourteen verses of alarm about the forbidden woman, the father does not simply say 'avoid adultery.' Instead, he offers a positive alternative that is frankly erotic: 'Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be intoxicated always with her love' (v19). Proverbs does not treat sexual desire as the enemy — it treats misdirected sexual desire as the enemy. The answer to the forbidden woman is not abstinence but the right woman. The water imagery of verses 15-18 (cistern, well, springs, streams) is deliberately ambiguous, functioning simultaneously as metaphor for sexual pleasure and for the exclusive, life-giving nature of faithful marriage. The 'spreading springs in the streets' of verse 16 may be a warning against scattering one's intimacy publicly rather than reserving it for one's own household.*

**Translation Friction:** *The chapter's focus on the male perspective — warning a son about a dangerous woman — can feel one-sided. No corresponding warning is given from a mother to a daughter about dangerous men. This reflects the patriarchal context of the text's composition, not a theological endorsement of the imbalance. Additionally, the forbidden woman is presented primarily as a threat to the man, with little attention to her own exploitation or suffering. Modern readers will want to read against the grain here, recognizing that the 'forbidden woman' is also a person with a story the text does not tell.*

**Connections:** *The honey-and-wormwood contrast (vv3-4) echoes the Song of Solomon's celebration of erotic love (Song 4:11, 'your lips drip honey') while inverting it — what Song celebrates as beautiful within commitment, Proverbs marks as lethal outside it. The water/cistern/well imagery connects to Song 4:12-15, where the beloved is a 'garden locked, a fountain sealed.' The theological conclusion (vv21-23) echoes Job 34:21 ('God's eyes are on the ways of a person') and anticipates Hebrews 4:13 ('nothing is hidden from His sight').*

<sup>1</sup>My son, pay attention to my wisdom;  
incline your ear to my understanding,  
  
<sup>2</sup>so that you may preserve foresight  
and your lips may guard knowledge.  
  
<sup>3</sup>For the lips of the forbidden woman drip honey,  
and her mouth is smoother than oil,  
  
<sup>4</sup>but her end tastes bitter as wormwood,  
sharp as a double-edged sword.  
  
<sup>5</sup>Her feet descend toward death;  
her steps take hold of Sheol.  
  
<sup>6</sup>She does not ponder the path of life;  
her ways wander, and she does not know it.  
  
<sup>7</sup>So now, sons, listen to me,  
and do not turn aside from the words of my mouth.

<sup>8</sup>Keep your way far from her;  
do not go near the door of her house,  
<sup>9</sup>or you will give your vigor to others  
and your years to the merciless,  
<sup>10</sup>or strangers will feast on your strength  
and your toil will end up in a foreigner's house,  
<sup>11</sup>and you will groan at the end,  
when your flesh and body are consumed,  
<sup>12</sup>and you will say, 'How I hated discipline!  
How my heart despised correction!  
<sup>13</sup>I did not listen to the voice of my teachers  
or incline my ear to my instructors.  
<sup>14</sup>I was on the verge of complete ruin  
in the midst of the gathered assembly.'  
<sup>15</sup>Drink water from your own cistern,  
flowing water from your own well.  
<sup>16</sup>Should your springs overflow into the street,  
your streams of water into the public squares?  
<sup>17</sup>Let them be for you alone,  
and not for strangers alongside you.  
<sup>18</sup>Let your fountain be blessed,  
and take joy in the wife of your youth —  
<sup>19</sup>a graceful doe, a lovely deer.  
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;  
be intoxicated always by her love.  
<sup>20</sup>Why then, my son, would you be intoxicated by a forbidden woman  
and embrace the bosom of an outsider?  
<sup>21</sup>For a person's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,  
and He weighs all their paths.  
<sup>22</sup>The wicked person's own iniquities will trap him,  
and he will be held fast by the ropes of his sin.  
<sup>23</sup>He will die for lack of discipline,  
and in the magnitude of his folly he will go astray.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. The father claims the wisdom as his own — *chokhmatai* ('my wisdom') and *tevnati* ('my understanding'). He does not present himself as merely relaying tradition but as one who has internalized it and now speaks from experience.

2. Mezimot ('foresight, discretion, plans') must be guarded, and the lips must preserve da'at ('knowledge'). The mention of lips anticipates the chapter's theme: the forbidden woman's lips drip honey (v3), and the son's own lips must guard what is true rather than swallow what is sweet but deadly.
3. The same word nofet ('dripping honey') appears in Song of Solomon 4:11 as a celebration: 'Your lips drip honey, my bride.' The identical language used positively in Song and negatively in Proverbs shows that the issue is not the sweetness itself but whether it belongs to a context of covenant faithfulness or covenant betrayal.
4. The acharitah ('her end, her outcome, her afterward') — the part you experience after the honey — is marah ka-la'anah ('bitter as wormwood'). La'anah (*Artemisia absinthium*) is the bitterest plant known in the region, used metaphorically throughout Scripture for the most extreme bitterness (Lamentations 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7). Her end is also chaddah ke-cherev piyyot ('sharp as a two-edged sword'). The sword piyyot ('of mouths') has edges on both sides — it cuts coming and going. From honey to wormwood, from oil to a blade: the trajectory of the forbidden woman's allure.
5. The downward geography from 2:18 returns: ragleiha yordot mavet ('her feet descend to death') and she'ol tse'adeiha yitmokhu ('her steps grip Sheol'). The verb yitmokhu ('take hold, grasp, support') means her steps are anchored in Sheol — she is not sliding toward death but walking steadily into it, and taking her companions with her.
6. The verse is ambiguous in Hebrew — the subject could be the forbidden woman or the young man she seduces. We read it as describing the woman herself: she does not palles ('make level, ponder, weigh') the orach chayyim ('path of life'). Her ma'geloteiha ('her tracks, her paths') na'u ('wander, stagger, sway'). The final lo teda ('she does not know') is devastating — she is unaware of her own wandering, stumbling in the same darkness as the wicked in 4:19.
7. The shift to plural banim ('sons') broadens the audience. The urgency of ve-attah ('and now, so then') marks the transition from description to direct command.
8. The command is geographic: harcheq ('make distant, keep far') your path from hers, and al tiqrav ('do not draw near') the petach beith ('entrance of her house'). Proximity is the precondition for sin — the father does not trust the son's resolve at close range. Distance is the strategy.
9. Hodekha ('your splendor, your vigor, your prime') given to acherim ('others, strangers') and shenoteykha ('your years') given to the akhzari ('the cruel, the merciless'). The consequences of sexual infidelity are not merely moral but economic and physical — the adulterer's best years and energy are consumed by those who have no loyalty to him.
10. The economic devastation continues: zarim ('strangers') will yisbe'u ('be satisfied, feast on') your koach ('strength, wealth, substance') and your atsavakha ('your toil, your painful labor') will enrich beit nokhri ('the house of a foreigner'). Adultery is not a private indulgence but a wealth transfer to those who do not love you.
11. The verb nahamta ('you will groan, roar, moan') describes anguished regret. The timing is be-acharitekha ('at your end, in your final days') — when the consequences have fully matured. The consumption of basar ('flesh') and she'er ('body, kin, flesh') may refer to disease, poverty, or simply the physical devastation that accompanies a wasted life.
12. The imagined lament echoes the vocabulary of 1:7 — the fool despised (na'ats) musar and tokhachat. Now the son, in the aftermath of folly, recognizes his own resemblance to the fool he was warned about. Self-recognition arrives too late to prevent the consequences.
13. The moray ('my teachers') and melammeday ('my instructors') are plural — the education was not from one source but from a community of wisdom teachers. The repetition of the ear-inclining language from verse 1 creates painful irony: what the father asked the son to do, the son refused.
14. Kim'at ('almost, nearly, on the verge of') hayiti bekhlo ra ('I was in all evil') — the fool was nearly destroyed. The phrase betokh qahal ve-edah ('in the midst of the congregation and assembly') means his disgrace was public. The qahal and edah are the covenant community — his shame was witnessed by everyone who mattered.
15. The water/cistern/well imagery for sexual love appears also in Song of Solomon 4:12-15, where the beloved is 'a garden locked, a fountain sealed.' Both texts use water as a symbol of intimate exclusivity.
16. This verse is best read as a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer: should your ma'yenotekha ('your springs, your fountains') — your procreative and intimate life — be scattered chutsah ('outside, in the street')? The barrechovot ('in the public squares') intensifies the exposure. The answer is implied: no, keep your water — your intimacy, your generative power — within your own household. Some interpreters read this as a positive wish for many children ('let your springs flow out'), but the context of sexual fidelity makes the rhetorical question reading more coherent.
17. The exclusivity is absolute: lekha levaddekha ('for you alone') and ve-ein lezarim ittakh ('and not for strangers with you'). The zarim ('strangers') are outsiders to the marriage covenant. The water — the intimacy, the children, the life — belongs within the marriage, shared with no one else.
18. Meqorekha ('your fountain, your source') barukh ('blessed') — the father pronounces blessing on the son's sexual life within marriage. The imperative usemach ('and rejoice, and take joy') me-eshet ne'urekha ('from the wife of your youth') makes marital joy a command, not merely a permission. The 'wife of your youth' is the one married in young adulthood — the original covenant partner.
19. The verb shagah ('be intoxicated, go astray, reel') is the same verb used in verse 20 for going astray with the forbidden woman. The deliberate reuse is the theological key to the chapter: erotic intoxication is not the problem. The question is only: with whom?

20. The same verb *tishgeh* ('be intoxicated, go astray') from verse 19 now applies to the *zarah* ('forbidden woman'). The rhetorical question is devastating: given what you have at home, why would you seek intoxication elsewhere? The word *cheq* ('bosom, lap, embrace') makes the alternative graphic and personal.
21. The theological ground beneath the entire chapter: *nokhach eyne YHWH* ('directly before the eyes of the LORD') are *darkhe ish* ('the ways of a man'). Nothing is hidden. The verb *mefalles* ('He weighs, He makes level, He examines') describes God's scrutiny as precise and thoroughgoing. The word that described human preparation of paths (4:26) now describes God's examination of them.
22. The punishment is self-inflicted: *avonothav* ('his own iniquities') *yilkedunu* ('will capture him, will trap him'). The word *chavle* ('ropes, cords') of his *chatta'to* ('his sin') describes sin as a binding agent. The wicked are not punished by an external force but ensnared by their own actions — the ropes they wove for others become the ropes that bind them.
23. The chapter ends with the same verb: *yishgeh* ('he will go astray, he will stagger'). In verse 19, intoxication with the wife was commanded; in verse 20, intoxication with the forbidden woman was questioned; in verse 23, the fool staggers to death in his own *ivvalto* ('folly, foolishness'). The three uses of *shagah* trace the arc of the chapter: right intoxication, wrong intoxication, fatal intoxication. Death comes *be-ein musar* ('for lack of discipline, without correction') — the *musar* he refused in verse 12 was the one thing that could have saved him.

## 6

**Summary:** *Proverbs 6 is the most topically diverse chapter in the book's first nine chapters, addressing four distinct subjects: the danger of guaranteeing a neighbor's debt (vv1-5), the lesson of the ant for the sluggard (vv6-11), the profile of the worthless troublemaker (vv12-15), the seven things the LORD detests (vv16-19), and a renewed warning against adultery (vv20-35). The chapter reads like a wisdom handbook, moving from financial prudence to work ethic to character assessment to moral absolutes to sexual fidelity.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The numerical proverb in verses 16-19 — 'six things the LORD hates, seven are detestable to Him' — is among the most theologically compressed passages in the Hebrew Bible. The ascending number pattern (six... seven) is a common ancient Near Eastern rhetorical device that signals the final item as the climax. The list moves from body parts to social effects: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that rush to evil, a false witness, and the one who sows discord among brothers. The climax is not violence or lying but the fracturing of community. For Proverbs, nothing is worse than destroying the unity of brothers. The ant passage (vv6-11) is notable for its implicit theology: the ant needs no commander, overseer, or ruler — it acts from internal wisdom. The sluggard, by contrast, has been given instruction and still refuses to act.*

**Translation Friction:** *The surety passage (vv1-5) reflects an economic context where personal guarantees could result in debt slavery. The advice to extract yourself immediately — 'like a gazelle from a hunter's hand' — may seem harsh toward the neighbor whose debt you guaranteed, but in the ancient world, financial overcommitment could destroy an entire household. The adultery passage (vv25-35) focuses almost entirely on the consequences for the male adulterer, including the jealous husband's rage. The woman is described primarily as a temptation, and the offended husband's fury is presented without critique. The text assumes a patriarchal legal framework in which adultery is primarily an offense against another man's household.*

**Connections:** *The 'seven detestable things' list connects to the broader biblical pattern of numbered proverbs (Proverbs 30:15-31, Amos 1-2). The ant imagery has parallels in Egyptian wisdom literature. The adultery warning (vv20-35) extends the theme from chapter 5 and sets up the dramatic narrative of chapter 7. The body-parts progression in verses 16-19 (eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet) connects to the body-parts instruction in 4:23-27 (heart, mouth, eyes, feet).*

<sup>1</sup>My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,  
if you have pledged yourself to a stranger with a handshake,

<sup>2</sup>you have been snared by the words of your mouth,  
caught by the words of your mouth.

<sup>3</sup>Do this then, my son, and free yourself,  
for you have fallen into your neighbor's hand:  
go, humble yourself, and press your neighbor urgently.

<sup>4</sup>Do not give sleep to your eyes  
or slumber to your eyelids.

<sup>5</sup>Free yourself like a gazelle from a hunter's hand,  
like a bird from the fowler's grip.

<sup>6</sup>Go to the ant, you sluggard;  
observe her ways and become wise.

<sup>7</sup>She has no commander,  
no overseer, and no ruler,

<sup>8</sup>yet she prepares her food in summer  
and gathers her provisions at harvest.

<sup>9</sup>How long will you lie there, sluggard?  
When will you rise from your sleep?

<sup>10</sup>'A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest' —

<sup>11</sup>and poverty will come upon you like a prowler,  
and your need like an armed man.

<sup>12</sup>A worthless person, a wicked man,  
goes about with crooked speech.

<sup>13</sup>He winks with his eyes,  
signals with his feet,  
points with his fingers.

<sup>14</sup>Perversity fills his heart;  
he devises evil at all times  
and sows discord.

<sup>15</sup>Therefore disaster will come on him suddenly;  
in an instant he will be shattered beyond healing.

<sup>16</sup>Six things the LORD hates;  
seven are detestable to Him:

<sup>17</sup>haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
and hands that shed innocent blood,

<sup>18</sup>a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
feet that rush to run toward evil,

- <sup>19</sup>a false witness who breathes out lies,  
and one who sows discord among brothers.
- <sup>20</sup>Guard, my son, your father's command,  
and do not forsake your mother's instruction.
- <sup>21</sup>Bind them on your heart continually;  
tie them around your neck.
- <sup>22</sup>When you walk, it will lead you;  
when you lie down, it will watch over you;  
and when you wake, it will speak with you.
- <sup>23</sup>For the command is a lamp and instruction is a light,  
and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life —
- <sup>24</sup>to guard you from the evil woman,  
from the smooth tongue of the outsider.
- <sup>25</sup>Do not desire her beauty in your heart,  
and do not let her capture you with her eyelids.
- <sup>26</sup>For a prostitute reduces a man to a loaf of bread,  
but a married woman hunts for a precious life.
- <sup>27</sup>Can a man carry fire against his chest  
without his clothes being burned?
- <sup>28</sup>Can a man walk on hot coals  
without scorching his feet?
- <sup>29</sup>So it is with the man who goes to his neighbor's wife;  
no one who touches her will go unpunished.
- <sup>30</sup>People do not despise a thief  
if he steals to fill his stomach when he is hungry,  
<sup>31</sup>but if caught, he must repay sevenfold;  
he must hand over all the wealth of his house.
- <sup>32</sup>But the one who commits adultery lacks sense;  
whoever does it destroys himself.
- <sup>33</sup>He will find wounds and disgrace,  
and his shame will not be wiped away.
- <sup>34</sup>For jealousy is a husband's fury,  
and he will show no mercy on the day of revenge.
- <sup>35</sup>He will not accept any compensation;  
he will not be willing, no matter how large the bribe.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aravta ('you have become surety, you have pledged') describes the act of guaranteeing another person's debt. Taqa'ta kappekha ('you have struck your hands') is the ancient equivalent of a handshake or contract — the physical gesture that seals a financial commitment. The urgency of what follows suggests that this pledge was impulsive and dangerous.
2. Noqashta ('you have been ensnared') and nilkadta ('you have been caught, captured') describe the pledge-maker as a trapped animal. The trap is imre fikha ('the words of your mouth') — your own speech has bound you. The repetition of the phrase emphasizes that the son's own words are the cage.
3. The escape plan requires two actions: hitrappes ('humble yourself, prostrate yourself, trample on your own pride') and rehav ('press urgently, storm, importune'). The first demands the surrender of dignity; the second demands aggressive persistence. Both are preferable to remaining trapped in a bad financial commitment.
4. The urgency forbids rest: no shenah ('sleep') and no tenumah ('slumber, dozing'). The financial trap must be resolved immediately — every hour of delay increases the danger.
5. The escape metaphors — tsevi ('gazelle') and tsippor ('bird') — emphasize speed and desperation. Both animals survive only by immediate, total flight. The yaqush ('fowler, bird-catcher') is the one who sets traps; the surety-giver has walked into one and must escape with the same urgency as prey fleeing a predator.
6. The atsel ('sluggard') is a distinctive Proverbs character who appears repeatedly (6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16). The sluggard is not merely tired but characterized by a particular kind of self-deception: always having a reason not to act.
7. Three terms of authority — qatsin ('commander, chief'), shoter ('overseer, officer'), and moshel ('ruler') — are absent from the ant's life. She needs no external management. The implied rebuke is sharp: the sluggard has father, teacher, and wisdom tradition — far more guidance than the ant — and still does less.
8. The ant's two actions — takhin ('she prepares, she establishes') in summer and agrah ('she gathers, she stores') at harvest — demonstrate foresight. She works when conditions allow in order to survive when they do not. The sluggard fails precisely at this point: he cannot connect present effort to future need.
9. The ad matay ('how long?') directed at the sluggard echoes Wisdom's own ad matay in 1:22. The question implies that the sluggard's sleep is not rest but evasion — he lies in bed to avoid the demands of the day.
10. The sluggard's own voice appears in quotation: me'at shenot ('a little sleep'), me'at tenumot ('a little slumber'), me'at chibbuq yadayim ('a little folding of the hands'). The triple me'at ('a little, just a bit') is the sluggard's self-deception — each delay is small, but they accumulate into destruction. The charm of the passage is that the sluggard never asks for much; he just asks for it perpetually.
11. Poverty (reshekha, 'your poverty') arrives kimhalekh ('like a traveler, like a prowler') — it approaches gradually, on foot, then suddenly it is at the door. Need (machsorekha, 'your lack') arrives ke-ish magen ('like a man with a shield, like an armed man') — by then it is a warrior you cannot fight off. The progression from quiet approach to armed assault captures how poverty works: it creeps before it conquers.
12. Adam beliyya'al ('a person of worthlessness, a person of Belial') and ish aven ('a man of iniquity, a man of trouble'). Beliyya'al may derive from beli ('without') and ya'al ('profit, worth') — a person of no value. The troublemaker's primary tool is iqqeshut peh ('crookedness of mouth') — perverted, twisted speech.
13. Three body parts used for covert communication: eyes that qorets ('wink, pinch shut'), feet that molel ('scrape, shuffle, signal'), and fingers that moreh ('point, teach, direct'). The troublemaker communicates through a private language of gestures — he conspires in plain sight using signals his targets cannot read.
14. Tahpukhot ('perversities, things turned upside down') are in his lev ('heart') — the command center is corrupted. He choresh ra ('plows evil, devises harm') at all times and yeshalle'ach midyanim ('sends out, dispatches strife'). The verb shalach ('send') with midyanim ('conflicts, disputes') presents discord as something deliberately launched, not accidentally caused.
15. Pit'om ('suddenly') and peta ('in an instant') — the same suddenness the troublemaker used against others now strikes him. His eido ('his disaster, his calamity') arrives without warning, and he yisshaver ('will be shattered, broken') ve-ein marpe ('and there is no healing, no remedy'). The sowing of discord produces a harvest of irreversible destruction.
16. The ascending numerical pattern (x... x+1) is found throughout the ancient Near East, from Ugaritic poetry to Amos's oracles against the nations. It creates anticipation: the hearer knows the final item will be the most important.
17. The list begins with three body parts: eynayim ramot ('eyes that are high, haughty, arrogant'), leshon shaqer ('a tongue of falsehood'), and yadayim shofkhot dam naqi ('hands pouring out innocent blood'). Eyes, tongue, hands — perception, speech, action, each corrupted. The dam naqi ('innocent blood') echoes the gratuitous violence of 1:11.
18. The list continues with heart (lev choresh machshevot aven, 'a heart plowing wicked plans') and feet (raglayim memaharot laruts lara'ah, 'feet hastening to run to evil'). The inward source (heart devising) produces the outward result (feet running). The verb charah ('to plow, to devise') applied to the heart shows that evil is cultivated, not accidental.

19. The verb yafiach ('breathes out, blows') applied to lies makes falsehood involuntary and constant — the false witness does not decide to lie; he exhales lies. The placement of the discord-sower at the climax of a list that includes murder reveals Proverbs' communal priorities: fracturing brotherhood is worse than shedding blood.
20. The instruction from 1:8 returns nearly verbatim, reopening the parental instruction format for the adultery warning. The mother's torah stands in equal authority with the father's mitsvah.
21. The binding imagery from 3:3 continues the Deuteronomic echo (Deuteronomy 6:8). The instructions must be physically attached — tamid ('continually, always') — to the heart and neck. The repetition of this imagery throughout the opening chapters creates a cumulative insistence: wear wisdom like clothing.
22. Three life-moments — walking, sleeping, waking — are all covered by parental instruction personified. It tancheh ('will lead, will guide'), tishmor ('will guard, will watch over'), and tesichekha ('will speak with you, will converse with you'). The instruction becomes a companion that is never absent — a guide on the road, a guardian in sleep, a conversation partner at dawn.
23. Mitsvah as ner ('lamp') and torah as or ('light') connect to the dawn imagery of 4:18. Instruction illuminates what darkness hides. The tokhechot musar ('reproofs of discipline') — the corrections that hurt — are derekh chayyim ('the way of life'). The road to life runs through correction, not around it.
24. The lamp/light of instruction (v23) serves a specific protective function: guarding from the eshet ra ('evil woman, woman of harm') and from chelqat leshon nokhriyyah ('the smoothness of the tongue of the foreign woman'). The same chelqah ('smoothness') from 5:3 returns — her weapon is always her speech.
25. The verb tachmod ('desire, covet') is the same verb from the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17). The adultery warning is grounded in the Decalogue — to desire the forbidden woman is to covet. Her af'appeiha ('her eyelids,' poetic for her glances) are the instruments of capture. Desire begins in the heart (bilevavekha) before it reaches the body.
26. Two categories are distinguished: the ishah zonah ('prostitute') costs you economically — she reduces a man ad kikkar lachem ('to a round of bread,' that is, to poverty). But the eshet ish ('wife of a man, married woman') does something worse: she tatsud ('hunts, stalks') a nefesh yeqarah ('a precious life, a valuable soul'). The prostitute takes your money; the adulteress takes your life.
27. The first of two rhetorical questions with obvious answers. Fire (esh) against the cheq ('chest, bosom, lap') will burn the begadav ('his garments'). The question expects no answer because the answer is self-evident. Adultery is like carrying fire — the burning is not a possibility but a certainty.
28. The second question intensifies: gechalim ('hot coals, embers') under the raglav ('his feet'). The answer, again, is obvious. The fire metaphor makes adultery a question of physics, not merely morality — consequences follow as inevitably as burns follow fire.
29. The application is direct: haba el eshet re'ehu ('the one who goes to his neighbor's wife') will lo yinnaqeh ('not be held innocent, not go unpunished'). The verb naqah ('to be clean, to be innocent, to be acquitted') in the negative means there is no escape from consequences. Kol hanoge'a bah ('everyone who touches her') extends the warning to any degree of involvement.
30. A surprising comparison begins: theft from hunger receives understanding, not contempt. The lo yavuzu ('they do not despise') shows that the community recognizes the mitigating force of genuine need.
31. Even the understood thief faces consequences: shiv'atayim ('sevenfold') restitution, potentially kol hon beito ('all the wealth of his house'). The sevenfold payment exceeds the Mosaic requirement (Exodus 22:1-4 specifies four- or fivefold) and may represent a general idiom for complete restitution.
32. The comparison's point: theft from hunger is understandable but still costly. Adultery is not even understandable — it is chasar lev ('lacking heart, lacking sense'). There is no mitigating circumstance. The no'ef ('adulterer') is mashchit nafsho ('destroying his own soul, ruining himself'). The destruction is self-inflicted.
33. Nega ('wound, blow, plague') and qalon ('disgrace, shame') — physical and social consequences. The cherpato ('his reproach, his disgrace') lo timmacheh ('will not be blotted out, erased'). Unlike the thief who can repay and restore his standing, the adulterer's reputation is permanently damaged.
34. Qin'ah ('jealousy, zeal, passionate anger') is chamat gaver ('the rage of a man, a husband's fury'). The gaver is the offended husband whose wife has been taken. His jealousy will not yachmol ('show mercy, spare, have compassion') on the yom naqam ('day of vengeance, day of retribution'). The social consequences of adultery include facing the wrath of a man with every reason to destroy you.
35. Unlike the thief's debt, which can be repaid (v31), the adulterer's offense is beyond financial resolution. Lo yissa pene khol kofer ('he will not lift the face of any ransom') — no payment will satisfy the husband. Lo yoveh ki tarbeh shochad ('he will not consent though you multiply the bribe'). Money cannot purchase forgiveness for this offense. The adultery sequence ends where it began: with consequences that are as certain as fire and as inescapable as debt.

## 7

**Summary:** *Proverbs 7 is the dramatic climax of the forbidden-woman warnings that began in chapter 2. Cast as a first-person eyewitness account, the father describes watching from his window as a naive young man walks past the forbidden woman's house at dusk. She seizes him, kisses him, and delivers a carefully crafted seduction speech (vv14-20). He follows her 'like an ox going to slaughter.' The chapter ends with the father's urgent warning: her house is the road to Sheol.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter is the finest piece of narrative art in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. It moves from instruction (vv1-5) to observation (vv6-9) to character description (vv10-12) to direct speech (vv14-20) to metaphor (vv22-23) to warning (vv24-27). The pacing is cinematic — the father watches from above as the scene unfolds below, giving the reader a God's-eye view of a man walking into his own destruction. The forbidden woman's speech is brilliantly constructed: she begins with religion ('I have fulfilled my vow offerings,' v14), moves to flattery ('I came out to meet you,' v15), then to sensory enticement (perfumed bed, v17), then to the crucial reassurance ('my husband is away,' vv19-20). Every element of her pitch removes one layer of the young man's resistance. Her religious language is particularly chilling — she weaponizes piety to lower his moral guard.*

**Translation Friction:** *The narrative presents the young man as a passive victim and the woman as the sole aggressor, which oversimplifies the dynamics of sexual temptation. The text does not explore the man's desire, his own complicity, or the social conditions that may have led the woman to her current situation. The focus is entirely on her predatory agency and his naive vulnerability. The description of the woman as 'dressed like a prostitute' (v10) raises questions about the text's attitude toward women's self-presentation that modern readers will want to examine critically.*

**Connections:** *The scene at dusk (v9) connects to the light/darkness imagery of 4:18-19 — the young man literally enters the darkness. The forbidden woman's speech is the negative counterpart to Woman Wisdom's speech in chapters 1 and 8: both speak publicly, both make promises, both invite the hearer to follow. The ox-to-slaughter metaphor (v22) echoes Isaiah 53:7 ('like a lamb led to slaughter') but with opposite theological valence — here the one led to slaughter is guilty, not innocent. The house-to-Sheol identification (v27) makes the forbidden woman's home an anti-temple, descending to death rather than ascending to God.*

- <sup>1</sup>My son, keep my words  
and treasure my commands within you.
- <sup>2</sup>Keep my commands and live;  
guard my instruction like the pupil of your eye.
- <sup>3</sup>Bind them on your fingers;  
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- <sup>4</sup>Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,'  
and call understanding your close relative,
- <sup>5</sup>to guard you from the forbidden woman,  
from the outsider who makes her words smooth.
- <sup>6</sup>For at the window of my house,  
through my lattice, I looked down,
- <sup>7</sup>and I observed among the naive —  
I noticed among the young men —

a youth who lacked sense.

<sup>8</sup>passing through the street near her corner,  
walking toward her house,

<sup>9</sup>at twilight, as evening fell,  
in the darkness of deepening night.

<sup>10</sup>And there — a woman comes to meet him,  
dressed as a prostitute, with a guarded heart.

<sup>11</sup>She is loud and brazen;  
her feet never stay at home.

<sup>12</sup>Now in the street, now in the squares,  
lurking at every corner.

<sup>13</sup>She seizes him and kisses him;  
with a brazen face she says to him,

<sup>14</sup>'I had to offer fellowship sacrifices;  
today I fulfilled my vows.

<sup>15</sup>So I came out to meet you,  
to seek your face eagerly — and I have found you!

<sup>16</sup>I have spread my couch with coverings,  
with colored linens from Egypt.

<sup>17</sup>I have scented my bed  
with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

<sup>18</sup>Come, let us drink deeply of love until morning;  
let us delight ourselves with passion.

<sup>19</sup>For my husband is not at home;  
he has gone on a distant journey.

<sup>20</sup>He took a bag of silver with him;  
he will not return until the full moon.'

<sup>21</sup>She sways him with her abundant persuasion;  
with the smoothness of her lips she pushes him over.

<sup>22</sup>He follows her at once,  
like an ox going to the slaughter,

<sup>23</sup>like a deer stepping into a noose  
until an arrow pierces its liver,  
like a bird rushing into a trap,  
not knowing it will cost him his life.

**24** So now, sons, listen to me;  
pay attention to the words of my mouth.

**25** Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways;  
do not stray onto her paths.

**26** For many are the victims she has brought down;  
numerous are all those she has killed.

**27** Her house is the road to Sheol,  
descending to the chambers of death.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening echoes 2:1 almost exactly — the same verbs (shamar, tsaphan) and the same structure. The repetition creates a literary frame: each major section of instruction begins with the same demand for attentive reception.
2. The ke-ishon eynekha ('like the pupil of your eye, like the little man of your eye') — the ishon is the dark center of the eye, the most sensitive and carefully guarded part of the body. The idiom means 'guard it as you would guard your own sight.' Instruction is as essential as vision.
3. The finger-binding and heart-inscription imagery continues the Deuteronomic tradition (Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18). The fingers suggest that every action (what the hands do) should be governed by instruction. The luach lev ('tablet of the heart') anticipates Jeremiah 31:33 and 2 Corinthians 3:3.
4. Wisdom as achoti ('my sister') and understanding as moda ('close relative, intimate friend, kinswoman'). In Song of Solomon 4:9-10, the beloved is called 'my sister, my bride' — the term implies both intimacy and protection. Making wisdom a family member means she belongs in your household permanently.
5. The purpose of the sister-relationship with wisdom: protection from the islah zarah and the nokhriyyah whose speech is hecheliqah ('she has made smooth, she has flattered'). The same language from 2:16 and 5:3 returns — the forbidden woman is always identified first by her smooth speech.
6. The narrative begins. The father positions himself be-challon beiti ('at the window of my house'), peering through the eshnab ('lattice, window grille'). The elevated position gives him the perspective the young man below lacks. The word nishqafti ('I looked down, I gazed out') emphasizes the downward angle — the father sees what is about to happen from above.
7. Among the petayim ('naive ones') the father spots a na'ar chasar lev ('a young man lacking heart/sense'). The chasar lev ('lacking heart') identifies him as someone without the internal command center needed to resist temptation. He is not wicked but empty — a vessel waiting to be filled by whatever voice reaches him first.
8. The young man's route is not accidental: he is over bashuq ('passing through the market street') etsel pinnah ('near her corner') and derekh beita yits'ad ('stepping toward her house'). The verbs suggest deliberate movement — he may not intend the final outcome, but he has chosen the geography that makes it possible.
9. The four-fold descent into darkness mirrors the four-fold descent of Psalm 1's wicked man (walking, standing, sitting). Each time marker is darker than the last. The young man is not ambushed by night; he walks into it voluntarily.
10. Vehinneh ('and behold!') signals dramatic appearance. She wears shit zonah ('the clothing of a prostitute') — attire that signals sexual availability. But her heart is netsurath lev ('guarded, hidden, secretive'). Her body is displayed; her intentions are concealed. The contrast between external openness and internal secrecy defines her method: she shows everything except what she actually wants.
11. Homiyyah ('noisy, turbulent, boisterous') and sorareth ('stubborn, rebellious, defiant') describe her public persona. Her ragleiha ('her feet') lo yishkenu ('do not settle, do not dwell') in her house. She is constantly in motion, constantly in public — the opposite of the wife who is celebrated in Proverbs 31 for the productivity of her household.
12. The pa'am... pa'am ('now... now') construction conveys restless movement. She is ba-chuts ('outside'), ba-rechovot ('in the broad places'), and te'erov ('she lies in ambush') at every pinnah ('corner'). The verb arav ('to ambush, to lie in wait') is the same word used for the sinners in 1:11 who ambush the innocent. She is a hunter.
13. Three rapid actions: hecheziqah bo ('she grabs him, she seizes him'), nashqah lo ('she kisses him'), and he'ezah paneiha ('she makes her face bold, she puts on a brazen expression'). The initiative is entirely hers. The verbs convey physical aggression — she is not waiting to be approached but actively capturing her prey.
14. Her seduction opens with piety. Zivche shelamim ('fellowship offerings, peace offerings') were the only sacrifices in which the worshiper ate a portion of the meat (Leviticus 7:15-16). Fulfilling nedarim ('vows') demonstrates religious devotion. Her opening gambit is to present herself as a faithful, devout woman who has just come from worship. The meat from the offering must be eaten that day — so she has a legitimate reason to invite a guest to dinner. Religion becomes the cover story for adultery.

15. The flattery begins: yatsati liqrakekha ('I came out to meet you') — you are the specific person I was looking for. Leshachar panekha ('to seek your face eagerly') uses shachar ('to seek at dawn, to seek earnestly') — the same verb used for seeking God in prayer. She applies the language of devotion to the act of seduction. Va'emtsa'ekka ('and I have found you!') — the exclamation implies that finding him is an answer to her search, making him feel uniquely desired.
16. The sensory enticement shifts to touch and sight: marvaddim ('coverings, spreads, tapestries') on the eres ('couch, bed'), made of chatuvot etun mitsrayim ('embroidered/colored Egyptian linen'). Egyptian linen was the luxury fabric of the ancient world. Her bed is not merely comfortable but extravagant — a display of wealth that implies status and sophistication.
17. From sight to smell: nafti ('I have sprinkled, I have scented') the mishkav ('bed, lying-place') with mor ('myrrh'), ahalim ('aloes, aloeswood'), and qinnamon ('cinnamon'). All three are luxury aromatics that appear in Song of Solomon (4:14) as expressions of erotic love. She has prepared a complete sensory environment designed to overwhelm resistance.
18. Lekhah ('come!') is the invitation. Nirveh dodim ('let us drink our fill of loves') uses the same ravah ('to be saturated, to drink deeply') from 5:19 where the father urged the son to be satisfied with his wife's love. The forbidden woman co-opts the language of legitimate marital passion. Nit'allesa ba'ohavim ('let us take pleasure in lovemaking') uses the hithpael of alas ('to exult, to enjoy'), expressing mutual indulgence. Her pitch is not merely physical but promises emotional connection.
19. The final barrier removed: ha-ish ('the man, the husband') is not beveito ('in his house'). She says halakh bederekh merachok ('he has gone on a far road') — not just away but far away. The information is strategically placed: after religion (v14), flattery (v15), luxury (vv16-17), and erotic promise (v18), she addresses the last concern — getting caught. The husband is removed. The coast is clear.
20. The silver bag indicates a commercial journey. The leyom hakkese ('at the time of the full moon') specifies his return date — the full moon is approximately two weeks away. The information is precise: there is not merely time but measured, guaranteed time. The young man can calculate his safety margin. Every detail of her speech is designed to make saying yes feel rational.
21. The irony of leqach ('teaching') applied to the forbidden woman's speech is sharp. She is, in her own way, a skilled instructor — but her curriculum leads to death. The young man chose the wrong teacher.
22. Holekh achareiha pit'om ('he walks after her suddenly, immediately') — the decision is instant once his resistance breaks. The simile ke-shor el tavach yavo ('like an ox coming to the slaughter') reduces the young man to livestock. The ox does not know what the slaughterhouse is; the young man does not know what the forbidden woman's house is. Both walk willingly into death.
23. The animal metaphors multiply: the arrow (chets) piercing the kevedo ('his liver') — the liver was considered a vital organ, and an arrow through it meant certain death. The tsippor ('bird') rushing el pach ('into a trap, into a snare') mirrors 1:17 where the bird sees the net and avoids it — this bird does not see. The final clause is the diagnosis: velo yada ki venafsho hu ('and he did not know that it concerned his life, his soul'). Ignorance is the killer. He did not know what he was walking into.
24. The narrative ends and the father draws the lesson. The plural banim ('sons') returns — this story was told for every young man, not just one. The ve-attah ('and now') signals the urgent conclusion.
25. Al yeset ('do not let it turn aside') — the heart (lev) must be held back from deviating toward her. Al teta ('do not wander, do not stray') on her netivoteiha ('her paths'). The guard-your-heart command of 4:23 finds its specific application here: the heart that is not guarded will drift toward the forbidden woman.
26. Rabbim chalalim hippilah ('many wounded/slain she has felled') and atsumim kol harugeha ('mighty/numerous are all her slain'). The vocabulary is military — chalalim ('pierced ones, casualties') and harugeha ('her slain, her killed') are battlefield terms. The forbidden woman's house is not a bedroom but a battlefield, and the casualties are measured in the same language as war dead.
27. The chapter's final image: darkhe she'ol beitah ('roads to Sheol is her house') — her house is not merely near Sheol but is Sheol's access road. The yordot el chadre mavet ('descending to the chambers of death') describes rooms within death's domain. The forbidden woman's bedroom is a chamber of death. The young man who entered her door has entered Sheol's gate.

## 8

*Summary: Proverbs 8 is Woman Wisdom's greatest speech — her magnum opus. She speaks in three movements: her public proclamation and moral credentials (vv1-21), her pre-existence and role in creation (vv22-31), and her final appeal (vv32-36). This is the theological summit of the book's first nine chapters. Wisdom is not merely good advice; she was present before the world was made, and she was the craftsman at God's side when He set the foundations of the earth.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The cosmological hymn in verses 22-31 is one of the most theologically significant passages in the entire Hebrew Bible. Wisdom declares: 'The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His acts of old. From eternity I was set up, from the beginning, before the earth existed' (vv22-23). She was present when God established the heavens, drew the horizon on the face of the deep, set the fountains of the deep, decreed the boundaries of the sea, and marked out the foundations of the earth. Verse 30 then makes the astounding claim: 'I was beside Him as a master craftsman, and I was His delight day after day, playing before Him at all times.' The word amon ('master craftsman' or 'nursling, darling') is debated, but either reading is remarkable — Wisdom was either God's co-worker in creation or God's beloved child, playing in His presence. The image of Wisdom 'playing' (mesachaqet) before God introduces joy, delight, and even playfulness into the creation account. God did not create grimly; He created joyfully, with Wisdom dancing at His side.*

**Translation Friction:** *The key theological question: is Wisdom a divine attribute, a separate being, a literary personification, or a proto-hypostasis? The text does not resolve this. Early Christianity read Proverbs 8 christologically (Christ as the pre-existent Wisdom of God), as reflected in John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-17. The Arian controversy of the 4th century focused intensely on verse 22: does 'the LORD possessed/created me' mean Wisdom (and therefore Christ) is a created being? The verb qanah can mean 'to create,' 'to acquire,' 'to possess,' or 'to beget' — each option carries different theological implications. The Hebrew text is genuinely ambiguous, and the ambiguity has fueled centuries of debate.*

**Connections:** *Proverbs 8:22-31 is the primary background text for John 1:1-3 ('In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God'), Colossians 1:15-17 ('He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation'), and Hebrews 1:2 ('through whom He made the world'). The creation imagery parallels Job 38 (God laying the earth's foundation, setting the sea's boundaries) and Genesis 1 (ordering the waters, establishing the heavens). Sirach 24 and Wisdom of Solomon 7-9 both expand on Proverbs 8's portrait of personified wisdom. The 'fear of the LORD' refrain in verse 13 ties back to 1:7 and forward to 9:10.*

<sup>1</sup>Does not wisdom call out?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

<sup>2</sup>On the heights beside the road,  
at the crossroads, she takes her stand.

<sup>3</sup>Beside the gates, at the entrance to the city,  
at the approach of the doorways, she cries aloud:

<sup>4</sup>To you, O people, I call,  
and my voice reaches out to all humanity.

<sup>5</sup>Learn shrewdness, you naive ones;  
you fools, gain sense.

<sup>6</sup>Listen, for I speak of noble things,  
and from my lips come what is right.

<sup>7</sup>For my mouth utters truth,  
and wickedness is detestable to my lips.

<sup>8</sup>All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
none of them are twisted or crooked.

<sup>9</sup>They are all straightforward to the one who understands,  
and right to those who have found knowledge.

<sup>10</sup>Receive my discipline rather than silver,  
and knowledge rather than finest gold.

<sup>11</sup>For wisdom is better than corals,  
and no treasure can compare with her.

<sup>12</sup>I, Wisdom, dwell with shrewdness,  
and I possess knowledge and foresight.

<sup>13</sup>The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.  
Pride and arrogance and the evil way  
and the mouth of perversity — I hate.

<sup>14</sup>Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;  
I am understanding; strength belongs to me.

<sup>15</sup>By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just.

<sup>16</sup>By me officials govern,  
and nobles — all who judge rightly.

<sup>17</sup>I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.

<sup>18</sup>Riches and honor are with me,  
enduring wealth and righteousness.

<sup>19</sup>My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.

<sup>20</sup>I walk in the path of righteousness,  
in the midst of the paths of justice,

<sup>21</sup>granting substance to those who love me  
and filling their treasuries.

<sup>22</sup>The LORD brought me forth as the first of His way,  
before His works of old.

<sup>23</sup>From eternity I was appointed,  
from the beginning, before the earth existed.

<sup>24</sup>When there were no ocean depths, I was brought forth;  
when there were no springs heavy with water.

<sup>25</sup>Before the mountains were sunk into place,  
before the hills, I was brought forth —

<sup>26</sup>before He had made the earth or the fields,  
or the first dust of the world.

<sup>27</sup>When He established the heavens, I was there;  
when He inscribed the horizon on the face of the deep,

<sup>28</sup>when He made firm the skies above,  
when He established the fountains of the deep,

<sup>29</sup>when He set a boundary for the sea  
so that the waters would not transgress His command,  
when He marked out the foundations of the earth —

<sup>30</sup>then I was beside Him as a master craftsman.  
I was His delight day after day,  
playing in His presence at all times,

<sup>31</sup>playing in His inhabited world,  
and my delight was with the children of humanity.

<sup>32</sup>So now, children, listen to me:  
how fortunate are those who keep my ways!

<sup>33</sup>Hear discipline and become wise;  
do not neglect it.

<sup>34</sup>How fortunate is the person who listens to me,  
watching daily at my gates,  
waiting beside my doorposts.

<sup>35</sup>For whoever finds me finds life  
and obtains favor from the LORD.

<sup>36</sup>But whoever misses me harms himself;  
all who hate me love death.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The rhetorical question expects an emphatic 'Yes!' Wisdom is already calling — the question is whether anyone is listening. The parallel between *chokmah* ('wisdom') and *tevunah* ('understanding') establishes them as aspects of the same reality. The verbs *tiqra* ('calls out') and *titten qolah* ('gives her voice') echo 1:20-21, framing chapters 1-9 with Wisdom's public proclamation.
2. Wisdom stations herself at the *rosh meromim* ('top of the heights') and *bet netivot* ('the meeting-place of paths, the crossroads'). She chooses the places of maximum visibility and decision — where travelers must choose which direction to go. Her position is strategic: she speaks where choices are made.
3. Three locations converge: *she'arim* ('gates,' the legal and commercial center), *pi qaret* ('the mouth of the city, the entrance'), and *mevo petachim* ('the approach of the doorways'). She is everywhere public life happens. Unlike the forbidden woman who lurks at corners in darkness (7:12), Wisdom stands openly at the most visible, most public locations.
4. The address is universal: *ishim* ('men, people') and *bene adam* ('sons of Adam, human beings'). Wisdom is not speaking to Israel alone but to all humanity. Her claim is cosmic, not tribal.
5. Wisdom addresses the *petayim* ('naive') and *kesilim* ('fools') directly. She does not write them off but offers them what they lack: *ormah* ('shrewdness, cunning') and *lev* ('heart, sense'). She provides the very thing the young man in chapter 7 was missing — *chasar lev* ('lacking heart').
6. *Negidim* ('noble things, princely things, things worthy of rulers') and *mesharim* ('right things, upright things, equitable things'). Wisdom's speech content matches her authority — she does not gossip or deceive but speaks what is worthy and straight.
7. *Emet* ('truth, reliability, faithfulness') is what Wisdom's *chikki* ('palate, mouth') *yehgeh* ('murmurs, meditates, utters'). Wickedness is *to'avat sefatay* ('an abomination to my lips'). The contrast with the forbidden woman is total: her mouth drips honey that leads to wormwood; Wisdom's mouth

speaks truth that leads to life.

