

PROVERBS

Chapter 2

The Value of Wisdom

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; 3 yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, 4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; 10 for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, 12 delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, 13 who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, 14 who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, 15 men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. 16 So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, 17 who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; 18 for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; 19 none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. 20 So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. 21 For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, 22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

The second address to a son. (TLSB)

Chapter 2 is the second address in Proverbs 1–9 from a father to a son. It consists of twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. (CC)

2:1–4 In the protasis the father begins his instruction by appealing to the son’s inner desire to have wisdom. All people yearn to know their Creator, and the words from God spoken by the father to his son kindle faith and strengthen the resolve to understand God more intimately. The father speaks of his son accepting and treasuring his inspired words (2:1). He then guides his son to a more active role in his education as the son searches for wisdom by paying attention and reaching out (2:2). The son’s desire both to learn of God and to live according to wisdom are the result of God himself working in him through his Word and Spirit (cf. Acts 10:44; Eph 1:13; Phil 2:13; 1 Thess 1:5–6). Finally, the father pictures his son as moving beyond simply being his student; the son matures into adulthood and is motivated to call for wisdom and search for it because of its supreme value (Prov 2:3–4). The father is setting forth a program of growth in divine knowledge and sanctification that is to occupy the son throughout his life. (CC)

2:1 *treasure... with you.* Just as the psalmist urged young men to avoid sin by hiding God’s word in their hearts (Ps 119:11). (CSB)

Store, guard, value. (TLSB)

The Qal (G) verb *סָתַר* means “hide” for the evil purpose of setting an ambush in 1:11, 18 (see the second textual note on 1:11). But here and in 2:7; 7:1; and 10:14 it has the positive meaning of “store up, treasure” divine wisdom and its blessings. The suffix on the prepositional phrase *עִמָּךְ* (pausal for *עִמְּךָ*), literally, “with you,” is masculine singular, referring back to *בְּנִי*, “my son,” earlier in the verse. Here it is best rendered as “inside you” because it refers to the internal appropriation of God’s words through faith. (CC)

In contrast to a life of wickedness, Solomon presents the moral benefits of wisdom. (PBC)

commandments – This is not merely a reference to the Ten Commandments but to all of God’s words. (PBC)

Refers not only to the Ten Commandments but to all of God’s words, which “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2Tm 3:15). (TLSB)

וְצִוְיָתִי—This clause is repeated verbatim in 7:1b. This is the first of ten occurrences of *צִוְיָתִי*, “command,” in Proverbs. The same suffixed plural as here, “my commands,” recurs in 3:1; 4:4; 7:1–2. (CC)

2:2 making your ear attentive. Listening implies obedience (Isa 55:3; Jer 13:15). (CSB)

וְהִבִּינְתָּ—In this address the noun *חָכְמָה* recurs in 2:6, 10. See “חָכְמָה, ‘Wisdom,’ and Related Words” in “Wisdom in Proverbs” in the introduction. It is parallel to *וְהִבִּינְתָּ*, “understanding,” in the second clause of 2:2. *חָכְמָה* and *וְהִבִּינְתָּ* are parallel also in 2:6; 3:13, 19; 5:1; 8:1; 21:30; 24:3 (cf. 10:23), always with *חָכְמָה* in the first clause and *וְהִבִּינְתָּ* in the second clause. (CC)

This construction is unusual for the Hiphil (H) of *שָׁמַע*, which normally means “pay attention, listen attentively” (see the textual note on 1:24). Here and in Ps 10:17, it is accompanied by *אָזְנוֹךָ*, “your ear.” A first possibility is that in Prov 2:2 (and Ps 10:17) the Hiphil has a causative meaning and *אָזְנוֹךָ* is its direct object: “cause your ear to pay attention to the wisdom” (cf. Joüon, § 125 x). The parallel construction in the second clause of the verse is a transitive Hiphil verb with a direct object (see the next textual note). A second possibility, reflected in the translation above, is that the Hiphil has its usual meaning, “pay attention,” with no direct object and *אָזְנוֹךָ* means “with your ear,” either as an “accusative of the organ or means by which the action is performed” (GKC, § 117 s; cf. Waltke-O’Connor, § 10.2.1h) or perhaps as an adverbial accusative (GKC, § 118 q). A third possibility is that *אָזְנוֹךָ* is to be regarded as the subject: “so that your ear pays attention to the wisdom” (cf. GKC, §§ 144 l and 144 m (b)). (CC)