8. Be-tsedek ('in righteousness') qualifies every word (kol imre pi, 'all the words of my mouth'). There is nothing niftal ('twisted, tortuous') or iqqesh ('crooked, perverted') in them. The absence of crookedness is the defining marker: the forbidden woman's speech was smooth; Wisdom's speech is straight.
9. Wisdom's words are nekhochim ('straight, plain, right') to the mevin ('one who discerns') and yesharim ('upright, right') to those who have already found da'at ('knowledge'). Understanding enables understanding — the more you know, the more Wisdom's words make sense. This is the opposite of the fool's spiral, where ignorance breeds more ignorance.
10. The economic comparison from 3:14-15 returns with new force: choose musari ('my discipline') over keseph ('silver') and da'at ('knowledge') over charutz nivchar ('chosen/finest gold'). Wisdom herself, not just the father, now makes the value claim.
11. Virtually identical to 3:15. The repetition of peninim ('corals/rubies/pearls') and kol chafatsim ('all desirable things') unable to equal wisdom creates a refrain throughout the first nine chapters — wisdom's incomparable value is stated and restated until it becomes the book's baseline assumption.
12. Wisdom speaks in the first person with authority: ani chokmah ('I, Wisdom'). She shakanti ('I dwell, I reside') with ormah ('shrewdness, cunning, craftiness') and she finds (emtsa) da'at mezimtot ('knowledge of foresight, knowledge of planning'). Wisdom is not naive — she is shrewd, strategic, and perceptive.
13. The definition of the fear of the LORD as 'hatred of evil' is one of the sharpest formulations in the book. It converts the fear of the LORD from a private devotional posture into a public moral stance — you cannot claim to fear the LORD while tolerating what He finds detestable.
14. Wisdom claims four possessions: etsah ('counsel, advice, strategy'), tushiyyah ('sound wisdom, effective counsel'), binah ('understanding' — she does not merely have it; she is it), and gevurah ('strength, might, power'). Wisdom is not weak or merely theoretical — she has the power to accomplish what she advises.
15. Wisdom claims political authority: bi ('by me, through me') melakhim yimlokhu ('kings reign'). She is the source of legitimate governance. Rozenim ('rulers, princes') yechoqqu tsedek ('decree, inscribe, enact righteousness'). Without wisdom, kings cannot rule justly; with her, their decrees embody tsedek ('righteousness'). Political authority is derivative of wisdom, not independent of it.
16. The claim extends from kings (v15) to sarim ('officials, princes') and nedivim ('nobles, generous ones') and kol shofte tsedek ('all judges of righteousness'). Every level of governance depends on wisdom. The judicial system itself requires her presence to function justly.
17. Wisdom offers reciprocal love: ani ohavay ehav ('I, those who love me, I love'). She also promises findability: meshacharay yimtsa'ununni ('those who seek me early/eagerly will find me'). Unlike the forbidden woman who hunts the unwary (7:12), Wisdom rewards those who seek her. The seeking must be meshachar ('at dawn, eagerly, diligently') — casual inquiry will not suffice.
18. Osher ('riches'), kavod ('honor'), hon ateq ('enduring wealth, ancient wealth') and tsedaqah ('righteousness'). The pairing of material prosperity with moral integrity is characteristic of Proverbs — true wealth includes righteousness, and righteousness includes a form of wealth.
19. Wisdom's piri ('my fruit') and tevu'ati ('my yield, my produce') surpass charutz ('fine gold'), paz ('pure gold, refined gold'), and keseph nivchar ('choice silver'). The agricultural metaphor (fruit, yield) applied to wisdom implies that she produces ongoing returns, not a one-time payment.
20. Wisdom walks — ahalekh ('I walk, I go') — in the orach tsedaqah ('path of righteousness') and betokh netivot mishpat ('in the midst of the paths of justice'). She is not merely a guide who points the way; she walks the road herself. Following wisdom means walking where she walks.
21. Lehanchil ohavay yesh ('to cause those who love me to inherit substance, reality, something') — the word yesh means 'existence, substance, what is real.' Wisdom provides not illusion but reality. She also fills (amalle) their otseroteihem ('their treasuries, their storehouses'). The gifts of wisdom are concrete and lasting.
22. We render qanani as 'brought me forth' to capture the generative force of the verb without committing to either 'created' or 'possessed.' The Hebrew is ambiguous, and we preserve the ambiguity rather than resolving it. The theological stakes of this translation choice are immense — entire christological debates have turned on whether this verb means 'created' or 'begot.'
23. Me-olam ('from eternity, from the distant past') nissakti ('I was set up, appointed, installed, poured out'). The verb nasakh may mean 'to install' (as a king is installed) or 'to weave' or 'to pour out' — each suggests a different kind of origin. Me-rosh ('from the first, from the head/beginning') miqqadme arets ('before the antiquity of the earth'). The earth itself is ancient, but Wisdom predates it.
24. Be-ein tehomot ('when there were no deeps, no primordial oceans') cholalti ('I was brought forth, I was birthed, I writhed into being'). The verb chul/chil means 'to writhe, to travail, to be born' — it is explicitly birth language. The tehomot ('deeps') echo Genesis 1:2 (tehom, 'the deep'). Before the primordial ocean existed, Wisdom was already born. The ma'yanot nikbadde mayim ('springs heavy/abundant with water') represent the underground water sources — even the hidden waters postdate Wisdom.
25. Beterem harim hotba'u ('before mountains were sunk, were set firmly') — the verb tava ('to sink, to be pressed down, to be immersed') describes mountains as driven into the earth like posts into the ground. Lifne geva'ot cholalti ('before hills I was birthed'). Mountains represent the most ancient, most permanent features of the landscape; Wisdom is older than all of them.
26. Ad lo asah erets ('while He had not yet made the earth') and chutsot ('open spaces, fields') and rosh afrot tevel ('the first/chief dust particles of the world'). Even dust — the most basic building material of creation — postdates Wisdom. She was there before the raw materials existed.

27. Now Wisdom describes not her priority but her presence during creation. Bahakhino shamayim ('when He established the heavens') sham ani ('there I was'). The two words sham ani ('I was there') are the chapter's quiet thunder — Wisdom witnessed everything. Bechuqo chug al pene tehom ('when He inscribed a circle/horizon on the face of the deep') — God drew the boundary between sky and sea, and Wisdom watched.
28. Be-ammetso shechaqim ('when He strengthened/made firm the clouds/skies above') and ba'azoz enot tehom ('when He made strong the springs of the deep'). Both the upper waters (sky) and the lower waters (deep springs) were set in place by God, with Wisdom present.
29. Besumo layyam chuqo ('when He placed for the sea its boundary/decreed') — the sea's limit is both physical (shoreline) and legal (decree). The waters lo ya'avru piv ('will not cross His mouth/command'). In Job 38:8-11, God gives the sea the same command: 'Here shall your proud waves be stopped.' Bechuqo mosde arets ('when He marked out the foundations of the earth') — the earth has structural supports, and God laid them.
30. We render amon as 'master craftsman' as the primary reading, acknowledging that 'darling child' is equally defensible. The choice of 'craftsman' connects to the broader theme of wisdom as skill (chokmah as artisanship in Exodus 31:3) and to the image of God as builder throughout vv27-29. But the 'darling child' reading explains the play language of verse 30b more naturally — a craftsman works; a child plays.
31. Mesachaqet betevel artso ('playing in the world of His earth, in His inhabited land') — Wisdom's play extends from God's presence (v30) into the created world itself. The earth is not merely God's construction project but Wisdom's playground. Vesha'ashu'ay et bene adam ('and my delights were with the sons of Adam') — the most stunning claim of all: Wisdom delights in human beings. Her joy is not only in God's presence but in human company. Humanity is not an afterthought of creation but the object of Wisdom's specific delight.
32. After the cosmic vision, the practical appeal. Ve-attah ('so now') transitions from creation theology to present command. Ashre derakhay yishmoru ('fortunate are those who guard my ways'). The ashre ('fortunate') from 3:13 returns — the blessing of wisdom-keeping is reaffirmed after the cosmic revelation.
33. The imperative sequence — shim'u ('hear'), chakhamu ('become wise'), al tifra'u ('do not neglect, do not let go') — is brisk and direct. After thirty-one verses of cosmic vision, the command is simple: listen, learn, hold on.
34. The image of lishqod al dalthotay yom yom ('watching at my doors day after day') and lishmor mezuzot petachay ('guarding the doorposts of my entrances') presents the wise person as a devoted attendant. The mezuzot ('doorposts') echo Deuteronomy 6:9, where God's commands are written on the doorposts. Now Wisdom's own doorposts are the destination. The devoted student stands at her door the way a servant stands at a master's gate — ready, attentive, unwilling to miss a word.
35. Motse'i matsa chayyim ('the one who finds me has found life') — wisdom and life are equated. Finding wisdom is not a step toward life; it is the finding of life itself. Vayyafeq ratson me-YHWH ('and draws forth favor from the LORD') — the verb yafaq ('to bring forth, to obtain, to draw out') suggests that God's favor flows naturally to the one who finds wisdom.
36. Wisdom's final word is the starkest binary in the book. Chot'i ('the one who misses me, the one who sins against me') — the root chata means 'to miss the mark, to go wrong.' Missing wisdom is self-harm (chomes nafsho, 'does violence to his own soul'). Kol mesan'ay ahevu mavet ('all who hate me love death'). The sentence is absolute: there is no third option between finding wisdom (and life) and hating wisdom (and loving death). The one who rejects wisdom has, whether knowingly or not, chosen death as a lover. This is Woman Wisdom's final word before the climactic confrontation of chapter 9.

## 9

**Summary:** *Proverbs 9 is the dramatic finale of the book's prologue (chapters 1-9). It presents two banquets side by side: Woman Wisdom has built her house, set her table, and sent her servants to invite the naive (vv1-6). Woman Folly has also set up shop and calls to the naive from her doorway (vv13-18). Between the two invitations sits a collection of sayings about the wise and the scoffer (vv7-12), including the restatement of the book's thesis: 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (v10). The reader must choose which banquet to attend.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The architectural symmetry is deliberate and devastating. Both women call from elevated positions. Both address the petayim ('naive'). Both say nearly identical words: 'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here' (vv4, 16). Both offer food and drink. The invitation sounds the same. The destinations could not be more different: Wisdom's house leads to life (v6); Folly's house leads to Sheol (v18). The chapter forces the reader to discern the difference between two voices that sound alike. This is the deepest lesson of the entire prologue — wisdom is not about hearing the right words but about knowing which voice speaks them. The seven pillars of Wisdom's house (v1) have been variously interpreted as the seven days of creation, the seven sections of the prologue, or simply architectural grandeur. Whatever the symbolism, the number seven signals completeness — Wisdom's house is fully built, structurally whole, and ready for guests.*

*Translation Friction: The central section (vv7-12) seems to interrupt the Wisdom-Folly contrast with a collection of loosely related sayings. Some scholars view these verses as a later insertion that disrupts the chapter's symmetrical structure. Others see them as a deliberate pause — a wisdom interlude that gives the reader time to reflect before encountering Folly's counter-invitation. The description of Woman Folly as 'loud, naive, and knowing nothing' (v13) may be read as a dismissive caricature. However, the text's point is not that all foolish people are women but that Folly mimics Wisdom — she copies the form while emptying it of content.*

*Connections: The two-banquet structure echoes the two-ways theology of Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 30:15-20 ('I set before you life and death'). The restatement of 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (v10) completes the inclusio begun in 1:7, framing the entire prologue. The 'stolen water is sweet' proverb (v17) connects to the water/cistern imagery of chapter 5 — Folly offers stolen water while Wisdom's husband was told to drink from his own cistern. The seven-pillared house has been connected to the seven-branched menorah and to the cosmic temple imagery of Solomon's temple.*

- <sup>1</sup>Wisdom has built her house;  
she has carved out her seven pillars.
- <sup>2</sup>She has slaughtered her meat,  
mixed her wine,  
and set her table.
- <sup>3</sup>She has sent out her servant women;  
she calls from the heights of the city,
- <sup>4</sup>'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here.'  
To the one who lacks sense, she says,
- <sup>5</sup>'Come, eat my food  
and drink the wine I have mixed.
- <sup>6</sup>Leave your naivety behind and live!  
Walk straight in the way of understanding.'
- <sup>7</sup>Whoever corrects a scoffer earns abuse,  
and whoever rebukes a wicked person gets hurt.
- <sup>8</sup>Do not rebuke a scoffer, or he will hate you;  
rebuke a wise person, and he will love you.
- <sup>9</sup>Give to the wise and they grow wiser;  
teach the righteous and they add to their learning.
- <sup>10</sup>The fear of the LORD is where wisdom begins,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
- <sup>11</sup>For through me your days will be multiplied,  
and years of life will be added to you.
- <sup>12</sup>If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;  
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

- <sup>13</sup>Woman Folly is loud;  
she is naive and knows nothing.
- <sup>14</sup>She sits at the door of her house,  
on a seat at the heights of the city,
- <sup>15</sup>calling to those who pass by,  
who are going straight on their way:
- <sup>16</sup>'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here.'  
To the one who lacks sense, she says,
- <sup>17</sup>'Stolen water is sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is delicious.'
- <sup>18</sup>But he does not know that the shades are there,  
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The seven pillars have generated endless speculation. Some see the seven days of creation, others the seven liberal arts, others the seven sections of the Proverbs prologue (chapters 1-9 divided differently). The most straightforward reading is that seven represents architectural completeness — a grand, fully columned hall ready for a feast.
2. Three preparations: *tavechah tivchah* ('she has slaughtered her slaughter' — cognate accusative emphasizing the act), *maskah yeinah* ('she has mixed her wine' — wine was mixed with spices and water to achieve the proper strength and flavor), and *arkhah shulchanah* ('she has arranged her table'). The feast is lavish and carefully prepared. Every detail reflects intentionality — Wisdom does not serve leftovers.
3. *Shalchah na'aroteiha* ('she has dispatched her young women servants') — Wisdom has a household staff, reinforcing the image of a great woman of means. She *tiqra* ('calls out') *al gappe merome qaret* ('from the ridges of the heights of the city'). Her invitation goes out from the highest point — it is public, visible, and impossible to miss. The parallel to 1:20-21 completes the frame: Wisdom cried out at the beginning of the prologue and cries out at its end.
4. *Mi feti yasur hennah* ('whoever is naive, let him turn aside here') — the same invitation Folly will offer in verse 16. The target audience is the *peti* ('naive, gullible, open') and the *chasar lev* ('lacking heart, lacking sense'). Wisdom does not address the already wise but the not-yet-formed. Her banquet is for those still choosing.
5. *Lekhu lachamu velachmi* ('come, eat of my bread/food') and *ushtu beyayin masakti* ('and drink of the wine I have mixed'). The invitation is generous — my food, my wine. Wisdom's hospitality is complete: she does not merely instruct but feeds. The banquet represents a full, embodied engagement with wisdom — not abstract knowledge but nourishing sustenance.
6. *Izvu petayim vichyu* ('abandon the naive ones — or, abandon naivety — and live!'). The imperative *vichyu* ('and live!') echoes the grandfather's command in 4:4. The alternative to naivety is not mere knowledge but life itself. *Ve-ishru bederekh vinah* ('and walk straight, advance, in the way of understanding'). The verb *ashar* ('to go straight, to walk forward, to advance') is from the same root as *ashre* ('fortunate') — the path of understanding is the fortunate path.
7. The wisdom interlude begins with a pragmatic observation: correcting a *lets* ('scoffer') brings *qalon* ('shame, disgrace') to the corrector. Rebuking a *rasha* ('wicked person') earns *mumo* ('his blemish, his insult, his defect reflected back'). The point is not that correction should be abandoned but that the audience matters — do not waste reproof on those who will weaponize it against you.
8. The contrast reveals the deepest difference between the wise and the foolish: the wise love correction because they love improvement; the foolish hate correction because they love themselves as they are. How you respond to rebuke is the diagnostic — if rebuke makes you grateful, you are wise; if it makes you hostile, you are a scoffer. There is no third category.
9. *Ten lechakham veyechkam od* ('give to the wise person and he will become wiser still') — wisdom has no ceiling. The wise can always become wiser. *Hoda letsaddiq veyosef leqach* ('make known to the righteous person and he will add learning') — the *tsaddiq* treats every new piece of instruction as additional treasure.
10. *Qedoshim* ('holy ones') is debated: it may refer to God (plural of majesty, 'the Holy One'), to the heavenly council, or to the community of the faithful. We read it as referring to God, parallel to 30:3 (*da'at qedoshim*, 'knowledge of the Holy One'). The singular sense is supported by the parallel with 'the LORD' in the first line.

11. Wisdom speaks again in the first person: *bi yirbu yamekha* ('through me your days will multiply'). The promise of long life — *shenot chayyim* ('years of life') — has been the recurring reward throughout the prologue (3:2, 3:16, 4:10). It is restated here as the final benefit before the reader must choose between the two banquets.
12. *Im chakhamta chakhamta lakh* ('if you have become wise, you are wise for yourself') — wisdom's benefits accrue to the wise person. *Velatstva levaddekha tissa* ('and if you have scoffed, alone you will carry it'). The loneliness of the consequences is the point: no one else will absorb the fallout of your choices. Wisdom blesses its owner; folly punishes its owner. The transaction is perfectly individual.
13. *Eshet kesilut* ('woman of foolishness, Woman Folly') is the anti-Wisdom. She is *homiyyah* ('loud, clamorous, turbulent') — the same word used for the forbidden woman in 7:11. She is *petayyut* ('naive, simple') and *uval yade'ah mah* ('and she does not know anything'). Her ignorance is total. Unlike Wisdom, who possesses counsel, strength, and knowledge (8:14), Folly has nothing to offer — but she offers it loudly.
14. Folly *yashvah* ('sits') rather than builds or sends or calls from the heights. The contrast with Wisdom is architectural: Wisdom built a house with seven pillars, slaughtered meat, mixed wine, and sent servants. Folly sits on a chair at her doorway. She has constructed nothing, prepared nothing, produced nothing. Her position at *merome qaret* ('the heights of the city') mimics Wisdom's (v3), but she occupies it without having earned it.
15. Folly targets *ovre derekh* ('those passing by on the road') — specifically those *hamyasherim orchotam* ('who are making their paths straight'). She does not pursue those already crooked but those walking straight. Her prey is the person who is on the right path but has not yet arrived — the vulnerable moment of transit.
16. The identical words from verse 4. This is the chapter's deepest point: Wisdom and Folly use the same invitation. The words are indistinguishable. The naive person must discern the speaker, not just the speech. This is why the entire prologue exists — to train the ear to recognize the difference between two voices that say the same thing.
17. The water/bread of Folly's offer contrasts directly with Wisdom's meat and wine (v2, 5). Wisdom offers a lavish, prepared feast; Folly offers stolen water and secret bread. The comparison reveals that Folly cannot create — she can only steal.
18. The chapter's final verse reveals what Folly's guest cannot see: *velo yada* ('and he does not know') *ki refa'im sham* ('that the shades are there'). The *refa'im* ('shades, the dead, the spirits of the departed') inhabit Folly's dining room. Her *qeru'eiha* ('her invited guests, those she has called') are *be-imqe she'ol* ('in the depths of Sheol'). The banquet is already populated by the dead — the young man who enters is not the first guest but the latest victim. The identical language from 2:18 ('her paths lead to the shades') returns to close the prologue exactly where it was predicted. Folly's house was always Sheol. The only question was whether the reader would recognize it in time.

# 10

**Summary:** *Proverbs 10 marks a dramatic shift in the book's form. The extended speeches, personified figures, and narrative sequences of chapters 1-9 give way to individual two-line proverbs — sharp, self-contained observations arranged with minimal visible connection between them. This is the beginning of the 'Proverbs of Solomon' collection (10:1-22:16), which contains 375 proverbs. Nearly every verse in chapter 10 is an antithetic parallelism: the first line makes a statement, and the second line states its opposite, almost always connected by the word 'but.' The dominant themes are the righteous versus the wicked, the wise versus the foolish, the diligent versus the lazy, and the power of speech.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The abrupt formal transition from chapter 9's dramatic banquet scene to chapter 10's staccato proverbs is itself meaningful. The prologue trained the reader to think; now the reader must apply that training to compressed, often ambiguous statements that offer no explanation. Each proverb is a seed that requires the reader's own wisdom to germinate. The antithetic structure that dominates this chapter is the poetic engine of the entire middle section of Proverbs — line A makes a claim, and line B reverses it. The 'but' (Hebrew *ve-* with adversative force) is the hinge on which wisdom turns. The chapter's opening verse is its dedication: 'A wise son brings joy to a father, but a foolish son is grief to his mother.' The personal, familial setting grounds the cosmic wisdom of chapters 1-9 in the daily reality of household life.*

**Translation Friction:** *The retributive theology of chapter 10 is stated with absolute confidence: the righteous prosper, the wicked perish, the diligent grow rich, the lazy become poor. This framework will be severely tested by Job, Ecclesiastes, and many psalms of lament. Proverbs 10 presents the general pattern without acknowledging the exceptions. Read as iron laws, these proverbs are demonstrably false; read as general observations about how life tends to work in a morally ordered universe, they are profound. The reader must supply the nuance that the proverbs deliberately omit.*

*Connections: The 'Proverbs of Solomon' superscription (v1a) connects to 1:1 and to the later collection headers at 22:17, 24:23, 25:1, 30:1, and 31:1. The righteous/wicked contrast throughout the chapter extends Psalm 1's two-ways theology into specific domains: speech, wealth, labor, and family. The lips/tongue/mouth vocabulary (vv6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32) makes speech the chapter's dominant concern — fully half the verses address what comes out of a person's mouth.*

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon.

A wise son brings joy to his father,  
but a foolish son is grief to his mother.

<sup>2</sup>Treasures gained by wickedness profit nothing,  
but righteousness delivers from death.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,  
but He thrusts aside the craving of the wicked.

<sup>4</sup>A slack hand makes for poverty,  
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

<sup>5</sup>A son who gathers in summer acts wisely,  
but a son who sleeps through harvest brings shame.

<sup>6</sup>Blessings crown the head of the righteous,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

<sup>7</sup>The memory of the righteous is a blessing,  
but the name of the wicked will rot.

<sup>8</sup>The wise in heart accept commands,  
but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

<sup>9</sup>Whoever walks with integrity walks securely,  
but whoever makes their ways crooked will be found out.

<sup>10</sup>Whoever winks with the eye causes pain,  
and a babbling fool will come to ruin.

<sup>11</sup>The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

<sup>12</sup>Hatred stirs up conflicts,  
but love covers all offenses.

<sup>13</sup>On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found,  
but a rod is for the back of the one who lacks sense.

<sup>14</sup>The wise store up knowledge,  
but the mouth of the fool invites ruin.

<sup>15</sup>The wealth of the rich is their fortified city;  
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

- <sup>16</sup>The earnings of the righteous lead to life;  
the income of the wicked leads to sin.
- <sup>17</sup>Whoever heeds discipline is on the path to life,  
but whoever ignores correction goes astray.
- <sup>18</sup>Whoever conceals hatred has lying lips,  
and whoever spreads slander is a fool.
- <sup>19</sup>Where words are many, sin is not absent;  
but whoever restrains his lips acts wisely.
- <sup>20</sup>The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;  
the heart of the wicked is worth little.
- <sup>21</sup>The lips of the righteous nourish many,  
but fools die for lack of sense.
- <sup>22</sup>The blessing of the LORD — it makes rich,  
and He adds no sorrow with it.
- <sup>23</sup>Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool,  
but wisdom is natural to a person of understanding.
- <sup>24</sup>What the wicked dread will come upon them,  
but the desire of the righteous will be granted.
- <sup>25</sup>When the storm passes, the wicked are gone,  
but the righteous stand on an everlasting foundation.
- <sup>26</sup>Like vinegar to the teeth  
and smoke to the eyes,  
so is the sluggard to those who send him.
- <sup>27</sup>The fear of the LORD adds days,  
but the years of the wicked are cut short.
- <sup>28</sup>The hope of the righteous brings joy,  
but the expectation of the wicked will perish.
- <sup>29</sup>The way of the LORD is a stronghold for the blameless,  
but destruction for evildoers.
- <sup>30</sup>The righteous will never be shaken,  
but the wicked will not inhabit the land.
- <sup>31</sup>The mouth of the righteous bears the fruit of wisdom,  
but the perverse tongue will be cut off.
- <sup>32</sup>The lips of the righteous know what is fitting,  
but the mouth of the wicked speaks perversity.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription mishle Shelomoh ('proverbs of Solomon') marks the beginning of the main collection. The first proverb grounds everything in the family: the ben chakham ('wise son') produces simchah ('joy') for the father, while the ben kesil ('foolish son') produces tugat ('grief, sorrow') for the mother. The asymmetry of father/mother rather than father/father is typical of Proverbs' inclusive parallelism — both parents are affected, though named separately.
2. Otsrot resha ('treasures of wickedness') — wealth acquired through evil means — lo yo'ilu ('do not profit, provide no benefit'). Against this, tsedaqah ('righteousness') tatsil mim mavet ('delivers from death'). The proverb compresses a massive theological claim into a single line: moral character, not material wealth, determines survival.
3. YHWH lo yar'iv ('the LORD will not cause to hunger') the nefesh tsaddiq ('soul/appetite of the righteous'). God actively provides for the righteous. Conversely, havvat resha'im yehdof ('the desire/craving of the wicked He pushes away, He repels'). The verb hadaf ('to push, to thrust, to drive away') is forceful — God actively resists the wicked's desires.
4. The double meaning of remiyyah ('slack' and 'deceitful') links laziness to dishonesty — both are forms of failure to do what the situation requires. The sluggard and the fraud are, at root, the same character.
5. The ant lesson of 6:6-8 returns in proverbial form. The oger baqqayits ('one who gathers in summer') is a ben maskil ('a prudent/wise son'). The nirdam baqqatsir ('one who sleeps deeply during harvest') is a ben mevish ('a son who causes shame, who brings disgrace'). Harvest is time-sensitive — the grain will rot or fall if not gathered promptly. Sleeping through harvest is not merely lazy but destructive.
6. Berakhot ('blessings') rest on the rosh tsaddiq ('head of the righteous') like a crown. The pi resha'im ('mouth of the wicked') yekhasseh chamas ('covers/conceals violence'). The wicked person's mouth is a cover for violence — what comes out as words hides what lives within as malice. The contrast between visible blessing and concealed violence is sharp.
7. In Hebrew culture, the shem ('name') is not a label but an identity — it carries the person's character and reputation forward through time. A rotting name is a rotting legacy. The most feared fate in ancient Israel was not death but being forgotten or remembered with disgust.
8. Chakham lev ('wise of heart') yiqqach mitsvot ('receives/accepts commands') — the wise are teachable, willing to take direction. The evil sefatayim ('fool of lips, babbling fool') yillabet ('will be tripped up, will stumble, will come to ruin'). The contrast is between receiving (wise) and producing without receiving (fool). The fool talks when he should listen and stumbles because his mouth is open when his ears should be.
9. Holekh batom ('the one walking in integrity/wholeness') yelexh betach ('walks securely, walks confidently'). The tom ('integrity') produces betach ('security') — the honest person has nothing to hide and therefore nothing to fear. The me'aqqesh derakhav ('the one who makes crooked his ways') yivvadea ('will be known, will be found out, will be exposed'). The crooked cannot stay hidden forever.
10. Qorets ayin ('one who winks the eye') echoes the troublemaker of 6:13. The wink signals deception and conspiracy. The second line repeats 10:8b exactly — the babbling fool appears twice in this chapter, reinforcing the danger of uncontrolled speech.
11. Pi tsaddiq ('the mouth of the righteous') is a meqor chayyim ('fountain/source of life'). The same meqor ('source, spring') imagery from 4:23 ('springs of life') now flows through the righteous person's speech. Words from the righteous give life. The second line repeats verse 6b — the wicked mouth covers violence.
12. The covering of pasha'im ('offenses, transgressions, rebellions') by love is not denial or enabling but a choice about what to do with information. The hateful person uses offenses as weapons; the loving person uses discretion as a shield.
13. The navon ('discerning person') carries wisdom on his lips — it is available, ready, findable. The chasar lev ('one lacking sense/heart') receives a shevet ('rod, staff') on the gev ('back'). What the wise communicate through words, the fool must learn through pain. The rod is not cruelty but the only pedagogy the fool's closed ears will accept.
14. Chakhamim yitspe'nu da'at ('the wise treasure/store up knowledge') — the same verb tsaphan from 2:1. The wise accumulate knowledge like savings. The pi evil ('mouth of the fool') is mechittah qerovah ('near destruction, destruction is close'). The fool's mouth is not a fountain of life (v11) but a proximity alarm for catastrophe.
15. Hon ashir ('the wealth of the rich person') is qiryat uzzo ('his city of strength, his fortified city') — wealth provides protection, security, a wall against misfortune. Mechittat dallim reshama ('the ruin of the poor is their poverty') — poverty is not merely uncomfortable but destructive, leaving the poor exposed to every threat the wealthy are shielded from. The proverb observes without prescribing — it does not say this arrangement is just, only that it exists.
16. Pe'ullat tsaddiq ('the work/wages of the righteous') leads lechayyim ('to life'). Tevu'at rasha ('the produce/income of the wicked') leads lechatta't ('to sin'). Wealth itself is morally neutral — what matters is whose hands it is in. In the hands of the righteous, earnings produce more life; in the hands of the wicked, income funds more sin.
17. Shomer musar ('the one who guards discipline') is on an orach lechayyim ('path to life'). The ozev tokhachat ('the one who abandons correction') mat'eh ('wanders, leads astray, causes to err'). The hinge between life and death is not talent or luck but the willingness to be corrected.

- 18.** Two speech-sins: mekhasseh sin'ah ('concealing hatred') behind siftei shaqer ('lips of falsehood') — pretending friendship while harboring malice. And motsi dibbah ('spreading slander, putting out a bad report'). Both are foolish because both corrupt the social fabric that sustains community.
- 19.** Berov devarim lo yechdal pasha ('in a multitude of words, transgression does not cease') — the more you talk, the more likely you are to sin. The probability of offense increases with volume. Vechosekh sefatav maskil ('but the one who holds back his lips is prudent'). Restraint of speech is a hallmark of wisdom throughout Proverbs. The wise speak less not because they know less but because they know enough to be careful.
- 20.** Leshon tsaddiq ('the tongue of the righteous') is keseph nivchar ('choice silver, selected silver') — refined, tested, valuable. Lev resha'im ('the heart of the wicked') is kim'at ('like a little, worth little, nearly nothing'). The righteous person's speech is precious metal; the wicked person's entire inner life is nearly worthless.
- 21.** Sifte tsaddiq yir'u rabbim ('the lips of the righteous shepherd/feed many') — the verb ra'ah ('to shepherd, to feed, to tend') applies pastoral imagery to speech. The righteous person's words feed the community as a shepherd feeds a flock. Evilim bachsar lev yamutu ('fools die in their lack of heart'). The absence of the heart/sense that wisdom provides is literally fatal.
- 22.** Birkat YHWH hi ta'ashir ('the blessing of the LORD — it enriches'). The pronoun hi ('it') is emphatic: the blessing itself does the work. Velo yosif etsev immah ('and He does not add pain/toil/sorrow with it'). Wealth from God comes without the etsev ('pain, toil, grief') that accompanies wealth gained through overwork or dishonesty. This is not a promise that the blessed never suffer but that God's blessing does not carry a hidden cost.
- 23.** Kisechoq likhsil asot zimmah ('like laughter/sport to a fool is doing wickedness') — the fool treats evil as entertainment, as a game. But chokmah le-ish tevunah ('wisdom belongs to a person of understanding') — wisdom comes as naturally to the discerning as depravity comes to the fool. What each finds easy reveals what each is.
- 24.** Megorat rasha ('the dread/fear of the wicked person') hi tevo'ennu ('it will come upon him') — the wicked person's worst fear becomes reality. Ta'avat tsaddiqim yitten ('the desire of the righteous He gives, He grants'). The proverb asserts a moral symmetry: dread comes true for the wicked; desire comes true for the righteous.
- 25.** Ka'avor sufah ('when the whirlwind passes through') ve-ein rasha ('the wicked is no more, the wicked has vanished'). The storm imagery from 1:27 returns: the wicked are swept away like chaff. Vetsaddiq yesod olam ('but the righteous is a foundation of eternity') — the righteous person is as permanent as a building's foundation. The storm test separates the rooted from the rootless — echoing Jesus' later parable of the house on the rock (Matthew 7:24-27).
- 26.** Two sensory irritants: chomets ('vinegar') that sets the teeth on edge and ashan ('smoke') that stings the eyes. The atsel ('sluggard') produces the same effect on those who rely on him — persistent, low-grade irritation that makes everything harder. The sluggard does not merely fail to perform; he actively aggravates everyone depending on him.
- 27.** Yirat YHWH tosf yamim ('the fear of the LORD adds days') — long life again as the fruit of right relationship with God. Ushenot resha'im tiqtornah ('but the years of the wicked will be shortened, cut short'). The verb qatsar ('to be short, to reap, to harvest early') suggests premature death — the wicked do not live out their allotted years.
- 28.** Tocheleth tsaddiqim simchah ('the hope/waiting of the righteous is joy') — what the righteous wait for arrives, producing simchah ('gladness, joy'). Tiqvat resha'im toved ('the hope/cord/expectation of the wicked perishes'). The tiqvah can mean both 'hope' and 'cord, line' — the wicked person's lifeline snaps.
- 29.** Derekh YHWH ('the way of the LORD') is ma'oz ('stronghold, refuge, fortress') for the tam ('blameless, person of integrity') but mechittah ('destruction, ruin') for po'ale aven ('workers of iniquity'). The same divine way functions as both protection and destruction depending on who encounters it.
- 30.** Tsaddiq le-olam bal yimmot ('the righteous person forever will not be moved, will not totter') echoes Psalm 15:5 and Psalm 16:8. Urshe'aim lo yishkenu erets ('but the wicked will not dwell in the land') reprises 2:21-22 — the land-theology of Deuteronomy applied to individual ethics.
- 31.** Pi tsaddiq yanuv chokmah ('the mouth of the righteous buds/bears fruit of wisdom') — the verb nuv ('to bear fruit, to flourish, to sprout') presents the righteous mouth as a fruit tree, connecting to the tree-of-life imagery of 3:18. Ulshon tahpukhot tikkaret ('but the tongue of perversity will be cut off') — the karath ('to cut off') is the language of covenant severance and death.
- 32.** Sifte tsaddiq yed'un ratson ('the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, what is fitting, what pleases'). The verb yada ('to know') applied to lips means they have the discernment to speak the right word at the right time. Pi resha'im tahpukhot ('the mouth of the wicked — perversity'). The chapter ends as it has run: righteous speech gives life; wicked speech inverts reality. The thirty-two verses have returned again and again to the same point: what comes out of the mouth reveals and determines who you are.

## 11

**Summary:** *Proverbs 11 continues the Solomonic collection of antithetic proverbs, pairing righteous and wicked conduct in nearly every verse. The chapter's dominant concern is the social consequences of character: how honesty or dishonesty, generosity or greed, humility or arrogance shape a person's standing in the community and determine their ultimate fate.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter exhibits an almost obsessive interest in economic justice. Dishonest scales open the chapter, and the theme of wealth — how it is gained, how it is used, whether it endures — runs through at least a third of the verses. The collection insists that generosity produces abundance while hoarding produces scarcity, an economic paradox that defies conventional logic. The repeated claim that righteousness delivers from death is not a promise of immortality but a statement about the structural reliability of moral order: those who live rightly avoid the traps that destroy the wicked.*

**Translation Friction:** *The clean antithesis between righteous and wicked outcomes in these proverbs represents idealized wisdom. The sages knew that life often fails to match these tidy pairings — Job and Ecclesiastes exist as canonical correctives. These proverbs function as general observations about how the moral order tends to work, not as ironclad guarantees. The modern reader must hold them in tension with the rest of the wisdom tradition.*

**Connections:** *The dishonest-scales imagery in verse 1 echoes Leviticus 19:35-36 and Deuteronomy 25:13-16, where fraudulent weights are called an abomination to the LORD. The generosity paradox in verses 24-25 anticipates the teaching of Jesus in Luke 6:38. The 'gold ring in a pig's snout' metaphor of verse 22 is unique in the Hebrew Bible — a vivid image found nowhere else in Scripture.*

<sup>1</sup>Dishonest scales are detestable to the LORD,  
but an accurate weight is His delight.

<sup>2</sup>When arrogance arrives, disgrace follows,  
but wisdom stays with the humble.

<sup>3</sup>The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

<sup>4</sup>Wealth is useless on the day of fury,  
but righteousness rescues from death.

<sup>5</sup>The righteousness of the blameless makes his path straight,  
but the wicked falls by his own wickedness.

<sup>6</sup>The righteousness of the upright rescues them,  
but the treacherous are trapped by their own craving.

<sup>7</sup>When a wicked person dies, his hope perishes,  
and the expectation of the powerful comes to nothing.

<sup>8</sup>The righteous is rescued from distress,  
and the wicked steps into his place.

<sup>9</sup>With his mouth a godless person destroys his neighbor,  
but through knowledge the righteous are rescued.

<sup>10</sup>When the righteous prosper, the city celebrates;  
when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.

<sup>11</sup>By the blessing of the upright a city is lifted up,  
but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

<sup>12</sup>Whoever despises his neighbor lacks sense,  
but a person of understanding keeps silent.

<sup>13</sup>A gossip reveals secrets,  
but a trustworthy person conceals a matter.

<sup>14</sup>Without guidance a people falls,  
but safety comes through many advisors.

<sup>15</sup>Whoever guarantees a loan for a stranger will suffer for it,  
but the one who refuses to pledge is secure.

<sup>16</sup>A gracious woman holds on to honor,  
and ruthless men hold on to wealth.

<sup>17</sup>A person of faithful love benefits himself,  
but a cruel person brings trouble on his own body.

<sup>18</sup>The wicked earns deceptive wages,  
but the one who sows righteousness reaps a genuine reward.

<sup>19</sup>Genuine righteousness leads to life,  
but whoever chases evil chases his own death.

<sup>20</sup>The twisted in heart are detestable to the LORD,  
but those whose way is blameless are His delight.

<sup>21</sup>Be assured: the wicked will not go unpunished,  
but the offspring of the righteous will escape.

<sup>22</sup>A gold ring in a pig's snout —  
that is a beautiful woman who abandons good sense.

<sup>23</sup>The desire of the righteous leads only to good;  
the hope of the wicked leads to fury.

<sup>24</sup>One person gives freely and gains even more;  
another withholds what is right and ends up in want.

<sup>25</sup>A generous person will be enriched,  
and whoever refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

<sup>26</sup>People curse whoever hoards grain,  
but blessing rests on the head of the one who sells it.

**27**Whoever earnestly seeks good finds favor,  
but whoever pursues evil — it will find him.

**28**Whoever trusts in his wealth will fall,  
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

**29**Whoever brings trouble on his household will inherit wind,  
and a fool will serve the wise in heart.

**30**The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,  
and the one who captures lives is wise.

**31**If even the righteous receives what he deserves on earth,  
how much more the wicked and the sinner!

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word even ('stone') refers to the stone weights used on balance scales in ancient commerce. An even shelemah is a weight that has not been shaved down or hollowed out to defraud.
1. The pairing of to'evah ('abomination') and ratson ('delight') establishes the emotional poles of God's response to human conduct. What disgusts God and what pleases God — the chapter will elaborate both categories.
2. The Hebrew is strikingly compressed: ba zadon va-yavo qalon — 'comes arrogance, and comes disgrace.' The two arrivals are presented as virtually simultaneous, as though arrogance carries disgrace inside it like cargo.
2. The tsenu'im ('humble, modest') are not self-deprecating people but those who have an accurate assessment of their own position. Wisdom resides with them because they remain teachable.
3. Tummah ('integrity, completeness, wholeness') comes from the same root as tam ('blameless, complete'). It describes a person whose inner character and outward conduct are aligned — no hidden agenda, no double life.
3. Selef ('crookedness, perverseness') suggests something twisted or distorted. The treacherous are destroyed not by external enemies but by their own warped character.
4. The 'day of wrath' is not necessarily eschatological. In wisdom literature, it refers to any moment of crisis when a person's true resources are tested. Wealth fails the test; character passes it.
5. The tamim ('blameless, complete') is not sinless but wholehearted — a person of undivided loyalty. His righteousness functions as a road-straightener, removing obstacles and keeping the way clear.
5. The reflexive logic is crucial: the wicked falls be-rish'ato ('by his own wickedness'). No external agent is needed. Wickedness is self-destructing.
6. Havvat ('craving, desire, greed, destructive appetite') is from havvah, which carries overtones of ruin and disaster. The treacherous are not trapped by external snares but by their own disordered desires.
7. The onim ('powerful, vigorous') in the parallel line may refer to those who trust in their own strength or resources. Death neutralizes every advantage. The verse is a memento mori — a reminder that death exposes the bankruptcy of a life built on wickedness or raw power.
8. The image is of a swap: the righteous escapes the trap, and the wicked walks into the same trap. The Hebrew tachatav ('in his place, instead of him') suggests a direct substitution — the wicked inherits the trouble that was meant for the righteous.
9. Chanef ('godless, profane, hypocritical') describes someone whose speech is disconnected from truth or loyalty. The mouth becomes a weapon of destruction against the re'a ('neighbor, companion, fellow'). Knowledge — da'at, discernment that sees through deception — is the righteous person's defense.
10. The qiryah ('city, town') is the social unit that benefits or suffers from the character of its members. Individual righteousness has communal consequences — the city itself rejoices. The double celebration (for righteous flourishing and wicked removal) underscores how deeply the community's welfare depends on moral leadership.
11. Birkat ('blessing of') suggests both the prayers and the beneficial influence of the upright. Their presence elevates the entire community. The wicked's mouth — their counsel, slander, and deceitful speech — has the opposite effect, pulling the social fabric apart.
12. Chasar lev ('lacking heart') means lacking judgment or intelligence — the 'heart' in Hebrew is the seat of thought, not emotion. Contempt for a neighbor reveals intellectual emptiness. The person of understanding (tevunot, 'discernments') knows when silence is the wiser course.

13. Rakhil ('gossip, slanderer, talebearer') is someone who trades in other people's confidences. The ne'eman ruach ('faithful of spirit, trustworthy in character') is the opposite — a person who can be trusted with sensitive information because their loyalty runs deeper than the thrill of sharing secrets.
14. Tachbulot ('guidance, direction, steering') comes from a nautical metaphor — the word is related to the ropes used to steer a ship. A nation without skilled navigation will capsize. The teshu'ah ('deliverance, salvation, safety') comes through rov yo'ets ('abundance of counselors') — the wisdom of collective deliberation.
15. The arav ('to pledge, to become surety') involves taking on financial liability for another person's debt. The sages consistently warn against this practice — not because generosity is wrong, but because pledging for a stranger (zar) puts one's household at risk for someone whose reliability is unknown.
16. The contrast is subtle: the eshet chen ('woman of grace, gracious woman') grasps kavod ('honor, dignity, weight'), while the aritsim ('ruthless, violent, tyrannical') grasp only osher ('riches'). The implication is that honor outranks wealth, and that the means of acquisition matter — grace versus ruthlessness.
17. The ish chesed ('person of faithful love') is someone whose habitual posture toward others is loyal kindness. The remarkable claim is that this benefits his own nefesh ('soul, self, life') — kindness is not self-sacrifice but self-nourishment. The akhzari ('cruel, merciless') person, by contrast, oker she'ero ('troubles his own flesh') — cruelty consumes the one who practices it.
18. The agricultural metaphor — sowing and reaping — frames moral conduct as an investment. The wicked's pe'ullat shaqer ('wages of falsehood') look profitable but prove hollow. The one who sows tsedaqah ('righteousness') receives sekher emet ('a reward of truth, a genuine reward') — returns that are real and lasting.
19. The verb meradef ('pursuing, chasing') gives the wicked an active, aggressive posture — they are not passively drifting toward evil but running after it. The irony is that what they are actually running toward is their own death.
20. Iqqeshe lev ('twisted of heart, crooked-hearted') describes people whose inner orientation is warped — they cannot think straight because their core is bent. The temime derekh ('blameless of way, those whose path is whole') are not perfect but integrated — their conduct matches their convictions.
21. The idiom yad le-yad ('hand to hand') likely means 'you can count on this' or 'I guarantee it' — a handshake of certainty. The zera tsaddiqim ('seed of the righteous, offspring of the righteous') extends the promise across generations: the consequences of righteous living benefit one's children.
22. This is one of the most vivid images in Proverbs. The nezem zahav ('gold ring') is a valuable nose ring, a mark of beauty and status. Placing it in the af chazir ('snout of a pig') creates a jarring absurdity — the precious ornament is wasted on an animal that will drag it through mud. A woman who is yafah ('beautiful') but sarat ta'am ('turned aside from taste/sense, lacking discretion') represents the same mismatch between external form and internal substance.
23. The ta'avah ('desire, longing, appetite') of the righteous is directed toward tov ('good') — their wants align with what is genuinely beneficial. The wicked's tiqvah ('hope, expectation') terminates in evrah ('fury, wrath, overflow') — what they anticipate and pursue circles back to destroy them.
24. The verb mefazer literally means 'to scatter' — the image is of a sower broadcasting seed. Generosity is presented as an investment, not a loss. The word yosher ('uprightness, what is right') in the second line suggests that withholding is not merely stingy but morally wrong.
25. Nefesh berakhah ('a soul of blessing, a generous soul') is tedusshan ('will be made fat, will be enriched') — in the ancient world, fatness was a sign of prosperity and health, not excess. The marveh ('one who waters, who gives drink, who saturates') gam hu yore ('he also will be watered') — the principle of reciprocity is built into the moral structure of reality.
26. The mone'a bar ('withholder of grain') is someone who stockpiles during famine to drive up prices — an ancient form of market manipulation. The community's response is to curse him (yiqqevuhu, 'they will pierce him with curses'). The mashbir ('one who sells, one who distributes grain') receives berakhah — communal blessing and divine favor.
27. The verb shocher ('seeking early, seeking earnestly') implies diligence and urgency — getting up at dawn to pursue something. The ironic reversal in the second line is sharp: the one who seeks evil does not need to find it; it comes to him (tevo'ennu, 'it will come upon him').
28. The boreach be-oshro ('one who trusts in his wealth') will yipol ('fall, collapse') — wealth makes a poor foundation. The righteous, by contrast, ke-aleh yifrachu ('like a leaf will flourish, sprout, bud'). The botanical image echoes Psalm 1:3 — the righteous are living things that grow, while the wealth-dependent are structures that collapse.
29. The oker beto ('troubler of his house') — the one who ruins his own family through greed, folly, or mismanagement — receives the most worthless inheritance imaginable: ruach ('wind'). You cannot hold wind, spend wind, or build on wind. The second line adds that the evil ('fool') ends up as eved ('servant') to the wise — foolishness leads to servitude.
30. The 'tree of life' in Proverbs is not identical to the tree in Eden but draws on the same symbolic reservoir — it represents access to enduring, flourishing life. The righteous person becomes this for others.
30. The phrase loqeach nefashot is ambiguous. Some read it as 'takes lives' (violence) to create an antithetic parallel, but the Masoretic accentuation pairs it with chakhham ('wise'), favoring a positive reading: the wise person wins others over.

31. This closing verse uses a qal va-chomer argument (light to heavy, lesser to greater): if the righteous — who is aligned with God — still faces consequences for his failings in this life, then certainly the wicked and the sinner will face even greater consequences. The verse is a reality check: no one escapes accountability, and the wicked should not imagine that their reckoning is indefinitely postponed.

# 12

**Summary:** *Proverbs 12 advances the Solomonic collection with twenty-eight antithetic proverbs centered on the practical consequences of speech, work, and character. The chapter gives sustained attention to the tongue — honest versus deceitful speech, reckless versus healing words — and to the value of diligent labor over laziness. It also introduces the theme of how people handle animals, making the care of livestock a moral indicator.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 10 stands out as one of the earliest ethical statements about animal welfare in ancient literature: the righteous person knows the nefesh ('life, being') of his animal. This is not sentimentality but recognition that how a person treats creatures under his authority reveals his character. The chapter also contains the striking claim that truthful speech endures forever while lying lasts only a moment (verse 19) — a statement about the structural durability of truth versus the fragility of deception.*

**Translation Friction:** *The sharp binary between the diligent and the lazy (verses 11, 24, 27) reflects an agrarian economy where hard physical work was the primary path to survival. Modern economic realities are more complex — systemic factors can override individual effort. The proverbs describe tendencies, not universal laws. Likewise, the claim that no harm befalls the righteous (verse 21) states an ideal that the rest of Scripture — and human experience — frequently complicates.*

**Connections:** *The 'tree of life' language from 11:30 continues implicitly through the agricultural imagery here. The concern with honest speech connects to the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16). The righteous person's care for animals in verse 10 echoes Deuteronomy 25:4 ('you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads grain') and anticipates Jesus's argument from animal care in Luke 13:15.*

<sup>1</sup>Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,  
but whoever hates correction is senseless.

<sup>2</sup>A good person draws favor from the LORD,  
but a person who schemes He condemns.

<sup>3</sup>No one is established by wickedness,  
but the root of the righteous cannot be moved.

<sup>4</sup>A woman of strength is a crown to her husband,  
but a disgraceful wife is like rot in his bones.

<sup>5</sup>The plans of the righteous aim at justice;  
the schemes of the wicked aim at deceit.

<sup>6</sup>The words of the wicked ambush for blood,  
but the mouth of the upright rescues them.

<sup>7</sup>The wicked are overturned and are gone,  
but the household of the righteous stands firm.

<sup>8</sup>A person is praised according to his insight,  
but the twisted in heart will be despised.

- <sup>9</sup>Better to be overlooked and have a servant  
than to boast of importance and lack bread.
- <sup>10</sup>A righteous person knows the life of his animal,  
but the compassion of the wicked is cruelty.
- <sup>11</sup>Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread,  
but whoever chases empty pursuits lacks sense.
- <sup>12</sup>The wicked covets the plunder of evil people,  
but the root of the righteous bears fruit.
- <sup>13</sup>The wicked is trapped by the sin of his lips,  
but the righteous escapes from distress.
- <sup>14</sup>From the fruit of his mouth a person is filled with good,  
and the work of his hands comes back to him.
- <sup>15</sup>The way of a fool seems right to him,  
but a wise person listens to advice.
- <sup>16</sup>A fool's irritation is known at once,  
but a shrewd person conceals an insult.
- <sup>17</sup>A truthful witness declares what is right,  
but a false witness speaks deceit.
- <sup>18</sup>There is reckless talk that cuts like sword thrusts,  
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- <sup>19</sup>Truthful speech endures forever,  
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
- <sup>20</sup>Deceit fills the heart of those who plot evil,  
but those who counsel peace find joy.
- <sup>21</sup>No real harm befalls the righteous,  
but the wicked are filled with trouble.
- <sup>22</sup>Lying lips are detestable to the LORD,  
but those who act faithfully are His delight.
- <sup>23</sup>A shrewd person conceals his knowledge,  
but the heart of fools broadcasts foolishness.
- <sup>24</sup>The hand of the diligent will rule,  
but laziness leads to forced labor.
- <sup>25</sup>Anxiety in a person's heart weighs it down,  
but a good word lifts it up.

**26**The righteous guides his neighbor well,  
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

**27**The lazy person does not roast what he catches,  
but diligence is a person's precious wealth.

**28**On the path of righteousness there is life;  
along that road there is no death.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Musar ('discipline, correction, instruction') is the word for formative training that includes rebuke. Loving musar means welcoming the painful process of being corrected. The sone tokachat ('hater of correction') is ba'ar ('brutish, like an animal, senseless') — a harsh comparison, suggesting that rejecting correction is subhuman.
2. The verb yafiq ('draws out, obtains, brings forth') suggests that the good person's relationship with God naturally produces ratson ('favor'). The ish mezimot ('person of plots, schemer') receives condemnation — yarshi'a, from the same root as rasha ('wicked'), meaning God declares him guilty.
3. The contrast is between instability and rootedness. Wickedness cannot provide yikon ('a firm foundation, an established position'). The righteous have a shoresh ('root') that bal yimot ('will not be shaken, will not be dislodged'). The botanical metaphor continues from chapter 11: the righteous are rooted; the wicked are rootless.
4. Eshet chayil is notoriously difficult to translate. Chayil means 'strength, valor, capability, wealth, army.' The woman described is not merely 'virtuous' in a passive sense but formidable — strong, competent, and worthy of respect. We render it 'woman of strength' to preserve the active force of the Hebrew.
5. Machshevot ('thoughts, plans, intentions') and tachbulot ('schemes, guidance, steering') are both words for deliberate mental activity. The difference is their orientation: the righteous plan toward mishpat ('justice, right judgment') while the wicked steer toward mirmah ('deceit, fraud').
6. The wicked's speech is personified as a predator lying in wait (erov dam, 'ambush of blood'). Words become weapons — false testimony, slander, manipulation that leads to someone's destruction. The upright's mouth, by contrast, has saving power — honest speech delivers people from danger.
7. Hafokh ('overturned, upended') uses the same verb applied to the destruction of Sodom. The wicked are flipped and ve-einam ('and they are not, and they are gone') — total erasure. The beit tsaddiqim ('house of the righteous') — their family, lineage, and legacy — ya'amod ('stands, endures').
8. Sekhel ('insight, prudence, good sense') is the quality that earns a person communal respect. The na'aveh lev ('twisted of heart, warped in mind') — someone whose inner orientation is distorted — will ultimately be despised regardless of outward appearance or temporary success.
9. This 'better than' proverb punctures social pretension. The niqleh ('lightly esteemed, overlooked, despised') who has a servant — meaning he has enough resources to sustain a household — is better off than the mitkabbed ('one who glorifies himself, who puts on airs') who chasar lachem ('lacks bread'). Substance beats performance.
10. The use of nefesh ('soul, life, being') for the animal is significant. Hebrew does not restrict nefesh to humans — animals are nefesh chayyah ('living beings') in Genesis 1. The righteous person recognizes the animal's experience as real.
10. The oxymoron 'the compassion of the wicked is cruelty' suggests that wickedness distorts even good impulses. A wicked person's version of mercy may be self-serving, manipulative, or ultimately harmful.
11. The oved admato ('worker of his ground') is the diligent farmer whose labor produces yisba lachem ('satisfaction of bread, plenty of food'). The meradef reqim ('pursuer of empty things') — one who chases get-rich-quick schemes or idle fantasies — ends up chasar lev ('lacking heart/sense'). Honest work produces; chasing illusions wastes.
12. The chamad ('covets, desires intensely') of the wicked is directed at metsod ra'im ('the net/catch/plunder of evil people') — he envies the ill-gotten gains of other wicked people. The righteous, by contrast, have a shoresh ('root') that yitten ('gives, produces, yields') — their productivity comes from depth, not theft.
13. The pesha sefatayim ('transgression of lips') becomes a moqesh ('snare, trap') — the wicked's own words ensnare him. The righteous, however, manages to exit (yetse, 'goes out, escapes') from tsarah ('distress, trouble'). Honest speech keeps a person free; dishonest speech binds.
14. The metaphor of 'fruit of the mouth' treats speech as productive labor — words generate consequences the way trees generate fruit. The parallel line extends the principle to manual work: gemul yede adam ('the dealing/reward of a person's hands') yashiv lo ('returns to him'). Both speech and labor create a return — positive or negative — that circles back to the source.
15. The evil ('fool') suffers from moral blindness: his path appears yashar ('straight, right, correct') be-einav ('in his own eyes'). Self-assessment without external input is unreliable. The wise person, by contrast, is shome'a le-etsah ('one who listens to counsel') — teachability is the hallmark of wisdom.

16. The fool's emotional response is *ba-yom yivvade'a* ('known on the same day, known immediately') — he cannot contain his anger; it spills out the moment he feels it. The *arum* ('shrewd, prudent, clever') person, however, *koseh qalon* ('covers disgrace, conceals the insult') — he absorbs the offense without public reaction, choosing the strategic response over the reflexive one.
17. The *yafiach emunah* ('one who breathes out faithfulness') — the verb suggests that truth flows from this person as naturally as breath. He *yaggid tsedeq* ('declares what is right, announces justice'). The *ed sheqarim* ('witness of falsehoods') produces *mirmah* ('deceit, fraud'). The courtroom setting is implied — reliable versus unreliable testimony.
18. The verb *boteh* is rare and suggests reckless, uncontrolled speech — blurting without thinking. The damage is compared to sword wounds, suggesting that verbal injury can be as real and painful as physical violence.
18. *Marpe* ('healing') comes from the root *rapha* ('to heal, to mend'). The wise person's speech functions as medicine — it repairs what has been damaged.
19. The *sefat emet* ('lip of truth') *tikkon la'ad* ('is established forever, stands permanently'). Truth has structural integrity — it does not need to be propped up or maintained because it corresponds to reality. The *leshon shaqer* ('tongue of falsehood') lasts only *ad argi'ah* ('until a blink, for a moment') — lies have no staying power because they have no foundation.
20. The *chorshe ra* ('plotters of evil, devisers of harm') carry *mirmah* ('deceit') in their hearts — deception is their inner reality, not just their outward behavior. The *yo'atse shalom* ('counselors of peace') experience *simchah* ('joy, gladness'). Working toward *shalom* — wholeness, well-being, communal harmony — produces inner satisfaction that plotting evil never can.
21. The bold claim that *lo ye'unneh la-tsaddiq kol aven* ('no evil/mischief befalls the righteous') expresses the confidence of wisdom theology at its most optimistic. The sages are not blind to suffering — but they assert that the righteous person's core is protected even when external circumstances are difficult. The wicked, by contrast, *male'u ra* ('are filled with evil/trouble') — saturated with the consequences of their own choices.
22. This verse echoes 11:1 in structure: *to'evat Yahweh* ('abomination to the LORD') paired with *retsono* ('His delight'). Lying lips provoke divine revulsion; *oseh emunah* ('doers of faithfulness, those who act reliably') earn divine pleasure. The God of Proverbs cares intensely about honesty.
23. The *arum* ('shrewd, prudent') person *koseh da'at* ('covers knowledge') — he does not display everything he knows but reveals it strategically. The fool's heart *yiqra ivvelet* ('calls out, proclaims foolishness') — it cannot help advertising its emptiness. Wisdom knows when to speak and when to withhold.
24. The *charutsim* ('diligent, sharp, decisive') — from a root meaning 'to cut, to be sharp' — gain authority (*timshol*, 'will rule'). The *remiyyah* ('laziness, slack hand, negligence') leads to *mas* ('forced labor, tribute labor, corvee'). In the ancient economy, those who failed to manage their own resources ended up working someone else's fields as conscripted labor.
25. *De'agah* ('anxiety, worry, care') in the heart *yashchannah* ('causes it to bow down, depresses it'). The remedy is simple and powerful: *davar tov* ('a good word') *yesamm'channah* ('makes it glad, lifts it'). The sages recognized the connection between emotional health and speech — the right word at the right time has real therapeutic power.
26. The verb *yater* is debated. It may mean 'explores, scouts out' (from *tur*) — the righteous person scouts the path for his neighbor, serving as a guide. The wicked's path, by contrast, *tat'em* ('causes them to wander, leads them astray'). The righteous person's moral clarity benefits those around him.
27. The image is vivid: the lazy person goes hunting but cannot be bothered to prepare the catch — the meat rots uneaten. All effort is wasted by the failure to follow through. The diligent person's *hon* ('wealth, substance') is *yaqar* ('precious, valuable') — not because he has more possessions but because he stewards them responsibly.
28. The chapter closes with a grand claim: *orach tsedaqah* ('the path of righteousness') is *chayyim* ('life'). The *derekh netivah* ('the way of the path, that road') is *al mavet* ('not death, no death'). Righteousness and life are mapped onto the same road. This is the core conviction of the Solomonic collection: the moral structure of reality rewards those who walk rightly.

# 13

**Summary:** *Proverbs 13 continues the Solomonic antithetic collection with twenty-five proverbs that probe the relationship between discipline and wisdom, the deceptiveness of appearances, and the long-term consequences of how wealth is gained and used. The chapter gives special attention to the contrast between real and apparent prosperity, insisting that substance matters more than show.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 12 — 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life' — is one of the most psychologically acute observations in ancient literature. The sages understood that prolonged unfulfillment is not merely disappointing but physiologically damaging. The 'tree of life' metaphor, appearing here for the second of four times in Proverbs, frames fulfilled desire as a source of vital renewal. The chapter also contains the counterintuitive observation that some who*

*appear rich have nothing while some who appear poor have great wealth (verse 7) — a warning against judging by surfaces.*

*Translation Friction: The claim that the righteous person 'has enough to satisfy his appetite' while 'the belly of the wicked goes empty' (verse 25) represents wisdom theology's confident assertion that moral order governs material outcomes. This is a general observation, not a universal guarantee — the sages themselves would acknowledge exceptions. The proverb about sparing the rod (verse 24) reflects ancient educational norms that modern readers must evaluate carefully within their cultural and ethical context.*

*Connections: The 'tree of life' in verse 12 connects to Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, and 15:4, forming a thematic thread through the collection. The concern with discipline (musar) in verses 1 and 24 echoes the parental instruction framework of chapters 1-9. The warning against wealth gained by fraud (verse 11) parallels the dishonest-scales concern of 11:1.*

- <sup>1</sup>A wise son accepts his father's discipline,  
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
- <sup>2</sup>From the fruit of his mouth a person eats what is good,  
but the appetite of the treacherous feeds on violence.
- <sup>3</sup>Whoever guards his mouth protects his life,  
but whoever opens his lips wide invites ruin.
- <sup>4</sup>The lazy person craves but gets nothing;  
the appetite of the diligent is richly satisfied.
- <sup>5</sup>A righteous person hates a false word,  
but the wicked makes himself repulsive and disgraceful.
- <sup>6</sup>Righteousness guards the person of blameless conduct,  
but wickedness brings down the sinner.
- <sup>7</sup>One person pretends to be rich but has nothing;  
another appears poor but has great wealth.
- <sup>8</sup>A rich person's wealth is the ransom for his life,  
but a poor person never even hears a threat.
- <sup>9</sup>The light of the righteous burns brightly,  
but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out.
- <sup>10</sup>Arrogance only breeds conflict,  
but wisdom is with those who take advice.
- <sup>11</sup>Wealth gained from nothing dwindles,  
but whoever gathers little by little grows rich.
- <sup>12</sup>Hope drawn out makes the heart sick,  
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
- <sup>13</sup>Whoever despises a word will be ruined by it,  
but whoever respects a command will be rewarded.

<sup>14</sup>The instruction of a wise person is a fountain of life,  
turning one away from the snares of death.

<sup>15</sup>Good sense wins favor,  
but the way of the treacherous is unyielding.

<sup>16</sup>Every shrewd person acts with knowledge,  
but a fool displays his foolishness.

<sup>17</sup>A wicked messenger falls into trouble,  
but a faithful envoy brings healing.

<sup>18</sup>Poverty and disgrace come to whoever rejects discipline,  
but whoever heeds correction will be honored.

<sup>19</sup>A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul,  
but fools find it detestable to turn from evil.

<sup>20</sup>Walk with the wise and become wise;  
keep company with fools and suffer harm.

<sup>21</sup>Trouble pursues sinners,  
but good rewards the righteous.

<sup>22</sup>A good person leaves an inheritance for his grandchildren,  
but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

<sup>23</sup>Abundant food lies in the fallow ground of the poor,  
but it is swept away through injustice.

<sup>24</sup>Whoever withholds his rod hates his son,  
but the one who loves him applies discipline early.

<sup>25</sup>The righteous eats enough to satisfy his appetite,  
but the belly of the wicked goes empty.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The implied verb in the first line — 'accepts' or 'heeds' — must be supplied; the Hebrew simply says 'a wise son — a father's discipline.' The compression forces the reader to make the connection: wisdom and receptivity to parental *musar* go together. The *lets* ('scoffer, mocker') refuses *ge'arah* ('rebuke, reprimand') — his contempt for correction defines him.
2. The fruit metaphor for speech recurs from 12:14. Good speech produces good nourishment for the speaker. The *nefesh bogedim* ('appetite of the treacherous') consumes *chamas* ('violence') — they feed on destruction, and destruction feeds on them.
3. *Notser piv* ('guards his mouth') and *shomer nafsho* ('keeps his life') are equated — controlling speech is an act of self-preservation. The *poseq sefatav* ('one who opens wide his lips, who lets his mouth fly open') brings *mechittah* ('ruin, destruction, terror') upon himself. The mouth is either a gate that protects or a breach that exposes.
4. The *atsel* ('sluggard, lazy person') has desires — *mit'avvah* ('craving, wanting intensely') — but *va-ayin* ('and nothing, and there is not'). Desire without effort produces emptiness. The *charutsim* ('diligent') have their *nefesh tedushshan* ('made fat, richly satisfied'). The proverb is not about wanting less but about coupling desire with disciplined work.
5. The righteous *yisna* ('hates') *devar shaqer* ('a word of falsehood') — his revulsion toward lying is visceral, not merely intellectual. The wicked *yav'ish* ('makes a stink, becomes repulsive') and *yachpir* ('brings shame, acts disgracefully'). The language is sensory: wickedness literally smells bad.

6. Tzedaqah functions as a protective force — it tisor ('guards, preserves') the tom derekh ('one whose way is blameless'). Wickedness, by contrast, tesallef ('overturns, perverts, brings down') the chattat ('sinner, one who misses the mark'). Character protects or destroys depending on its orientation.
7. The hitpael verb forms (mit'asher, mitrosesh) indicate reflexive action — 'making oneself rich/poor,' acting the part. The emphasis is on performance versus substance. This proverb resists any simple equation between visible prosperity and actual well-being.
8. The kofer nefesh ('ransom of life') suggests that the wealthy person is a target — his riches buy him out of danger, but they also attract danger in the first place. The rash ('poor person') lo shama ge'arah ('does not hear rebuke/threat') — no one threatens or extorts him because he has nothing worth taking. Poverty has one unexpected advantage: obscurity.
9. Or ('light') for the righteous versus ner ('lamp') for the wicked — the righteous have a self-sustaining light that yismach ('rejoices, burns joyfully'), while the wicked have only a lamp, dependent on oil, that yid'akh ('is extinguished, goes dark'). The metaphor suggests that the righteous person's vitality is internally generated while the wicked person's prosperity requires constant external fuel.
10. The raq ('only, nothing but') is emphatic: the sole source of matsisah ('strife, conflict, quarreling') is zadon ('arrogance, presumption'). Every fight traces back to someone's pride. Wisdom, by contrast, dwells with the no'atsim ('those who allow themselves to be advised, the well-counseled'). Humility is the prerequisite for peace.
11. Hon me-hevel ('wealth from emptiness/vapor/fraud') — whether gained by fraud, speculation, or windfall — yim'at ('diminishes, becomes small'). The qovets al yad ('one who gathers by hand, who accumulates gradually') yarbeh ('increases, multiplies'). The proverb endorses slow, honest accumulation over sudden riches. Easy money evaporates; earned money compounds.
12. The verb memushakhah ('drawn out, prolonged, delayed') emphasizes the duration of waiting. It is not the hope itself that sickens but the endless delay. This is an observation about human psychology, not a theological complaint.
12. The 'tree of life' — the second of four appearances in Proverbs — here symbolizes renewed vitality through fulfilled longing. It connects desire and life: when what we deeply need actually arrives, it is like gaining access to the source of life itself.
13. The baz le-davar ('one who despises a word/matter') will yechavel lo ('be pledged/ruined/destroyed for it'). The 'word' here likely means authoritative instruction — parental, wise, or divine. Contempt for instruction leads to ruin. The yere mitsvah ('one who fears/respects a command') is yeshullam ('is rewarded, is made whole').
14. Torat chakham ('the instruction of the wise') is a meqor chayyim ('fountain of life, spring of living water') — an image of constantly flowing, life-sustaining vitality. The purpose is lasur mi-moqshe mavet ('to turn aside from the snares of death') — wisdom's instruction steers a person around the traps that lead to destruction.
15. Sekhel tov ('good sense, sound judgment') produces chen ('grace, favor') — people are attracted to a person of good sense. The derekh bogedim ('way of the treacherous') is eitan ('hard, enduring, unyielding') — it is a path with no give, no flexibility, that ultimately grinds its walkers down.
16. The arum ('shrewd, prudent') person ya'aseh be-da'at ('acts with knowledge') — his decisions are informed, considered, based on evidence. The kesil ('fool') yifros ivvelet ('spreads out foolishness, lays it open for display') as though putting it on exhibition. The fool advertises his deficiency.
17. The mal'akh rasha ('wicked messenger, unreliable envoy') yipol be-ra ('falls into evil/trouble') — he either corrupts the message or brings disaster through his unreliability. The tsir emunim ('faithful envoy, trustworthy messenger') is marpe ('healing') — he restores what was broken, delivers what was promised, and mends the relationship between sender and recipient.
18. The pore'a musar ('one who lets discipline go, who refuses correction') receives resh ('poverty') and qalon ('disgrace, shame'). The shomer tokhachat ('one who guards/heeds correction') yekhubad ('is honored, is treated with dignity'). The economic and social consequences of refusing to learn are real and measurable.
19. The ta'avah niyah ('a desire that has come into being, a desire that is realized') is te'erav la-nefesh ('sweet to the soul, pleasant to the being'). This echoes verse 12's tree-of-life language. The second line reveals why fools remain stuck: to'avat kesilim sur me-ra ('it is an abomination to fools to turn from evil') — they find the very idea of repentance repulsive.
20. Holekh et chakhamim yechkam ('one who walks with wise people will become wise') — wisdom is contagious; proximity to wise people shapes character. Ro'eh kesilim yeroa' ('one who companions with fools will be broken/harmed') — foolishness is equally contagious. The proverb is about the formative power of association.
21. Ra'ah ('evil, calamity, trouble') is personified as a pursuer — it hunts sinners down. The righteous receive the opposite: yeshalem tov ('good is repaid to them'). The moral order is portrayed as self-enforcing: consequences track behavior.
22. The tov ('good person') has enough to bequeath not just to children but to bene vanim ('children's children, grandchildren') — a sign of sustained prosperity across generations. The cheil choter ('wealth of the sinner') is tsafun la-tsaddiq ('stored up for the righteous') — an ironic reversal where the sinner's ill-gotten gains end up benefiting those who live rightly.
23. The nir ra'shim ('newly broken ground of the poor') contains rov okhel ('abundant food') — the poor have productive potential. But yesh nispeh be-lo mishpat ('there is that which is swept away without justice/judgment') — social injustice destroys what the poor could produce. This verse contains a rare acknowledgment that poverty can result from systemic injustice, not just laziness.

24. The chosekh shivto ('one who withholds his rod') is described as *sone veno* ('hating his son') — a deliberately provocative statement. The parent who avoids correcting a child is not being kind but cruel, because the child will grow up unformed. The *ohavo* ('one who loves him') *shicharo musar* ('seeks him early with discipline, applies correction from the start'). Love, in the sages' framework, requires the willingness to cause short-term discomfort for long-term formation.
24. The 'rod' (*shevet*) in ancient wisdom literature represents parental authority and corrective discipline. The sages understood discipline as an expression of love, not its opposite.
25. The *tsaddiq eats le-sova nafsho* ('to the satisfaction of his being') — not luxury but sufficiency. His needs are met. The *beten resha'im* ('belly of the wicked') *techsar* ('is lacking, is deficient'). The wicked may have much but are never satisfied; the righteous may have little but have enough. The contrast is between contentment and insatiability as much as between wealth and poverty.

# 14

**Summary:** *Proverbs 14 is the longest chapter in the Solomonic collection at thirty-five verses. It canvasses an extraordinary range of topics — the fear of the LORD, the reliability of witnesses, the nature of anger, the treatment of the poor, the deceptiveness of human self-assessment — weaving them into the persistent antithetic framework of wise versus foolish, righteous versus wicked. The chapter repeatedly returns to the question of what is real versus what merely appears to be real.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter contains two of the most quoted lines in Proverbs: 'There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death' (verse 12) and 'In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence' (verse 26). Verse 12 is so important that it is repeated verbatim in 16:25 — the only proverb in the Solomonic collection to appear twice in identical form. The chapter also contains a striking economic ethic: the one who oppresses the poor insults his Maker (verse 31), establishing a direct theological link between treatment of the vulnerable and relationship with God.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 4 — 'Where there are no oxen the manger is clean, but abundant harvest comes through the strength of an ox' — is a bracing piece of realism that cuts against any perfectionism. Productive life is messy. The clean manger produces nothing. Some readers may struggle with verse 13's observation that 'even in laughter the heart may be in pain' — the sages were not naive optimists but sharp observers of how people mask suffering with performance.*

**Connections:** *The 'way that seems right' in verse 12 connects to the two-ways theology of Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 30:15-20. The fear of the LORD as a 'fountain of life' (verse 27) echoes 13:14 and anticipates the programmatic statement of 1:7. The connection between oppressing the poor and insulting God (verse 31) parallels Job 31:13-15 and anticipates Matthew 25:40.*

<sup>1</sup>The wisest of women builds her household,  
but a foolish woman tears it down with her own hands.

<sup>2</sup>The one who walks in uprightness fears the LORD,  
but the one whose ways are crooked despises Him.

<sup>3</sup>In the mouth of a fool is a rod of arrogance,  
but the lips of the wise protect them.

<sup>4</sup>Where there are no oxen the feeding trough is clean,  
but an abundant harvest comes through the strength of an ox.

<sup>5</sup>A faithful witness does not lie,  
but a false witness breathes out deception.

<sup>6</sup>A scoffer searches for wisdom but finds nothing;  
knowledge comes easily to the discerning.

<sup>7</sup>Walk away from a foolish person,  
for you will not find knowledgeable speech on his lips.

<sup>8</sup>The wisdom of the shrewd is to understand his own path;  
the foolishness of fools is self-deception.

<sup>9</sup>Fools mock at guilt,  
but among the upright there is goodwill.

<sup>10</sup>The heart knows its own bitterness,  
and no outsider can share in its joy.

<sup>11</sup>The house of the wicked will be demolished,  
but the tent of the upright will flourish.

<sup>12</sup>There is a path that seems straight to a person,  
but its end is the ways of death.

<sup>13</sup>Even in laughter the heart may ache,  
and joy may end in grief.

<sup>14</sup>The faithless in heart will have his fill of his own ways,  
but a good person is satisfied from what is above him.

<sup>15</sup>The naive person believes everything,  
but the shrewd person watches his step.

<sup>16</sup>A wise person is cautious and turns from evil,  
but a fool is reckless and overconfident.

<sup>17</sup>A short-tempered person acts foolishly,  
and a schemer is hated.

<sup>18</sup>The naive inherit foolishness,  
but the shrewd are crowned with knowledge.

<sup>19</sup>The evil will bow before the good,  
and the wicked will stand at the gates of the righteous.

<sup>20</sup>Even by his neighbor the poor person is disliked,  
but the rich person has many friends.

<sup>21</sup>Whoever despises his neighbor sins,  
but whoever shows grace to the poor — how fortunate he is.

<sup>22</sup>Do not those who plot evil go astray?  
But faithful love and truth belong to those who plan good.

<sup>23</sup>In all hard work there is profit,  
but mere talk leads only to poverty.

- <sup>24</sup>The crown of the wise is their wealth;  
the garland of fools is foolishness.
- <sup>25</sup>A truthful witness saves lives,  
but a deceitful witness breathes out lies.
- <sup>26</sup>In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,  
and his children will have a refuge.
- <sup>27</sup>The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
turning one away from the snares of death.
- <sup>28</sup>A large population is a king's glory,  
but without people a ruler is ruined.
- <sup>29</sup>The patient person has great understanding,  
but the short-tempered person exalts foolishness.
- <sup>30</sup>A tranquil heart is the life of the body,  
but envy is rot in the bones.
- <sup>31</sup>Whoever oppresses the poor insults his Maker,  
but whoever shows grace to the needy honors Him.
- <sup>32</sup>The wicked is overthrown by his own calamity,  
but the righteous has refuge even in death.
- <sup>33</sup>Wisdom rests quietly in the heart of the discerning,  
but among fools it makes itself known.
- <sup>34</sup>Righteousness elevates a nation,  
but sin is a disgrace to any people.
- <sup>35</sup>A king's favor rests on a servant who acts wisely,  
but his fury falls on one who acts disgracefully.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Chakhemot nashim ('wisdom of women, the wisest among women') is an intensive plural — the wisest of the wise among women. She bantah vetah ('has built her house') — the bayit ('house') is both the physical home and the family unit, the household as a social and economic institution. The ivvelet ('foolish woman') be-yadehah tehersennah ('with her own hands tears it down'). The destruction is self-inflicted and deliberate, though perhaps unintentional in its consequences.
2. Walking be-yoshro ('in his uprightness') is equated with fearing the LORD — ethical conduct is the expression of reverence for God. The neloz derakhav ('one twisted in his paths, whose ways are crooked') is bozeihu ('one who despises Him') — moral crookedness is not merely poor behavior but active contempt for God.
3. The choter ga'avah ('rod/shoot of pride') in the fool's mouth means his arrogant speech becomes a rod that beats him — his own words punish him. The wise person's lips tishmoren ('guard them, protect them') — careful speech is self-defense.
4. This verse stands outside the typical righteous-versus-wicked framework and delivers pure agricultural pragmatism. Oxen eat, they defecate, they require care — but without them, the field cannot be plowed at scale. The clean manger is a sign of poverty, not efficiency.
5. The ed emunim ('faithful witness, reliable witness') lo yekhazzev ('does not deal falsely, does not lie') — his reliability is the negative: he simply does not do the thing that destroys trust. The ed shaqer ('witness of falsehood') yafiach kezavim ('breathes out lies') — deception flows from him as naturally as exhalation.

6. The lets ('scoffer') searches for wisdom but va-ayin ('and there is nothing') — his contemptuous attitude blocks reception. Wisdom requires humility, and the scoffer has none. For the navon ('discerning, understanding person') knowledge is naqal ('easy, accessible, light') — not because it requires no effort but because the discerning person's posture makes learning natural.
7. The imperative lekh mi-neged ('go from the front of, walk away from') is direct: leave the presence of a fool. The reason is pragmatic — bal yada'ta sifteï da'at ('you will not know/find lips of knowledge') — there is nothing to learn there. Proximity to fools wastes time and may corrupt your own thinking.
8. The arum ('shrewd, prudent') person's wisdom consists in havin darkko ('understanding his way') — knowing where he is going, why, and what the costs and consequences will be. Self-knowledge is the foundation. The kesilim ('fools') practice mirmah ('deceit') — but the context suggests they deceive themselves above all. Foolishness is fundamentally a failure of self-understanding.
9. The evilim ('fools') yalits asham ('mock at guilt, scoff at the guilt offering') — they treat moral failure as a joke, refusing to take the consequences of wrongdoing seriously. Among the yesharim ('upright'), by contrast, there is ratson ('favor, acceptance, goodwill') — right relationships produce mutual respect and generosity.
10. This verse breaks from the antithetic pattern to make a single observation about the loneliness of inner experience. It anticipates modern psychology's recognition that subjective experience is ultimately incommunicable in its fullness.
11. The beit ('house') — suggesting permanence, solidity, stone construction — of the wicked will yishamed ('be destroyed, demolished'). The ohel ('tent') — suggesting fragility, impermanence, vulnerability — of the upright will yafriach ('flourish, blossom, bloom'). The reversal is deliberate: the seemingly solid is destroyed while the seemingly fragile thrives.
12. The word yashar ('straight, right, upright') is the same word used positively throughout Proverbs for moral uprightness. The irony is devastating: the path looks yashar but leads to death. Appearances of moral correctness can be fatally misleading.
12. The repetition of this exact verse in 16:25 is unique in the Solomonic collection. The sages considered this warning important enough to state twice — the danger of self-deception warranted double emphasis.
13. Gam bi-sechoq yikh'av lev ('even in laughter the heart is pained') — the sages observed that outward cheerfulness can mask inner suffering. People laugh while they hurt. And acharitah simchah tugah ('the end of joy is grief') — happiness does not last. This is not pessimism but observation: human emotional experience is layered and unstable.
14. The sug lev ('turned-back of heart, faithless, backslider') will yisba mi-derakhav ('be filled with his own ways') — his own conduct will become his punishment, forced to consume the consequences of his choices. The ish tov ('good person') is satisfied me-alav ('from what is above him, from himself') — likely meaning from the fruit of his own good conduct, or from God who is above.
15. The peti ('naive, gullible, simple') ya'amin le-khol davar ('believes every word') — he has no filter, no critical faculty, no ability to distinguish reliable information from nonsense. The arum ('shrewd') yavin la-ashuro ('understands his step, pays attention to where he is going'). Critical thinking is a survival skill.
16. The wise person yare ('fears, is cautious') and sar me-ra ('turns aside from evil') — his caution is not cowardice but prudence. The fool mit'abber ('crosses boundaries, acts recklessly') and bote'ach ('is confident, trusts himself'). False confidence is the fool's signature — he barges ahead where the wise person pauses.
17. Qetsar appayim ('short of nostrils, quick to anger') — the Hebrew locates anger in the nose, as flaring nostrils. A person whose fuse is short ya'aseh ivvelet ('does foolishness') — anger produces bad decisions. The ish mezimot ('person of schemes, plotter') yissane ('is hated') — his reputation for manipulation makes him socially toxic.
18. The peta'im ('naive, gullible') nachalu ivvelet ('inherit foolishness') — folly is their estate, what they receive by default when they fail to pursue wisdom. The arumim ('shrewd') yaktiru da'at ('crown themselves with knowledge') — knowledge becomes their ateret ('crown, diadem'), a mark of honor and authority.
19. Shachu ra'im lifne tovim ('the evil bow before the good') — the moral order ultimately reasserts itself, reversing apparent power dynamics. The wicked end up as supplicants al sha'are tsaddiq ('at the gates of the righteous') — seeking what only the righteous can provide.
20. This verse does not endorse the social dynamic it describes — it reports it. The rash ('poor person') yissane ('is disliked, hated') gam le-re'ehu ('even by his companion') — poverty isolates. The ashir ('rich person') has rabbim ohavim ('many who love him') — wealth attracts. The sages observed this pattern without approving it; subsequent verses (especially verse 31) will challenge it.
21. The baz le-re'ehu ('one who despises his neighbor') is choter ('sinning, missing the mark') — contempt for another person is a moral failure, not merely a social faux pas. The mechonon aniyim ('one who shows grace to the poor') receives ashrov ('his blessedness, his happiness') — generosity toward the vulnerable produces human flourishing.
22. The rhetorical question expects a 'yes': the chorshe ra ('plotters of evil') yit'u ('go astray, wander, err'). Those who plan evil are themselves lost. The chorshe tov ('planners of good') receive chesed ve-emet ('faithful love and truth') — the paired divine attributes that characterize God's own covenant loyalty.

23. Be-khol etsev ('in all toil, in every painful exertion') yihyeh motar ('there will be surplus, profit, advantage'). Even difficult, unglamorous work produces results. But devar sefatayim ('word of lips, mere talk') akh le-machsor ('only to poverty, nothing but want'). Talk without action is economically catastrophic.
24. The wise wear their oshram ('wealth') as an ateret ('crown') — their prosperity adorns them and reflects their competence. The fools' ivvelet ('foolishness') is their only crown — they have nothing to display but their own folly. The repetition of ivvelet in both halves of the line may be textually difficult; some emend the second to a different word, but the Masoretic text emphasizes: all fools have to show for themselves is more foolishness.
25. The ed emet ('witness of truth') is matsil nefashot ('rescuer of lives/souls') — honest testimony in court or community literally preserves people from wrongful punishment or unjust treatment. The yafiach kezavim ('breather-out of lies') is mirmah ('deceit, fraud') — his testimony endangers others.
26. The pairing of fear (yir'ah) and confidence (mivtach) is deliberately paradoxical. The person who fears God has nothing else to fear, because the ultimate authority is already his refuge. This is not servile terror but awe that produces stability.
27. Nearly identical to 13:14, where 'the instruction of the wise' is the fountain of life. Here the fear of the LORD occupies the same structural position — suggesting that the fear of the LORD and wise instruction are functionally equivalent. Both are meqor chayyim ('fountain of life') and both serve lasur mi-moqshe mavet ('to turn aside from death's snares').
28. Be-rov am ('in abundance of people') is hadrat melekh ('the glory/majesty of a king'). A ruler's power depends on his people — without subjects, a king is nothing. Be-efes le'om ('in the absence of a nation') is mechittat razon ('the ruin of a prince/ruler'). This is political realism: leadership exists in relationship to community.
29. Erekh appayim ('long of nostrils, slow to anger, patient') has rav tevunah ('great understanding, abundant discernment'). Patience is not passive but a sign of deep comprehension. The qetsar ruach ('short of spirit, hasty-tempered') merim ivvelet ('lifts up, exalts, elevates foolishness') — his impatience puts folly on a pedestal.
30. Lev marpe ('a healing heart, a heart at peace, a tranquil heart') is chayyei vesarim ('the life of the flesh/body') — inner peace literally sustains physical health. Qin'ah ('envy, jealousy, passionate rivalry') is reqav atsamot ('rotteness of bones'). Envy does not merely distress the mind; it decays the body. The sages anticipated the psychosomatic insight that emotional states affect physical well-being.
31. The osehu ('his Maker') explicitly connects treatment of the poor to theology proper. God takes personally how people treat the vulnerable because the vulnerable bear His image. This principle resurfaces in Job 31:15 and in Jesus's parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:40).
32. The rasha is yiddacheh ('driven away, thrust out') be-ra'ato ('in his calamity/evil'). The righteous, however, choseh be-moto ('takes refuge in his death') — an extraordinary claim that trust in God extends even through death. Some scholars emend 'in his death' to 'in his integrity' (be-tummo), but the Masoretic text stands as one of the Hebrew Bible's rare hints at hope beyond death.
33. Wisdom tanuach ('rests, settles, is at peace') in the heart of the navon ('discerning person') — it does not need to announce itself or prove itself. Among fools it tivvade'a ('makes itself known, is revealed') — possibly meaning that even among fools wisdom eventually becomes apparent, or that fools' lack of wisdom is obvious to all.
34. Tsedaqah teromem goy ('righteousness lifts up a nation') — this moves beyond individual ethics to political theology. National righteousness — justice, honesty, care for the vulnerable — elevates an entire people. Chattat ('sin, missing the mark') is chesed le'ummim — a much-debated phrase, likely meaning 'a disgrace/reproach to peoples.' National sin degrades a nation's standing and integrity.
35. The retson melekh ('king's favor') goes to the eved maskil ('servant who acts with insight, a competent servant'). The evrat ('his fury, his wrath') falls on the mevish ('one who causes shame, who acts disgracefully'). In the court setting, competence earns favor and incompetence earns wrath — a principle that applies beyond royal courts to any relationship where performance is evaluated.

# 15

*Summary: Proverbs 15 is among the richest chapters in the Solomonian collection, weaving together the power of speech, the omniscience of God, the superiority of little-with-righteousness over much-with-injustice, and the irreplaceable value of discipline. The chapter opens and closes with speech — a gentle answer versus a harsh word — and fills the middle with a sustained meditation on what the LORD sees, what He loves, and what He finds detestable.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: This chapter contains the fourth and final 'tree of life' reference in Proverbs (verse 4: 'a healing tongue is a tree of life'), completing the metaphor's arc through the book. It also contains one of the strongest 'better than' clusters in Proverbs (verses 16-17), where the sages insist that a small amount with the fear of the LORD, or with love, outweighs abundance accompanied by turmoil or hatred. These are not throwaway platitudes but deliberate challenges to the prosperity assumptions that run through much of the wisdom tradition.*

*Translation Friction: The claim that the LORD's eyes are everywhere, watching the wicked and the good (verse 3), raises questions about divine surveillance that modern readers may find unsettling. The sages intend it as comfort — God is not absent — but it also underscores accountability. The repeated insistence that the LORD detests the sacrifice and the way of the wicked (verses 8-9) while delighting in the prayer of the upright creates sharp categories that leave little room for the complex moral reality of most human lives.*

*Connections: The 'gentle answer turns away wrath' of verse 1 anticipates James 1:19-20. The 'eyes of the LORD' in verse 3 echoes 2 Chronicles 16:9. The 'better than' proverbs in verses 16-17 connect to Psalm 37:16 and anticipate Jesus's teaching about treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). The 'healing tongue as tree of life' in verse 4 completes the series from 3:18, 11:30, and 13:12.*

<sup>1</sup>A gentle answer turns away fury,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

<sup>2</sup>The tongue of the wise makes knowledge attractive,  
but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.

<sup>3</sup>The eyes of the LORD are everywhere,  
watching the wicked and the good.

<sup>4</sup>A healing tongue is a tree of life,  
but crookedness in it is a crushing of the spirit.

<sup>5</sup>A fool rejects his father's discipline,  
but whoever heeds correction becomes shrewd.

<sup>6</sup>In the house of the righteous is great treasure,  
but the income of the wicked brings trouble.

<sup>7</sup>The lips of the wise spread knowledge,  
but the heart of fools does not.

<sup>8</sup>The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the LORD,  
but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

<sup>9</sup>The way of the wicked is detestable to the LORD,  
but He loves the one who pursues righteousness.

<sup>10</sup>Harsh discipline awaits the one who abandons the path;  
whoever hates correction will die.

<sup>11</sup>The grave and the place of destruction lie open before the LORD —  
how much more the hearts of human beings!

<sup>12</sup>A scoffer does not love being corrected;  
he will not go to the wise.

<sup>13</sup>A joyful heart brightens the face,  
but a grieving heart crushes the spirit.

<sup>14</sup>The heart of the discerning seeks knowledge,  
but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.

- <sup>15</sup>All the days of the afflicted are hard,  
but a cheerful heart has a never-ending feast.
- <sup>16</sup>Better is a little with the fear of the LORD  
than great treasure with turmoil.
- <sup>17</sup>Better a meal of vegetables where there is love  
than a fattened ox with hatred.
- <sup>18</sup>A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict,  
but the patient person calms a dispute.
- <sup>19</sup>The way of the lazy person is like a hedge of thorns,  
but the path of the upright is a clear highway.
- <sup>20</sup>A wise son brings joy to his father,  
but a foolish person despises his mother.
- <sup>21</sup>Foolishness is entertainment to the senseless,  
but a person of understanding walks a straight course.
- <sup>22</sup>Plans fail without consultation,  
but with many advisors they succeed.
- <sup>23</sup>A person finds joy in giving a good answer,  
and a word at the right time — how good it is!
- <sup>24</sup>The path of life leads upward for the wise,  
turning him away from the grave below.
- <sup>25</sup>The LORD tears down the house of the proud  
but secures the widow's boundary.
- <sup>26</sup>Evil plans are detestable to the LORD,  
but gracious words are pure.
- <sup>27</sup>Whoever chases dishonest gain brings trouble on his household,  
but the one who hates bribes will live.
- <sup>28</sup>The heart of the righteous considers before answering,  
but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil.
- <sup>29</sup>The LORD keeps far from the wicked,  
but He hears the prayer of the righteous.
- <sup>30</sup>Bright eyes bring joy to the heart,  
and good news strengthens the bones.
- <sup>31</sup>The ear that listens to life-giving correction  
will dwell among the wise.

**32**Whoever refuses discipline despises his own life,  
but whoever listens to correction gains understanding.

**33**The fear of the LORD is the discipline of wisdom,  
and before honor comes humility.

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TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Rakh ('soft, tender, gentle') describes not weakness but deliberate restraint — the choice to lower the temperature of a confrontation. The proverb assumes that the speaker has the power to choose tone and that this choice has predictable consequences.
2. The wise person's tongue tetiv da'at ('makes knowledge good, presents knowledge well') — it is not enough to possess knowledge; one must know how to present it effectively. The fool's mouth yabbi'a ivvelet ('gushes, pours out, bubbles up with foolishness') — there is no filter, no restraint, just a constant flow of nonsense.
3. Be-khol maqom ('in every place') eine Yahweh ('the eyes of the LORD') tsofot ('are watching, observing, keeping guard over') ra'im ve-tovim ('the wicked and the good'). Nothing escapes God's observation. This is simultaneously a comfort (the righteous are seen) and a warning (the wicked cannot hide). The LORD's vision is total and impartial.
4. This completes the 'tree of life' series in Proverbs: wisdom itself (3:18), the fruit of the righteous (11:30), fulfilled desire (13:12), and now healing speech (15:4). Each use identifies something that gives or sustains life — and the final one locates that life-giving power in words.
4. Shever be-ruach ('breaking of spirit') describes the internal damage caused by deceptive or cruel speech. It is not merely emotional hurt but a structural collapse of the inner person.
5. The evil ('fool') yin'ats ('spurns, despises, treats with contempt') musar aviv ('his father's discipline'). The shomer tokhachat ('one who guards/heeds correction') ya'arim ('becomes shrewd, grows prudent'). Correction is the raw material from which shrewdness is built.
6. The beit tsaddiq ('house of the righteous') contains chosen rav ('great treasure, abundant store'). The tevu'at rasha ('produce/income of the wicked') ne'ekaret ('is troubled, brings disturbance'). Wealth acquired righteously is stable; wealth acquired wickedly is volatile.
7. The wise person's lips yezaru da'at ('scatter, spread, sow knowledge') — the agricultural metaphor treats knowledge as seed that the wise broadcast for others to harvest. The fool's heart lo khen ('not so, does not do this') — it produces nothing worth spreading.
8. Zevach resha'im ('sacrifice of the wicked') is to'avat Yahweh — religious ritual performed by those whose lives contradict it provokes God's revulsion. Tefillat yesharim ('prayer of the upright') is retsono ('His delight, His pleasure'). God evaluates worship by the character of the worshiper, not the quality of the offering. This anticipates the prophetic critique of empty ritual (Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24).
9. Extending verse 8 from worship to way of life: not just the wicked person's sacrifice but his entire derekh ('way, path, lifestyle') is to'evah. And God does not merely accept the righteous — ye'ehav ('He loves') the meradef tsedaqah ('pursuer of righteousness'). The verb 'pursues' implies effort, intention, and persistence.
10. Musar ra ('severe discipline, harsh correction') awaits the ozev orach ('one who abandons the path, who leaves the way'). The escalation is clear: the sone tokhachat ('hater of correction') yamut ('will die'). Refusal to be corrected is not just foolish — it is fatal. The path metaphor implies that there is a right way, and leaving it has consequences.
11. She'ol va-avaddon ('the grave and destruction/Abaddon') — the deepest, most hidden regions of the cosmos — are neged Yahweh ('before the LORD, in front of Him, visible to Him'). If even the realm of the dead is transparent to God, af ki libboth bene adam ('how much more the hearts of human beings'). The qal va-chomer argument: if the most concealed reality is visible to God, nothing in the human heart can be hidden.
12. The lets ('scoffer') does not love the one who corrects him, and as a result el chakhamim lo yelekh ('to the wise he will not go'). His contempt for correction isolates him from the very people who could help him. The scoffer's defining trait is that he makes himself unreachable.
13. Lev same'ach ('a happy heart') yetiv panim ('makes the face good, brightens the countenance') — inner joy is visible externally. Be-atsvat lev ('in grief of heart, through a heart's sorrow') ruach nekhe'ah ('the spirit is stricken, crushed'). The connection between inner emotional state and outward appearance is treated as observable fact.
14. The navon ('discerning person') has a heart that yevaqqesh da'at ('seeks knowledge') — an active, hungry pursuit of understanding. The fool's mouth yir'eh ivvelet ('grazes on foolishness') — the pastoral metaphor suggests that the fool browses on folly the way a cow grazes in a field, consuming whatever is in front of him without discrimination.
15. Kol yeme ani ra'im ('all the days of the afflicted are evil/hard') — the person weighed down by suffering experiences every day as painful. But the tov lev ('good of heart, cheerful-hearted person') has mishteh tamid ('a perpetual feast'). The feast is not external abundance but internal disposition. The proverb does not deny suffering but asserts that inner attitude transforms the experience of daily life.
16. This verse directly challenges the prosperity theology that could be extracted from other proverbs. The sages assert that the quality of one's relationship with God outweighs the quantity of one's possessions. It is a corrective from within the wisdom tradition itself.

17. Aruchat yaraq ('a portion of vegetables, a humble herb-meal') with ahavah ('love') present outweighs a shor avus ('fattened ox, stall-fed beef') — the finest meat available — accompanied by sin'ah ('hatred'). The proverb moves from verse 16's theological comparison (fear of the LORD versus wealth) to a domestic one (love versus luxury). The principle is the same: relational quality determines the value of material conditions.
18. The ish chemah ('person of fury') yegareh madon ('stirs up strife, provokes quarreling'). The erekh appayim ('slow to anger, patient') yashqit riv ('quiets a dispute, settles a quarrel'). Anger is incendiary; patience is extinguishing. The capacity to remain calm has direct social utility.
19. The atsel ('lazy person') experiences his path as ki-mesukhat chadeq ('like a thorn hedge') — every step is painful and obstructed. But the orach yesharim ('path of the upright') is selulah ('built up, paved, a highway'). The difference is not in the external terrain but in the approach: diligence clears obstacles while laziness lets them accumulate until the path is impassable.
20. This nearly duplicates 10:1. The wise son yesammach av ('makes his father rejoice'). The kesil adam ('foolish person') bozeh immo ('despises his mother'). The pairing of father and mother ensures that both parents are honored — or dishonored — by a child's character.
21. The chasar lev ('one lacking heart/sense') finds simchah ('joy, delight') in ivvelet ('foolishness') — he is entertained by what should alarm him. The ish tevunah ('person of understanding') yeyasher lakhet ('makes his walk straight, maintains a direct course'). The difference between the two is what they find enjoyable: the senseless are amused by folly; the wise are engaged by right direction.
22. Hafer machashavot ('plans are frustrated, purposes are overturned') be-ein sod ('without counsel, without confidential deliberation'). But be-rov yo'atsim taqum ('with many counselors it stands, it is established'). The proverb, echoing 11:14, endorses collective wisdom over solitary decision-making.
23. Simchah la-ish be-ma'aneh fiv ('joy to a person in the answer of his mouth') — the satisfaction of finding the right thing to say. Davar be-itto ('a word in its time, a word at the right moment') mah tov ('how good!') — timing transforms speech. The same word spoken too early or too late has diminished power, but the right word at the right moment is a source of delight.
24. Orach chayyim ('the path of life') is le-ma'lah ('upward') for the maskil ('the wise, insightful person'). The purpose is le-ma'an sur mi-she'ol mattah ('in order to turn aside from She'ol below'). The vertical imagery — upward toward life, downward toward the grave — maps moral direction onto spatial direction. Wisdom lifts; folly descends.
25. The beit ge'im ('house of the arrogant') yissach Yahweh ('the LORD will tear away, uproot, demolish'). But God yatsev ge'vul almanah ('establishes, sets firm, the boundary marker of the widow'). The widow — among the most vulnerable in ancient society — receives God's direct protection of her property rights. God demolishes pride and defends the defenseless.
26. Machshevot ra ('evil plans, wicked schemes') are to'avat Yahweh. But imre no'am ('words of pleasantness, gracious words') are tehorim ('pure, clean'). The contrast pairs internal intention (evil plans) with verbal expression (gracious words), and God evaluates both. Purity of speech reflects purity of heart.
27. The botse'a batsa ('one who cuts off a cut, who pursues unjust gain') oker beto ('troubles his house, brings ruin on his household'). The sone mattanot ('one who hates gifts/bribes') yichyeh ('will live'). Integrity in financial dealings preserves life; greed destroys the entire household.
28. The tsaddiq's heart yehgeh la-anot ('meditates to answer, considers before responding') — the same verb hagah used in Psalm 1:2 for meditation on instruction. The righteous person's speech is pre-processed through reflection. The wicked's mouth yabbi'a ra'ot ('gushes out evil things') — unfiltered, unconsidered, destructive.
29. Rachoq Yahweh me-resha'im ('the LORD is far from the wicked') — distance here means relational alienation, not physical absence (verse 3 already established that God sees everything). God is present everywhere but relationally distant from those who persist in wickedness. Tefilat tsaddiqim yishma ('the prayer of the righteous He hears') — proximity to God is maintained through right living and prayer.
30. Me'or einayim ('light of the eyes, bright eyes, a cheerful look') yesammach lev ('makes the heart rejoice'). Shemu'ah tovah ('good news, a good report') tedashhen etsem ('makes the bones fat, strengthens the frame'). Both lines describe how positive external stimuli — a friendly face, encouraging news — produce internal well-being. The sages understood the body-mind connection.
31. The ozen shoma'at tokhachat chayyim ('ear that hears the correction of life, ear that listens to life-giving rebuke') be-qerev chakhamim talin ('in the midst of the wise will lodge, will dwell'). Receptivity to correction is the entrance fee to the community of the wise. The 'correction of life' is rebuke that leads to life — painful but vital.
32. The pore'a musar ('one who rejects discipline, who lets correction go') is mo'es nafsho ('despises his own soul/life') — refusing correction is a form of self-hatred, because it consigns oneself to avoidable destruction. The shome'a tokhachat ('one who listens to correction') qoneh lev ('acquires heart, gains understanding'). The heart — the seat of thought and wisdom — can be purchased through the currency of humility.
33. Yir'at Yahweh ('the fear of the LORD') is musar chokhmah ('the discipline/instruction of wisdom') — reverencing God is how wisdom trains a person. And lifne khavod anavah ('before honor, humility') — the pathway to genuine honor passes through humility first. Those who try to seize honor directly miss it; those who humble themselves receive it. This verse closes the chapter with the chapter's dominant themes united: fear of God, discipline, and the proper ordering of human ambition.

## 16

**Summary:** *Proverbs 16 marks a shift in the Solomonic collection. The first half (verses 1-9) concentrates an unusually dense cluster of 'Yahweh proverbs' — statements about God's sovereignty over human plans, speech, and outcomes. The second half returns to the standard topics of kingship, pride, speech, and the contrast between wisdom and folly. This chapter contains some of the most theologically charged statements in the entire book.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The opening nine verses form the most sustained meditation on divine sovereignty in Proverbs. The human heart plans, but the LORD directs the tongue (verse 1), evaluates motives (verse 2), establishes plans when committed to Him (verse 3), has made everything for its purpose (verse 4), detests arrogance (verse 5), and directs a person's steps (verse 9). This sequence systematically dismantles human autonomy without destroying human responsibility — the person still plans, still speaks, still acts, but God is the one who determines outcomes. Verse 25 repeats 14:12 verbatim: 'There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the ways of death.'*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 4 — 'The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble' — is one of the most theologically difficult statements in the Hebrew Bible. It can be read as affirming that God has a purpose even for the existence of evil, or more modestly that the wicked will meet their proper end on the day of judgment. The sages do not resolve the tension; they state it and leave it.*

**Connections:** *The divine-sovereignty cluster in verses 1-9 connects to Jeremiah 10:23 ('I know, LORD, that a person's way is not in their own hands') and James 4:13-15 ('If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'). Verse 6 — 'by faithful love and truth sin is atoned for' — echoes the chesed ve-emet pairing from Exodus 34:6. The repetition of 14:12 in verse 25 creates a structural echo across the collection.*

<sup>1</sup>A person may arrange his thoughts,  
but the answer of the tongue comes from the LORD.

<sup>2</sup>All a person's ways seem clean to him,  
but the LORD weighs the motives.

<sup>3</sup>Commit your actions to the LORD,  
and your plans will be established.

<sup>4</sup>The LORD has made everything for its purpose,  
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

<sup>5</sup>Everyone with an arrogant heart is detestable to the LORD;  
be assured, he will not go unpunished.

<sup>6</sup>By faithful love and truth wrongdoing is atoned for,  
and by the fear of the LORD one turns from evil.

<sup>7</sup>When the LORD is pleased with a person's ways,  
He makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

<sup>8</sup>Better a little gained with righteousness  
than great income without justice.

<sup>9</sup>A person's heart plans his course,  
but the LORD directs his steps.

- <sup>10</sup>An oracle is on the lips of the king;  
his mouth must not betray justice.
- <sup>11</sup>Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD;  
all the weights in the bag are His work.
- <sup>12</sup>Wicked conduct is detestable to kings,  
for a throne is established by righteousness.
- <sup>13</sup>Righteous speech delights kings,  
and they love the one who speaks honestly.
- <sup>14</sup>A king's fury is a messenger of death,  
but a wise person can appease it.
- <sup>15</sup>In the light of a king's face there is life,  
and his favor is like a cloud of spring rain.
- <sup>16</sup>How much better to acquire wisdom than gold!  
To gain understanding is preferable to silver.
- <sup>17</sup>The highway of the upright turns away from evil;  
whoever guards his path preserves his life.
- <sup>18</sup>Before destruction comes arrogance,  
and before a fall comes a haughty spirit.
- <sup>19</sup>Better to be humble in spirit among the lowly  
than to divide plunder with the proud.
- <sup>20</sup>Whoever is attentive to a matter will find good,  
and whoever trusts in the LORD — how fortunate he is.
- <sup>21</sup>The wise in heart is called discerning,  
and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.
- <sup>22</sup>Insight is a fountain of life for the one who has it,  
but the discipline of fools is foolishness.
- <sup>23</sup>The heart of the wise instructs his mouth  
and adds persuasiveness to his speech.
- <sup>24</sup>Pleasant words are a honeycomb —  
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.
- <sup>25</sup>There is a path that seems straight to a person,  
but its end is the ways of death.
- <sup>26</sup>The appetite of a worker works for him,  
for his hunger drives him on.

<sup>27</sup>A worthless person digs up evil,  
and on his lips is something like a scorching fire.

<sup>28</sup>A perverse person sows conflict,  
and a whisperer separates close friends.

<sup>29</sup>A violent person lures his neighbor  
and leads him down a path that is not good.

<sup>30</sup>Whoever narrows his eyes is plotting perversion;  
whoever purses his lips brings evil to completion.

<sup>31</sup>Gray hair is a crown of splendor;  
it is found on the path of righteousness.

<sup>32</sup>Better a patient person than a warrior,  
and one who controls his temper than one who captures a city.

<sup>33</sup>The lot is cast into the lap,  
but every decision belongs to the LORD.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The ma'arkhe lev ('arrangements of the heart') uses military language — ma'arakhah is a battle formation. The human heart lines up its thoughts like troops, but God controls the actual engagement. The gap between preparation and performance belongs to God.
2. Kol darkhe ish zakh be-einav ('all a person's ways are pure in his own eyes') — self-assessment is unreliable because self-interest distorts perception. But tokhen ruchot Yahweh ('the LORD weighs the spirits/motives') — God evaluates the ruach, the inner drive and intention behind the visible behavior. Human beings see surfaces; God calibrates depths.
3. Gol el Yahweh ma'asekha ('roll upon the LORD your works') — the verb gol means to roll a burden off one's own shoulders and onto someone else's. It is an act of trust: placing the weight of one's undertakings onto God. The result is ve-yikkonu machshevotekha ('and your plans will be established, made firm'). Surrender to God does not cancel planning but secures it.
4. The la-ma'anehu is ambiguous — it could mean 'for its own purpose' or 'for His purpose' (God's). The ambiguity may be intentional. The verse pushes the reader toward trust in God's governance even when evil seems purposeless.
4. This verse has generated enormous theological discussion. It does not resolve the problem of evil but asserts that God's sovereignty encompasses it.
5. Kol gevah lev ('everyone lifted up of heart, everyone with an arrogant heart') is to'avat Yahweh. The idiom yad le-yad ('hand to hand') means 'you can count on it, certainly, without a doubt.' The proud person will lo yinnaqeh ('not be held innocent, not go unpunished'). Pride is the sin God most consistently and emphatically condemns in Proverbs.
6. Be-chesed ve-emet yekhupar avon ('by faithful love and truth iniquity is covered/atoned for') — the word yekhupar uses the language of cultic atonement (kipper, 'to cover, to make atonement'). The claim is remarkable: the divine attributes of chesed and emet, when expressed in human relationships, have atoning power. And be-yir'at Yahweh sur me-ra ('by the fear of the LORD one turns from evil') — reverence for God is the engine of moral change.
7. Bi-rtsoth Yahweh darke ish ('when the LORD delights in a person's ways') gam oyvav yashlim itto ('even his enemies He makes to be at peace with him'). The verb yashlim is from the same root as shalom — God establishes peace even between adversaries when He favors a person's conduct. This is not a guarantee of universal popularity but a statement about God's power to transform hostile relationships.
8. Another 'better than' proverb echoing 15:16-17. Me'at bi-tsedaqah ('a little with righteousness') outweighs rov tevu'ot be-lo mishpat ('abundant income without justice'). The comparison is not between rich and poor but between legitimate and illegitimate gain. Integrity determines the true value of income.
9. This verse is the capstone of verses 1-9. The progression moves from thought (verse 1) through motive (verse 2), commitment (verse 3), purpose (verse 4), pride (verse 5), atonement (verse 6), favor (verse 7), and justice (verse 8) to arrive here: God is sovereign over the actual path a life takes. Human planning is the pencil sketch; God draws in ink.
10. Qesem ('oracle, divination, authoritative pronouncement') describes the king's speech as carrying the weight of divine authority. Be-mishpat lo yim'al piv ('in judgment his mouth must not act unfaithfully') — this is both description and prescription. The king's words carry oracular power,

which makes his responsibility for justice absolute.

11. Peles u-mo'azne mishpat la-Yahweh ('a scale and balances of justice belong to the LORD') — God owns the standard of fair measurement. Ma'asehu kol avne kis ('His work are all the stones of the bag') — every weight-stone used in commerce is ultimately God's creation. Commercial honesty is a theological matter because God made the tools of measurement and claims them as His own.
12. To'avat melakhim asot resha ('an abomination to kings is doing wickedness') — not merely that kings should avoid wickedness but that they should find it repulsive. The reason: ki vi-tsedaqah yikkon kisse ('for by righteousness a throne is made firm'). Stability of governance depends on moral integrity. Wickedness undermines the very foundation of royal authority.
13. Retson melakhim siftei tsedeq ('the delight of kings is lips of righteousness') — good kings value honest advisors. Dover yesharim ye'ehav ('and the one who speaks upright things he loves'). The court setting is implied: wise rulers surround themselves with truthful counselors rather than flatterers.
14. Chamat melekh ('the wrath of a king') is mal'akhe mavet ('messengers of death') — royal anger can be lethal. But ish chakham yekhapperannah ('a wise person can atone for it, can cover it, can pacify it'). The verb kipper (from which Yom Kippur derives) means to cover or deflect — the wise person knows how to de-escalate royal rage.
15. Be-or pene melekh chayyim ('in the light of the king's face is life') — the king's smile signals safety and prosperity. Retsono ke-av malqosh ('his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain') — the malqosh is the spring rain that comes just before harvest, essential for the final ripening of crops. Royal favor is as life-giving as the rain that completes the agricultural cycle.
16. Qenoh chokhmah mah tov me-charuts ('acquiring wisdom — how much better than gold!'). The exclamation mah tov ('how good!') expresses genuine enthusiasm. Qenot binah nivchar mi-kasef ('gaining understanding is to be chosen over silver'). Wisdom and understanding are presented as commodities — they can be 'acquired' and 'gained' — but they outvalue precious metals.
17. Mesillat yesharim ('the highway of the upright') is sur me-ra ('turning aside from evil') — the upright person's road is defined by what it avoids. Shomer nafsho notser darkko ('the one who guards his life preserves his way') — self-preservation and moral vigilance are the same activity.
18. The parallelism pairs shever ('shattering, destruction') with kishalon ('stumbling, tripping, falling') and ga'on ('arrogance, pride') with govah ruach ('height of spirit'). Both lines say the same thing with intensifying imagery: pride is the precondition for collapse.
19. Tov shefal ruach et aniyim ('good is lowliness of spirit with the poor/afflicted') me-challeq shalal et ge'im ('than dividing spoil with the arrogant'). The proverb directly follows verse 18's warning about pride. If pride precedes destruction, then humility among the lowly is the safer — and morally superior — position, even if dividing spoils with the proud is more lucrative.
20. Maskil al davar ('one who gives attention to a matter, who handles a situation with insight') yimtsa tov ('will find good'). Bote'ach ba-Yahweh ashra'v ('the one who trusts in the LORD — his blessednesses, how fortunate he is'). Practical competence and theological trust are presented as complementary, not competing, sources of well-being.
21. The chakham lev ('wise of heart') earns the reputation navon ('discerning'). And meteq sefatayim ('sweetness of lips, pleasant speech') yosif leqach ('adds to learning/persuasiveness'). How something is said affects how much is received. The wise person's content and delivery work together.
22. Sekhel ('insight, good sense') is meqor chayyim ('fountain of life') for its possessors — it sustains them the way a spring sustains a community. But musar evilim ivelet ('the discipline of fools is foolishness') — fools teach each other only how to be more foolish. The correction they give is as empty as their understanding.
23. Lev chakham yaskil pihu ('the heart of the wise makes his mouth prudent') — wisdom in the heart governs what comes out of the mouth. Ve-al sefatav yosif leqach ('and to his lips adds learning/persuasiveness'). Internal wisdom produces external eloquence — the two are connected, not separate.
24. Tsuf devash imre no'am ('a honeycomb of honey are words of pleasantness') — honeycomb is the purest, most natural form of sweetness. Matoq la-nefesh ('sweet to the soul/appetite') u-marpe la-atsem ('and healing to the bone'). Kind speech nourishes the inner person and restores the body. The sages took the healing power of words literally, not just metaphorically.
25. This verse is identical to 14:12 — the only exact repetition in the Solomonic collection. The sages considered this warning important enough to state twice. Self-assessed correctness is unreliable; what looks right can lead to death. The repetition functions as a structural refrain, reminding the reader that human judgment requires external correction.
26. Nefesh amel amlah lo ('the appetite of a toiler toils for him') — hunger is the engine of labor. Ki akhaf alav pihu ('for his mouth bends upon him, presses him, urges him') — the mouth's demands drive the body to work. The proverb is not cynical but observational: physical need is a powerful motivator.
27. Ish beliyya'al ('a man of worthlessness, a scoundrel') koreh ra'ah ('digs up evil') — he excavates trouble, actively searching for ways to cause harm. Al sefato ke-esh tsarevet ('on his lip like a fire that scorches') — his speech burns everything it touches.
28. Ish tahpukhot ('person of perversions, crooked person') yeshallach madon ('sends out strife, sows quarreling'). The nirgan ('whisperer, gossip') mafrid alluf ('separates a close friend, divides an intimate companion'). Gossip is singled out as uniquely destructive to human bonds — it can sever the closest friendships.

- 29.** The ish chamas ('person of violence') yefatteh re'ehu ('entices his neighbor, seduces his companion'). The verb patah ('to entice, to seduce, to deceive') suggests manipulation rather than force — the violent person draws others in through false promises before revealing the true nature of the road.
- 30.** The body language of the schemer: otseh einav ('closing/narrowing his eyes') to plan tahpukhot ('perversions, crooked schemes'), and qorets sefatav ('pinching/pursing his lips') as he killah ra'ah ('completes evil, brings harm to fruition'). The sages were acute observers of nonverbal communication — they could read conspiracy in facial expressions.
- 31.** Ateret tif'eret sevah ('a crown of beauty/splendor is gray hair') — old age is honored, not despised. But the qualifying clause matters: be-derekh tsedaqah timmatse ('on the path of righteousness it is found'). The crown is not automatic — it belongs to those who have lived rightly. Gray hair earned through righteous living is beautiful; gray hair alone is merely aging.
- 32.** The gibbor ('warrior, hero, mighty man') was the most admired figure in ancient Near Eastern culture. To say that patience surpasses him is a radical reevaluation of strength. The proverb does not denigrate military courage but elevates emotional mastery above it.
- 33.** Ba-cheiq yutal et ha-goral ('into the lap the lot is thrown') — casting lots was a standard method of decision-making in the ancient world, used when human wisdom had reached its limits. U-me-Yahweh kol mishpatu ('and from the LORD is all its judgment/decision') — even the apparently random fall of the lot is under God's governance. The chapter that began with divine sovereignty over human speech (verse 1) closes with divine sovereignty over chance itself. Nothing falls outside God's jurisdiction.

# 17

**Summary:** *Proverbs 17 continues the Solomonic collection with twenty-eight proverbs that examine friendship, family bonds, the power and limits of speech, and the social consequences of conflict. The chapter gives particular attention to what holds relationships together and what tears them apart, with several proverbs exploring the nature of genuine friendship versus opportunistic alliance.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 17 — 'A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity' — is one of the most enduring statements on loyalty in world literature. The chapter also contains the remarkable medical observation that 'a joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones' (verse 22), anticipating by millennia the scientific recognition that emotional state affects physical health. Verse 3 uses the smelting metaphor — God refines hearts the way a crucible refines metal — which becomes one of the Hebrew Bible's most important images for divine testing.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 2 — 'A prudent servant will rule over a disgraceful son' — reflects the social dynamics of an era when servitude was a normal economic institution. The proverb's point is about merit overriding birthright, which is radical within its context, but the modern reader will note the assumption of a servant class. Verse 26 warns against punishing the righteous and striking nobles — the concern with protecting the powerful as well as the innocent reflects a hierarchical social order that modern readers may find uncomfortable.*

**Connections:** *The refining metaphor in verse 3 echoes Malachi 3:2-3 and 1 Peter 1:7. The 'friend who loves at all times' in verse 17 anticipates Jonathan's friendship with David (1 Samuel 18-20) and Jesus's statement 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends' (John 15:13). The 'joyful heart as medicine' in verse 22 connects to 15:13 and 15:15.*

**1**Better a dry crust with peace  
than a house full of feasting with conflict.

**2**A shrewd servant will rule over a disgraceful son  
and will share the inheritance among the brothers.

**3**The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold,  
but the LORD tests hearts.

- <sup>4</sup>An evildoer listens to wicked lips;  
a liar gives ear to a destructive tongue.
- <sup>5</sup>Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker;  
whoever rejoices over disaster will not go unpunished.
- <sup>6</sup>Grandchildren are the crown of the elderly,  
and the glory of children is their parents.
- <sup>7</sup>Fine speech does not suit a fool —  
how much less do lying lips suit a noble.
- <sup>8</sup>A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of its giver —  
wherever he turns, he succeeds.
- <sup>9</sup>Whoever covers an offense seeks love,  
but whoever keeps bringing it up separates close friends.
- <sup>10</sup>A rebuke goes deeper into a perceptive person  
than a hundred blows into a fool.
- <sup>11</sup>A rebellious person seeks only evil,  
so a merciless messenger will be sent against him.
- <sup>12</sup>Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs  
than a fool caught up in his foolishness.
- <sup>13</sup>Whoever returns evil for good —  
evil will never leave his house.
- <sup>14</sup>Starting a quarrel is like releasing water —  
so drop the dispute before it breaks loose.
- <sup>15</sup>Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent —  
both are detestable to the LORD.
- <sup>16</sup>Why should a fool have money in hand to buy wisdom  
when he has no sense?
- <sup>17</sup>A true friend shows love at every turn,  
and a brother is born for adversity.
- <sup>18</sup>A person who lacks sense shakes hands on a pledge  
and puts up security in his neighbor's presence.
- <sup>19</sup>Whoever loves conflict loves transgression;  
whoever builds his gate high invites ruin.
- <sup>20</sup>The twisted in heart finds nothing good,  
and the one who distorts with his tongue falls into trouble.

**21**Whoever fathers a fool does so to his own grief;  
the parent of a senseless child has no joy.

**22**A joyful heart is good medicine,  
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

**23**The wicked takes a bribe from inside his robe  
to pervert the course of justice.

**24**Wisdom is right in front of the discerning,  
but the eyes of a fool roam to the ends of the earth.

**25**A foolish son is a grief to his father  
and bitterness to the mother who bore him.

**26**Punishing the righteous is not right,  
nor is striking the noble for their integrity.

**27**The one who has knowledge uses few words,  
and the person of understanding keeps a cool head.

**28**Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;  
whoever seals his lips is thought discerning.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Pat charevah ('a dry piece of bread, a crust') with shalvah ('tranquility, peace, quietness') outweighs bayit male zivche riv ('a house full of sacrifice-feasts with strife'). The zivchei riv are meat from sacrificial offerings — the finest food available. But abundance is worthless when accompanied by quarreling. This echoes 15:17 and reinforces the priority of relational quality over material quantity.
2. The eved maskil ('servant who acts with insight') yimshol ('will rule over') the ben mevish ('son who causes shame'). Merit overrides birth order. The servant will even yachaloq nachalah ('divide the inheritance') among the brothers — gaining economic standing that would normally be reserved for biological heirs. Competence rewrites social hierarchy.
3. The refining metaphor is one of the Hebrew Bible's most important images for divine testing. It appears in Psalm 66:10, Isaiah 48:10, Zechariah 13:9, and Malachi 3:2-3. The process is painful but purposeful — it does not destroy but purifies.
4. The mera ('evildoer') maqshiv al sefat aven ('gives attention to a lip of iniquity'). The sheqer ('liar') mezin al leshon havvot ('gives ear to a tongue of destruction'). People seek out speech that matches their own character — the wicked are drawn to wicked talk, and liars find other liars' words appealing. Moral character determines what information you consume.
5. This echoes 14:31. The lo'eg la-rash ('one who mocks the poor') cheref osehu ('reproaches his Maker') — mockery of the poor is mockery of God who created the poor person. The same'ach le-eid ('one who rejoices at calamity, who celebrates another's disaster') lo yinnaqeh ('will not be held innocent'). Schadenfreude is a moral offense with divine consequences.
6. Ateret zeqenim bene vanim ('the crown of old people is their grandchildren') — a long life crowned by grandchildren is the highest form of earthly blessing in the wisdom tradition. Ve-tif'eret banim avotam ('and the glory of children is their fathers/parents') — children derive their sense of identity and honor from their parents. The bonds run both directions: the old are crowned by the young, and the young are adorned by the old.
7. Sefat yeter ('a lip of excess, fine/eloquent speech') does not suit the naval ('fool, churlish person'). The qal va-chomer intensifies: af ki le-nadiv sefat shaqer ('how much less lying speech for a noble/generous person'). If fine speech is wasted on a fool, then lying is even more inappropriate for someone who should be noble. The proverb is about the fitness between a person's character and their speech.
8. Even chen ('a stone of grace/charm, a magic stone') — the shochad ('bribe, gift') appears to its possessor as an all-powerful tool. El kol asher yifneh yaskil ('wherever he turns he prospers/succeeds'). The proverb observes the perceived power of bribery without necessarily endorsing it — it describes how the briber sees the world. Bribery works, at least in appearance.
9. The verb mekhasseh ('covers') does not mean hiding wrongdoing from accountability but choosing not to rehearse a forgiven offense. The second line's shoneh ('repeats, brings up again') is the opposite action — constantly returning to the wound.

10. Techat ge'arah be-mevin ('a rebuke descends into one who understands') more effectively me-hakkot kesil me'ah ('than striking a fool a hundred times'). One word of correction, received by a person with understanding, accomplishes more than extreme physical punishment applied to someone who lacks discernment. The difference is in the receiver, not the correction.
11. The meri ('rebellious, defiant one') yevaqqesh ra ('seeks evil') — rebellion is not neutral independence but active pursuit of harm. The consequence is that a mal'akh akhazari ('cruel/merciless messenger') yeshullach bo ('is sent against him'). Whether this is a human agent of judgment or a metaphor for inescapable consequences, the point is clear: rebellion against moral order triggers a severe response.
12. Pagosh dov shakkul be-ish ('let a bear bereaved of cubs meet a person') — a mother bear whose cubs have been taken is one of the most dangerous animals in the ancient Near Eastern imagination. Yet the proverb says: ve-al kesil be-ivalto ('and not a fool in his folly'). The fool in the grip of his foolishness is more dangerous than a raging bear. The comparison is deliberately extreme — foolishness is not merely annoying but lethal.
13. The meshiv ra'ah tachat tovah ('one who returns evil in exchange for good') will find that lo tamush ra'ah mi-beto ('evil will not depart from his house'). The betrayal of kindness triggers a permanent curse — the person who repays good with evil sets in motion a chain of consequences that will haunt his household indefinitely. This is one of the strongest statements about moral causation in the collection.
14. The hydraulic metaphor is brilliant: water pressure builds behind a dam, and the smallest breach becomes catastrophic. The verb poter ('releases, lets out') describes a deliberate action — the person who starts a quarrel is choosing to open the floodgate.
15. Matsdiq rasha ('one who declares the wicked righteous, who acquits the guilty') and marshi'a tsaddiq ('one who condemns the righteous, who declares the innocent guilty') — both inversions of justice are to'avat Yahweh gam sheneihem ('an abomination to the LORD, both of them'). God is equally offended by both forms of judicial corruption. Injustice in either direction provokes the same divine revulsion.
16. The rhetorical question expresses exasperation: lammah zeh mechir be-yad kesil liqnot chokhmah ('why is there a purchase price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom') ve-lev ayin ('and heart there is none')? The fool may have the resources (mechir, 'price, payment') but lacks the lev ('heart, mind, capacity') to receive what he purchases. Wisdom cannot be bought by those who lack the inner capacity to understand it.
17. The verb yivaled ('is born') is striking — it does not say a brother 'appears' or 'shows up' in adversity but that he was born for it. His existence finds its purpose in the crisis. This verse defines friendship and brotherhood in terms of loyalty under pressure.
18. Adam chasar lev ('a person lacking heart/sense') toqe'a kaf ('strikes the hand, shakes hands') — the handshake seals a financial guarantee. He orev aruvvah ('pledges a pledge, takes on surety') lifne re'ehu ('before his neighbor'). The warning against surety recurs throughout Proverbs (6:1-5, 11:15) — it is foolish to take financial responsibility for another person's debts.
19. Ohev pasha ohev matstsah ('one who loves transgression loves strife') — the two are inseparable. The one who magbiha pitcho ('raises his doorway high, builds an ostentatious gate') mevaqqesh shaver ('seeks breaking/ruin'). The high gate may symbolize arrogance — making oneself conspicuous invites destruction. Or it may be literal: an extravagant entrance signals wealth that attracts danger.
20. The iqqesh lev ('twisted-hearted') lo yimtsa tov ('does not find good') — a crooked heart cannot recognize or receive what is genuinely beneficial. The nehpath bi-lshono ('one who overturns/distorts with his tongue') yippol be-ra'ah ('falls into evil/calamity'). Both internal crookedness and verbal distortion lead to the same outcome: trouble.
21. Yoled kesil le-tugah lo ('the one who begets a fool — for grief it is to him'). The pain is inescapable: a foolish child is a permanent source of sorrow. Ve-lo yismach avi naval ('and the father of a churlish person does not rejoice'). The naval is not merely stupid but morally deficient — churlish, crass, and incapable of decency.
22. Lev same'ach yetiv gehah ('a joyful heart makes healing good, does good like a cure') — inner joy has medicinal power. Ruach nekhe'ah teyabbesh garem ('a crushed spirit dries up the bone') — emotional devastation produces physical deterioration. The sages understood what modern psychoneuroimmunology confirms: emotional states affect bodily health. This is not metaphor but observed reality presented as wisdom.
23. Shochad me-cheiq ('a bribe from the bosom/fold of the garment') — hidden, secretive, passed discreetly — rasha yiqqach ('a wicked person takes/accepts'). The purpose: le-hattot orchot mishpat ('to bend the paths of justice, to pervert the course of judgment'). Bribery distorts the legal system, and the secrecy of the transaction underscores its shame.
24. Et pene mevin chokhmah ('before the face of the discerning person is wisdom') — wisdom is immediately available to the person who has understanding; it is right there. But eine kesil bi-qtseh arets ('the eyes of a fool are at the end of the earth') — the fool looks everywhere except where wisdom actually is. His attention is scattered to the far horizons while wisdom stands directly in front of him.
25. Ka'as le-aviv ben kesil ('vexation to his father is a foolish son') and memer le-yoladeto ('bitterness to the one who bore him, to his mother'). Both parents suffer. The father experiences ka'as ('vexation, anger, grief') and the mother memer ('bitterness'). A child's foolishness is the deepest disappointment a parent can face.
26. Gam anosh la-tsaddiq lo tov ('also to fine/punish the righteous is not good') — the legal system must not penalize those who are in the right. Le-hakkot nedivim al yosher ('to strike nobles for uprightness') — those in positions of honor should not be punished for doing what is right. The verse defends the just from unjust punishment and the honorable from retaliation for their integrity.
27. Chosekh amarav yode'a da'at ('the one who restrains his words knows knowledge') — economy of speech is a sign of genuine knowledge. Yeqar ruach ish tevunah ('precious/cool of spirit is a person of understanding') — the person of understanding does not overheat emotionally. Both restraint in speech and coolness of temperament mark the truly wise.

28. Gam evil macharish chakham yechashev ('even a fool, when he is silent, is reckoned wise'). The humor is intentional: a fool's best strategy is silence, because the moment he opens his mouth he reveals his folly. Otem sefatav navon ('the one who shuts his lips is considered discerning'). Silence is the most accessible form of wisdom — anyone can practice it.

# 18

**Summary:** *Proverbs 18 delivers twenty-four proverbs that probe the power of speech, the nature of isolation, the reliability of wealth versus the reliability of God, and the dynamics of conflict and friendship. The chapter is notable for its concentration of proverbs about the tongue and its consequences — words are presented as forces that either build or destroy, with life-and-death implications.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 10 — 'The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe' — is one of the most beloved verses in Proverbs, creating a vivid image of God's name as a fortified refuge. Verse 21 — 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue' — is perhaps the single most quoted proverb about speech in the entire collection. The chapter also contains the devastating observation that a person's gift 'makes room for him' (verse 16), a realistic assessment of how patronage and access work in hierarchical societies.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 22 — 'He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD' — celebrates marriage as a divine blessing but uses language that modern readers may find one-directional. The Hebrew matsa ishah ('finds a woman/wife') reflects a social context in which marriage was initiated by the man. The theological point — that marriage is a source of divine favor — stands, but the relational dynamics described reflect ancient practice. Verse 11 describes the rich person's wealth as 'a high wall in his imagination,' which may critique false security or simply observe it.*

**Connections:** *The 'strong tower' of verse 10 echoes Psalm 61:3 and 2 Samuel 22:3. The death-and-life power of the tongue in verse 21 anticipates James 3:1-12. The finding of a wife as divine favor in verse 22 connects to Proverbs 19:14 and 31:10. The deep-waters imagery in verse 4 echoes 20:5.*

<sup>1</sup>The one who isolates himself pursues his own desire;  
he lashes out against all sound judgment.

<sup>2</sup>A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,  
but only in displaying his own opinions.

<sup>3</sup>When wickedness arrives, contempt comes with it,  
and with dishonor comes disgrace.

<sup>4</sup>The words of a person's mouth are deep waters;  
the fountain of wisdom is a flowing stream.

<sup>5</sup>Showing partiality to the wicked is not right,  
nor is depriving the righteous of justice.

<sup>6</sup>A fool's lips walk into a fight,  
and his mouth calls for a beating.

<sup>7</sup>A fool's mouth is his ruin,  
and his lips are a trap for his own life.

<sup>8</sup>The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;  
they go down into the innermost parts.

- <sup>9</sup>Whoever is careless in his work  
is a brother to the one who destroys.
- <sup>10</sup>The LORD's name is a fortified tower;  
the righteous runs into it and is safe.
- <sup>11</sup>The wealth of the rich is his fortified city,  
and like a high wall — in his imagination.
- <sup>12</sup>Before destruction a person's heart is proud,  
and before honor comes humility.
- <sup>13</sup>Whoever answers before listening —  
that is his foolishness and his disgrace.
- <sup>14</sup>A person's spirit can endure his illness,  
but a crushed spirit — who can bear it?
- <sup>15</sup>The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge,  
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.
- <sup>16</sup>A person's gift makes room for him  
and brings him into the presence of the powerful.
- <sup>17</sup>The first to state his case seems right  
until his neighbor comes and cross-examines him.
- <sup>18</sup>Casting lots settles disputes  
and separates powerful opponents.
- <sup>19</sup>A brother who has been wronged is harder to reach than a fortified city,  
and quarrels between them are like the bars of a fortress.
- <sup>20</sup>From the fruit of his mouth a person's stomach is filled;  
by the harvest of his lips he is satisfied.
- <sup>21</sup>Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruit.
- <sup>22</sup>Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing  
and receives favor from the LORD.
- <sup>23</sup>The poor person speaks with pleas,  
but the rich person answers harshly.
- <sup>24</sup>A person with many companions may be ruined,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. Le-ta'avah yevaqqesh nifrad ('for desire/appetite the separated one seeks') — the person who isolates himself from community is driven by selfish craving. Be-khol tushiyyah yitgalla ('against all sound judgment he breaks out, he quarrels'). Isolation breeds selfishness and hostility toward wisdom. The proverb warns that withdrawal from community is not independence but self-destruction.

2. Lo yachpots kesil bi-tevunah ('a fool does not delight in understanding') — understanding does not interest him. Ki im be-hitgallot libbo ('but only in the uncovering of his heart, in revealing what is in his mind'). The fool's pleasure is self-expression, not comprehension. He wants to broadcast, not receive.
3. Be-vo rasha ba gam buz ('when the wicked comes, contempt also comes') — wickedness does not travel alone; it brings a retinue of social consequences. Ve-im qalon cherpah ('and with dishonor, reproach'). The wicked person's arrival brings an atmosphere of contempt and shame into every setting.
4. The relationship between the two lines is debated. They may be synonymous (speech is deep and flowing), or antithetic (ordinary speech is murky depths; wisdom is a clear stream). The ambiguity may be intentional — the proverb itself has deep waters.
5. Se'et pene rasha lo tov ('lifting the face of the wicked is not good') — to 'lift the face' means to show favoritism, to give special treatment. Le-hattot tsaddiq ba-mishpat ('to bend the righteous in judgment') — to distort justice against the innocent. Both judicial bias and perversion of verdict are condemned.
6. Sifte kesil yavo'u ve-riv ('a fool's lips enter into strife, walk into a quarrel') — the fool's mouth leads him into conflicts he cannot handle. U-fiv le-mahalumot yiqra ('and his mouth calls for blows'). The fool's speech is so provocative that it effectively invites physical retaliation. His words write checks his body cannot cash.
7. Pi kesil mechittah lo ('a fool's mouth is ruin/destruction to him') and sefatav moqesh nafsho ('his lips are a snare for his soul/life'). The fool's own speech becomes the instrument of his downfall. He needs no external enemy; his mouth is both the weapon and the trap.
8. Divre nirgan ('the words of a gossip/whisperer') ke-mitlahamim ('are like things greedily swallowed, like choice morsels') — gossip is delicious. People consume it eagerly. Ve-hem yaredu chadre vaten ('and they go down into the chambers of the belly, into the innermost parts'). Gossip does not stay on the surface; it penetrates deeply, lodging in the core of a person's being where it shapes attitudes and destroys relationships from within.
9. Gam mitrappah bi-melakhto ('even the one who is slack/careless in his work') ach hu le-va'al mashchit ('is a brother to the master of destruction'). Negligence and active destruction are siblings — the lazy person and the vandal produce the same result. What is not maintained falls apart just as effectively as what is deliberately ruined.
10. The 'name of the LORD' (shem Yahweh) is not a magical formula but the full weight of God's revealed character — His faithfulness, His power, His covenant loyalty. To run to God's name is to trust in who God has shown Himself to be.
11. Hon ashir qiryat uzza ('the wealth of the rich person is his strong city') — placed immediately after the 'strong tower' of God's name, this verse creates a deliberate contrast. The rich person sees his wealth as a fortress. But u-ke-chomah nisgavah be-maskito ('and like a wall set high — in his imagination/conception'). The word maskit ('imagination, conception, mental image') is devastating: the wall is not real. It exists only in the rich person's mind. The security that wealth provides is a mental construct, not an actual fortification.
12. Lifne shever yigbah lev ish ('before shattering, a person's heart is high/proud') — echoing 16:18, pride precedes the fall. Ve-lifne khavod anavah ('and before honor, humility') — echoing 15:33. The chapter places these familiar truths in the context of verses 10-11: true security (God's name) produces humility; false security (wealth) produces the pride that precedes destruction.
13. Meshiv davar be-terem yishma ('one who returns a word before he hears') — answering before you have fully listened. Ivvelet hi lo u-khlimmah ('foolishness it is to him and shame'). Premature response is both foolish (because uninformed) and shameful (because it disrespects the speaker). Listening must precede speaking.
14. Ruach ish yekhalkel machalehu ('a person's spirit sustains/supports his sickness') — inner resilience can carry a person through physical illness. But ruach nekhe'ah mi yissa'annah ('a crushed spirit — who will bear it?'). Physical illness can be endured if the spirit is strong; but when the spirit itself is broken, there is nothing left to bear the weight. The question is rhetorical: no one can carry a broken spirit. This is why emotional and spiritual health are more fundamental than physical health.
15. Both heart and ear are engaged: the navon's heart yiqneh da'at ('acquires knowledge') and the wise person's ear tevaqqesh da'at ('seeks knowledge'). Knowledge is not passively received but actively pursued through both internal reflection (heart) and attentive listening (ear).
16. Mattan adam yarchiv lo ('a person's gift broadens/makes room for him') — a well-placed gift opens doors, creates space, expands opportunities. Ve-lifne gedolim yanchennuh ('and before great ones it leads him'). The proverb observes the social reality of patronage without necessarily endorsing it. Gifts — whether bribes, strategic presents, or demonstrations of generosity — are the currency of access in hierarchical societies.
17. Tsaddiq ha-rishon be-rivo ('the first in his dispute appears righteous/right') — whoever speaks first in a legal dispute has the advantage of the unchallenged narrative. U-va re'ehu va-chaqaro ('and his neighbor comes and examines him, cross-examines him'). The proverb is a warning against premature judgment: do not decide until you have heard both sides. Every story sounds convincing until it is tested.
18. Ha-goral ('the lot') yashbit midyanim ('causes disputes to cease'). When negotiation fails and both parties are too powerful to yield, the lot — understood as expressing God's decision (see 16:33) — provides a resolution that both sides accept. U-vein atsumin yafrid ('and between powerful ones it separates/decides'). The lot is a dispute-resolution mechanism for conflicts that human wisdom cannot settle.
19. Ach nifsha mi-qiryat oz ('a brother who has been offended/transgressed against — more than a city of strength') — a betrayed family member is harder to win back than a walled city is to conquer. U-medanim ki-veriach armon ('and quarrels are like the bar of a fortress/palace'). The bar that secures a fortress gate is the last and strongest defense — once a family quarrel reaches that level of entrenchment, it becomes nearly impenetrable.

The proverb acknowledges that broken family bonds are among the most difficult of all human problems to repair.

- 20.** Mi-peri fi ish tisba bitno ('from the fruit of a person's mouth his belly is satisfied') — speech produces consequences that feed back to the speaker. Tevu'at sefatav yisba ('the produce of his lips satisfies him'). The agricultural metaphor — fruit, harvest, produce — treats speech as something planted and cultivated. You eat what your mouth has planted.
- 21.** The 'power of the tongue' (yad lashon, 'the hand of the tongue') personifies the tongue as having a hand — an agency, a capacity to act. This verse is the culmination of the chapter's sustained meditation on speech and its consequences.
- 22.** Matsa islah matsa tov ('finds a woman/wife, finds good') — marriage is categorized as tov, the same word used in Genesis 1 for God's evaluation of creation. Va-yafek ratson me-Yahweh ('and he draws out favor from the LORD'). Marriage is not merely a human arrangement but a channel of divine blessing. The proverb celebrates the institution without specifying the characteristics of the wife — the simple fact of marriage, when rightly entered, is itself the good.
- 23.** Tachanunim yedabber rash ('with entreaties the poor person speaks') — poverty forces a person into the posture of begging, requesting, pleading. Ve-ashir ya'aneh azzot ('and the rich person answers harshly/roughly'). Wealth gives a person the social license to be blunt, rude, and dismissive. The proverb describes this dynamic without endorsing it — it is a sociological observation about how economic power shapes social interaction.
- 24.** Ish re'im le-hitro'e'a ('a person of companions/friends — to be broken/shattered') — having many shallow friendships can lead to ruin, because quantity of associations is not quality of relationship. Ve-yesh ohev daveq me-ach ('but there is a friend who clings/sticks closer than a brother'). The rare, deep friendship — the one friend who is daveq ('clinging, adhering, stuck fast') — outweighs all casual connections. This echoes 17:17's friend who loves at all times.

# 19

**Summary:** *Proverbs 19 contains twenty-nine proverbs that give extended attention to poverty, wealth, and the social dynamics that surround economic status. The chapter also probes family relationships — the grief caused by foolish children, the gift of a prudent wife, the responsibilities of parents in discipline — and returns repeatedly to the consequences of laziness, lying, and the refusal to learn.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter contains some of the most socially aware proverbs in the collection. The observation that the poor person is abandoned even by his brothers (verse 7) and that wealth attracts friends while poverty repels them (verse 4) shows the sages' unflinching recognition of economic reality. But the chapter also insists that God stands with the poor: whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD (verse 17), and whoever oppresses them will be repaid. The chapter holds both observations — social cruelty toward the poor and divine solidarity with the poor — in unresolved tension.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 13 describes a foolish son as 'ruin to his father' and a quarrelsome wife as 'a constant dripping,' both harsh images. The parallel structure risks equating a bad child with a bad spouse, and the gendered language reflects the male perspective of the ancient sages. Verse 18 urges discipline 'while there is hope' but warns 'do not set your heart on his destruction,' suggesting that the line between corrective discipline and destructive rage was recognized as a real danger in ancient parenting.*

**Connections:** *The 'lending to the LORD' in verse 17 anticipates Jesus's identification with the poor in Matthew 25:40. The 'prudent wife from the LORD' in verse 14 connects to 18:22 and the eshet chayil of 31:10. The laziness theme (verses 15, 24) echoes the 'sluggard passages' in 6:6-11 and 26:13-16.*

**1**Better a poor person who walks in integrity  
than one who has twisted speech and is a fool.

**2**Desire without knowledge is not good,  
and whoever rushes ahead misses the mark.

**3**A person's own foolishness ruins his path,  
and then his heart rages against the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>Wealth adds many friends,  
but the poor person is separated from his companion.

<sup>5</sup>A false witness will not go unpunished,  
and whoever breathes out lies will not escape.

<sup>6</sup>Many seek the favor of a generous person,  
and everyone is a friend to the one who gives gifts.

<sup>7</sup>All the brothers of a poor person despise him —  
how much more do his friends keep their distance!  
He chases them with pleas, but they are gone.

<sup>8</sup>Whoever acquires sense loves his own life;  
whoever guards understanding will find good.

<sup>9</sup>A false witness will not go unpunished,  
and whoever breathes out lies will perish.

<sup>10</sup>Luxury does not suit a fool,  
much less for a servant to rule over princes.

<sup>11</sup>A person's insight makes him slow to anger,  
and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

<sup>12</sup>A king's fury is like the roar of a lion,  
but his favor is like dew on the grass.

<sup>13</sup>A foolish son is ruin to his father,  
and a wife's quarreling is a constant dripping.

<sup>14</sup>House and wealth are inherited from parents,  
but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

<sup>15</sup>Laziness casts a person into a deep sleep,  
and an idle appetite goes hungry.

<sup>16</sup>Whoever keeps a command guards his own life,  
but whoever despises his ways will die.

<sup>17</sup>Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,  
and He will repay him for his good deed.

<sup>18</sup>Discipline your son while there is still hope,  
but do not set your heart on destroying him.

<sup>19</sup>A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty;  
if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.

<sup>20</sup>Listen to advice and accept discipline,  
so that you will be wise in the end.

- <sup>21</sup>Many plans fill a person's heart,  
but the counsel of the LORD — that will stand.
- <sup>22</sup>What is desirable in a person is his faithful love,  
and a poor person is better than a liar.
- <sup>23</sup>The fear of the LORD leads to life;  
whoever has it rests satisfied, untouched by harm.
- <sup>24</sup>The lazy person buries his hand in the dish  
but will not even bring it back to his mouth.
- <sup>25</sup>Strike a scoffer and the naive learns caution;  
correct the discerning and he gains knowledge.
- <sup>26</sup>A son who ruins his father and drives out his mother  
is a source of shame and disgrace.
- <sup>27</sup>Stop listening, my son, to instruction  
that leads you away from words of knowledge.
- <sup>28</sup>A worthless witness mocks justice,  
and the mouth of the wicked swallows down wrongdoing.
- <sup>29</sup>Judgments are prepared for scoffers,  
and beatings for the backs of fools.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. *Tov rash holekh be-tummo* ('good is the poor who walks in his wholeness/integrity') *me-iqqesh sefatav ve-hu kesil* ('than one twisted of lips who is a fool'). Integrity outranks economic status. The poor person with a straight path is better off — morally and ultimately — than the person whose speech is crooked, regardless of his wealth.
2. *Gam be-lo da'at nefesh lo tov* ('also without knowledge, a soul/desire is not good') — even good intentions, when uninformed, produce bad results. *Ve-ats be-raglayim choter* ('and hasty with feet sins/misses'). Speed without wisdom leads to error. The pairing of ignorance and haste suggests that both are forms of the same problem: acting without adequate preparation.
3. *Ivvelet adam tesallef darkko* ('a person's foolishness overturns/perverts his way') — his own folly wrecks his life. *Ve-al Yahweh yiz'af libbo* ('and against the LORD his heart rages/is indignant'). The irony is devastating: the person destroys his own path through foolishness and then blames God for the results. Self-inflicted ruin followed by theological blame-shifting is a pattern the sages recognized and condemned.
4. *Hon yosif re'im rabbim* ('wealth adds/multiplies many friends') — money is magnetic; people gravitate toward it. *Ve-dal me-re'ehu yippared* ('and the poor from his friend is separated'). Poverty isolates. The proverb does not celebrate this dynamic but observes it with clear eyes. The sages saw through the pretense of wealth-based friendship.
5. *Ed sheqarim lo yinnaqeh* ('a witness of falsehoods will not be held innocent') and *yafiach kezavim lo yimalet* ('one who breathes out lies will not escape'). The double assertion — not unpunished, not escaped — emphasizes certainty. The legal system and the moral order both catch up with liars eventually.
6. *Rabbim yechallu pene nadv* ('many entreat the face of a generous person/noble') — people flock to those who give. *Ve-khol ha-re'a le-ish mattan* ('and everyone is a friend to the person of gifts'). Generosity attracts friendship, but the proverb leaves open whether these friendships are genuine or mercenary.
7. The Hebrew of the final clause is textually difficult. The sense is clear even if the syntax is fractured: the poor person calls after people who are already gone. The broken syntax may itself mirror the desperation — the sentence falls apart, just as the relationships have.
8. *Qoneh lev ohev nafsho* ('the one who acquires heart/sense loves his own soul/life') — pursuing wisdom is an act of self-care, not self-denial. *Shomer tevunah limtso tov* ('the one who guards understanding — to find good'). Understanding is something that must be both acquired and maintained. Those who do both will find *tov* — the good that the moral order reliably provides.

9. Nearly identical to verse 5, but the final verb escalates: from *lo yimalet* ('will not escape') to *yoved* ('will perish'). The repetition with intensification drives the point home: lying under oath is not merely punishable but ultimately fatal.
10. *Lo na'aveh li-khsil ta'anug* ('luxury/pleasure is not fitting for a fool') — the fool lacks the character to handle prosperity well. *Af ki le-eved meshol be-sarim* ('how much less for a servant to rule over princes'). The *qal va-chomer* argument: if even a free fool cannot handle luxury, a servant ruling princes is even more out of order. The proverb addresses the disruption caused when people hold positions they are not suited for.
11. *Sekhel adam he'erikh appo* ('a person's insight lengthens his anger, makes him slow to anger') — the same quality that produces wisdom also produces patience. *Ve-tif'arto avor al pasha* ('and his splendor/glory is to pass over a transgression'). The person who can let an offense go — who has the strength to not retaliate — possesses *tif'arah* ('beauty, glory, splendor'). Forgiveness is not weakness but magnificence.
12. *Naham ka-kefir za'af melekh* ('like the roaring of a young lion is the king's rage') — terrifying, dangerous, inescapable. *U-ke-tal al esev retsono* ('and like dew on the grass is his favor'). Dew is gentle, life-giving, and arrives quietly in the early morning. The contrast captures the two poles of royal power: lethal anger and nourishing favor.
13. *Havvot le-aviv ben kesil* ('destruction/ruin to his father is a foolish son'). The *havvot* ('calamities, destructions') — plural intensifies — reduce the father's life to wreckage. *Delef tored midyene ishah* ('a dripping that drives away is the quarreling of a wife'). The image is of a roof leak that never stops — maddening, relentless, erosive. Both images describe forms of domestic misery that cannot be escaped because they come from within the household itself.
14. *Bayit va-hon nachalat avot* ('house and wealth are the inheritance of fathers/parents') — material assets can be passed down through generations. *U-me-Yahweh ishah maskalelet* ('but from the LORD is a wife who acts wisely'). A wise spouse cannot be inherited, purchased, or manufactured — she is a direct gift from God. This elevates the prudent wife above all material possessions in the hierarchy of blessings.
15. *Atslah tappil tardemah* ('laziness causes to fall a deep sleep') — the *tardemah* is the kind of supernatural deep sleep that fell on Adam (Genesis 2:21) and Abraham (Genesis 15:12). Laziness produces a stupor so profound it is almost supernatural. *Ve-nefesh remiyyah tir'av* ('and a slack/idle soul will go hungry'). The lazy person does not just underperform — he loses consciousness of his own needs until hunger forces him awake.
16. *Shomer mitsvah shomer nafsho* ('the one who guards a command guards his soul/life') — obedience to authoritative instruction is self-preservation. *Bozeh derakhav yamut* ('the one who despises his ways will die'). To 'despise one's ways' is to be careless about one's own conduct, to treat one's moral direction as unimportant. Such carelessness is fatal.
17. The commercial language (*malveh*, 'lends'; *yeshalleh*, 'repays') is deliberate. God is not merely pleased by generosity — He incurs a debt. This transforms charity from a one-way gift into a divine investment with guaranteed returns.
18. *Yasser binkha ki yesh tiqvah* ('discipline your son because there is hope') — the window for effective correction is limited. While the child is still forming, discipline can change his trajectory. *Ve-el hamito al tissa nafshekha* ('and toward his death/destruction do not lift up your soul'). The second line is a warning: discipline must not become rage. The parent who disciplines with the goal of genuine formation is wise; the parent who crosses into destructive anger has ceased to parent.
19. The *gedol chemah* ('great of fury, hot-tempered person') *nose onesh* ('bears punishment, pays the penalty') — his rage generates consequences he must absorb. *Ki im tatsil ve-od tosif* ('for if you deliver him, again you will need to add/repeat'). Rescuing a person from the consequences of his temper is futile — you will have to keep doing it because the underlying anger has not changed. The proverb warns against enabling habitual anger.
20. *Shema etsah ve-qabbal musar* ('hear counsel and receive discipline') — both passive reception (listening) and active acceptance (taking correction on board) are required. *Le-ma'an techkam be-acharitekha* ('so that you will be wise in your latter end, in your future'). The investment in humility now produces wisdom later. The *acharit* ('end, future, latter days') is the payoff for present submission to correction.
21. *Rabbot machashavot be-lev ish* ('many plans are in a person's heart') — the human mind generates an abundance of schemes, ambitions, and strategies. *Va-atsat Yahweh hi taqum* ('but the counsel of the LORD — it will stand, it will rise, it will endure'). This echoes the sovereignty theme of 16:1-9: human planning is real but provisional. God's counsel is the only thing with permanent standing power.
22. *Ta'avat adam chasdo* ('the desire/desirable quality of a person is his chesed') — what makes a person attractive and worthy is not wealth or status but faithful love, loyal kindness. *Ve-tov rash me-ish kazav* ('and better is a poor person than a man of falsehood'). Poverty with honesty outranks prosperity with lying. Character, not capital, determines human worth.
23. *Yir'at Yahweh le-chayyim* ('the fear of the LORD is for life, leads to life') — reverence for God and life are mapped onto the same trajectory. *Ve-save'a yalin bal yippaqed ra* ('and satisfied he will lodge/rest, not visited by evil'). The person who fears God sleeps soundly because he is *save'a* ('satisfied, content') and *bal yippaqed ra* ('not subject to evil visitation'). Security, contentment, and rest are the fruits of reverence.
24. *Taman atsel yado ba-tsallachat* ('the lazy person buries/hides his hand in the dish/bowl') *gam el pihu lo yeshivannah* ('even to his mouth he will not return it'). The image is absurdly comic: the lazy person has his hand in the food but is too lazy to lift it to his own mouth. The exaggeration makes the point unforgettable: laziness is so extreme it defeats even self-interest.
25. *Lets takkeh u-feti ya'arim* ('strike a scoffer and the naive becomes shrewd') — the scoffer himself does not learn from punishment, but the naive person watching does. *Ve-hokhiach le-navon yavin da'at* ('and correct the discerning and he understands knowledge'). The discerning person needs only a word — no blows required. Three levels of learner: the scoffer (unreachable), the naive (learns from observing consequences), and the discerning (learns from verbal correction).

26. Meshadded av ('one who destroys/ruins his father') and mavriach em ('one who drives away his mother') — the son who financially exploits his father and forces his mother from her home. Ben mevish u-machpir ('a son of shame and disgrace'). This describes not merely disappointing behavior but active destruction of one's own parents — the most fundamental betrayal of the family bond.
27. Chadal beni lishmo'a musar lishgot me-imre da'at ('cease, my son, from hearing discipline that causes straying from words of knowledge'). The verse warns against false instruction — teaching that appears to be wisdom but actually leads away from genuine knowledge. Not all correction is wise; some 'discipline' is misleading. The student must discriminate between instruction that builds and instruction that destroys.
28. Ed beliyya'al ('a witness of worthlessness/wickedness') yalits mishpat ('mocks justice, scorns judgment') — he treats the legal system as a joke. U-fi resha'im yevalla aven ('and the mouth of the wicked swallows iniquity'). The wicked consume wrongdoing as eagerly as food — they devour it, internalize it, make it part of themselves.
29. Nakhonu la-letsim shefatim ('prepared for scoffers are judgments') — the consequences are already arranged, waiting. U-mahalumot le-gev kesilim ('and blows for the back of fools'). The scoffer and the fool will receive the correction they have refused to accept voluntarily. What they would not learn through instruction they will learn through suffering.

## 20

*Summary: Proverbs 20 closes the second decade of the Solomonic collection with thirty proverbs that survey intoxication, royal authority, human self-deception, the dangers of hasty vows, divine sovereignty over human affairs, and the recurring themes of honest weights, diligent labor, and the superiority of inner character over outward appearance. The chapter gives particular attention to the opacity of the human heart and God's unique ability to penetrate it.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 9 — 'Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?' — is one of the most searching questions in the wisdom literature. The expected answer is 'no one,' which places Proverbs in surprising agreement with the more pessimistic assessments of human nature found in Job and Ecclesiastes. The chapter also contains the striking metaphor of human purpose as deep water (verse 5): the intentions of the heart are buried below the surface, accessible only to the person of understanding who knows how to draw them out. Verse 27 identifies the human spirit as the LORD's lamp, searching the innermost parts — an extraordinary image of divine-human collaboration in self-knowledge.*

*Translation Friction: Verse 1 warns against wine and strong drink, but the Hebrew Bible elsewhere presents wine positively (Psalm 104:15, Ecclesiastes 9:7). The sages are not prohibitionist but pragmatic: wine makes a fool of the unwary. Verse 20 — 'whoever curses his father or mother, his lamp will go out in utter darkness' — reflects the severity of the ancient honor code toward parents. The consequence described is not merely social disapproval but complete extinction.*

*Connections: The deep-water metaphor in verse 5 echoes 18:4. The dishonest-weights condemnation in verses 10 and 23 connects to 11:1 and 16:11. The human spirit as God's lamp in verse 27 anticipates Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 about the Spirit searching the deep things of God. The king's heart directed by God in verse 24 echoes 16:1-9 and 21:1.*

<sup>1</sup>Wine is a scoffer and strong drink a brawler;  
whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

<sup>2</sup>The terror of a king is like the roar of a lion;  
whoever provokes him forfeits his own life.

<sup>3</sup>It is honorable for a person to avoid a quarrel,  
but every fool jumps into one.

<sup>4</sup>The lazy person does not plow in autumn;  
he looks for a harvest but there is nothing.

<sup>5</sup>The intentions in a person's heart are deep water,  
but a person of understanding draws them out.

<sup>6</sup>Many a person claims to be loyal,  
but a truly faithful person — who can find one?

<sup>7</sup>A righteous person walks in his integrity —  
how fortunate are his children after him.

<sup>8</sup>A king who sits on the judgment seat  
scatters all evil with his gaze.

<sup>9</sup>Who is able to say, 'I have made my heart clean;  
I am pure from my sin'?

<sup>10</sup>A double standard — one weight and another weight,  
one measure and another measure —  
both are detestable to the LORD.

<sup>11</sup>Even a child is known by his actions —  
whether his conduct is pure and upright.

<sup>12</sup>The ear that hears and the eye that sees —  
the LORD made them both.

<sup>13</sup>Do not love sleep, or you will become poor;  
open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread.

<sup>14</sup>'Bad! Bad!' says the buyer,  
but after walking away, he boasts.

<sup>15</sup>There is gold and an abundance of jewels,  
but lips of knowledge are a rare treasure.

<sup>16</sup>Take his garment — he has put up security for a stranger;  
hold it as collateral for outsiders.

<sup>17</sup>Bread gained by deceit tastes sweet to a person,  
but afterward his mouth is full of gravel.

<sup>18</sup>Plans are established through counsel,  
and with wise guidance wage war.

<sup>19</sup>A gossip reveals secrets,  
so do not associate with someone who talks too freely.

<sup>20</sup>Whoever curses his father or mother —  
his lamp will be snuffed out in the deepest darkness.

<sup>21</sup>An inheritance seized too quickly at the start  
will not be blessed in the end.

<sup>22</sup>Do not say, 'I will repay evil.'

Wait for the LORD, and He will deliver you.

<sup>23</sup>Differing weights are detestable to the LORD,  
and dishonest scales are not right.

<sup>24</sup>A person's steps are directed by the LORD —  
so how can anyone understand his own path?

<sup>25</sup>It is a trap to rashly declare something holy  
and only after making vows to reflect.

<sup>26</sup>A wise king winnows the wicked  
and drives the threshing wheel over them.

<sup>27</sup>The human spirit is the LORD's lamp,  
searching all the innermost chambers.

<sup>28</sup>Faithful love and truth guard a king,  
and he sustains his throne through faithful love.

<sup>29</sup>The glory of the young is their strength,  
and the splendor of the old is gray hair.

<sup>30</sup>Blows that wound cleanse away evil,  
and beatings reach the innermost parts.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Lets ha-yayin ('a scoffer is wine') homeh shekhar ('a noisemaker/brawler is strong drink') — wine and beer are personified as the kinds of people wisdom literature most consistently condemns: the scoffer and the troublemaker. Ve-khol shogeh bo lo yekham ('and everyone who goes astray by it/them will not be wise'). Alcohol does not merely accompany foolishness; it produces it. The person who is led astray by drink has abandoned the path of wisdom.
2. Naham ka-kefir eimat melekh ('like the roar of a young lion is the dread of a king') — echoing 19:12. The mit'abbero ('one who crosses him, who provokes his anger') choter nafsho ('sins against his own soul/life, forfeits his own life'). Provoking royal anger is suicidal. The proverb is practical court advice: respect the king's power or suffer the consequences.
3. Kavod la-ish shevet me-riv ('honor for a person is sitting out of strife, ceasing from quarreling') — the wise person walks away from fights. Ve-khol evil yitgalla ('and every fool breaks out, bursts in, gets entangled'). The fool cannot resist the quarrel; he is drawn to conflict the way a moth is drawn to flame. Restraint is a mark of honor; eagerness to fight is a mark of foolishness.
4. Me-choref atsel lo yacharosh ('from the cold/winter the lazy person will not plow') — the autumn plowing season in Israel is cold and uncomfortable, and the lazy person refuses to endure it. Ve-sha'al ba-qatsir va-ayin ('and he asks/looks at harvest and there is nothing'). The consequence is mathematical: no plowing, no harvest. The lazy person is surprised by the emptiness that his own inaction guaranteed.
5. The verb yidlennah ('draws it out') is from dalah ('to draw water from a well') — the same action as lowering a bucket on a rope. The image is of a person reaching down into the deep well of another person's heart and bringing the hidden intention to the surface.
6. Rov adam yiqra ish chasdo ('most people proclaim, each one, his own loyal kindness') — nearly everyone advertises their own faithfulness. Ve-ish emunim mi yimtsa ('but a person of faithfulness — who will find?'). The gap between self-proclaimed loyalty and actual reliability is vast. People talk about their chesed; few actually live it. The rhetorical question implies: truly faithful people are extraordinarily rare.
7. Mithalekh be-tummo tsaddiq ('walking in his integrity is the righteous person') — the righteous person's daily life is characterized by tummah ('wholeness, integrity, completeness'). Ashre vanav acharav ('how fortunate are his children after him'). The righteous person's integrity becomes a legacy — his children inherit not just property but the blessing of a father's good name and honest example.
8. Melekh yoshev al kisse din ('a king sitting on the throne of judgment') mezareh be-einav kol ra ('winnows with his eyes all evil'). The verb mezareh ('winnows') is from the threshing floor — the king's discerning gaze separates guilt from innocence the way a farmer separates grain from chaff. The ideal king's eyes are tools of justice; his presence itself drives evil away.

9. The two verbs — zikkiti ('I have purified, cleansed') and taharti ('I am pure, clean') — are both cultic terms normally associated with ritual purification. The proverb applies them to the moral interior: who can claim that their inner life is ritually clean? No one. The question demolishes self-righteousness.
10. Even va-even eifah ve-eifah ('a stone and a stone, an ephah and an ephah') — having two sets of weights and measures, one for buying (heavier) and one for selling (lighter). To'avat Yahweh gam sheneihem ('an abomination to the LORD, both of them'). The repetition of this theme (11:1, 16:11, 20:23) shows how deeply the sages cared about commercial honesty. God finds double standards in business personally offensive.
11. Gam be-ma'alalav yitnakker na'ar ('even by his deeds a youth is recognized/known') — character reveals itself early. Im zakh ve-im yashar po'olo ('whether pure and whether upright is his work'). You do not need to wait for adulthood to see who a person is becoming. Childhood behavior is already diagnostic. The proverb encourages early observation and early intervention.
12. Ozen shoma'at ve-ayin ro'ah ('a hearing ear and a seeing eye') Yahweh asah gam sheneihem ('the LORD made both of them'). The capacity to perceive — to hear truth and to see reality — is a divine gift. If God made the instruments of perception, then perception carries moral weight: we are obligated to use the faculties God gave us. The verse also implies that God who made ear and eye Himself hears and sees all things.
13. Al te'ehav shenah pen tivvaresh ('do not love sleep lest you be dispossessed/impooverished') — excess sleep is the lazy person's drug of choice. Peqach einakha seva lachem ('open your eyes — satisfaction of bread'). The imperative is blunt: wake up, see what needs to be done, and do it. The reward is simple sufficiency — seva lachem, enough bread. The proverb does not promise wealth, only adequacy as the reward for wakefulness.
14. Ra ra yomar ha-qoneh ('bad, bad, says the buyer') — the buyer talks down the merchandise to drive the price lower. Ve-ozel lo az yithallal ('and going away from there, then he boasts'). Once he has secured the bargain, he brags about his shrewd deal. The proverb captures the timeless psychology of haggling: public disparagement of goods followed by private celebration of the purchase. The sages found the behavior amusing enough to record.
15. Yesh zahav ve-rov peninim ('there is gold and abundance of pearls/corals/jewels') — precious materials are available. U-khli yeqar sifte da'at ('but a precious vessel are the lips of knowledge'). Knowledge-bearing speech is rarer and more valuable than gold or gems. The comparison is economic: knowledgeable speech is the scarcest and therefore the most precious commodity.
16. Leqach bigdo ki arav zar ('take his garment because he has become surety for a stranger') — if someone is foolish enough to guarantee a stranger's debt, seize his cloak as collateral because he is a high credit risk. U-ve'ad nokhrim chablehu ('and for foreigners/outsideers hold him as pledge'). The proverb is practical financial advice: do not trust the creditworthiness of anyone who has pledged for an unknown party.
17. Arev la-ish lechem shaqer ('sweet/pleasant to a person is bread of deceit') — ill-gotten gains taste good at first. Ve-achar yimmale pihu chatsav ('and afterward his mouth is filled with gravel/crushed stone'). The sweetness turns to gravel — what was pleasant becomes painful, gritty, inedible. The pleasure of dishonest gain is temporary; its consequences are lasting and miserable.
18. Machashavot be-etsah tikkon ('plans are established through counsel') — echoing 15:22. Good planning requires consultation. U-ve-tachbulot aseh milchamah ('and with guidance/steering make war'). The tachbulot ('strategic guidance, steering') needed for warfare is the highest form of deliberative wisdom — the stakes are lives. If even war requires wise counsel, how much more do lesser decisions.
19. Goleh sod holekh rakhil ('one who reveals secrets is a gossip/slanderer') — the person who cannot keep confidences is dangerous to befriend. U-le-foteh sefatav lo tit'arav ('and with one who opens wide his lips do not mix/associate'). The warning is social: avoid the company of people who cannot control their speech, because anything you share with them will become public.
20. Meqallel aviv ve-immo ('one who curses his father and his mother') yid'akh nero be-ishon choshekh ('his lamp will be extinguished in the pupil of darkness, in the deepest darkness'). The ishon choshekh ('apple/pupil of darkness') is the darkest possible darkness — the center of the night, where no light penetrates. Cursing one's parents leads to total extinction. The severity reflects the ancient world's absolute prioritization of parental honor.
21. Nachalah mevohelet ba-rishonah ('an inheritance hastened/rushed at the beginning') ve-acharitam lo tevorakh ('and its end will not be blessed'). Wealth acquired too quickly — whether through impatience, manipulation, or dishonesty — does not produce lasting blessing. The pattern echoes 13:11: easy money evaporates. The acharit ('end, final outcome') is what matters, and hastily gained wealth fails the long-term test.
22. Al tomar ashallema ra ('do not say I will repay evil') — do not take vengeance into your own hands. Qavveh la-Yahweh ve-yosha lakh ('wait for the LORD and He will save you'). The command to renounce personal retaliation is paired with a promise: God will handle the justice. This is one of the clearest anti-vengeance statements in the wisdom literature and directly anticipates Romans 12:17-19.
23. To'avat Yahweh even va-aven ('an abomination to the LORD is a stone and a stone') — repeating the condemnation of verse 10 with slight variation. U-mo'azne mirmah lo tov ('and scales of deceit are not good'). The repetition within a single chapter underscores how seriously the sages took commercial integrity. God's revulsion at fraudulent weights is stated twice because the temptation to cheat in business is persistent.
24. Me-Yahweh mits'ade gaver ('from the LORD are the steps of a man') — echoing 16:9, God directs the actual trajectory of a person's life. Ve-adam mah yavin darkko ('and a person — how can he understand his way?'). The rhetorical question admits the limits of self-understanding: if God is the one directing our steps, then we cannot fully comprehend why our lives take the paths they do. Humility before divine sovereignty is the appropriate posture.
25. Moqesh adam yala qodesh ('a snare for a person is to blurt out holy — to rashly declare something as sacred/devoted') ve-achar nedarim levaqquer ('and after vows to investigate/consider'). The proverb warns against impulsive religious commitments — making vows before thinking them through. A vow once spoken to God is binding, so careless dedication creates an inescapable obligation. Think before you vow, not after.

26. Mezaresh resha'im melekh chakham ('winnows the wicked does a wise king') — the same winnowing image from verse 8, now applied specifically to removing evil from the kingdom. Va-yashev aleihem ofan ('and he turns the wheel upon them'). The ofan ('wheel') is the threshing wheel that crushes grain — the wise king does not merely identify the wicked but applies the full weight of justice to them.
27. The neshimah ('breath, spirit') connects to Genesis 2:7, where God breathes into Adam's nostrils the nishmat chayyim ('breath of life'). That same divine breath now functions as a searchlight, probing the interior spaces of human consciousness. The verse suggests a collaboration between divine illumination and human self-awareness.
28. Chesed ve-emet yitsru melekh ('faithful love and truth guard/protect a king') — the paired divine attributes (see 14:22, 16:6) are the king's true bodyguards. Ve-sa'ad ba-chesed kis'o ('and he supports/upholds his throne through chesed'). Political stability depends not on military power but on the king's practice of loyal kindness. The throne endures because of chesed, not because of force.
29. Tiferet bachurim kocham ('the glory/beauty of young men is their strength') — youth's distinctive contribution is physical vigor. Va-hadar zeqenim sevah ('and the majesty/splendor of the elderly is gray hair'). Each stage of life has its own glory: youth has power; age has wisdom. The proverb honors both rather than privileging one over the other.
30. Chabburat petsa tamriq be-ra ('wounds of a blow cleanse/scour away evil') — the metaphor treats corrective suffering as a purifying agent. U-makkot chadre vaten ('and blows reach the chambers of the belly/innermost parts'). Physical consequences penetrate where words cannot reach. The proverb affirms that painful correction can reach the deepest levels of a person's character, purging evil that verbal instruction alone cannot dislodge.

## 21

**Summary:** *Proverbs 21 continues the Solomonic collection with proverbs emphasizing divine sovereignty over human plans, the priority of justice over ritual, and the futility of resisting the LORD's purposes. The chapter opens with the striking image of the king's heart as a water channel in God's hand and closes with the declaration that no wisdom or strategy can stand against the LORD.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter contains one of the most politically radical statements in ancient Near Eastern literature: the king's heart is merely an irrigation ditch that God directs wherever He pleases (v1). In a world where kings claimed divine status or divine favor as their right, this proverb reduces royal authority to passive clay. Verse 3 elevates justice and righteousness above sacrifice — a theme that echoes the prophets (Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8) — suggesting that the wisdom tradition and the prophetic tradition share this conviction independently. The chapter's final verse (v31) — 'The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD' — is a perfect summary of biblical theology: human preparation is legitimate, but outcomes belong to God alone.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 9 ('Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome woman') reflects the patriarchal social structure where men controlled domestic space. The observation is pragmatic, not prescriptive, but it addresses only men's frustration without acknowledging women's perspective. Verse 18 ('The wicked becomes a ransom for the righteous') does not teach substitutionary atonement but observes that the consequences intended for the righteous often fall on the wicked instead — a reversal pattern, not a transaction.*

**Connections:** *The 'king's heart as water channels' image (v1) connects to Isaiah 44:27-28, where God directs Cyrus as His shepherd. The priority of justice over sacrifice (v3) parallels 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6. The 'horse prepared for battle' (v31) echoes Psalm 20:7 ('Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we invoke the name of the LORD our God'). The chapter's emphasis on divine sovereignty over human plans links to Proverbs 16:1, 9 and 19:21.*

<sup>1</sup>The king's heart is a water channel in the LORD's hand —  
He directs it wherever He pleases.

<sup>2</sup>Every path a person takes looks right to him,  
but the LORD weighs hearts.

<sup>3</sup>Practicing righteousness and justice  
is preferred by the LORD over sacrifice.

<sup>4</sup>Haughty eyes and an inflated heart —  
the lamp of the wicked is sin.

<sup>5</sup>The plans of the diligent lead only to abundance,  
but everyone who rushes ends only in lack.

<sup>6</sup>Gaining wealth by a lying tongue  
is a fleeting vapor — those who chase it chase death.

<sup>7</sup>The violence of the wicked drags them away,  
because they refuse to practice justice.

<sup>8</sup>Crooked is the path of a guilty person,  
but the conduct of the pure is upright.

<sup>9</sup>Better to sit on a corner of the roof  
than to share a house with a quarrelsome woman.

<sup>10</sup>The appetite of the wicked craves what is harmful;  
his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.

<sup>11</sup>When a scoffer is punished, the naive become wise;  
when a wise person is instructed, he gains knowledge.

<sup>12</sup>The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked;  
He overturns the wicked to ruin.

<sup>13</sup>Whoever blocks his ear from the cry of the poor —  
he too will cry out and not be answered.

<sup>14</sup>A gift given in secret calms anger,  
and a concealed bribe subdues fierce rage.

<sup>15</sup>Doing justice is a joy to the righteous  
but a terror to those who practice wickedness.

<sup>16</sup>A person who strays from the path of insight  
will rest in the assembly of the dead.

<sup>17</sup>Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;  
whoever loves wine and oil will never grow rich.

<sup>18</sup>The wicked becomes a ransom for the righteous,  
and the treacherous takes the place of the upright.

<sup>19</sup>Better to live in a desert land  
than with a quarrelsome and irritable woman.

<sup>20</sup>Precious treasure and oil fill the home of the wise,  
but a fool swallows them up.

<sup>21</sup>Whoever pursues righteousness and faithful love  
finds life, righteousness, and honor.

<sup>22</sup>A wise person can scale a city of warriors  
and bring down the stronghold they trusted in.

<sup>23</sup>Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue  
guards his life from troubles.

<sup>24</sup>The proud and arrogant — 'Scoffer' is his name —  
he acts with overflowing contempt.

<sup>25</sup>The craving of the lazy person kills him,  
because his hands refuse to work.

<sup>26</sup>All day long he craves and craves,  
but the righteous gives without holding back.

<sup>27</sup>The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable —  
how much more when offered with evil intent!

<sup>28</sup>A lying witness will perish,  
but the person who listens will speak with lasting authority.

<sup>29</sup>A wicked person puts on a bold face,  
but the upright considers his way carefully.

<sup>30</sup>There is no wisdom, no understanding,  
no counsel that can stand against the LORD.

<sup>31</sup>The horse is prepared for the day of battle,  
but victory belongs to the LORD.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Palge mayim (channels of water) is the same phrase used in Psalm 1:3 for the streams beside which the righteous tree is planted. Here the metaphor shifts from nourishment to control.
1. The proverb does not say the king is aware of God's direction. The water does not know it is being redirected. This is a statement about God's sovereignty, not about the king's piety.
2. The verb tokhen ('weighs, examines, measures') comes from the world of scales and balances. God does not merely observe — He assesses with precision. The same verb appears in Proverbs 16:2.
3. The pairing of tsedaqah and mishpat is one of the most important word pairs in the Hebrew Bible. Together they describe a society that functions as God intended — where relationships are right and judgments are fair.
4. The Hebrew nir can mean either 'lamp' or 'freshly plowed land.' If 'lamp,' the proverb says that what lights the wicked person's way is sin itself — their guiding light is darkness. If 'plowed land,' it means that everything the wicked produce is sin. Both readings yield the same conclusion: arrogance pervades every aspect of the wicked person's life.
5. The contrast is between charutz ('diligent, sharp, decisive') and ats ('to hurry, to be hasty'). Diligence is not slowness but purposeful planning followed by steady execution. Haste is action without thought — the illusion of productivity.

6. Hevel niddaf ('vapor driven, mist blown away') uses the same hevel that dominates Ecclesiastes — breath, vapor, something that vanishes instantly. Wealth gained through deception is not merely unstable; it is already gone the moment you grasp it.
7. Shod ('violence, destruction, robbery') becomes the agent that devours its own practitioners. The verb yegovrem ('drags them, sweeps them away') pictures violence as a current that carries the violent person downstream to ruin.
8. Hafakhpakh ('twisted, crooked, perverse') is an intensified form suggesting not just one wrong turn but a path that twists back on itself repeatedly. The contrast with zakh ('pure, clean, transparent') and yashar ('straight, upright') emphasizes that moral clarity produces directional clarity.
9. The flat rooftop was exposed to wind, rain, and sun — the worst living space in an Israelite home. The proverb uses 'better...than' (tov...min) format to make a deliberately absurd comparison: even the most uncomfortable solitude is preferable to relentless domestic conflict. The observation is repeated in 25:24. The Hebrew eshet midyanim ('woman of contentions') targets behavior, not gender, though the male audience of the collection means the examples address men's domestic experience.
10. Nefesh here means 'appetite, desire, inner drive' rather than 'soul' in the Greek philosophical sense. The wicked person's fundamental orientation is toward harm — evil is not an occasional lapse but a craving. The result is social: when desire is directed toward harm, the neighbor becomes an obstacle rather than a fellow human deserving compassion.
11. The proverb identifies two learning methods: the naive (peti) learn from watching consequences fall on others, while the wise (chakham) learn directly from instruction. The scoffer (lets) learns from neither — he exists in the proverb only as a negative example for others. Three character types, three relationships to learning.
12. The capitalized 'Righteous One' reflects the interpretive possibility that God is the subject. The ambiguity may be intentional — both the righteous person and God observe the wicked household, and both know its end.
13. The reciprocity is precise: the verb za'aq ('to cry out, to shout for help') applies to both the poor person and the one who ignored him. The one who refused to hear will find himself unheard. This is not abstract karma but covenant logic — God responds to those who respond to others.
14. The proverb observes a social reality without endorsing it: gifts and bribes work. The distinction between mattan ('gift') and shochad ('bribe') is significant — the first is neutral, the second carries negative moral weight. The proverb is descriptive, not prescriptive; it tells you how the world works, not how it should work.
15. The contrast is revealing: the same action — the administration of justice — produces opposite emotional responses depending on the person's character. The righteous find simchah ('joy, gladness') in fair judgment; the wicked find mechittah ('terror, ruin, destruction'). Justice is a mirror that reveals the observer.
16. Repha'im ('the dead, shades') refers to the inhabitants of Sheol — the shadowy underworld of Israelite cosmology. The proverb warns that abandoning wisdom is not a detour but a fatal turn. The verb yanuach ('will rest, will settle') implies permanence — this is not a temporary wandering but a final destination.
17. Wine and oil represent the consumable luxuries of Israelite life. The proverb does not condemn enjoyment but warns against making enjoyment the primary pursuit. Ahev ('loves, is devoted to') implies ongoing, habitual orientation — not occasional celebration but lifestyle hedonism.
18. Kofer is the same word used for the ransom price of a life in Exodus 21:30. The proverb appropriates sacrificial-legal language to describe the observed reversal of fortunes: the wicked pay the price meant for the righteous.
19. This is the second 'better...than' proverb about domestic strife in this chapter (see v9). The escalation from 'corner of the roof' to 'desert' adds rhetorical force: if a rooftop was insufficient escape, try the wilderness. The addition of va-ka'as ('and anger, and irritation') intensifies the portrait beyond v9. These proverbs are observations about the destructive power of chronic conflict, addressed to the male audience of the collection.
20. The verb yevall'ennu ('swallows it, devours it, consumes it') suggests the fool does not spend resources but gulps them down — an image of wasteful, animal-like consumption. The wise person accumulates because of self-discipline; the fool consumes because he cannot restrain appetite.
21. The repetition of tsedaqah — once as what is pursued and again as what is found — is deliberate. Righteousness compounds: practicing it produces more of it.
22. The proverb asserts that wisdom is superior to military strength. A single wise person can accomplish what an army cannot — breach the defenses of the mighty. The verb yarad ('brings down, causes to descend') and oz mivtechah ('the strength of its confidence, the stronghold it trusted') emphasize that wisdom dismantles not just walls but the confidence those walls inspired.
23. The repetition of shomer ('guards, keeps, watches over') creates a direct equation: guarding the mouth equals guarding the life. The nefesh ('life, self, being') is at stake in every word spoken. In Proverbs, speech is never merely verbal — it is existential.
24. This is a character definition: three words (zed, yahir, lets) pile up to create a complete portrait. Zed ('presumptuous, insolent'), yahir ('haughty, arrogant'), and lets ('scoffer, mocker') converge on a single personality type. The phrase 'Scoffer is his name' uses the naming formula to say: this is not behavior but identity. The 'overflow of presumption' (evrat zadon) suggests someone whose arrogance spills over into action — he cannot contain it.
25. The paradox: the lazy person is not free from desire — he wants as much as anyone. But his hands refuse (me'anu, 'they refuse, they are unwilling') to do the work that would satisfy the desire. He is killed by the gap between wanting and doing. The verb temitenu ('kills him') is not metaphorical —

Proverbs treats chronic laziness as self-destruction.

- 26.** The contrast between the lazy craver and the righteous giver completes the portrait begun in v25. The lazy person's entire day is consumed by unsatisfied desire; the righteous person's life overflows in generosity. The verb *yachsokh* ('withholds, holds back, spares') with the negation means the righteous person gives freely, without calculating.
- 27.** The 'how much more' (*af ki*) construction creates two levels of offense: a wicked person's sacrifice is already *to'evah* ('detestable, abominable') because his life contradicts his offering; if he also brings it with *zimmah* ('evil intent, scheming, wickedness') — perhaps to manipulate God or create a pious appearance — the offense compounds. This extends the logic of v3: God prefers justice over sacrifice, and a wicked person's sacrifice is worse than no sacrifice at all.
- 28.** The contrast is between the false witness who invents testimony and the person who *shomea* ('listens, hears, pays attention') before speaking. The liar's words die with him; the listener's words endure *la-netsach* ('forever, perpetually, with permanence'). Truth has staying power; lies self-destruct.
- 29.** *He'ez panav* ('he makes his face strong, he hardens his countenance') describes brazen, shameless posturing — the wicked person projects confidence he does not have. The upright person, by contrast, *yavin darkho* ('understands his way, discerns his path') — he thinks before acting. The contrast is between performed certainty and genuine discernment.
- 30.** The triple *ein* ('there is not') is emphatic and total. No exceptions, no qualifications. Human wisdom is real and valuable — but it is never ultimate.
- 31.** *Teshu'ah* (from *yasha*, 'to save, to deliver') is the same root as the name *Yehoshua* (Joshua) and *Yeshua* (Jesus). The word encompasses military victory, rescue from danger, and spiritual salvation. Here it primarily means the outcome of battle, but the theological resonance runs deeper.

## 22

**Summary:** *Proverbs 22 transitions from the main Solomonic collection (vv1-16) into the 'Words of the Wise' section (vv17-29), a collection heavily influenced by the Egyptian 'Instruction of Amenemope.'* The chapter moves from individual proverbs about reputation, wealth, and child-rearing to an extended address from teacher to student, complete with a formal introduction and thematic organization around social ethics and self-control.

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 6 ('Train a child in his way') is one of the most quoted and most misunderstood proverbs in English. The Hebrew *al-pi darkho* ('according to his way, according to his path') likely means according to the child's nature and developmental stage, not according to the parent's preferred moral program. The proverb is observational wisdom, not a divine guarantee. Beginning at verse 17, the 'Words of the Wise' section marks a dramatic shift in literary form — from two-line independent proverbs to multi-verse instructions with motivation clauses. The parallels with Amenemope are so extensive that most scholars conclude literary dependence in one direction or the other, with the majority view being that the Hebrew writer adapted the Egyptian material.*

**Translation Friction:** *The relationship between Proverbs 22:17-23:11 and the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope raises questions about the nature of biblical inspiration. The parallels include shared imagery (moving boundary stones), shared structure (thirty sayings), and shared themes (protecting the poor). Rather than undermining the text's authority, this connection demonstrates that Israel's wisdom tradition engaged seriously with international wisdom and was not produced in isolation. The phrase *sheloshim* ('thirty' in 22:20) may refer to the thirty chapters of Amenemope.*

**Connections:** *Verse 2 ('The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD made them all') connects to Proverbs 29:13. The 'Words of the Wise' section (22:17-24:22) parallels the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope, particularly the boundary stone prohibition (22:28 / Amenemope ch. 6), the scribe before kings (22:29 / Amenemope ch. 30), and the warning against exploiting the poor at the gate (22:22-23 / Amenemope ch. 2). The teacher-student address form echoes Proverbs 1-9.*

**1**A good name is more desirable than great wealth;  
favor is better than silver and gold.

**2**The rich and the poor cross paths —  
the LORD made them both.

<sup>3</sup>The shrewd person sees danger and takes cover;  
the naive walk straight into it and pay the price.

<sup>4</sup>The result of humility and the fear of the LORD  
is wealth, honor, and life.

<sup>5</sup>Thorns and traps line the path of the crooked;  
whoever guards his life stays far from them.

<sup>6</sup>Dedicate a young person according to his own way;  
even when he grows old, he will not turn from it.

<sup>7</sup>The rich rule over the poor,  
and the borrower is slave to the lender.

<sup>8</sup>Whoever sows injustice will harvest disaster,  
and the rod of his fury will be broken.

<sup>9</sup>The generous person will be blessed,  
because he shares his food with the poor.

<sup>10</sup>Drive out the scoffer and conflict leaves with him;  
quarreling and insults will cease.

<sup>11</sup>Whoever loves a pure heart and gracious speech —  
the king will be his friend.

<sup>12</sup>The eyes of the LORD guard knowledge,  
but He overturns the words of the treacherous.

<sup>13</sup>The lazy person says, 'There's a lion outside!  
I'll be killed in the streets!'

<sup>14</sup>The mouth of the forbidden woman is a deep pit;  
the one under the LORD's displeasure falls into it.

<sup>15</sup>Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a youth;  
the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

<sup>16</sup>Oppressing the poor to enrich yourself,  
or giving to the rich — both lead only to loss.

<sup>17</sup>Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise;  
set your heart on my knowledge.

<sup>18</sup>For it is pleasing when you guard them in your belly;  
let them be ready together on your lips.

<sup>19</sup>So that your trust may be in the LORD,  
I am teaching you today — yes, you.

20 Have I not written for you thirty sayings  
 of counsel and knowledge,  
 21 to teach you what is reliable — words of truth —  
 so you can bring back truthful answers to those who sent you?  
 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor,  
 and do not crush the afflicted at the gate,  
 23 because the LORD will take up their case  
 and rob the life of those who rob them.  
 24 Do not befriend a hot-tempered person,  
 and do not associate with someone given to rage,  
 25 or you will learn his ways  
 and set a trap for your own life.  
 26 Do not be among those who shake hands on pledges  
 or who guarantee the debts of others.  
 27 If you have nothing to pay,  
 why should your bed be taken from under you?  
 28 Do not move an ancient boundary marker  
 that your ancestors set in place.  
 29 Do you see a person skilled in his work?  
 He will stand before kings;  
 he will not stand before obscure men.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew simply says *shem* ('name') without 'good' — the adjective is implied. In Israelite culture, a name was not a label but a reputation — the summary of a person's character as known by the community. *Chen tov* ('good favor, gracious esteem') describes how others regard you. Both are relational goods that money cannot purchase.
2. This proverb appears nearly verbatim in 29:13. The shared-maker theology here is practical, not abstract — it grounds social ethics in creation theology. If God made both, then the rich person who despises the poor insults the Maker.
3. *Arum* ('shrewd, prudent, clever') is the same word used for the serpent in Genesis 3:1 — it describes keen perception without moral judgment. Here shrewdness is positive: the ability to read situations accurately and act accordingly. The *petayim* ('naive ones, simple ones') lack this perceptiveness and suffer for it.
4. *Egev* ('consequence, result, reward; heel, footstep') connects humility and reverence for God to tangible outcomes. The pairing of *anavah* ('humility') with *yir'at YHWH* ('fear of the LORD') is significant: genuine reverence for God produces not arrogance but lowliness. The three rewards — wealth, honor, life — represent the full scope of human flourishing in the wisdom tradition.
5. *Tsinnim* ('thorns') and *pachim* ('traps, snares') are not punishments imposed from outside but natural features of the crooked path itself. The person who chooses crookedness walks into a landscape of pain and entanglement. The one who guards his *nefesh* ('life, self') avoids that path entirely.
6. This is a proverb, not a promise. Proverbs describe how life generally works, not how it always works. Reading it as a divine contract ('if I raise my child right, God guarantees the outcome') misreads the genre. The emphasis is on the parent's responsibility to understand and work with the child's nature.
7. This proverb observes economic power dynamics without approving them. The verb *yimshol* ('rules, dominates') and the noun *eved* ('slave, servant') describe the social reality of debt in the ancient world: borrowing created a power relationship indistinguishable from servitude. The proverb warns; it does not celebrate.

8. The agricultural metaphor — sowing and reaping — is the wisdom tradition's primary image for moral cause and effect. Avlah ('injustice, unrighteousness') produces aven ('disaster, trouble, wickedness'). The second line adds that the oppressor's instrument of punishment — the shevet ('rod, staff') of his rage — will itself be broken. Power used unjustly is self-destroying.
9. Tov-ayin (literally 'good of eye') means generous, open-handed — the opposite of ra-ayin ('evil of eye,' which means stingy). The 'eye' idiom reflects the ancient understanding that the eye reveals the heart's orientation: a good eye looks outward toward others' needs, a bad eye looks inward toward self-protection. Blessing follows generosity because generosity aligns with God's own character.
10. The proverb identifies the scoffer (lets) as the catalyst for communal conflict. Remove the person, and the conflict evaporates. The three words madon ('strife, contention'), din ('quarrel, dispute'), and qalon ('shame, dishonor, insult') represent escalating forms of social disruption. The solution is not mediation but removal.
11. The proverb pairs internal quality (tehar-lev, 'purity of heart') with external expression (chen sefatav, 'grace of his lips'). The person whose inner life is clean and whose speech is gracious gains access to the highest level of society — the king's friendship. Character and communication together open doors that ambition alone cannot.
12. God actively protects truth (da'at, 'knowledge') while subverting falsehood. The verb natsru ('guard, watch over, preserve') and yesallef ('overturns, subverts, perverts') create a double action: God is both guardian and judge, preserving what is true and dismantling what is false.
13. The humor is intentional. The lazy person invents an absurd excuse — a lion roaming the city streets — to justify staying indoors. The proverb mocks the creative energy that lazy people invest in avoiding work. The same joke appears in 26:13 with slight variation. Lions existed in ancient Israel but virtually never appeared in urban areas.
14. The 'forbidden woman' (zarot, plural of zarah) refers to the adulteress figure developed in Proverbs 1-9. Her mouth — her seductive speech — is compared to a deep pit (shuchah amuqqah), a trap that is easy to fall into and nearly impossible to escape. The second line adds a disturbing dimension: falling for her seduction is itself a sign of God's displeasure (ze'um YHWH), suggesting a judicial hardening.
15. Ivvelet ('foolishness, folly') is not innocent ignorance but the active resistance to wisdom that Proverbs considers the default human condition. Qeshurah ('bound, tied') suggests it is not casual but deeply embedded. The shevet musar ('rod of discipline') represents corrective training broadly — the full range of consequences that teach a young person to abandon foolish patterns. The proverb observes that children do not naturally gravitate toward wisdom; they must be trained into it.
16. Two apparently opposite actions — taking from the poor and giving to the rich — produce the same result: machsor ('lack, want, poverty'). Exploiting the vulnerable and currying favor with the powerful are both strategies that backfire. The proverb refuses to let economic calculation override moral reality.
17. The shift from independent proverbs to direct address signals a new collection. 'Words of the Wise' (divre chakhamim) is the section title, parallel to 'Proverbs of Solomon' in 10:1 and 25:1. The teacher-student format returns to the style of Proverbs 1-9.
18. The 'belly' (beten) is the seat of internalized knowledge — wisdom stored deep inside, not merely memorized but absorbed. The movement from belly to lips describes the process: take it in deeply (study, reflect, digest), and it will be available on your lips when needed (speech, counsel, response). Wisdom internalized becomes wisdom expressed.
19. The purpose clause reveals the ultimate goal of the 'Words of the Wise': not mere intellectual development but trust in the LORD (mivtachekha ba-YHWH). Wisdom instruction aims at faith. The emphatic af attah ('even you, yes, you') personalizes the address — this is not abstract teaching but direct, individual challenge.
20. The textual difficulty here is ancient — the Masoretes themselves flagged the discrepancy between the written and read forms. The rendering 'thirty sayings' follows the Qere and the Amenemope parallel, which together provide the strongest interpretive case.
21. Qosht ('reliability, certainty, truth') is an Aramaic loanword, rare in Hebrew, suggesting a cosmopolitan or late vocabulary. The purpose of wisdom education is twofold: to know what is true (internal) and to report truth accurately (external). The phrase le-sholchekha ('to those who send you') implies the student is an envoy or representative — someone who will carry answers back to an authority. Wisdom training produces trustworthy messengers.
22. The 'gate' (sha'ar) was the public space where legal cases were heard and commercial transactions occurred — the ancient courtroom and marketplace combined. Crushing the afflicted 'at the gate' means exploiting legal processes to harm the vulnerable. The reason given — ki dal hu ('because he is poor') — seems obvious but is the point: poverty itself is being weaponized. The poor person is targeted precisely because he lacks the resources to fight back.
23. God becomes the poor person's attorney (yariv rivam, 'will plead their case, will argue their lawsuit'). The legal imagery is precise: the poor person has no advocate at the gate, so God Himself enters the courtroom. The punishment mirrors the crime — qava ('to rob, to plunder') is turned back on the perpetrator. Those who rob the poor will have their own nefesh ('life') robbed by God.
24. Ba'al af (literally 'master of anger, possessor of wrath') and ish chemot ('man of furies, person of hot anger') describe someone whose defining characteristic is uncontrolled anger. The warning is practical: association leads to imitation (v25). Anger is contagious.
25. Te'elaf ('you will learn, you will become accustomed to') describes unconscious adoption of behavior patterns. The danger is not that you will choose to become angry but that proximity will rewire your habits. The moqesh ('snare, trap') is self-set — you trap yourself by absorbing someone else's

destructive patterns.

- 26.** Toq'e kaf ('strikers of the palm') refers to the handshake that sealed a financial guarantee. The warning against surety — co-signing someone else's loan — is one of the most repeated financial warnings in Proverbs (6:1-5, 11:15, 17:18, 20:16). The ancient wisdom is timeless: guaranteeing another person's debt puts your own assets at risk.
- 27.** The image is vivid and concrete: the creditor literally takes the bed out from under the debtor. Mishkav ('bed, sleeping place') represents the most basic necessity of life. The rhetorical question implies the absurdity of risking what you cannot afford to lose.
- 28.** The parallel with Amenemope is particularly close here: both texts prohibit moving boundary stones, both ground the prohibition in respect for ancestral rights, and both present it as a fundamental ethical norm. This is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for literary connection between the two texts.
- 29.** The parallel with Amenemope chapter 30 is notable: both texts close with the image of the skilled scribe who serves royalty. The shared conclusion suggests the two texts may have been organized with awareness of each other's structure.

## 23

**Summary:** *Proverbs 23 continues the 'Words of the Wise' collection with extended instructions on self-control in the presence of power, the futility of chasing wealth, respect for parents and the aged, avoidance of prostitution, and a vivid concluding portrait of the drunkard. The chapter moves from table manners before a ruler to the devastating consequences of alcohol abuse.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The warning against staring at wealth (vv4-5) contains one of the most striking images in Proverbs: riches sprout wings and fly away like an eagle toward the sky. The Hebrew makes the eagle's flight a spontaneous generation — wealth 'makes itself wings,' as if it were alive and determined to escape. The chapter's final section on drunkenness (vv29-35) is the longest sustained poetic treatment of alcohol in the Hebrew Bible. It is not a moral lecture but a masterful piece of observational writing — the drunkard's bloodshot eyes, unexplained wounds, swaying vision, and the devastating final line: 'When will I wake up? I need another drink.' The addict's own voice closes the poem.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 13-14 endorse corporal punishment of children with the claim that beating will not kill the child and may save him from Sheol. Modern readers must reckon with the cultural distance: physical discipline was assumed across the ancient Near East, and the proverb operates within that assumption. The text is not a license for abuse but a reflection of ancient pedagogy. The 'stingy host' passage (vv6-8) uses the phrase ra-ayin ('evil eye') which in this context means 'grudging, miserly' — not the supernatural 'evil eye' of later folk tradition.*

**Connections:** *The 'Words of the Wise' section continues from 22:17. The wealth-sprouting-wings image (v5) connects to the transience theme in Ecclesiastes. The 'do not move a boundary marker' (v10) repeats 22:28 and Deuteronomy 19:14. The father-rejoicing theme (vv15-16, 24-25) echoes Proverbs 10:1 and 15:20. The drunkard portrait (vv29-35) parallels Isaiah 28:7-8 and anticipates Habakkuk 2:15-16.*

<sup>1</sup>When you sit down to eat with a ruler,  
pay careful attention to what is before you.

<sup>2</sup>Put a knife to your throat  
if you are a person with a big appetite.

<sup>3</sup>Do not crave his delicacies,  
for they are deceptive food.

<sup>4</sup>Do not exhaust yourself chasing wealth;  
have the sense to stop.

<sup>5</sup>Will you fix your gaze on what is already gone?  
Wealth sprouts wings for itself  
and flies off like an eagle toward the sky.

<sup>6</sup>Do not eat the bread of a stingy host,  
and do not crave his delicacies.

<sup>7</sup>For as he calculates inside himself, so he is.  
'Eat! Drink!' he says to you,  
but his heart is not with you.

<sup>8</sup>The little you have eaten you will vomit up,  
and your pleasant words will be wasted.

<sup>9</sup>Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,  
for he will despise the insight of your words.

<sup>10</sup>Do not move an ancient boundary marker,  
and do not encroach on the fields of orphans,

<sup>11</sup>because their Redeemer is strong;  
He will take up their case against you.

<sup>12</sup>Bring your heart to discipline  
and your ears to words of knowledge.

<sup>13</sup>Do not withhold discipline from a youth;  
if you strike him with the rod, he will not die.

<sup>14</sup>You will strike him with the rod  
and rescue his life from Sheol.

<sup>15</sup>My son, if your heart is wise,  
my own heart will rejoice —

<sup>16</sup>yes, my inmost being will celebrate  
when your lips speak what is right.

<sup>17</sup>Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
but live in the fear of the LORD all day long.

<sup>18</sup>For there is surely a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.

<sup>19</sup>Listen, my son, and be wise,  
and guide your heart on the right path.

<sup>20</sup>Do not be among heavy drinkers  
or among those who gorge on meat.

<sup>21</sup>For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor,  
and drowsiness dresses you in rags.

<sup>22</sup>Listen to your father, who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old.

<sup>23</sup>Buy truth and never sell it —  
wisdom, discipline, and understanding.

<sup>24</sup>The father of a righteous person will greatly rejoice;  
whoever fathers a wise child will delight in him.

<sup>25</sup>Let your father and mother be glad;  
let the woman who bore you rejoice.

<sup>26</sup>My son, give me your heart,  
and let your eyes guard my ways.

<sup>27</sup>For a prostitute is a deep pit,  
and a foreign woman is a narrow well.

<sup>28</sup>She too lies in ambush like a robber  
and multiplies the faithless among humanity.

<sup>29</sup>Who has misery? Who has regret?  
Who has quarrels? Who has complaints?  
Who has wounds for no reason?  
Who has bloodshot eyes?

<sup>30</sup>Those who linger over wine,  
those who go searching for mixed drinks.

<sup>31</sup>Do not gaze at wine when it glows red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
when it goes down smoothly.

<sup>32</sup>In the end it bites like a snake  
and strikes like a viper.

<sup>33</sup>Your eyes will see strange things,  
and your mind will speak distorted words.

<sup>34</sup>You will be like someone lying down in the middle of the sea,  
like someone sprawled on top of the rigging.

<sup>35</sup>'They hit me, but I felt no pain.  
They beat me, but I didn't notice.  
When will I wake up?  
I need to find another drink.'

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bin tavin ('understand carefully, discern thoroughly') is an emphatic form — the doubled verb insists on maximum awareness. Dining with a ruler was a political act in the ancient world, not a casual meal. 'What is before you' has a double meaning: the food on the table and the powerful person across from you. Both require vigilance.

2. The image is deliberately shocking: the knife at the throat is a hyperbolic metaphor for extreme self-control. If your appetite controls you, you must take drastic measures to control it before it controls the situation. Ba'al nefesh ('master of appetite, person of great desire') describes someone whose hunger — for food, for status, for the ruler's favor — could lead him to overindulge and make a fool of himself.
3. Lechem kezavim ('bread of lies, deceptive food') warns that the ruler's table is not generous hospitality but a calculated display. The food comes with strings attached. Every bite accepted creates an obligation. The delicacies (mat'ammotav) are bait, not gifts.
4. Tiga ('to toil, to weary yourself, to exhaust') implies not ordinary work but obsessive, health-destroying labor driven by greed. The command mi-binatēkha chadal ('from your understanding, stop') means: use the very intelligence you are devoting to wealth-getting to recognize when to quit. Wisdom tells you where ambition should end.
5. The wordplay between ha-ta'if ('will you cause your eyes to fly') and ya'uf ('it flies away') connects the straining eye to the departing wealth — your eyes fly toward it, and it flies away from you.
6. Ra ayin ('evil of eye') is the opposite of tov-ayin ('good of eye,' 22:9). The 'evil eye' in Hebrew wisdom means 'grudging, miserly, resentful of what others receive' — not the supernatural curse of later folklore. Eating a stingy person's food creates obligation to someone who will later resent having shared it.
7. The rendering of sha'ar is debated — it may mean 'gatekeeper' (one who guards the threshold) or 'calculator' (one who reckons costs). Both meanings fit: the stingy host is a gatekeeper of his own generosity, calculating what everything costs him.
8. The physical disgust of vomiting (teq'annah) matches the social disgust of wasted courtesy. When you discover the host's true nature, everything — the food and your compliments — will come back up. The proverb warns that accepting hospitality from the wrong person degrades both body and speech.
9. The kesil ('fool, dullard') is not unintelligent but uninterested. He yavuz ('despises, treats with contempt') the sekhel ('insight, good sense') of your words. Teaching a fool is not merely ineffective — it is self-degrading, because your wisdom is subjected to contempt.
10. This repeats the boundary-stone prohibition from 22:28 but adds a specific victim: orphans (yetomim). Orphans had no father to defend their property rights in court. Stealing their land was attacking the most defenseless members of society — a direct affront to God, who claims the role of orphan-defender (v11).
11. Go'el is the same word used for God's redemption of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 6:6) and for Boaz's role in the book of Ruth. Here it names God's active, personal commitment to orphan defense.
12. Havi'ah ('bring, cause to come') is active — the student must deliver his own heart and ears to the learning process. Wisdom does not come to the passive; the student must come to wisdom. Musar ('discipline, correction, instruction') and imre-da'at ('words of knowledge') represent the full curriculum: correction of wrong behavior and acquisition of right understanding.
13. The proverb operates within the universal ancient assumption that physical correction was part of child-rearing. The assurance 'he will not die' addresses a parent's hesitation — the rod causes temporary pain, not permanent harm. Modern readers must read this within its cultural context while recognizing that the underlying principle (correction is an act of love, not neglect) transcends the specific method.
14. Sheol (she'ol) is the underworld, the realm of the dead — not the later theological concept of hell. The proverb claims that corrective discipline can save a young person from the path that leads to early death. 'Rescue his nefesh from Sheol' means: keep him alive by keeping him on the right path. The stakes are existential, not merely behavioral.
15. The teacher shifts to the intimate address 'my son' (beni) and reveals personal investment: the student's wisdom produces joy in the teacher's heart. Gam ani ('even I, I also, I myself') is emphatic — the teacher's delight is real, not professional. Wisdom is relational; it produces joy in the community of those who share it.
16. Kilyotai ('my kidneys, my innermost parts') represents the deepest seat of emotion in Hebrew anthropology — what we would call 'gut feeling' or 'the core of my being.' The teacher's joy at hearing the student speak mesharim ('upright things, straight words, what is right') is visceral, not cerebral.
17. The temptation to envy sinners (yeqanne libbekha ba-chatta'im) assumes that sinners appear to prosper — a problem that tormented the psalmists (Psalm 37, 73) and the author of Ecclesiastes. The antidote is not denial but redirection: yir'at YHWH ('the fear of the LORD') all day long. Sustained reverence displaces envy by reorienting what the heart values.
18. Acharit ('end, future, outcome, what comes after') assures the student that the story is not over. The apparent prosperity of sinners is not the final chapter. Tiqvatekha ('your hope, your expectation') will not be cut off (tikaret, from karat, the same verb used for being 'cut off' from the covenant community). The promise is that the righteous path leads somewhere — patience will be vindicated.
19. The imperative sequence — shema ('listen'), chakkam ('be wise'), asher ('guide, set straight') — maps the learning process: attention leads to wisdom, which leads to directing the heart. The student is not passive but active: he must steer (asher) his own heart (lev) along the path (derekh). Wisdom is not received; it is practiced.
20. Sov'e-yayin ('drunkards, wine-guzzlers') and zolale vasar ('gluttons of meat, flesh-devourers') represent excess in both drink and food. The prohibition is social: al-tehi ('do not be among, do not associate with') warns against the company of the intemperate. The issue is not wine or meat per se but the loss of self-control that comes from habitual overindulgence and the peer pressure that perpetuates it.

21. The three-step progression: excess leads to drowsiness (numah, 'sleepiness, slumber'), which leads to poverty, which leads to rags. The personification of drowsiness as a tailor who dresses you in torn clothing (qera'im, 'rags, torn garments') is darkly humorous — the habits you indulge in become the wardrobe you wear.
22. Zeh yeladekha ('this one who fathered you, who gave you birth') grounds the command in biological reality: the person you are tempted to dismiss gave you existence. The second line addresses a specific temptation — contempt for an aging mother (al-tavuz ki zaqenah immekha). When parents become old and dependent, the power dynamic reverses, and the adult child may be tempted to treat them as burdens. The proverb forbids it.
23. The commercial metaphor is pointed: emet ('truth') is something you acquire at cost (qeneh, 'buy, acquire, purchase') and never liquidate (al-timkor, 'do not sell'). Truth, wisdom, discipline, and understanding are assets that must be held permanently. The one-directional transaction — buy but never sell — means that once acquired, these are not negotiable under any circumstances.
24. Gil yagil ('will surely rejoice, will greatly celebrate') is an emphatic form — doubled to express the intensity of the father's joy. The parallel between tsaddiq ('righteous') and chakham ('wise') confirms that in Proverbs, these are nearly synonymous: wisdom produces righteousness, and righteousness is the practical expression of wisdom.
25. The mother appears alongside the father (yismach-avikha ve-immekha), and the closing phrase yoladtekha ('she who gave you birth') specifically honors the mother's physical labor and sacrifice. The child's wise life is presented as a gift returned to both parents.
26. Tenah-veni libbakha li ('give, my son, your heart to me') is the teacher's most direct and intimate request. He asks for the student's full inner allegiance — not mere compliance but heart-level trust. The eyes (einekha) that guard (tittsornah, 'observe, watch, keep') the teacher's ways complete the picture: heart given inward, eyes directed outward.
27. Shuchah amuqqah ('deep pit') and be'er tsarah ('narrow well') are trap images — easy to fall into, impossible to climb out of. The zonah ('prostitute') and nokhriyyah ('foreign woman, outsider woman') are presented as two dimensions of sexual danger: the professional and the culturally unfamiliar. Both use seduction as a mechanism of entrapment.
28. The verb te'erov ('she lurks, she lies in ambush') is military and predatory language. The seductress is not passive but active — a hunter, not merely a temptation. The result of her work is multiplication: tosef bogedot ('she increases the faithless/treacherous'). Each person she ensnares becomes another person unfaithful to their commitments.
29. The sixfold 'who has?' (lemi) creates an incantatory rhythm that mimics the drunkard's repetitive, circular existence. The wounds 'for no reason' (chinnam) are the telltale sign — injuries the drinker cannot explain because he cannot remember receiving them.
30. Lam'acharim al-ha-yayin ('those who stay late over the wine, those who linger') and labba'im lachqor mimsakh ('those who come to investigate mixed wine') describe the dedicated drinker. Mimsakh ('mixed wine') was wine blended with spices or additional ingredients to increase potency. The verb chaqar ('to search, to investigate, to explore') is darkly ironic — the drunkard applies the diligence of a scholar to finding the strongest drink.
31. The seduction of wine is presented through visual and sensory appeal: yit'addam ('it reddens, it glows'), yitten ba-kos einu ('it gives its eye in the cup' — it gleams, it catches the light), yithalekh be-mesharim ('it goes in smoothness, it slides down easily'). Wine is personified as a seducer — it catches your eye, it looks beautiful, it enters smoothly. The next verses reveal what happens after the smooth entrance.
32. The reversal is complete: what went down smoothly (v31) now bites and stings. Nachash ('snake, serpent') and tsif'oni ('viper, adder') are both venomous creatures. The acharito ('its end, its aftermath') reveals the true nature of what seemed pleasant — wine that entered like silk exits like venom. The contrast between the smooth cup and the striking serpent is the chapter's most powerful image.
33. Zarot ('strange things' or 'strange women') and tahpukhot ('distortions, perversities, twisted things') describe the dual impairment of drunkenness: visual distortion and mental confusion. The drunk sees what is not there and says what makes no sense. Both perception (eyes) and speech (heart/mind) are corrupted.
34. Two absurd and terrifying positions: sleeping in the open ocean and sleeping at the top of a ship's mast (or rigging, chibbel). The drunkard's equilibrium is so destroyed that his subjective experience resembles the most violently unstable positions imaginable. The nausea and disorientation of severe intoxication are captured perfectly in the sea-swell image.
35. The shift to first person is the poem's masterstroke. The teacher stops describing the drunkard and lets the drunkard describe himself. The voice is simultaneously comic and tragic — a person who cannot feel blows, cannot remember being beaten, and whose only thought upon waking is to repeat the cycle. This is one of the earliest literary depictions of addiction.

## 24

**Summary:** *Proverbs 24 concludes the 'Words of the Wise' (vv1-22) and appends a brief additional collection titled 'These also are by the wise' (vv23-34). The chapter addresses envy of the wicked, the strength wisdom provides, the duty to rescue the innocent, the certainty of divine judgment, and the famous 'sluggard's vineyard' parable. It moves from prohibitions and exhortations to a closing narrative illustration.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verses 11-12 contain one of the most morally demanding statements in the Hebrew Bible: the obligation to rescue those being dragged to slaughter, with the explicit warning that claiming ignorance will not work before God. This is not a suggestion but an imperative, and it eliminates the defense of 'I did not know.' God weighs hearts (see 21:2) and will repay according to action or inaction. The 'sluggard's vineyard' parable (vv30-34) is the only true narrative in the Proverbs collection — a first-person account of walking past a lazy man's ruined field and drawing a lesson. It ends with a nearly verbatim quotation of 6:10-11, creating an internal echo within the book.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 17-18 ('Do not rejoice when your enemy falls... or the LORD may see and be displeased and turn His anger away from him') has troubled interpreters because the motivation seems self-interested: do not gloat lest God relent and spare your enemy. But the deeper logic is about leaving judgment to God entirely — if you take satisfaction in another's downfall, you have inserted yourself into God's judicial role, and He may reverse the outcome to preserve His sovereignty over justice.*

**Connections:** *The rescue imperative (vv11-12) connects to Ezekiel 3:17-21 (the watchman's obligation) and James 4:17 ('whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin'). The 'do not rejoice at your enemy's fall' teaching (vv17-18) is echoed in Job 31:29 and expanded by Jesus in Matthew 5:44. The sluggard's vineyard (vv30-34) quotes Proverbs 6:10-11 verbatim. The 'these also are by the wise' header (v23) parallels the collection headers in 10:1, 22:17, and 25:1.*

- <sup>1</sup>Do not envy violent people,  
and do not desire to be among them,
- <sup>2</sup>for their hearts plan violence  
and their lips speak of causing harm.
- <sup>3</sup>By wisdom a house is built,  
and by understanding it is established.
- <sup>4</sup>and by knowledge its rooms are filled  
with every kind of precious and pleasant wealth.
- <sup>5</sup>A wise person is powerful,  
and a person of knowledge increases strength.
- <sup>6</sup>For by wise strategy you wage your war,  
and victory comes through many advisors.
- <sup>7</sup>Wisdom is beyond the fool's reach;  
at the city gate he cannot open his mouth.
- <sup>8</sup>Whoever schemes to do harm  
will be called a master of plots.

<sup>9</sup>The scheming of folly is sin,  
and the scoffer is detestable to others.

<sup>10</sup>If you collapse on the day of trouble,  
your strength is indeed small.

<sup>11</sup>Rescue those being dragged off to death;  
hold back those stumbling toward slaughter.

<sup>12</sup>If you say, 'But we did not know about this!' —  
does not He who weighs hearts perceive it?  
Does not He who guards your life know?  
And will He not repay each person according to what he has done?

<sup>13</sup>Eat honey, my son, for it is good,  
and drippings from the comb are sweet on your palate.

<sup>14</sup>Know that wisdom is the same for your soul.  
If you find it, there will be a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.

<sup>15</sup>Do not lie in ambush, wicked one, against the home of the righteous;  
do not ravage his resting place.

<sup>16</sup>For the righteous person falls seven times and rises again,  
but the wicked stumble into disaster.

<sup>17</sup>When your enemy falls, do not rejoice;  
when he stumbles, do not let your heart celebrate,

<sup>18</sup>or the LORD will see and be displeased,  
and He may turn His anger away from your enemy.

<sup>19</sup>Do not be agitated by evildoers;  
do not envy the wicked.

<sup>20</sup>For the evildoer has no future,  
and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

<sup>21</sup>Fear the LORD and the king, my son,  
and do not associate with those who seek upheaval,

<sup>22</sup>for disaster will rise against them suddenly,  
and who knows the ruin that both can bring?

<sup>23</sup>These also are by the wise:  
Showing partiality in judgment is not good.

<sup>24</sup>Whoever tells the guilty, 'You are innocent' —  
peoples will curse him, nations will denounce him.

<sup>25</sup>But those who convict the guilty will prosper,  
and a rich blessing will come upon them.

<sup>26</sup>An honest answer  
is like a kiss on the lips.

<sup>27</sup>Prepare your work outside,  
get everything ready in the field;  
then afterward, build your house.

<sup>28</sup>Do not testify against your neighbor without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.

<sup>29</sup>Do not say, 'I will do to him what he did to me;  
I will pay him back for what he has done.'

<sup>30</sup>I passed by the field of a lazy man  
and by the vineyard of a person lacking sense.

<sup>31</sup>And there it was — overgrown with thorns everywhere,  
nettles covering its surface,  
and its stone wall broken down.

<sup>32</sup>I observed and took it to heart;  
I looked and drew a lesson.

<sup>33</sup>'A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest' —

<sup>34</sup>and poverty will come marching toward you like a vagabond,  
and want like an armed warrior.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens with the same warning that closed the previous instruction unit (23:17): do not let envy of the wicked corrupt your moral compass. 'Violent people' (anshe ra'ah, literally 'men of evil/harm') are those who use force and manipulation to get ahead. The desire (tit'av, 'to crave, to long for') to join them is the temptation of expedience — their methods seem to work.
2. The verb yehgeh ('meditates, murmurs, plans') is the same word used for meditating on God's instruction in Psalm 1:2 — here inverted. Where the righteous person meditates on torah, the violent person meditates on shod ('destruction, violence, devastation'). Same cognitive process, opposite content.
3. Bayit ('house') means both the physical structure and the household — the family, the legacy, the dynasty. Wisdom builds (yibbaneh, passive — wisdom is the means) and understanding establishes (yitkonen, 'is made firm, is set on a foundation'). The passive voice emphasizes that wisdom is an instrument, not an agent — it is the tool God provides for building stable lives.
4. The progression from wisdom (v3) to understanding (v3) to knowledge (da'at, v4) represents three aspects of the same intellectual virtue. Wisdom designs, understanding constructs, and knowledge furnishes. The filled rooms (chadarim, 'inner chambers') represent abundance that comes from living wisely — not sudden wealth but accumulated prosperity.
5. Ge'vur chakham ba-oz ('a wise warrior is in strength') links wisdom to military power — the wise commander is stronger than the merely brave. This extends the logic of 21:22 (the wise person scales the city of warriors). Me'ammets ko'ach ('strengthening power, increasing might') suggests continuous growth — wisdom compounds strength over time.
6. Tachbulot ('guidance, steering, strategy') comes from the language of sailing — the ropes that steer a ship. War requires not just courage but navigation. Teshu'ah be-rov yo'ets ('deliverance in an abundance of counselors') repeats the teaching of 11:14 and 15:22: wisdom is collective, not individual. No single person sees everything; many advisors together see more.

7. Ra'mot ('corals, high things, things beyond reach') describes wisdom as elevated above the fool's capacity. The practical consequence: ba-sha'ar ('at the gate') — the place of legal proceedings and civic deliberation — the fool has nothing to contribute. He cannot open his mouth (lo yiftach-pihu) because he has nothing worth saying. Wisdom's absence results in civic silence.
8. Ba'al mezimot ('master of schemes, lord of plots') is a reputation label — the community will name you according to your behavior. Mezimmah can mean either 'prudence' (positive) or 'scheme' (negative); here the context determines the negative reading. The schemer earns a title that follows him permanently.
9. Zimmah ('scheme, plan, purpose') when paired with ivvelet ('folly') produces sin (chattat). The proverb locates sin not just in action but in intention — planning foolishness is already sinful. The scoffer (lets) is to'avat le-adam ('detestable to humanity') — universally despised, not merely by the wise but by everyone.
10. The wordplay between tsarah ('trouble, distress') and tsar ('narrow, small, constricted') is untranslatable: 'in the day of distress — distressed is your strength.' Crisis reveals capacity. The verb hitrappita ('you become slack, you go limp, you collapse') describes not physical weakness but moral failure — the inability to act when action is needed.
11. The verse does not specify who is doing the killing or why. The imperative applies regardless of the circumstances: if someone is being unjustly killed, you are commanded to intervene. The breadth of application is the point.
12. This is among the most ethically demanding passages in wisdom literature. It places a positive obligation on the bystander and removes the most common excuse for inaction. The theological grounding is God's omniscience: He knows what you knew and what you chose not to do.
13. Honey (devash) was the primary sweetener in ancient Israel and a symbol of the good life. Nofet ('drippings, oozing honey from the comb') is the purest, most desirable form. The instruction is not merely about food but sets up the analogy in v14: as honey is sweet to the body, wisdom is sweet to the soul.
14. The comparison is precise: what honey does for the taste buds, wisdom does for the nefesh ('soul, self, life'). The promise repeats 23:18 verbatim — yesh acharit ve-tiqvatekha lo tikkaret ('there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off'). Wisdom offers sweetness now and security later.
15. The address shifts to the wicked person directly — a rare move in Proverbs. Neveh tsaddiq ('the dwelling of the righteous') and rivtso ('his resting place, his lair') describe the righteous person's home and security. The verbs te'erov ('lie in ambush') and teshaddad ('ravage, destroy, plunder') are predatory and military. The wicked person is warned: attacking the righteous is futile because of what follows in v16.
16. The contrast is between falling and rising (the righteous) versus falling and staying down (the wicked). The righteous person's advantage is not immunity from suffering but the capacity to recover from it.
17. The prohibition against gloating (al-tismach, 'do not be glad'; al-yagel libbakha, 'do not let your heart exult') is remarkable in the ancient Near Eastern context, where celebrating an enemy's downfall was normal and expected. The next verse provides the theological reason.
18. The logic is counterintuitive: your gloating may cause God to relent toward the very person you want punished. Ra be-einav ('evil in His eyes, displeasing to Him') refers to your attitude, not your enemy's behavior. God finds schadenfreude repulsive because it usurps His role as judge. If you celebrate another's downfall, you claim ownership of judgment that belongs to God, and He may reverse the outcome to reassert His sovereignty.
19. Titchar ('be heated, be agitated, burn with anger') describes the emotional disturbance caused by watching the wicked prosper. The command addresses the psychological toll of perceived injustice. Combined with the envy prohibition, it tells the student: neither covet their success nor let their success make you angry.
20. Acharit ('future, outcome, latter end') for the wicked is empty — lo tihyeh acharit la-ra ('there will be no future for the evil one'). The lamp (ner) that represents life, prosperity, and continuity will be extinguished (yid'akh, 'will be put out, will be snuffed'). The wicked person's prosperity is temporary; his lamp has a limited supply of oil.
21. The pairing of the LORD and the king (YHWH va-melek) places divine and royal authority on the same side. Shonim ('those who change, those who are different, revolutionaries') describes people who destabilize — whether through political rebellion or constant inconsistency. The wisdom tradition values stability and order; those who constantly overturn existing structures are dangerous company.
22. This verse marks the end of the 'thirty sayings' section that began at 22:17. The collection closes with fear — an appropriate bookend to the opening call for attention and trust.
23. The collection header 'these also are by the wise' parallels 'proverbs of Solomon' (10:1) and 'words of the wise' (22:17). It attributes the following material to the same wisdom tradition without specifying individual authors.
24. The judge who acquits the guilty (omer la-rasha tsaddiq attah, 'saying to the wicked one, you are righteous') commits a public crime that the entire community recognizes. The consequences are social: peoples (ammim) will curse him and nations (le'ummim) will denounce him. Corrupt justice is not a private failing but a public offense that draws universal condemnation.
25. The contrast with v24: the judge who properly convicts (makhichim, from yakach, 'to rebuke, to convict, to decide rightly') receives blessing (birkat-tov, 'blessing of good'). The community rewards integrity in judgment because everyone's security depends on a just legal system.
26. The kiss (yishshaq sefatayim, 'he kisses lips') was a sign of respect and approval. Devarim nekhochim ('straight words, honest answers, direct speech') earn the same response as a kiss — they create intimacy and trust. The proverb values directness: honest speech is an act of relational

warmth.

27. The sequence is crucial: first secure your livelihood (field work, agricultural preparation), then build your house (establish your household). The proverb counsels economic pragmatism — do not start a family or household until you have the means to sustain it. Foundations before structures; income before expenditure.
28. Ed chinnam ('witness for nothing, witness without cause') describes false or frivolous testimony — giving evidence against a neighbor when there is no legitimate grievance. Combined with the prohibition against lip-deception (haphitteta bi-sefatekha), the proverb protects the legal system from weaponized speech. The courtroom — the gate — depends on honest witnesses.
29. The prohibition against personal vengeance (al-tomar ka'asher asah li ken e'eseh-lo) forbids the reciprocity instinct: he hurt me, so I will hurt him. The phrase ashiv la-ish ke-fo'olo ('I will repay the man according to his deed') is the language of divine judgment (see v12) — when a human being claims it, he usurps God's prerogative. Repayment belongs to God, not to the offended party.
30. The shift to narrative is the literary surprise. After chapters of imperative instruction, the teacher becomes a storyteller. This first-person form gives the lesson immediacy and credibility — 'I saw this with my own eyes.'
31. The description is visual and detailed: qimmeshonim ('thorns, thistles') have taken over the entire field. Charullim ('nettles, stinging weeds') cover its face (panav, the surface of the ground). The stone wall (gal avanim, 'stone heap') that protected the vineyard from animals has collapsed (neherasah, 'was torn down, was demolished'). Every element of productive agriculture — cleared ground, cultivated soil, protective walls — has been lost to neglect.
32. The teacher's response models the learning process: echezeh ('I observed, I beheld'), ashit libbi ('I set my heart,' meaning I reflected deeply), ra'iti ('I saw' — repeated for emphasis), laqachti musar ('I took discipline/instruction'). Four verbs trace the path from observation to reflection to insight to life-change. The wise person learns from what he sees.
33. This verse quotes the lazy person's own self-justification — each 'a little' (me'at) sounds harmless by itself. A little sleep, a little rest, a little pause. The repetition exposes the deception: each 'little' adds up. The folding of hands (chibbuq yadayim, 'embracing of hands, crossing of arms') is the physical posture of inaction. This verse is quoted verbatim from Proverbs 6:10.
34. Poverty is personified twice: as a mithallekh ('one who walks about, a wanderer, a vagabond') who arrives uninvited, and as an ish magen ('a man with a shield, an armed warrior') who cannot be resisted. The two images capture both stealth and force: poverty sneaks up on you and then overpowers you. This verse also quotes Proverbs 6:11, creating an internal echo that links the two passages on laziness.

## 25

**Summary:** *Proverbs 25 opens the 'Hezekiah Collection' — proverbs of Solomon copied by the scribes of King Hezekiah of Judah (c. 715-686 BCE). This chapter is rich in extended similes and comparisons, moving from the glory of kings and the hiddenness of God, through social wisdom about legal disputes, speech, and self-control, to the famous instruction about giving food and drink to your enemy.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The superscription (v1) is one of the most important editorial notes in the Hebrew Bible: it tells us that Hezekiah's court scribes actively collected, copied, and arranged Solomonic proverbs — evidence of a royal scribal project preserving wisdom literature centuries after Solomon. This chapter is also unusually dense with simile: nearly every proverb uses 'like' (ke-) comparisons, creating a gallery of vivid images — apples of gold in silver settings, cold water to a tired soul, clouds without rain, a broken tooth and a twisted foot. Verses 21-22 (feeding your enemy) are quoted by Paul in Romans 12:20, becoming one of the Hebrew Bible's most influential ethical instructions in the New Testament.*

**Translation Friction:** *The 'coals of fire on his head' image in verse 22 has been debated for centuries. Does it mean you will cause your enemy pain (punitive reading)? Or does it refer to an Egyptian penitential ritual where carrying coals on the head symbolized shame and repentance (transformative reading)? The transformative reading fits the context better: kindness to an enemy provokes inner shame that may lead to genuine change. The punitive reading contradicts the spirit of v21.*

**Connections:** *The Hezekiah editorial note (v1) connects to 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32, which describe Hezekiah's religious reforms. The 'apples of gold' image (v11) has no exact parallel but echoes Song of Songs 2:3-5 in its use of fruit imagery. Verses 21-22 are quoted in Romans 12:20. The 'rooftop' proverb (v24) repeats 21:9 verbatim. The 'cold water to a thirsty soul' (v25) connects to Psalm 42:1-2 and Jeremiah 2:13.*

- <sup>1</sup>These also are proverbs of Solomon,  
copied by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah.
- <sup>2</sup>It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,  
but the glory of kings is to search a matter out.
- <sup>3</sup>The heavens for height and the earth for depth,  
but the heart of kings — unfathomable.
- <sup>4</sup>Remove the dross from silver,  
and a vessel emerges for the refiner.
- <sup>5</sup>Remove the wicked from the king's presence,  
and his throne will be established in righteousness.
- <sup>6</sup>Do not promote yourself in the king's presence,  
and do not stand in the place of the great,
- <sup>7</sup>for it is better to be told, 'Come up here!'  
than to be humiliated before a noble  
whom your own eyes have seen.
- <sup>8</sup>Do not rush to bring a lawsuit,  
or what will you do in the end  
when your neighbor puts you to shame?
- <sup>9</sup>Argue your case with your neighbor directly,  
but do not reveal another person's secret,
- <sup>10</sup>or the one who hears will disgrace you,  
and your bad reputation will never go away.
- <sup>11</sup>A word spoken at the right moment  
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
- <sup>12</sup>A gold ring and an ornament of fine gold —  
that is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.
- <sup>13</sup>Like the cold of snow on a harvest day  
is a faithful messenger to those who send him;  
he refreshes the soul of his masters.
- <sup>14</sup>Clouds and wind but no rain —  
that is a person who boasts of a gift he never gives.
- <sup>15</sup>Through patience a ruler can be persuaded,  
and a gentle tongue can break a bone.
- <sup>16</sup>If you find honey, eat only what you need;  
too much, and you will vomit it up.

<sup>17</sup>Make your foot scarce at your neighbor's house,  
or he will grow tired of you and hate you.

<sup>18</sup>A war club, a sword, and a sharpened arrow —  
that is a person who bears false witness against his neighbor.

<sup>19</sup>A broken tooth and a twisted foot —  
that is trusting a treacherous person in a time of trouble.

<sup>20</sup>Stripping off a garment on a cold day,  
pouring vinegar on an open wound —  
that is singing songs to a heavy heart.

<sup>21</sup>If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;  
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

<sup>22</sup>For you will heap burning coals on his head,  
and the LORD will reward you.

<sup>23</sup>The north wind brings rain,  
and a secretive tongue brings angry looks.

<sup>24</sup>Better to sit on a corner of the roof  
than to share a house with a quarrelsome woman.

<sup>25</sup>Cold water to a weary soul —  
that is good news from a distant land.

<sup>26</sup>A muddied spring and a polluted fountain —  
that is a righteous person who gives way before the wicked.

<sup>27</sup>Too much honey is not good,  
and searching for your own glory is no glory at all.

<sup>28</sup>A city with broken walls and no defenses —  
that is a person with no control over his spirit.

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TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription authenticates both the Solomonic origin and the Hezekian transmission. It distinguishes this collection from 10:1-22:16 (also attributed to Solomon but without named editors) and from the 'Words of the Wise' (22:17-24:34, attributed to an unnamed wisdom tradition).
2. The verb *haster* ('to hide, to conceal') applied to God does not describe deception but transcendence — God conceals things because they belong to a level of reality humans cannot yet access. The verb *chaqor* ('to search, to investigate, to explore') applied to kings is the same word used for mining precious metals (Job 28) — it describes intensive, sustained inquiry.
3. Three immeasurable things: the height of the sky, the depth of the earth, and the inner life of a king. *Ein cheqer* ('there is no searching, it is unsearchable') applied to the king's heart means that royal decision-making is opaque to outsiders. The king investigates others (v2) but cannot himself be fully investigated. This is both a statement about royal privacy and a warning: do not assume you understand what the king is thinking.
4. *Sigim* ('dross, impurities, waste metal') must be removed before silver can be shaped. The metallurgical metaphor sets up verse 5: as dross must be removed from silver before it becomes useful, so the wicked must be removed from the king's presence before governance becomes righteous.
5. The application of the metallurgy image: the *rasha* ('wicked person') is the dross in the king's court. Once removed, the throne is established (*yikkon*, 'made firm, set on a stable foundation') in *tsedeq* ('righteousness, justice'). The purity of governance depends on the purity of the inner circle.

6. Tithaddar ('to glorify yourself, to make yourself splendid, to put yourself forward') warns against self-promotion before royalty. The advice is practical and social: do not claim a rank above your station. Jesus echoes this in Luke 14:7-11, where he tells guests not to choose the best seat at a banquet.
7. The social calculus is clear: being invited upward is honor; being pushed downward is shame. The phrase asher ra'u einekha ('whom your eyes have seen') adds the sting of witnesses — the humiliation happens in public, before people you know. Strategic humility avoids this risk.
8. Maher ('quickly, hastily, in haste') warns against impulsive litigation. The acharitah ('its end, its outcome') is unpredictable — you may lose, and the defeat will be public (behakhlīm, 'when he shames, when he humiliates'). The proverb counsels patience and private resolution before public confrontation.
9. Two instructions in one: settle disputes face to face (rivekha riv et re'ekha, 'your dispute, dispute with your neighbor') and do not drag third parties' private information into the conflict (sod acher al-tegal, 'another's secret do not uncover'). Disputes should be contained, not weaponized with gossip.
10. Dibbakekha ('your bad report, your infamy, your reputation for gossip') lo tashuv ('will not return, will not go away') warns that a reputation as a gossip or betrayer of confidences is permanent. Once people know you cannot be trusted with secrets, that knowledge cannot be undone.
11. The phrase al-ofanav (literally 'upon its wheels' or 'upon its turnings') is often rendered 'fitly spoken' or 'aptly spoken.' The root ofen means 'wheel' or 'manner' — a word that rolls out at exactly the right moment, turning precisely as it should.
12. The comparison links the beauty of jewelry to the beauty of correction. A mokhiach chakham ('wise reprover, wise person who corrects') paired with an ozen shoma'at ('hearing ear, ear that listens') creates something as valuable and beautiful as gold jewelry. Both parties are needed: the rebuke must be wise and the ear must be willing. Without the listening ear, even golden correction is wasted.
13. Snow-cooled water (not actual snowfall, which would ruin the harvest) was the ultimate refreshment during the exhausting harvest season. A tsir ne'eman ('faithful messenger, trustworthy envoy') provides the same relief to his senders: the assurance that the task was completed properly. Nefesh adonav yashiv ('he restores the soul of his masters') uses the same verb as Psalm 23:3 ('he restores my soul').
14. In an arid climate, clouds and wind that produce no rain are a cruel promise — the appearance of relief without the reality. Nesi'im ('clouds, vapor') and ruach ('wind') create anticipation; geshem ayin ('rain — none!') is the devastating letdown. A person who mithalleh be-mattat shaqer ('boasts of a false gift, brags about what he will give but does not') generates the same emotional cruelty: raised hope followed by nothing.
15. Orekh appayim ('length of nostrils,' the Hebrew idiom for patience, since anger was associated with flaring nostrils) can move a qatsin ('ruler, leader, commander'). Lashon rakkah ('soft tongue, gentle speech') can break a gerem ('bone') — the hardest structure in the body yields to the softest approach. The proverb celebrates the paradoxical power of gentleness: soft breaks hard.
16. Honey represents any good thing — pleasure, wealth, comfort. The proverb endorses enjoyment (ekhol, 'eat!') but within limits (dayyekka, 'your sufficiency, what is enough for you'). Beyond the limit, even sweetness becomes sickness. Self-regulation transforms a blessing into sustained enjoyment; excess transforms it into nausea.
17. Hoqar raglekha ('make your foot rare/precious') extends the honey principle to social visits. Even good relationships are ruined by excess. Yisba'akha ('he will have his fill of you') uses the same verb as v16 — just as you can have too much honey, your neighbor can have too much of you.
18. Three weapons — mefits ('mace, war club'), cherev ('sword'), and chets shanun ('sharpened arrow') — represent three kinds of damage: blunt force, cutting, and piercing from a distance. False testimony does all three: it bludgeons reputation, cuts relationships, and wounds from afar. The progression from close-range to long-range suggests that false witness does damage even at a distance.
19. Both images describe body parts that should function but do not: a shen ro'ah ('bad tooth, broken tooth') that was supposed to chew and a regel mu'adet ('slipping foot, dislocated foot') that was supposed to walk. Trusting a boged ('traitor, unfaithful person') in crisis is the same: the support you counted on collapses precisely when you need it most.
20. Three images of inappropriate action: removing warmth when cold is needed, applying acid to a wound (chomets al-nater, 'vinegar on soda/natron' — which produces a fizzing, useless chemical reaction), and singing cheerful songs to a person in grief. Forced cheer for a grieving person is not comfort but cruelty — it strips away the dignity of sorrow and adds pain to pain. The proverb validates grief and condemns the impulse to fix sadness with performance.
21. This proverb is quoted by Paul in Romans 12:20 as the basis for 'overcoming evil with good.' The Hebrew text makes no reference to the motivation being punishment — the instruction is simply to meet need regardless of the relationship.
22. Whatever the coals image means, the final clause settles the ethical direction: God rewards this behavior. Acts of enemy-love align with God's will, and God will repay the person who practices them. The reward is from God, not from the enemy's changed behavior.
23. Ruach tsafo ('north wind') in Israel typically brings rain from the Mediterranean. Lashon sater ('hidden tongue, secretive speech, backbiting') similarly produces a predictable result: panim niz'amim ('angry faces, indignant countenances'). The cause-and-effect is as reliable as weather: gossip produces anger as surely as the north wind produces rain.
24. This is a verbatim repetition of 21:9. Its presence here in the Hezekiah collection suggests it circulated independently and was included in both collections. The repetition itself is significant — it shows that the editors did not harmonize the collections but preserved them as received.
25. Mayim qarim ('cold water') on a nefesh ayefah ('exhausted/thirsty soul') is instant, physical relief. Shemu'ah tovah me-erets merchaq ('good news from a far country') provides the same relief to the anxious mind. In a world without instant communication, news from distant family or business

took weeks or months — the arrival of good news after long uncertainty was as reviving as cold water after hard labor.

- 26.** A ma'yan nirpas ('trampled spring') and maqor mashchat ('corrupted source') are water sources ruined by contamination — still present but no longer useful. When a tsaddiq ('righteous person') collapses (mat, 'totters, stumbles, gives way') before a rasha ('wicked person'), the community loses its source of clean moral water. The righteous person who compromises under pressure becomes a polluted spring — present but poisoned.
- 27.** Extending v16, excessive honey consumption is now paired with excessive self-promotion. Cheqer kevodam kavod ('the investigation of their glory is glory' — read sarcastically, or emended to 'the investigation of weighty matters is weighty/burdensome') suggests that constantly seeking your own honor is as sickening as gorging on honey. True glory is not pursued; it is received.
- 28.** The military image would have been especially vivid in the Hezekiah collection, since Hezekiah witnessed the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-19). A breached wall was not a metaphor but a lived terror.

## 26

**Summary:** *Proverbs 26 continues the Hezekiah collection with three concentrated sections: the fool (vv1-12), the sluggard (vv13-16), and the troublemaker — the meddler, the deceiver, and the gossip (vv17-28). The chapter is notable for its humor, its vivid animal imagery, and the famous paradox of verses 4-5: should you answer a fool or not?*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The juxtaposition of verses 4 and 5 ('Do not answer a fool according to his folly' / 'Answer a fool according to his folly') is one of the most discussed pairs in Proverbs. The apparent contradiction is intentional: wisdom cannot be reduced to a single rule. Sometimes engaging a fool dignifies his nonsense; sometimes not engaging him lets him think he is wise. The wise person must discern which situation requires which response. This is the wisdom tradition at its most sophisticated — refusing to flatten complexity into a formula. The sluggard section (vv13-16) is the funniest passage in Proverbs, culminating in the lazy person who cannot lift his hand from the dish to his mouth (v15) yet considers himself wiser than seven counselors (v16).*

**Translation Friction:** *The violent imagery applied to fools — a whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, a rod for the fool's back (v3) — reflects a society where physical punishment was an accepted corrective measure. The comparison of fools to animals is intentionally degrading: the fool has abandoned the use of reason, so he must be managed like a beast. Modern readers will want to distinguish between the proverb's diagnosis (foolishness resists all verbal correction) and its prescribed remedy (physical force).*

**Connections:** *The fool-answer paradox (vv4-5) connects to Ecclesiastes 10:12-14 and Jesus' own varied responses to hostile questioners — sometimes he answered, sometimes he remained silent. The dog-returning-to-vomit image (v11) is quoted in 2 Peter 2:22. The 'lion in the road' excuse (v13) repeats 22:13. The gossip-and-charcoal image (v20-21) connects to James 3:5-6 on the tongue as fire.*

<sup>1</sup>Like snow in summer and rain at harvest,  
honor does not suit a fool.

<sup>2</sup>Like a fluttering sparrow, like a darting swallow,  
an undeserved curse will not land.

<sup>3</sup>The whip suits the horse, the bridle the donkey,  
and a rod for the fool's back.

<sup>4</sup>Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you yourself will become like him.

<sup>5</sup>Answer a fool according to his folly,  
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

<sup>6</sup>Cutting off your own feet and drinking violence —  
that is sending a message through a fool.

<sup>7</sup>Legs hang limp on a lame person —  
so does a proverb in the mouth of fools.

<sup>8</sup>Like tying a stone into a sling —  
that is giving honor to a fool.

<sup>9</sup>A thornbush brandished by a drunk —  
that is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

<sup>10</sup>An archer who wounds everyone at random —  
that is one who hires a fool or hires a passerby.

<sup>11</sup>As a dog returns to its vomit,  
so a fool repeats his folly.

<sup>12</sup>Do you see a person wise in his own eyes?  
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

<sup>13</sup>The lazy person says, 'A lion is on the road!  
A lion is in the open square!'

<sup>14</sup>A door turns on its hinges,  
and the lazy person turns on his bed.

<sup>15</sup>The lazy person buries his hand in the dish;  
he is too tired to bring it back to his mouth.

<sup>16</sup>The lazy person is wiser in his own eyes  
than seven people who give thoughtful answers.

<sup>17</sup>Grabbing a dog by the ears —  
that is a passerby who meddles in someone else's quarrel.

<sup>18</sup>Like a madman shooting  
flaming arrows and death —

<sup>19</sup>that is a person who deceives his neighbor  
and then says, 'I was only joking!'

<sup>20</sup>Without wood, a fire goes out;  
without a gossip, conflict dies down.

<sup>21</sup>Charcoal for embers and wood for fire —  
so is a quarrelsome person for kindling conflict.

<sup>22</sup>The words of a gossip are like tasty morsels;  
they go down into the innermost parts.

<sup>23</sup>Silver glaze over a clay pot —  
that is burning lips with a wicked heart.

<sup>24</sup>A hateful person disguises himself with his lips,  
but inside he stores up deceit.

<sup>25</sup>When he makes his voice gracious, do not trust him,  
for seven abominations fill his heart.

<sup>26</sup>Hatred may be concealed by deception,  
but his wickedness will be exposed before the assembly.

<sup>27</sup>Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,  
and whoever rolls a stone — it will roll back on him.

<sup>28</sup>A lying tongue hates those it crushes,  
and a flattering mouth brings ruin.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Snow in summer is impossible in Israel; rain during harvest is destructive (it ruins drying grain). Both are wrong-season events. Honor given to a kesil ('fool, dullard') is equally out of place — it disrupts the natural moral order.
2. The tsippor ('bird, sparrow') and deror ('swallow') are erratic in flight — they dart and flutter but do not settle. A qillat chinnam ('curse without cause, undeserved curse') behaves the same way: it has no place to land, no target to hit, because there is no moral ground for it to attach to. The proverb assures: if the curse is undeserved, it cannot harm you.
3. The three-part comparison equates the fool with draft animals: each requires an external control device because internal direction is absent. The shot ('whip'), meteg ('bridle'), and shevet ('rod') are instruments of compulsion. The fool's back (gev kesilim) replaces the animal's back — the fool has placed himself in the animal category by refusing to respond to reason.
4. This verse and the next are not contradictory but complementary — they describe two different situations requiring two different responses. The wise person must discern which applies.
5. The deliberate placement of these contradictory commands side by side is an editorial choice — the Hezekiah scribes preserved the tension rather than resolving it. The tension itself is the teaching: wisdom is not a rulebook but a faculty of judgment.
6. The imagery is deliberately absurd: sending a message via a fool is like amputating your own legs (meqattseh raglayim, 'cutting off feet') and drinking chamas ('violence, harm'). You destroy your own ability to walk (act) and consume destruction (experience the consequences). The fool as messenger does not deliver the message — he delivers disaster.
7. The lame person's legs (shoqayim, 'legs, thighs') are dalyu ('hang loose, dangle, are lifted but useless') — they exist but cannot function. A mashal ('proverb, comparison, wisdom saying') in a fool's mouth is equally useless: the words are present but the understanding is absent. The fool can recite wisdom but cannot apply it.
8. Tsrer even be-margemah ('binding a stone in a sling') could mean: (1) tying the stone so it cannot be released — defeating the sling's purpose, or (2) loading a precious stone into a weapon that will fling it away. Either way, the action wastes something valuable. Giving honor (kavod) to a fool is equally wasteful — it either cannot accomplish its purpose or it throws value away.
9. A drunk waving a choach ('thorn branch, thornbush') is dangerous to everyone nearby but especially to himself — he cannot control the weapon and will likely injure himself. A fool wielding a proverb is equally dangerous: he may use it at the wrong time, apply it to the wrong situation, or weaponize it against the innocent. Wisdom in the wrong hands is a hazard.
10. This verse is notoriously difficult to translate. Rav mecholel kol ('a master who wounds everyone' or 'a great one who creates everything') is ambiguous. The rendering follows the interpretation that likens the person who hires fools and random strangers to an archer who shoots wildly — everyone gets hurt. Hiring without discernment is indiscriminate destruction.
11. The comparison is not just about returning to bad behavior but about returning to something the body itself rejected. The fool's experience should have taught him — his own life expelled the folly — but he goes back anyway.
12. The shocking conclusion of the fool section: the only person worse than a fool is the person who thinks he is wise (chakham be-einav, 'wise in his own eyes'). The fool at least might encounter wisdom and recognize it; the self-satisfied 'wise' person has immunized himself against learning. His self-assessment blocks all correction. This is the most dangerous condition in Proverbs — not ignorance but the illusion of knowledge.

13. The excuse has escalated from 22:13: there the lion was vaguely 'outside'; here it patrols both the derekh ('road') and the rehov ('open square, public plaza'). The lazy person's imagination grows more elaborate over time, filling every possible route with danger. The humor lies in the specificity of the excuse and the total absence of actual risk.
14. The comparison is brilliant in its precision: the door moves (tissov, 'turns, rotates') but goes nowhere — it swings back and forth on its tsir ('hinge, pivot') without ever leaving its frame. The lazy person does the same on his mittah ('bed') — he rolls and shifts but never gets up. Maximum motion, zero progress.
15. The laziness has reached its absurd apex: the atsel has managed to get his hand into the dish (tsallachat, 'bowl, dish, plate') but nil'ah ('is exhausted, is wearied') by the effort of returning it to his mouth. He wants to eat but cannot complete the motion. The proverb is comic hyperbole, but the point is real: laziness eventually destroys even the capacity for self-care. This verse is nearly identical to 19:24.
16. The sluggard section's devastating conclusion: the person who cannot feed himself considers himself wiser than shiv'ah meshive ta'am ('seven who return sense, seven who give reasoned answers'). Seven is the number of completeness — the lazy person thinks he is wiser than every possible advisor. His laziness has metastasized into self-delusion. This connects to v12: the self-proclaimed wise person is worse than a fool.
17. Machaziq be-ozne-kelev ('grasping the ears of a dog') puts you in an impossible position: you cannot hold on (the dog will bite you) and you cannot let go (the dog will bite you). The meddler (over mit'abber al-riv lo-lo, 'a passer-by getting involved in a quarrel not his own') is in the same trap: once involved in someone else's conflict, there is no safe exit.
18. The mitlahlelah ('one acting crazy, a madman, one raving') who shoots ziqqim ('firebrands, flaming projectiles'), chitstsim ('arrows'), and mavet ('death') is random and lethal. The three projectiles represent escalating destruction — fire, piercing, and death itself. This image sets up v19.
19. The deadly joke: after causing real harm through deception (rimmah, 'deceived, cheated, misled'), the offender retreats into the defense of humor — halo mesacheq ani ('am I not playing? I was just kidding!'). The proverb exposes this as a lie: deception is deception regardless of the label you attach afterward. Calling harm a joke does not undo the harm.
20. The physics of conflict is identical to the physics of fire: remove the fuel and the fire dies. The nirgan ('gossip, whisperer, slanderer') is the wood that keeps quarrels burning. Remove the gossip and the madon ('strife, contention, quarrel') goes quiet (yishtoq, 'becomes silent, ceases, is stilled'). The solution to chronic conflict is identifying and removing the person who feeds it.
21. Extending v20's fire metaphor: pecham ('charcoal') intensifies gechalim ('embers/coals'), and etsim ('wood') feeds esh ('fire'). The quarrelsome person (ish midyanim, 'man of contentions') functions identically: he takes existing tension and intensifies it (lecharchar riv, 'to stoke strife, to heat up a quarrel'). He does not start fires from nothing — he finds smoldering embers and adds fuel.
22. This verse repeats 18:8 verbatim. Ke-mitlahamim ('like swallowed morsels, like delicious bites') describes gossip's appeal: people consume it eagerly because it is fascinating. The words descend to chadre-vaten ('the inner chambers of the belly') — they are internalized, digested, and become part of the listener. Gossip is not surface noise; it becomes part of how you see the person being discussed.
23. Kesef sigim metsuppeh al-charesh ('silver dross overlaid on pottery') describes a cheap vessel made to look valuable — the ceramic is worthless, and the coating is not real silver but slag. Sefatayim dolqim ('burning lips, fervent lips, smooth lips') combined with lev ra ('a wicked heart, an evil mind') is the human equivalent: passionate speech covering corrupt intentions. The exterior gleams; the interior is worthless.
24. Yinnaker ('disguises himself, makes himself unrecognizable') — the sone ('hater, enemy') uses speech to conceal his true nature. Be-qirbo ('in his midst, in his inner being') he stores mirmah ('deceit, treachery'). The external presentation and the internal reality are opposites. Verses 24-26 form a unit about concealed hatred.
25. Ki yechanen qolo ('when he makes his voice gracious, when he speaks charmingly') — the deceiver can produce beautiful speech at will. Sheva to'avot be-libbo ('seven detestable things are in his heart') — the number seven means his heart is completely full of what God finds abhorrent. The warning is absolute: al-ta'amen-bo ('do not believe in him, do not trust him'). Some people's charm is a weapon.
26. The concealment of sin'ah ('hatred') by mashshaon ('deception, guile') is temporary. The ra'ato ('his wickedness, his evil') will be revealed (tiggaleh, 'will be uncovered, will be exposed') be-qahal ('in the assembly, before the community'). The proverb assures that hidden hatred has an expiration date — public exposure is coming.
27. The boomerang principle: traps set for others ensnare the trapper. Koreh shachat ('one who digs a pit') falls into his own excavation. Golel even ('one who rolls a stone' — presumably to set a trap or block a path) has it roll back (elav tashuv, 'to him it returns'). This is not karma but divine justice operating through natural consequences. Ecclesiastes 10:8 repeats the same observation.
28. The chapter's final proverb reveals the motive behind deception: the liar hates his victims (yisna dakkav, 'hates those he has crushed/oppressed'). Lying is not neutral — it proceeds from hatred. The flattering mouth (peh chalaq, 'smooth mouth') produces midcheh ('ruin, overthrow, stumbling') — smooth words are the pathway to destruction. The chapter ends as it began: with the contrast between appearance and reality.

## 27

**Summary:** *Proverbs 27 continues the Hezekiah collection with proverbs about the uncertainty of tomorrow, the value of honest friendship, the testing power of praise, the insatiability of the human eye, and the importance of diligent pastoral care. The chapter moves from warnings about boasting and jealousy to an extended closing section on agricultural stewardship as a metaphor for responsible living.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 6 ('Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive') is one of the most psychologically acute statements in the Bible. It identifies the paradox that pain from a trusted person can be more valuable than pleasure from an untrustworthy one. The chapter also contains the striking observation that 'iron sharpens iron' (v17) — an image of mutual friction producing mutual improvement. The agricultural closing (vv23-27) is unusual for Proverbs: it is an extended pastoral poem rather than a series of independent proverbs, describing the rhythms of responsible land management as the foundation of security.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 15-16 compares a quarrelsome woman to a constant dripping on a rainy day, then says trying to restrain her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil. As with similar proverbs (21:9, 19; 25:24), the observation addresses only men's frustration in a patriarchal context. The intensity of the simile — wind and oil, forces that cannot be contained — suggests genuine despair at chronic domestic conflict. Verse 14 ('blessing a neighbor loudly early in the morning will be counted as a curse') warns against socially tone-deaf enthusiasm — good intentions delivered at the wrong time are perceived as aggression.*

**Connections:** *The 'wounds of a friend' (v6) connects to Psalm 141:5 ('Let the righteous strike me; it is a kindness'). 'Iron sharpens iron' (v17) has no exact parallel but resonates with Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (two are better than one). The agricultural conclusion (vv23-27) echoes the garden-and-field imagery throughout Proverbs (24:30-34) and anticipates the agrarian economics described in Ruth. The 'do not boast about tomorrow' warning (v1) connects to James 4:13-16.*

<sup>1</sup>Do not boast about tomorrow,  
for you do not know what a day may give birth to.

<sup>2</sup>Let another person praise you, not your own mouth —  
a stranger, not your own lips.

<sup>3</sup>A stone is heavy and sand is weighty,  
but a fool's provocation outweighs them both.

<sup>4</sup>Fury is cruel and anger is a flood,  
but who can stand before jealousy?

<sup>5</sup>Open rebuke is better  
than love that stays hidden.

<sup>6</sup>Trustworthy are the wounds of a friend,  
but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.

<sup>7</sup>A satisfied appetite tramples on honey,  
but to a hungry appetite every bitter thing is sweet.

<sup>8</sup>Like a bird that strays from its nest,  
so is a person who strays from his place.

- <sup>9</sup>Oil and incense make the heart glad,  
and the sweetness of a friend comes from sincere counsel.
- <sup>10</sup>Do not abandon your friend or your father's friend,  
and do not go to your brother's house on the day of your disaster.  
Better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.
- <sup>11</sup>Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad,  
so I can answer anyone who mocks me.
- <sup>12</sup>The shrewd person sees danger and takes cover;  
the naive walk straight into it and pay the price.
- <sup>13</sup>Take his garment — he has guaranteed a stranger's debt;  
hold it as collateral — he has pledged for a foreign woman.
- <sup>14</sup>Blessing your neighbor in a loud voice early in the morning —  
it will be counted as a curse.
- <sup>15</sup>A constant dripping on a rainy day  
and a quarrelsome woman are alike.
- <sup>16</sup>Trying to restrain her is like restraining the wind  
or grasping oil with your right hand.
- <sup>17</sup>Iron sharpens iron,  
and one person sharpens the face of another.
- <sup>18</sup>Whoever tends a fig tree eats its fruit,  
and whoever serves his master will be honored.
- <sup>19</sup>As water reflects a face back to a face,  
so the human heart reflects the person.
- <sup>20</sup>Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,  
and the eyes of a person are never satisfied.
- <sup>21</sup>The crucible tests silver and the furnace tests gold,  
and a person is tested by the praise he receives.
- <sup>22</sup>Even if you grind a fool in a mortar  
with a pestle among the grain,  
his foolishness will not leave him.
- <sup>23</sup>Know well the condition of your flocks;  
pay close attention to your herds.
- <sup>24</sup>For wealth does not last forever,  
and does a crown endure from generation to generation?
- <sup>25</sup>When the grass is removed and new growth appears  
and the mountain herbs are gathered in,

**26** lambs will provide your clothing,  
and goats will be the price for a field.

**27** There will be enough goat's milk for your food,  
food for your household,  
and sustenance for your servant girls.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. Ma-yeled yom ('what a day may give birth to') personifies the day as a pregnant woman — you cannot predict what it will produce. The verb yalad ('to give birth') implies that each day contains something gestating, unknown, about to emerge. The proverb counsels humility before the future: plans are legitimate, but boasting about outcomes you cannot control is foolishness.
2. Zar ('stranger, outsider, another person') and nokhri ('foreigner, someone from outside') together represent anyone other than yourself. Even the most distant person's praise is more valuable than self-praise. The proverb does not forbid confidence but forbids advertising it — let your work speak and let others do the endorsing.
3. Even (stone) and chol (sand) are the heaviest natural substances in daily experience. The fool's ka'as ('anger, vexation, provocation') is kaved ('heavy, burdensome') beyond both. The proverb measures emotional weight in physical terms: dealing with a fool's anger is a load that exceeds any physical burden.
4. Chemah ('fury, rage, venom') is akhziyyut ('cruel, merciless'). Af ('anger, wrath') is shetef ('a flood, an overwhelming torrent'). Both are destructive — but qin'ah ('jealousy, envy, zeal') surpasses both. The rhetorical question mi ya'amod ('who can stand?') implies: no one. Jealousy is more destructive than rage because rage burns out; jealousy smolders indefinitely.
5. Tokhachat megullah ('rebuke that is uncovered, correction out in the open') is preferred over ahavah mesuttaret ('love that is concealed, hidden affection'). Love that never expresses itself — especially through honest correction — is useless. The proverb values visible, active engagement over invisible, passive warmth. Love that does not speak when speech is needed is not functioning as love.
6. Na'atarot is often translated 'deceitful' but the root atar means 'to multiply, to be abundant.' The enemy's kisses are not just false but profuse — suspiciously generous, overwhelmingly affectionate. The excess itself is the warning sign.
7. Nefesh seve'ah ('a full/satisfied appetite') rejects (tavus, 'tramples, spurns') even nofet ('dripping honey' — the finest sweetness). Nefesh re'evah ('a hungry/starving appetite') finds even bitter things (kol-mar) sweet (matok). The proverb observes how need transforms perception: what you have in abundance loses value; what you lack becomes precious. This applies to food, companionship, home, and every other human good.
8. A tsiptor nodedet min-qinnah ('a bird wandering from its nest') is vulnerable — exposed to predators and weather, separated from its young. A person who abandons his maqom ('place, proper location, home') faces the same exposure. The proverb values rootedness: your place — your home, your community, your responsibilities — is where you belong. Wandering may look like freedom but feels like exile.
9. Shemen ('oil, perfume') and qetoret ('incense') are sensory pleasures that lift the mood (yesammach-lev, 'make the heart rejoice'). A friend's metek ('sweetness, pleasantness') comes from etsat-nefesh ('counsel of the soul, advice from the heart') — not flattery but genuine, deeply meant guidance. The proverb equates the pleasure of a friend's honest counsel with the pleasure of physical luxuries.
10. Three instructions about relational priority: maintain inherited friendships (re'akha ve-rea avikha), do not burden family with emergencies when they are far away (beit achikha al-tavo be-yom eidekha), and value proximity (tov shakhen qarov me-ach rachoq). The proverb is pragmatic: in a crisis, the person next door can help you now; your brother three days' journey away cannot. Cultivate nearby relationships.
11. The teacher reveals a personal stake: the student's wisdom vindicates the teacher. Chorfi ('my reproacher, the one who taunts me') questions the teacher's competence. The student's wise life is the teacher's best answer — a living refutation of any critic. The parent-teacher's reputation depends on the student's character.
12. Nearly identical to 22:3. The repetition within the Hezekiah collection confirms that proverbs circulated independently and could appear in multiple collections. The message remains: discernment (reading situations accurately) is a survival skill.
13. Nearly identical to 20:16. The instruction is addressed to the lender: if someone has been foolish enough to guarantee a stranger's or foreign woman's debt, protect yourself by taking his garment as collateral. The proverb simultaneously warns against surety and instructs others how to manage the risk created by those who ignore that warning.
14. The humor is sharp: the person thinks he is being generous (mevarekh, 'blessing') but the delivery — be-qol gadol ('in a great voice, loudly') and ba-boqer hashkem ('early in the morning, at the crack of dawn') — transforms the blessing into a curse. Good intentions delivered at the wrong time, in the wrong way, with the wrong volume, produce the opposite of their intended effect. Social intelligence is as important as moral intention.
15. Delef tored ('a driven drip, a persistent leak') on a yom sagrir ('a day of driving rain, a stormy day') cannot be stopped, cannot be ignored, and gradually destroys sanity. The eshet midyanim ('woman of contentions') has the same effect. The comparison focuses on relentlessness: the issue is not the volume of any single complaint but the unending, erosive repetition.

16. Two impossible tasks: *tsfan ruach* ('hiding/containing the wind') and *shemen yemino yiqra* ('oil of his right hand calls out' — oil is slippery and cannot be held). The quarrelsome person cannot be contained, managed, or controlled by external force. The proverb does not offer a solution — it simply describes an insoluble problem, which is itself a form of wisdom.
17. The word *yachad* can mean 'sharpens' or 'together' — both meanings may be active. Iron sharpens iron when brought together; people sharpen people when they engage closely. The double meaning reinforces the message: closeness and friction together produce excellence.
18. The fig tree (*te'enah*) required constant care — pruning, watering, protecting from pests. The one who does the work (*notser*, 'guards, tends, watches over') eats the reward. The parallel: whoever faithfully serves (*shomer adonav*, 'guards his master, attends to his lord') will be honored (*yekhubad*). Faithful service, like faithful agriculture, produces a harvest.
19. *Ka-mayim ha-panim la-panim* ('as in water, the face to the face') — still water acts as a mirror, showing you your own face. *Ken lev-ha-adam la-adam* ('so the heart of the person to the person') can mean either: (1) your heart is a mirror that reveals who you truly are, or (2) one person's heart reflects another's — what you project, you receive back. Both readings teach self-knowledge: look at your heart, and you will see your true self; look at how others respond to you, and you will see what you are projecting.
20. *She'ol* and *Avaddon* (the underworld and the place of destruction) have bottomless capacity — they always accept more dead. The human eye (*eine ha-adam*) has the same bottomless quality: it is never satisfied (*lo tisba'nah*, 'they are not filled, they do not have enough'). Desire always wants more. The comparison is unsettling: human appetite shares the insatiability of death itself.
21. The *matsref* ('crucible, refining pot') and *kur* ('furnace, smelter') expose impurities in metals through extreme heat. Praise (*mahalal*, 'what is praised, the content of praise') does the same to a person: how you respond to praise reveals your character. If praise inflates you, the impurity of pride is exposed. If praise humbles you, the metal is pure. Praise is a furnace.
22. The image is extreme: putting a fool in a *makhtesh* ('mortar, grinding bowl') and pounding him with an *eli* ('pestle') alongside *rifot* ('grain, crushed grain'). Even this level of pressure — literal pulverization — will not separate the fool from his *ivvelet* ('folly'). Foolishness is not a surface coating that can be removed; it is integral to the fool's being. This is the most pessimistic statement about the fool in Proverbs: some people cannot be fixed.
23. The agricultural conclusion (*vv23-27*) functions as a parable for all responsible stewardship. 'Flocks' and 'herds' represent whatever resources, relationships, or responsibilities God has entrusted to you.
24. The rhetorical question (*ve-im nezer le-dor va-dor*, 'does even a crown last generation to generation?') challenges even royal security. If kings cannot guarantee permanence, ordinary people certainly cannot. The solution (*vv25-27*) is not despair but diligent stewardship — manage what you have, because nothing is guaranteed.
25. The agricultural cycle begins: *galah chatsir* ('the hay is removed, the first cutting disappears'), and *nir'ah-deshe* ('the new green growth is visible'). The *isevot harim* ('herbs/plants of the mountains') are collected. The passage describes seasonal rhythm — the attentive farmer reads the landscape and acts in time.
26. The flocks provide both necessities (*kevashim li-levushekha*, 'lambs for your clothing' — wool) and capital (*mechir sadeh attudim*, 'goats are the price of a field' — livestock as currency for land purchase). Attentive husbandry produces both daily provision and long-term investment.
27. The pastoral vision concludes with sufficiency: *de chalev izzim* ('enough goat's milk') for personal needs (*lachimkha*), household needs (*lechem betekha*), and the support of dependents (*chayyim le-na'arotekha*, 'life for your young women/servant girls'). The picture is not lavish wealth but sustainable provision — enough for everyone in your care. The chapter ends where wisdom always ends: with diligent responsibility producing reliable provision.

## 28

**Summary:** *Proverbs 28 continues the Hezekiah collection with a sharp focus on governance, justice, wealth, and the moral courage required to confront wrongdoing. The chapter contrasts the wicked who flee when no one pursues with the righteous who are bold as a lion, and develops extensive teachings on honest leadership, the dangers of greed, the blessedness of confession, and the reliability of the person who walks in integrity.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *This chapter contains one of the most penetrating observations about political legitimacy in the ancient world: when a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a person of understanding and knowledge, stability endures (v2). The chapter also contains the clearest statement on confession in Proverbs: 'Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will receive mercy' (v13). This is not merely practical advice but theological conviction — God responds to honest confession with *racham* ('compassion, mercy'). The chapter's political proverbs (*vv2, 3, 12, 15-16, 28*) form a sustained meditation on what makes governance just or unjust.*

*Translation Friction: Verse 8 ('Whoever increases wealth by interest and profit gathers it for one who will be generous to the poor') reflects the Torah's prohibition against lending at interest to fellow Israelites (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37, Deuteronomy 23:19-20). The proverb does not merely discourage usury but declares it ultimately futile — the wealth will end up in the hands of the generous. Verse 24 ('Whoever robs his father or mother and says it is no transgression is a companion of a destroyer') addresses the specific abuse of parents by adult children, a violation of the fifth commandment.*

*Connections: The 'bold as a lion' image (v1) connects to Psalm 91:13 and the lion imagery throughout Proverbs. The confession teaching (v13) parallels Psalm 32:3-5 and 1 John 1:9. The usury prohibition (v8) connects to the Torah lending laws (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37). The 'many rulers' in a corrupt land (v2) echoes the chaotic king-succession in northern Israel (1-2 Kings). The 'trustworthy person blessed' (v20) connects to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:21).*

- <sup>1</sup>The wicked flee when no one pursues,  
but the righteous are as bold as a young lion.
- <sup>2</sup>When a land transgresses, its rulers multiply;  
but with a person of understanding and knowledge, stability endures.
- <sup>3</sup>A poor ruler who oppresses the weak  
is like a driving rain that leaves no food.
- <sup>4</sup>Those who abandon instruction praise the wicked,  
but those who keep instruction resist them.
- <sup>5</sup>People given to evil do not understand justice,  
but those who seek the LORD understand everything.
- <sup>6</sup>Better a poor person who walks in integrity  
than a rich one whose ways are crooked.
- <sup>7</sup>A son who keeps instruction is discerning,  
but a companion of gluttons shames his father.
- <sup>8</sup>Whoever increases wealth by interest and profit  
gathers it for someone who will be generous to the poor.
- <sup>9</sup>Whoever turns his ear away from hearing instruction —  
even his prayer is detestable.
- <sup>10</sup>Whoever leads the upright astray on an evil path  
will fall into his own pit,  
but the blameless will inherit what is good.
- <sup>11</sup>A rich person is wise in his own eyes,  
but a poor person with understanding sees through him.
- <sup>12</sup>When the righteous triumph, there is great splendor;  
but when the wicked rise to power, people hide.
- <sup>13</sup>Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
but whoever confesses and abandons them will receive mercy.

<sup>14</sup>Blessed is the person who always trembles with caution,  
but whoever hardens his heart will fall into disaster.

<sup>15</sup>A roaring lion and a charging bear —  
that is a wicked ruler over a helpless people.

<sup>16</sup>A leader who lacks understanding is a great oppressor,  
but whoever hates unjust gain will enjoy long life.

<sup>17</sup>A person burdened with the guilt of bloodshed  
will flee to the pit — let no one support him.

<sup>18</sup>Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered,  
but whoever is crooked in his ways will fall suddenly.

<sup>19</sup>Whoever works his land will have plenty of food,  
but whoever chases fantasies will have plenty of poverty.

<sup>20</sup>A faithful person will overflow with blessings,  
but whoever rushes to get rich will not go unpunished.

<sup>21</sup>Showing partiality is not good;  
a person can be corrupted for a piece of bread.

<sup>22</sup>A stingy person hurries after wealth  
and does not realize that poverty will overtake him.

<sup>23</sup>Whoever rebukes a person will afterward find more favor  
than the one who flatters with his tongue.

<sup>24</sup>Whoever robs his father or mother  
and says, 'It is no offense' —  
he is a companion of a destroyer.

<sup>25</sup>A greedy person stirs up conflict,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD will prosper.

<sup>26</sup>Whoever trusts in his own heart is a fool,  
but whoever walks in wisdom will be delivered.

<sup>27</sup>Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing,  
but whoever hides his eyes will receive many curses.

<sup>28</sup>When the wicked rise to power, people hide;  
but when they perish, the righteous flourish.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The plural 'wicked flee' contrasted with 'righteous are bold' suggests that wickedness produces collective panic while righteousness produces individual courage. One righteous person has more nerve than a crowd of the wicked.
2. Be-fesha erets rabbim sareiha ('in the transgression of a land, many are its rulers') observes that national sin produces political instability — coups, assassinations, rapid turnover of leaders. This describes the northern kingdom of Israel precisely, where nine dynasties and nineteen kings ruled in two centuries. The antidote is not more rulers but better ones: adam mevin yodea ('a person who understands and knows') brings continuity (ya'arikh,

'will prolong, will make last').

3. Gever rash ve-osheq dallim ('a poor/needy man who oppresses the poor') describes the worst kind of oppressor: one who knows poverty but still exploits the vulnerable. Matar sochef ('sweeping rain, driving downpour') destroys rather than nourishes — rain that should bring life instead washes away crops and leaves no lechem ('bread, food'). The irony is devastating: rain should mean harvest; this ruler should mean justice. Both betray their function.
4. Torah here means 'instruction' broadly — the teaching of wisdom and the direction of God. Those who have abandoned it (ozevee torah) find themselves praising the wicked (yehalelu rasha) because they have lost the moral framework to distinguish right from wrong. Those who keep instruction (shomere torah) contend with the wicked (yitgaru vam, 'they oppose them, they provoke them, they resist them'). Moral discernment produces moral courage.
5. Anshe-ra ('men of evil') lack the capacity to understand mishpat ('justice, judgment') — their moral corruption has destroyed their moral perception. Mevaqshe YHWH ('those who seek the LORD') yavinu khol ('understand everything'). The claim is bold: seeking God produces comprehensive understanding. Not omniscience, but moral clarity — the ability to see situations truly and judge them accurately.
6. Tummo ('his integrity, his completeness, his blamelessness') is the poor person's wealth. Iqqesh derakhayim ('twisted of ways, crooked in his paths') is the rich person's poverty. The proverb reverses economic categories: true wealth is character, and true poverty is moral corruption. This is not romanticism about poverty but a clear hierarchy of values.
7. Notser torah ('one who guards/keeps instruction') demonstrates discernment (mevin). Ro'eh zolelim ('companion of gluttons, one who associates with wasteful people') brings shame (yakhlim, 'shames, disgraces') on his father. The choice of company reveals the child's character and reflects on the parent. The same associational logic appears throughout Proverbs: you become like those you keep company with.
8. Neshekh ('interest, usury' — literally 'a bite') and tarbit ('increase, profit, surcharge') were both prohibited in lending to fellow Israelites. The proverb declares that wealth accumulated this way will not remain with the exploiter — God will redirect it to chonen dallim ('one who shows grace to the poor'). The usurer's hoard is temporary; it is merely in transit to a more generous owner.
9. The consequence is severe: refusing to hear God's instruction (mesir ozno mi-shemo'a torah) renders even prayer to'evah ('detestable, abominable'). The person who will not listen to God cannot expect God to listen to him. Prayer from a person who has rejected instruction is not humble petition but presumptuous demand — and God finds it repulsive.
10. Leading the yasharim ('upright ones') astray on a bad path triggers the boomerang principle: bi-shechuto hu-yippol ('into his own pit he will fall'). The temimim ('blameless, complete, those of integrity') inherit good (yinchalu-tov). The one who corrupts others is destroyed by his own corruption; those who resist corruption receive the inheritance.
11. Wealth creates the illusion of wisdom (chakham be-einav, 'wise in his own eyes'). The rich person mistakes financial success for intellectual superiority. But a dal mevin ('poor person of understanding') can yachqerenu ('search him out, investigate him, see through him') — discernment is not correlated with income. The poor person with genuine understanding can expose the rich person's pretension.
12. Two political scenarios: righteous leadership produces tiferet ('splendor, glory, beauty') — public flourishing. Wicked leadership produces concealment (yechuppas adam, 'people are searched for, people go into hiding'). The verb chuppas can mean either 'people are sought out' (by the wicked, for persecution) or 'people hide' (for self-protection). Either reading describes a society of fear.
13. The verb modeh means both 'to confess' and 'to give thanks' — in Hebrew, honest acknowledgment of failure and grateful acknowledgment of God share the same word. Confession is an act of thanks: it thanks God for being the kind of God who responds to honesty with mercy.
14. Ashre adam mefached tamid ('blessed is the person who is afraid always') seems paradoxical — how can fear produce blessedness? The fear (pachad) here is not anxiety but moral vigilance: the constant awareness that one wrong step can lead to ruin. The opposite — maqsheh libbo ('one who hardens his heart') — is the person who refuses to feel moral concern, who becomes insensitive to warning. Pharaoh is the Bible's classic example of a hardened heart.
15. Ari nohem ('a growling lion') and dov shoqeq ('a rushing/charging bear') are the two most dangerous predators in ancient Israel. A moshel rasha ('wicked ruler') over am-dal ('a poor/helpless people') is equally predatory: he devours those who cannot defend themselves. The comparison degrades the ruler to the level of a wild animal — he has abandoned the image of God for the image of a beast.
16. Nagid chasar tevunot ('a prince/leader lacking understanding') produces rav ma'ashaqqot ('much oppression, great extortion'). Incompetent leadership is not merely ineffective but actively harmful — the leader without understanding defaults to exploitation. The antidote is some betsa ('one who hates unjust gain, one who despises profit from exploitation') — this leader ya'arikh yamim ('will lengthen days, will enjoy longevity'). The quality that extends a ruler's life is not wisdom alone but integrity — specifically, the refusal to profit from injustice.
17. Adam ashuq be-dam-nafesh ('a person oppressed by the blood of a life') carries the weight of murder. Ad-bor yanus ('to the pit he will flee') — his trajectory is downward, toward the grave. Al-yitmekhu-vo ('let no one hold him up, let no one support him') is a communal instruction: do not shield a murderer from consequences. Justice demands that the community not intervene to protect the guilty.
18. Holekh tamim ('one who walks in integrity, one whose conduct is complete') yivvashe'a ('will be saved, will be delivered'). Ne'eqash derakhayim ('one twisted in ways, one crooked in paths') yippol be-echat ('will fall in one' — suddenly, all at once, in a single collapse). Integrity produces gradual security; crookedness produces sudden catastrophe. The fall is be-echat — one event, one moment, total.

19. The identical proverb appears in 12:11. Oved admato ('one who works his ground') is contrasted with meraddef reqim ('one who pursues empty things, one who chases vapors'). The first has food (yisba-lachem, 'will be satisfied with bread'); the second has poverty (yisba-rish, 'will be satisfied with lack'). The ironic use of yisba ('will be satisfied, will have plenty') for both outcomes is darkly humorous — both are satisfied, but one is satisfied with bread and the other with emptiness.
20. Ish emunot ('a person of faithfulnesses' — the plural intensifies) is rav-berakhot ('abundant in blessings'). Faithfulness (emunah) produces blessings (berakhot) as naturally as rain produces growth. Ats leha'ashir ('one who hurries to become rich') lo yinnaqeh ('will not be held innocent, will not go unpunished'). The contrast is between patient faithfulness and impatient greed — the first accumulates blessings over time, the second accumulates guilt.
21. Haker-panim ('recognizing faces, showing favoritism') — judging based on who someone is rather than what is true — is lo-tov ('not good'). The second line reveals how cheaply justice can be bought: al-pat-lechem ('for a piece of bread, for a morsel of food') a person will commit pasha ('transgression, rebellion'). Justice collapses not always under great pressure but sometimes under trivial inducement.
22. Nivhal la-hon ('one who hastens toward wealth, one who is panicked about getting rich') is identified as ish ra-ayin ('a person of evil eye' — stingy, grudging). The irony: the person desperate to accumulate does not know (lo yeda) that his hoarding mentality produces the opposite of what he intends. Cheser yevo'ennu ('lack will come to him') — scarcity arrives precisely because he grasped so tightly.
23. Mokhiach adam ('one who corrects/rebukes a person') earns chen ('favor, grace, goodwill') — not immediately but acharai ('afterward, later, in retrospect'). The flatterer (machaliq lashon, 'one who makes the tongue smooth') wins immediate approval but loses long-term trust. Time vindicates the honest corrector and exposes the flatterer.
24. Gozel aviv ve-immo ('one who robs his father and his mother') represents the ultimate betrayal of the family bond. The self-justification — omer ein pasha ('he says, there is no transgression') — compounds the crime by denying it. The person who can steal from parents and feel no guilt is chaver le-ish mashchit ('a companion of a man of destruction, an associate of one who destroys'). He has allied himself with the principle of destruction itself.
25. Rechav-nefesh ('wide of appetite, expansive of desire, greedy') generates madon ('strife, conflict') because insatiable desire inevitably encroaches on others' territory. Bote'ach al-YHWH ('one who trusts in the LORD') yedusshan ('will be made fat, will prosper, will flourish'). Trust in God satisfies the appetite that greed cannot — it produces the abundance that grasping fails to deliver.
26. Boteach be-libbo ('one who trusts in his own heart') is a kesil ('fool') — self-trust is identified as the core of foolishness. The heart (lev), which Proverbs repeatedly identifies as deceptive and needing guidance, is the worst possible object of trust. Holekh be-chokhmah ('one who walks in wisdom') yimmalet ('will escape, will be delivered'). The path of wisdom is the path of deliverance; the path of self-trust is the path of the fool.
27. Noten la-rash ('one who gives to the poor') ein machsor ('there is no lack') — generosity does not deplete but sustains. Ma'alim einav ('one who hides his eyes, one who looks away') receives rav-me'erot ('many curses'). The 'hidden eyes' image is powerful: the person who deliberately avoids seeing need is not passive but active — he works to not see what is in front of him.
28. This verse echoes v12 and forms a bracket around the chapter's political teachings. Be-qum resha'im ('when the wicked rise') produces hiding (yissater adam). Be-ovedam ('when they perish, when they are destroyed') produces flourishing (yirbu tsaddiqim, 'the righteous multiply'). The health of a society is directly measured by who holds power. Wicked leadership suppresses the righteous; their removal allows the righteous to emerge and multiply.

## 29

**Summary:** *Proverbs 29 is the final chapter of the Hezekiah collection (chapters 25-29), concluding with intensified contrasts between righteous and wicked leadership, the value of discipline, the danger of flattery, and the foundational declaration that 'the fear of the LORD' produces safety. The chapter serves as a capstone for the entire Solomonic wisdom tradition.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 18 ('Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint') is one of the most frequently quoted — and most frequently misapplied — verses in the Bible. The Hebrew chazon does not mean 'vision' in the modern leadership sense (goals, dreams, strategic plans) but 'prophetic revelation' — the word of God delivered through a prophet. Without divine revelation, the people become unrestrained. The verse is a statement about the necessity of God's word, not about organizational leadership. Verse 25 ('The fear of man is a trap, but whoever trusts in the LORD is set on high') captures the fundamental choice between human approval and divine security that runs through all of Proverbs.*

*Translation Friction: The chapter's repeated endorsement of physical discipline for children (vv15, 17, 19) reflects ancient pedagogy and should not be extracted from its cultural context as a timeless prescription. The underlying principle — that discipline produces character — transcends the specific method. Verse 24 ('Whoever shares with a thief hates his own life') uses the legal situation where a person who knows the identity of a thief but refuses to testify under oath (hearing the adjuration and not speaking) becomes complicit in the crime.*

*Connections: Verse 13 ('The poor person and the oppressor meet together; the LORD gives light to the eyes of both') echoes 22:2. Verse 18 on prophetic vision connects to 1 Samuel 3:1 ('the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision'). Verse 25 on the fear of man connects to Isaiah 51:12-13 and Psalm 56:4. The Hezekiah collection closes, and the book shifts to non-Solomonic voices: Agur (ch. 30) and Lemuel (ch. 31).*

- <sup>1</sup>A person often rebuked who stiffens his neck  
will be suddenly shattered beyond repair.
- <sup>2</sup>When the righteous increase, the people rejoice;  
when the wicked rule, the people groan.
- <sup>3</sup>A person who loves wisdom makes his father rejoice,  
but whoever keeps company with prostitutes wastes his wealth.
- <sup>4</sup>A king establishes the land through justice,  
but one who demands bribes tears it down.
- <sup>5</sup>A person who flatters his neighbor  
spreads a net for his own feet.
- <sup>6</sup>In the transgression of an evil person is a trap,  
but the righteous person sings and rejoices.
- <sup>7</sup>The righteous person understands the case of the poor;  
the wicked person has no such understanding.
- <sup>8</sup>Scoffers set a city ablaze,  
but the wise turn away anger.
- <sup>9</sup>When a wise person takes a fool to court,  
the fool rages and laughs and there is no resolution.
- <sup>10</sup>The bloodthirsty hate the blameless,  
but the upright seek to protect his life.
- <sup>11</sup>A fool vents all his feelings,  
but a wise person holds them back quietly.
- <sup>12</sup>A ruler who listens to lies —  
all his officials will be wicked.
- <sup>13</sup>The poor person and the oppressor meet —  
the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.
- <sup>14</sup>A king who faithfully judges the poor —  
his throne will be established forever.

<sup>15</sup>The rod and rebuke produce wisdom,  
but an undisciplined youth shames his mother.

<sup>16</sup>When the wicked multiply, transgression increases,  
but the righteous will see their downfall.

<sup>17</sup>Discipline your son and he will give you rest;  
he will bring delight to your soul.

<sup>18</sup>Where there is no prophetic revelation, the people throw off restraint,  
but whoever keeps instruction — blessed is he.

<sup>19</sup>A servant will not be corrected by words alone;  
he may understand but will not respond.

<sup>20</sup>Do you see a person hasty in his words?  
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

<sup>21</sup>Whoever pampers his servant from youth  
will find him ungrateful in the end.

<sup>22</sup>An angry person stirs up conflict,  
and a hot-tempered person commits many offenses.

<sup>23</sup>A person's pride will bring him low,  
but a humble spirit will obtain honor.

<sup>24</sup>Whoever shares with a thief hates his own life;  
he hears the oath of adjuration but does not testify.

<sup>25</sup>The fear of people sets a trap,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD is set safely on high.

<sup>26</sup>Many seek the face of a ruler,  
but justice for a person comes from the LORD.

<sup>27</sup>An unjust person is detestable to the righteous,  
and an upright person is detestable to the wicked.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ish tokhachot ('a person of rebukes, someone frequently corrected') who maqsheh-oref ('hardens his neck, stiffens his back') is using the stubborn-ox metaphor — an animal that refuses the yoke. Peta yisshaver ('suddenly he will be broken') and ein marpe ('there is no healing') describe catastrophic, irreversible destruction. The suddenness is key: the hardened person thinks he is getting away with it until the moment everything collapses at once.
2. Bi-revot tsaddiqim ('when the righteous multiply/increase') — not merely when they hold office, but when their influence grows — the people (ha-am) rejoice (yismach). Bi-meshol rasha ('when a wicked person rules') the people groan (ye'anach). The groaning is not dissent but suffering — the involuntary sound of people being crushed under unjust governance.
3. The contrast pairs intellectual virtue (ohev chokhmah, 'lover of wisdom') with moral vice (ro'eh zonot, 'companion of prostitutes'). The first produces family joy; the second destroys family resources. Ye'abbed-hon ('destroys wealth, squanders resources') is total — the patron of prostitutes does not merely spend but annihilates his inheritance.
4. Melekh be-mishpat ya'amid erets ('a king through justice causes the land to stand') — justice is the foundation that holds the nation upright. Ish terumot ('a man of contributions/exactions') — one who demands bribes or excessive taxes — yehersennah ('tears it down, demolishes it'). The same ruler who could build can destroy, depending on whether he practices mishpat or extortion.

5. Machaliq al-re'ehu ('one who makes smooth upon his neighbor, one who flatters') is actually pores reshet al-pe'amav ('spreading a net over his steps'). The ambiguity of 'his' — whose feet? the neighbor's or the flatterer's? — may be intentional. Flattery ensnares both parties: the one being flattered is lured into false security, and the flatterer sets a trap that may also catch him.
6. Be-fesha ish ra moqesh ('in the transgression of an evil man, a snare') — sin is its own trap. The evil person's transgression contains the mechanism of his own capture. The righteous, freed from this self-entrapment, can yarun ve-sameach ('sing and rejoice') — the emotional tone of innocence is joy.
7. Yodea tsaddiq din dallim ('the righteous knows the case/judgment of the poor') — the righteous person not only sees the poor but understands their legal rights, their situation, their needs. The wicked person lo-yavin da'at ('does not understand knowledge') — he lacks the moral framework to comprehend why the poor person's case matters. Moral blindness is a form of intellectual failure.
8. Anshe latson ('men of scoffing, scornful people') yappichu qiryah ('blow upon a city, set a city aflame') — scoffers are incendiaries, using mockery and contempt to inflame public passion. Chakhamim yashivu af ('wise ones turn back anger') — the wise function as the city's fire department, calming what scoffers ignite. The political stakes are clear: scoffers destabilize communities; wise people stabilize them.
9. The wise person who enters legal dispute (nishpat) with a fool (ish evil) discovers that rational process is impossible. The fool veers between ragaz ('raging, shaking with anger') and sachaq ('laughing, mocking') — emotional extremes that prevent any nachat ('rest, resolution, settling'). Engaging a fool in formal proceedings produces only chaos.
10. Anshe damim ('men of blood, bloodthirsty people') hate the tam ('blameless, person of integrity') because his existence is an implicit rebuke to their violence. The yesharim ('upright ones') yevaqsu nafsho ('seek his life') — here meaning they seek to protect and preserve the blameless person's life, not to harm him. The upright actively defend the innocent whom the violent hate.
11. Kol-rucho yotsi kesil ('all his spirit the fool sends out') — the fool expresses every emotion, every opinion, every impulse without filter. Chakham be-achor yeshabbechannah ('a wise person in the back/afterwards calms it') — the wise person restrains his spirit, holding it back and calming it down before releasing it. Self-regulation is the difference between wisdom and folly.
12. Moshel maqshiv al-devar-shafer ('a ruler who pays attention to false speech') creates a systemic effect: kol-mesharetav resha'im ('all his servants become wicked'). The leader's tolerance for falsehood sets the moral standard for the entire administration. Liars rise because the leader rewards lying; honest people leave because honesty is penalized. Corruption flows from the top down.
13. This echoes 22:2 with a variation: instead of 'the LORD made them both,' now 'the LORD gives light to the eyes of both' (me'ir eine sheneihem YHWH). Me'ir ('gives light, illuminates') may mean gives physical life (the light of the eyes is life itself) or gives understanding. Either way, both the poor and the oppressor exist by God's sustaining power. The oppressor breathes God's air and sees with God's light — and will answer to the God who gave him both.
14. Shofet be-emet dallim ('one who judges with truth/faithfulness the poor') — the test of a king's justice is not how he treats the powerful but how he treats the powerless. A king who passes this test earns permanent stability: kis'o la-ad yikkon ('his throne will be established forever'). Permanence is the reward for justice.
15. Shevet ve-tokhachat ('rod and rebuke') together represent the full range of corrective discipline — physical consequence and verbal instruction. Together they yitten chokhmah ('give wisdom, produce wisdom'). Na'ar meshullach ('a youth set free, a child sent away, an undisciplined young person') mevish immo ('shames his mother'). The mother is specifically named because she bore the primary daily responsibility for child-rearing in Israelite society — the undisciplined child is her public failure.
16. Bi-revot resha'im yirbeh-pasha ('when the wicked increase, transgression increases') — wickedness is exponential, each wicked person generating more transgression. Ve-tsaddiqim be-mappaltam yir'u ('but the righteous will see their fall') — the righteous do not need to act against the wicked; they need only wait. The wicked's multiplication contains the seed of its own collapse.
17. Yasser binkha ('discipline your son') produces two rewards: vinichekkha ('he will give you rest, he will give you peace') and yitten ma'adannot le-nafshekha ('he will give delicacies to your soul'). The disciplined child becomes a source of menucha ('rest, peace') and ma'adannot ('delicacies, pleasures, delights') — a well-raised child is one of life's deepest satisfactions.
18. This verse is persistently misapplied in corporate and church leadership contexts as a proof text for 'having a vision statement.' The Hebrew is specifically about divine revelation through prophets, not human strategic planning. The absence of God's word, not the absence of human goals, is what produces social chaos.
19. The proverb observes that some people — here, the eved ('servant, slave') who has no internal motivation to comply — cannot be corrected by verbal instruction alone (bi-devarim lo-yivvaser, 'by words he will not be disciplined'). Ki-yavin ('though he understands') ve-ein ma'aneh ('there is no answer, no response') — comprehension without compliance. Understanding the instruction is not the problem; responding to it is.
20. Ish ats bi-devarav ('a person hurried in his words') — someone who speaks before thinking — is worse off than a fool (tiqvah li-khesil mimmennu, 'there is more hope for a fool than for him'). This echoes 26:12, where the self-proclaimed wise person is also ranked below the fool. The hasty speaker, like the self-proclaimed wise person, has a specific defect that blocks learning: his mouth moves faster than his mind.
21. Mefanneq ('one who pampers, coddles, indulges') his eved from youth (minno'ar) will discover that the servant's acharit ('end, outcome') is manon — a word of uncertain meaning, possibly 'insolent,' 'ungrateful,' 'claiming the status of a son,' or 'grief.' The proverb warns that indulgence produces entitlement. Excessive kindness without appropriate structure creates expectations that cannot be sustained.

22. *Ish af* ('a man of anger') generates *madon* ('strife'). *Ba'al chemah* ('master of fury') produces *rav-pasha* ('much transgression'). Anger does not merely disrupt peace; it generates sin. The more intense the anger (from *af* to *chemah*), the greater the moral damage (from conflict to transgression).
23. *Ga'avat adam tashpilenu* ('the pride of a person will lower him, will humiliate him') — pride produces the opposite of what it intends. It aims for elevation and achieves humiliation. *Shefal-ruach* ('lowly of spirit, humble in disposition') *yitmokh kavod* ('will grasp honor, will take hold of glory'). The paradox is complete: grasping for honor produces humiliation; accepting lowliness produces honor.
24. *Choleq im-gannav* ('one who shares with a thief, one who partakes with a thief') *sone nafsho* ('hates his own life'). The second line explains: *alah yishma* ('he hears the adjuration, the oath, the curse') — the public oath requiring witnesses to come forward — *ve-lo yaggid* ('and he does not tell, and he does not testify'). By staying silent when he knows the thief's identity, he becomes an accomplice. His self-hatred is enacted through his silence: he chooses loyalty to a criminal over his own survival.
25. *Cherdat adam* does not mean 'the fear that people experience' but 'the fear of people' — anxiety about what others will think, say, or do. It is the social anxiety that drives people to compromise integrity for approval.
26. *Rabbim mevaqshim pene-moshel* ('many seek the ruler's face' — seek his favor, try to get an audience) but *me-YHWH mishpat-ish* ('from the LORD comes a person's judgment'). The ultimate verdict does not come from the king's court but from God's. Seeking royal favor is natural and often necessary, but it is not ultimate. The final disposition of your case rests with God, not with any human authority.
27. The final verse of the Hezekiah collection — and the final Solomonic proverb in the book — establishes mutual revulsion as the ultimate boundary between righteousness and wickedness. The righteous find the unjust repulsive (*to'avat tsaddiqim ish avel*); the wicked find the upright repulsive (*to'avat rasha yeshar-darekh*). There is no middle ground, no neutral territory. The moral divide is not merely intellectual disagreement but visceral incompatibility. Each finds the other's way of life *to'evah* — abominable, detestable, repellent. This is the wisdom tradition's final word on the two ways.

## 30

**Summary:** *Proverbs 30 is 'the words of Agur son of Jakeh' — an oracle from a figure otherwise unknown in the Hebrew Bible. The chapter opens with a confession of intellectual limitation (vv1-4), transitions to a prayer for neither poverty nor wealth (vv7-9), and then develops a series of numerical proverbs ('three things... four things') that catalog wonders, mysteries, and social observations through lists of four. Agur's voice is strikingly different from Solomon's — more humble, more questioning, more awed by the limits of human knowledge.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Agur's opening confession (vv2-4) is unique in wisdom literature: 'I am more stupid than any person, and I do not have human understanding.' This is not false modesty but genuine epistemological humility — the recognition that the search for wisdom encounters a hard ceiling. His rhetorical questions in verse 4 ('Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists?') echo God's challenge to Job (Job 38-41) and establish that some knowledge belongs to God alone. The 'two things I ask' prayer (vv7-9) is one of the most balanced prayers in the Bible — asking for neither poverty (which might drive him to steal and profane God's name) nor wealth (which might produce self-sufficiency and denial of God). The numerical proverbs (vv15-31) are a literary form found across the ancient Near East, using pattern recognition to organize observations about the natural and social world.*

**Translation Friction:** *Agur's identity is debated: is he Israelite or foreign? The name 'Agur son of Jakeh' has no other biblical occurrence. The word *massa* (v1) could be 'oracle/utterance' or 'from Massa' — a region in northern Arabia associated with Ishmael's descendants (Genesis 25:14). If Agur is a non-Israelite sage, his inclusion in Proverbs demonstrates that Israel recognized wisdom wherever it appeared. The phrase *la-ithiel la-ithiel ve-ukhal* (v1) is notoriously difficult — possibly names ('to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal') or a confession ('I have wearied myself, God; I have wearied myself, God, and I am spent').*

**Connections:** *Agur's questions (v4) closely parallel God's speech in Job 38-41. The prayer for sufficiency (vv7-9) anticipates Jesus' 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matthew 6:11) and Paul's 'I have learned to be content' (Philippians 4:11-12). The numerical proverbs connect to the form used in Amos 1-2 ('For three transgressions... and for four'). The 'way of a man with a young woman' (v19) connects to the mystery language of Song of Songs.*

‡The words of Agur son of Jakeh — the oracle.  
The man declares: I have wearied myself, O God;

I have wearied myself, O God, and I am spent.

<sup>2</sup>Surely I am more ignorant than anyone,  
and I lack ordinary human understanding.

<sup>3</sup>I have not learned wisdom,  
nor do I possess the knowledge of the Holy One.

<sup>4</sup>Who has gone up to heaven and come back down?  
Who has gathered the wind in his fists?  
Who has wrapped the waters in a garment?  
Who has established all the ends of the earth?  
What is his name, and what is his son's name —  
if you know?

<sup>5</sup>Every word of God is refined;  
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

<sup>6</sup>Do not add to His words,  
or He will rebuke you and you will be exposed as a liar.

<sup>7</sup>Two things I ask of you —  
do not refuse me before I die:

<sup>8</sup>Keep falsehood and lies far from me;  
give me neither poverty nor wealth —  
feed me my allotted portion of bread.

<sup>9</sup>lest I be full and deny you  
and say, 'Who is the LORD?'  
or lest I become poor and steal  
and profane the name of my God.

<sup>10</sup>Do not slander a servant to his master,  
or he will curse you and you will be held guilty.

<sup>11</sup>There is a generation that curses its father  
and does not bless its mother.

<sup>12</sup>There is a generation pure in its own eyes  
but not washed from its filth.

<sup>13</sup>There is a generation — how haughty their eyes!  
How their eyelids are raised in arrogance!

<sup>14</sup>There is a generation whose teeth are swords,  
whose jaws are set with knives,  
to devour the poor from the earth  
and the needy from among humanity.

<sup>15</sup>The leech has two daughters: Give! Give!  
Three things are never satisfied;  
four never say, 'Enough!'

<sup>16</sup>Sheol and the barren womb,  
land that is never satisfied with water,  
and fire that never says, 'Enough!'

<sup>17</sup>The eye that mocks a father  
and scorns obedience to a mother —  
the ravens of the valley will gouge it out,  
and the young vultures will eat it.

<sup>18</sup>Three things are too wonderful for me;  
four I cannot understand:

<sup>19</sup>the way of an eagle in the sky,  
the way of a snake on a rock,  
the way of a ship in the heart of the sea,  
and the way of a man with a young woman.

<sup>20</sup>This is the way of an adulterous woman:  
she eats and wipes her mouth  
and says, 'I have done nothing wrong.'

<sup>21</sup>Under three things the earth trembles,  
and under four it cannot bear up:

<sup>22</sup>a servant who becomes king,  
a fool who is stuffed with food,

<sup>23</sup>an unloved woman who gets married,  
and a servant girl who displaces her mistress.

<sup>24</sup>Four things are among the smallest on earth,  
but they are extraordinarily wise:

<sup>25</sup>Ants — a people without strength,  
yet they prepare their food in summer.

<sup>26</sup>Rock badgers — a people without power,  
yet they make their home in the cliffs.

<sup>27</sup>Locusts have no king,  
yet they advance together in formation.

<sup>28</sup>A lizard you can catch with your hands,  
yet it lives in the palaces of kings.

<sup>29</sup>Three things are stately in their stride;  
four are majestic in their walk:

**30**The lion, mightiest among animals,  
who does not retreat before anything;

**31**the strutting rooster, the male goat,  
and a king with his army around him.

**32**If you have been foolish in exalting yourself,  
or if you have plotted evil — hand over mouth!

**33**For pressing milk produces butter,  
pressing the nose produces blood,  
and pressing anger produces conflict.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The textual difficulty is ancient — the Septuagint and other versions also struggled with this verse. The confessional reading has gained scholarly support because it makes Agur's opening a statement of intellectual exhaustion that leads naturally into the confession of ignorance in verses 2-4.
2. Ba'ar ('brutish, stupid, like an animal') is a strong word — Agur does not say he is merely less wise than others but that he is sub-human in understanding. Lo-vinat adam li ('the understanding of a human is not mine') reinforces the claim. This is either genuine despair at the limits of human knowledge or a rhetorical strategy: by confessing total ignorance, Agur positions himself to receive wisdom from God alone.
3. The parallel between chokhmah ('wisdom') and da'at qedoshim ('knowledge of the holy ones' or 'knowledge of the Holy One') elevates the discussion: Agur is not merely confessing ignorance about practical matters but about divine knowledge. Qedoshim could be plural ('holy ones, angels') or a plural of majesty ('the Holy One, God'). Either way, Agur confesses that ultimate wisdom — knowledge of God's nature and purposes — exceeds his grasp.
4. These questions parallel God's interrogation of Job (Job 38-41) but come from a human sage rather than from God. Agur asks what only God can answer, thereby demonstrating that the ceiling of wisdom is the floor of theology: true wisdom begins with acknowledging what cannot be known.
5. After confessing his own ignorance (vv2-4), Agur turns to what can be known: imrat Eloah ('the word of God'). Every word is tserufah ('refined, purified, tested by fire') — language from metallurgy, meaning God's word has been through the furnace and proven pure. God Himself is a magen ('shield') to those who chosim bo ('take refuge in him'). Where human wisdom fails, God's word stands; where human understanding ends, divine protection begins.
6. Al-tosef al-devarav ('do not add to His words') draws a boundary around human contribution to divine revelation. God's word is complete and refined (v5); human additions contaminate it. The consequence: yokhiach bekha ('He will reprove you, He will convict you') and nikhzavta ('you will be found a liar, you will be proven false'). Adding to God's word puts human words in God's mouth — a form of lying about God.
7. The 'two things' formula is part of the numerical pattern that structures the entire chapter. Agur applies the same form to his prayer that he will use for his observations about the natural world.
8. The theological sophistication of this prayer is remarkable: Agur recognizes that both poverty and wealth are spiritual dangers, and asks God for the middle path — sufficiency without excess, enough without surplus. This is rare in any era's prayer tradition.
9. The prayer's logic is entirely theological: both dangers are expressed in terms of their effect on the God-relationship, not on personal comfort. Agur's concern is not happiness but faithfulness — he wants the economic condition that best preserves his ability to trust and honor God.
10. Talshen ('to slander, to inform against, to accuse with the tongue') a servant to his master — using your social position to harm someone who cannot defend himself — invites the servant's curse, which in this case will be effective (ve-ashamta, 'and you will be found guilty, and you will bear guilt'). The proverb protects the powerless: even a servant has the right not to be maligned.
11. The first of four 'there is a generation' (dor) proverbs (vv11-14), cataloging types of people who violate fundamental moral norms. This generation attacks the parent-child bond — the most basic social unit — by cursing the father and withholding blessing from the mother. The progression from cursing to not-blessing captures both active and passive violations of the fifth commandment.
12. Tahir be-einav ('pure in its own eyes') but lo ruchatz mi-tso'ato ('not washed from its excrement/filth'). The self-assessment and the reality are opposite: they see purity; God sees unwashed filth. Tso'ah ('excrement, human waste') is the strongest possible image for moral contamination.
13. Mah ramu einav ('how high their eyes are!') and af'appav yinnase'u ('their eyelids are lifted up') describe the physical posture of contempt: nose in the air, eyes looking down on everyone else. The exclamation mah ('how!') expresses the observer's disgust at the level of arrogance.
14. The predatory generation: charavot shinnav ('swords are their teeth') and ma'akhalot metall'otav ('knives are their jaw teeth'). They consume the poor (le-ekhol aniyim me-erets) and the needy (evyonim me-adam) — economic exploitation described as cannibalism. The poor are not merely exploited; they are eaten. This is the most visceral image of oppression in Proverbs.

15. The leech introduces the theme of insatiability that runs through the numerical proverbs. The three-four pattern (three things... four things) appears in Amos 1-2, Job 5:19, and throughout Near Eastern wisdom literature. The pattern builds suspense: the first three items establish a category, and the fourth provides the climax.
16. Four things that never reach satiation: She'ol (the realm of the dead — always accepting more dead), otser racham ('a closed womb, a barren womb' — the desperate longing for children), erets lo-save'ah mayim ('earth not satisfied with water' — parched ground in an arid climate), and esh ('fire' — which consumes everything and still demands more fuel). Each represents a different dimension of insatiable need: death, fertility, sustenance, and destruction.
17. The punishment matches the offense: the eye (ayin) that mocked and scorned parents will be pecked out by orvei-nachal ('ravens of the valley') and eaten by bene-neshar ('young eagles/vultures'). The image is of an unburied corpse — the ultimate disgrace in Israelite culture. The mocking child ends up as carrion, his disrespectful eye consumed by scavengers. The violence of the image reflects the severity with which the wisdom tradition regards contempt for parents.
18. Nifle'u mimmeni ('are too wonderful for me, are beyond my comprehension') uses the same root as pele ('wonder, marvel') — these are not confusing but awe-inspiring. Agur is not frustrated but amazed. The four things that follow (v19) share a common quality that Agur finds mysterious.
19. Almah ('young woman of marriageable age') does not necessarily imply virgin (that would be betulah) but a young woman in the phase of life when sexual attraction and romantic pursuit are most intense. The 'way of a man with a young woman' may refer to courtship, seduction, or the act of love itself — in any case, a process that defies rational explanation.
20. The adulteress exploits the 'traceless path' principle of v19: just as the eagle leaves no track in the sky, she claims her adultery left no evidence. Akhelah u-machatah piha ('she eats and wipes her mouth') — the eating is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and the wiping is the erasure of evidence. Ve-amerah lo fa'alti aven ('she says, I have not done wrong') — the denial is not confusion but strategy. The untraceable path becomes a tool of deception.
21. Ragazah erets ('the earth trembles, the land shakes') — the social disruption is so severe that Agur describes it as seismic. Lo-tukhal se'et ('it cannot bear, it cannot carry the weight') — the social order collapses under the weight of these inversions.
22. Eved ki yimlokh ('a slave when he reigns') — power without the training or character to use it. Naval ki yisba-lachem ('a fool when he is satisfied with bread') — abundance given to someone who will waste it. Both represent social inversions that produce disorder, not because class hierarchy is sacred but because authority and resources without wisdom are destructive.
23. Senu'ah ki tibba'el ('a hated/unloved woman when she is married') — marriage does not resolve deep bitterness; it amplifies it. The unloved woman brings her resentment into the marriage, and the household suffers. Shifchah ki tirash gevirtah ('a servant girl when she inherits/displaces her mistress') — the social inversion produces arrogance and instability (compare Hagar and Sarah, Genesis 16). These are not moral judgments on the women but observations about social dynamics.
24. Qetanne-arets ('small ones of the earth, the tiniest creatures') are chakhamim mechukhamim ('wise, made wise, wisest of the wise'). The superlative form (mechukhamim) is emphatic — these tiny creatures are wiser than their size suggests. Agur now catalogs four small animals that demonstrate wisdom through their behavior.
25. Nemalim ('ants') are am lo-az ('a people without power, a nation with no strength') — individually insignificant. But va-yakhinu ba-qayits lachmam ('they prepare their bread in summer') — their collective organization and foresight compensate for individual weakness. Wisdom lesson: preparation and planning overcome weakness.
26. Shefannim ('rock badgers, hyraxes') are am lo-atsum ('a people without might'). But they compensate by choosing an impregnable home: va-yasimu va-sela beitam ('they set their house in the rock, they make the cliff their dwelling'). Wisdom lesson: choose your position wisely, and your weakness becomes irrelevant.
27. Arbeh ('locusts') have melekh ein ('no king, no ruler') — no centralized command structure. But va-yetse chotsets kullo ('they go out divided/organized, all of them') — they move in coordinated ranks despite having no leader. Wisdom lesson: order does not require hierarchy; cooperation can be self-organizing.
28. Semamit ('lizard' or 'spider' — identification uncertain) be-yadayim titappes ('with hands can be grasped, can be caught with bare hands') — utterly vulnerable. But ve-hi be-hekhle melekh ('and she is in the palaces of the king') — she has penetrated the most secure and prestigious dwelling. Wisdom lesson: persistence and adaptability can take you anywhere, regardless of your size or apparent vulnerability.
29. Metive tsa'ad ('making good their step, excellent in walking, stately in stride') describes creatures whose movement commands attention and respect. The next two verses identify four animals (and a human figure) whose gait embodies dignity.
30. Layish ('lion' — a rare poetic word for lion, also used in Job 4:11) is gibbor ba-behemah ('the warrior among animals, the mightiest of beasts'). Lo-yashuv mippene-khol ('he does not turn back from the face of anything') — the lion never retreats. His dignity comes from fearless power.
31. The identification of zarzir motnayim is debated — 'greyhound,' 'horse,' 'rooster,' and 'starling' have all been proposed. The 'girded loins' description suggests a creature that struts with its midsection prominent and proud. The rooster or fighting cock fits this description well.
32. Two conditions: im navalta be-hitnassel ('if you have acted foolishly by exalting yourself) or im zammota ('if you have plotted, if you have schemed evil'). One remedy: yad le-feh ('hand to mouth') — stop talking immediately. The gesture of putting hand to mouth means: shut up before you make

it worse. Silence is the first step of correction.

33. Three parallel actions with the same verb *mits* ('pressing, squeezing, churning'): press milk, get butter; press a nose, get blood; press anger (*appayim*, 'nostrils/anger' — the same word for both), get conflict (*riv*). The chapter's final proverb uses a simple physical observation to teach a relational lesson: if you keep pressing, something will come out — and with anger, what comes out is always conflict. Stop pressing.

# 31

**Summary:** *Proverbs 31 contains two distinct units: the words of King Lemuel transmitting his mother's oracle about royal virtue (vv1-9) and the eshet chayil poem — the 'woman of strength' acrostic (vv10-31). The first section warns a king against women, wine, and neglect of the poor. The second is a twenty-two-verse alphabetic poem celebrating a woman whose strength, industry, wisdom, and generosity embody everything Proverbs has taught about the wise life.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The eshet chayil poem is an acrostic: each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from aleph to tav. This formal structure makes it a complete portrait — from A to Z, nothing is left out. The word chayil (v10) is the same word used throughout the Hebrew Bible for military might, warrior strength, and economic power. Ruth is the only other woman in the Bible specifically called eshet chayil (Ruth 3:11). The poem's woman is not domestic in a diminished sense — she is an economic force: buying real estate (v16), running a textile operation (vv13, 19, 22, 24), engaging in international trade (v14), and providing for an extended household. She is praised not for beauty or submission but for strength, wisdom, and productive capability. The final verse (v30) explicitly subordinates beauty to the fear of the LORD as the true basis of praise.*

**Translation Friction:** *The eshet chayil has been used both to celebrate and to burden women. Read as a description of one extraordinary individual, it is inspiring. Read as a checklist that every woman must fulfill simultaneously, it is crushing. The poem is a portrait, not a prescription — it paints the ideal the way Proverbs 1-9 paints the ideal wise man. No single person embodies every trait simultaneously. Lemuel's mother's warning against women (vv3) reflects the real danger of court concubines siphoning royal resources and attention, not a general disparagement of women — the same chapter closes with the most exalted portrait of a woman in the Hebrew Bible.*

**Connections:** *The eshet chayil echoes Woman Wisdom from Proverbs 1-9: both are sought, both provide wealth and honor, both call from public spaces, both are more precious than jewels. The poem's opening question ('who can find?', v10) echoes 'who has found?' applied to wisdom itself (Proverbs 3:13, 8:35). Ruth is called eshet chayil in Ruth 3:11, connecting the literary ideal to a narrative embodiment. Lemuel's mother's instruction (vv1-9) parallels the maternal teaching tradition of Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20. The word chayil connects to the 'mighty men of valor' (*gibborei chayil*) throughout Joshua, Judges, and 1-2 Samuel — the woman of strength is a warrior of the household.*

<sup>1</sup>The words of King Lemuel — an oracle  
that his mother taught him.

<sup>2</sup>What, my son?  
What, son of my womb?  
What, son of my vows?

<sup>3</sup>Do not give your strength to women,  
nor your ways to those who destroy kings.

<sup>4</sup>It is not for kings, Lemuel —  
not for kings to drink wine,  
nor for rulers to crave strong drink,

<sup>5</sup>Lest they drink and forget what has been decreed  
and twist the rights of all the afflicted.

<sup>6</sup>Give strong drink to the one who is perishing  
and wine to the bitter of soul.

<sup>7</sup>Let him drink and forget his destitution  
and remember his misery no more.

<sup>8</sup>Open your mouth for the voiceless —  
for the rights of all who are destitute.

<sup>9</sup>Open your mouth, judge with righteousness,  
and defend the rights of the poor and needy.

<sup>10</sup>A woman of strength — who can find her?  
Her worth is far beyond jewels.

<sup>11</sup>The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will not lack gain.

<sup>12</sup>She brings him good, not harm,  
all the days of her life.

<sup>13</sup>She seeks out wool and flax  
and works with willing hands.

<sup>14</sup>She is like merchant ships;  
she brings her food from far away.

<sup>15</sup>She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and portions for her servant girls.

<sup>16</sup>She evaluates a field and acquires it;  
from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

<sup>17</sup>She girds her waist with strength  
and makes her arms powerful.

<sup>18</sup>She tastes that her profit is good;  
her lamp does not go out at night.

<sup>19</sup>She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her fingers grasp the spindle.

<sup>20</sup>She opens her hand to the poor  
and reaches out her arms to the needy.

<sup>21</sup>She does not fear the snow for her household,  
for her entire household is clothed in scarlet.

- <sup>22</sup>She makes bed coverings for herself;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- <sup>23</sup>Her husband is known at the city gates  
when he sits among the elders of the land.
- <sup>24</sup>She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies sashes to the merchants.
- <sup>25</sup>Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the days to come.
- <sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the instruction of faithful love is on her tongue.
- <sup>27</sup>She watches over the affairs of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- <sup>28</sup>Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband, and he praises her:
- <sup>29</sup>'Many women have done valiantly,  
but you surpass them all.'
- <sup>30</sup>Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting,  
but a woman who fears the LORD — she will be praised.
- <sup>31</sup>Give her the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her at the gates.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. If Lemuel is from Massa (in Arabia), then both Agur (ch. 30) and Lemuel (ch. 31) are non-Israelite sages whose wisdom Israel valued enough to canonize. The book of Proverbs ends not with Solomon but with international voices, demonstrating that wisdom transcends national boundaries.
2. The triple mah ('what?') is a mother's urgent address — part rebuke, part plea. She names him three ways: beri ('my son' — the intimate term), bar-bitni ('son of my womb' — reminding him of his physical origin in her body), and bar-nedarai ('son of my vows' — she had made sacred vows concerning him, perhaps dedicating him to God before birth, like Hannah with Samuel). Each name increases the emotional weight: you are mine, you came from my body, you were promised to God.
3. Chelekha ('your strength, your vigor, your resources') — the same word chayil that will describe the ideal woman in verse 10. The king's chayil must not be wasted on women who drain rather than build. Lamchot melakhin ('to those who wipe out kings, to the destroyers of kings') warns that sexual entanglements have toppled monarchies — Solomon himself being the prime example (1 Kings 11:1-4). The irony: the chapter opens by warning against women who destroy and closes by celebrating a woman who builds.
4. The repetition al la-melakhim ('not for kings, not for kings') is emphatic and personal — his mother calls him by name. Wine (yayin) and strong drink (shekhar) are prohibited not universally but specifically for kings. The reason follows in v5: intoxication corrupts judgment, and the king's judgment is the nation's justice system.
5. Pen-yishteh ve-yishkach mechuqqaq ('lest he drink and forget what is inscribed/decreed') — alcohol causes the king to forget the law he is supposed to administer. Vi-yeshanneh din kol-bene-oni ('and he changes/perverts the judgment of all the sons of affliction') — the poor, who depend on the king for justice, are the first victims of royal drunkenness. Intoxicated power is unjust power.
6. If wine is not for kings (whose minds must be clear), it is for the oved ('one who is perishing, the dying person') and the mare nefesh ('bitter of soul, those in anguish'). This is not a prescription for escapism but a recognition that alcohol has a legitimate use as palliative care — easing the suffering of those who are dying or in extreme distress. The mother distinguishes between medicinal use (appropriate) and recreational use by rulers (dangerous).

7. Yishteh ve-yishkach risho ('let him drink and forget his destitution') — the same verb (shakach, 'to forget') that was dangerous for kings (v5) is merciful for the suffering. Amalo lo yizkor-od ('his toil he will remember no more'). What is a liability for the powerful is a comfort for the powerless. Context determines morality.
8. Petach-pikha le-illem ('open your mouth for the mute, speak up for the voiceless') — the king's voice must serve those who have no voice. El-din kol-bene chalof ('for the judgment/rights of all the sons of passing away, the destitute, those who are disappearing') — the most vulnerable members of society, those who are being erased. The queen mother commands her son to use royal power for advocacy, not self-indulgence.
9. Shefot-tsedeq ('judge with righteousness, render just judgment') and din ani ve-eyvon ('give justice to the poor and the needy') close the queen mother's instruction with the core mandate of kingship: justice for the vulnerable. The final word of her oracle is eyvon ('needy, destitute') — the last person on society's ladder is the first priority on the king's agenda.
10. The acrostic begins here with aleph א. Each of the following 22 verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This literary device makes the poem a comprehensive portrait — from aleph to tav, from A to Z, she is complete.
11. Bet ב. Batach bah lev ba'aloh ('the heart of her husband trusts in her') — trust (bitachon) is the foundation of the marriage. The husband's confidence is not passive but based on observed competence. Shalal lo yechsar ('profit/spoil he will not lack') — shalal originally means 'plunder, spoil of war,' here used for economic gain. The military vocabulary is consistent: she is a warrior whose victories produce wealth.
12. Gimel ג. Gemalat-hu tov ve-lo ra ('she repays him good and not evil') — the verb gamal means 'to repay, to deal bountifully, to treat.' Kol yeme chayyeha ('all the days of her life') emphasizes duration: this is not seasonal behavior but a lifetime commitment. Her goodness to her husband is not occasional but constitutive — it defines her entire married life.
13. Dalet ד. Dareshah tsemer u-fishtim ('she seeks wool and flax') — she is an active sourcer of raw materials, not a passive recipient. Wool and flax are the two primary textile fibers of the ancient Near East. Va-ta'as be-chefets kappeha ('she works with the delight/willingness of her hands') — chefets means 'delight, pleasure, desire.' Her work is not drudgery but energized purpose.
14. He ה. Ka-oniyot socher ('like ships of a merchant, like trading vessels') — the comparison is to international commerce. She imports provisions from a distance (mi-merchaq tavi lachmah, 'from afar she brings her bread'). The image elevates her beyond the domestic sphere into the world of trade and logistics. She does not merely manage a pantry; she runs a supply chain.
15. Vav ו. Va-taqom be-od laylah ('she rises while it is still night') — she is the first person awake, preparing before dawn. Teref le-veitah ('prey/food for her household') — teref (from taraf, 'to tear, to seize prey') uses predatory language for provision. She is a hunter-provider. Choq le-na'aroteha ('allotted portions for her young women/servant girls') — she manages staff and distributes resources with fairness and order.
16. Zayin ז. Zammamah sadeh va-tiqqachehu ('she considers/plans regarding a field and takes it') — the verb zamam ('to plan, to purpose, to consider') shows that she makes strategic real estate decisions. She does not impulse-buy; she evaluates and then acts. Mi-peri kappeiha nat'ah karem ('from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard') — her profits fund further investment. She reinvests earnings into productive assets.
17. Chet ח. Chagerah ve-oz motneiha ('she girds with strength her waist') — 'girding the loins' is the Hebrew idiom for preparing for hard work or battle. Warriors girded themselves for combat; she girds herself for labor. Va-te'ammets zero'oteha ('she makes strong her arms') — she builds her physical capacity to work. This is not a delicate woman; she is powerful, physically prepared for demanding work.
18. Tet ט. Ta'amah ki-tov sachrah ('she tastes/perceives that her trade/profit is good') — she monitors the quality of her business output. Lo-yikhbeh va-laylah nerah ('her lamp does not go out at night') — she works late, not from anxiety but from productive energy. The burning lamp symbolizes both activity and prosperity.
19. Yod י. Yadeiha shillechah va-kishor ('her hands she sends to the distaff') and kappeiha tamkhu falekh ('her palms hold the spindle') — spinning thread was the fundamental textile craft of the ancient world. The distaff holds raw fiber; the spindle twists it into thread. She masters the basic technology of her industry.
20. Kaf כ. Kappah paresah le-ani ('her palm she spreads open to the afflicted') and yadeiha shillechah la-eyvon ('her hands she extends to the needy'). The same hands that work the spindle (v19) also give to the poor (v20). Productivity and generosity are not competing activities but complementary ones — she works in order to give. The open hand (paresah) is the physical opposite of the clenched fist of hoarding.
21. Lamed ל. Lo-tira le-veitah mi-shaleg ('she does not fear for her household from snow') — winter does not catch her unprepared. Kol-beitah lavush shanim ('all her household is dressed in scarlet/double garments'). Shanim could mean 'scarlet' (expensive, warm dye) or 'double garments' (from shenayim, 'two' — double-layered clothing for warmth). Either reading shows preparation and quality: her family is warm and well-dressed because she planned ahead.
22. Mem מ. Marvaddim asetah-lah ('coverings/tapestries she makes for herself') — she provides luxury for her own household. Shesh ve-argaman levushah ('fine linen and purple are her clothing'). Shesh ('fine linen,' imported from Egypt) and argaman ('purple,' dyed with the prohibitively expensive murex snail extract) are materials of royalty. She dresses not in rags but in the finest fabrics, which she has earned through her own industry.
23. Nun נ. Noda ba-she'arim ba'aloh ('known at the gates is her husband') — the husband has public status and civic influence. Be-shivto im-ziqne-arets ('when he sits with the elders of the land') — he holds a position of honor and authority. But the context makes clear: his public standing is enabled by her private industry. He can sit with the elders because she has handled everything else.

- 24.** Samekh (). Sadin asetah va-timkor ('a linen garment she makes and sells') — she manufactures goods for market, not just for household use. Chagor natnah la-kena'ani ('a sash/belt she gives to the trader/Canaanite'). Kena'ani can mean 'Canaanite' or 'merchant' (Canaanites were known as traders). She is not a cottage hobbyist but a commercial producer supplying professional merchants.
- 25.** Ayin (). Oz-ve-hadar levushah ('strength and splendor are her clothing') — her real garments are not linen and purple (v22) but oz ('strength, power') and hadar ('dignity, majesty, splendor'). Va-tischaq le-yom acharon ('she laughs at the future day, she laughs at the last day'). Her preparation is so thorough that she can face the future without anxiety. She laughs (tischaq) — the opposite of fear. The future, which terrifies the unprepared, amuses the woman of strength.
- 26.** Torat chesed ('instruction of faithful love') is one of the most beautiful phrases in Proverbs. Torah (instruction) sets the form; chesed (faithful love) sets the tone. She teaches truth with kindness — the combination that Proverbs has been building toward across all 31 chapters.
- 27.** Tsade (). Tsofiyyah halikhot beita ('she watches the goings/activities of her household') — tsofiyyah ('she watches, she observes, she keeps lookout') uses watchman/sentinel vocabulary. She is the household's sentry, monitoring everything that comes and goes. Lechem atslut lo tokhel ('bread of laziness she does not eat') — she does not consume anything she has not earned. Her food is the fruit of her labor, never the bread of idleness.
- 28.** Qof (). Qamu vaneha va-ye'ashruha ('her children rise up and call her blessed/fortunate') — the verb ashar (from ashre, 'blessed, happy') means they publicly declare her blessed. Ba'aloh va-yehallelah ('her husband, and he praises her') — the husband joins the chorus. The whole household acknowledges her. This is public honor — not private appreciation but community-recognized worth.
- 29.** The husband's praise uses chayil — the same word from verse 10's opening question and verse 3's warning. The king was told to protect his chayil; the woman embodies chayil; and now her husband declares her chayil surpasses all others. The word binds the chapter together.
- 30.** This verse is the theological center of the eshet chayil poem. All her achievements — economic, domestic, commercial, charitable — flow from yir'at-YHWH ('the fear of the LORD'). Without this verse, the poem could be read as a celebration of mere productivity. With it, every accomplishment is grounded in reverence for God. The fear of the LORD is the root; everything else is fruit.
- 31.** The acrostic is complete: from aleph (v10) to tav (v31), the portrait is finished. The woman of strength has been described from A to Z, and the final image is public recognition. The book that began with 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge' (1:7) ends with a woman whose fear of the LORD (v30) produces works that praise her in the public square (v31). Wisdom has been embodied.