וְהִבִּינְתָּ לְבָבְךָ—This is, literally, “you may turn your heart to understanding.” The Hiphil (H) of *הִבִּינְתָּ* with the transitive meaning, “to turn (something), incline, direct,” takes the object *לְבָבְךָ*, “heart,” also in 21:1 (in a longer construction) and, for example, Josh 24:23 and Ps 119:36. For *לְבָבְךָ*, see the first textual note on Prov 2:10. (CC)

With the ears (or eyes, if reading) we take these words in. (PBC)

wisdom – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

In this address the noun *וְהִבִּינְתָּ* recurs in 2:2–3, 6, 11. The cognate noun and synonym *בִּינָה* occurs in the first clause of 2:3. The cognate verb *בִּיַּן* occurs in the clause *אָז תִּבְיַן*, “then you will

understand,” in 2:5a, 9a. For this vocabulary, see “בִּינָה, ‘Understanding,’ and Related Words” in “Wisdom in Proverbs” in the introduction. Although the noun בִּינָה is usually translated in this commentary as “understanding,” in 2:3 it is translated as “intelligence” to contrast it with תְּבוּנָה. (CC)

heart. The Hebrew word translated “heart” here (and in 4:21; 1Ki 3:9) can sometimes be translated “mind” (see Job 12:3). (CSB)

Once they are taken in, then, in the heart we store them. Notice how the acquisition of godly wisdom seems to grow in intensity. First it is a matter of accepting and storing up. Later, it becomes a crying a loud for and a searching for as “for hidden treasure.” (PBC)

2:4 *seek ... search.* Wisdom remains hidden from those who do not request it by prayer and faith. The search for wisdom is lifelong. (TLSB)

אֶם־תִּבְקֹשׁוּןֶהָ כִּכְסֹף—This is the first of fourteen occurrences in Proverbs of the Piel (D) of שָׁקַף, “to seek.” Its third feminine singular suffix (-וֹהָ) could refer back to any of the three feminine nouns for “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) or “understanding” (תְּבוּנָה or בִּינָה) in 2:2–3. (CC)

silver ... hidden treasures. Job 28:1–11 describes ancient mining techniques, comparing mining with the search for wisdom (see Job 28:12). (CSB)

This is the first of thirteen occurrences in Proverbs of הָקָדָ, which usually refers to “money” in general, as here and also, for example, in 7:20, but it is translated as “silver” when it is paired with “gold” (3:14; 8:10, 19; 16:16). The LXX translates הָקָדָ here literally with ἀργύριον, which can mean either “silver” or “money” (e.g., Mt 25:18, 27; Mk 14:11; Acts 8:20). (CC)

2:5–8 In the first apodosis the father reminds his son of God’s promise to confer knowledge. Here the father implies that the advice he is giving his son is not simply human insight. Instead the father is passing on God’s wisdom, for God alone gives true knowledge and understanding through his Word (2:6). To those who listen to his Word, God promises to give the fear of Yahweh (faith), divine knowledge, and saving wisdom (2:5–6). God blesses his people with the ability to make sound judgments based on divine wisdom (2:7) instead of being seduced by sinful desires and the world (see 2:16–19). This ability is one way God protects his people as they live (2:7–8). These verses also introduce the metaphor of life’s conduct as to “walk” along “paths” or a “way” (2:7–8). This metaphor is developed through 2:15 as the contrasting paths of wisdom and sin are explored. (CC)

2:5 *fear of the LORD.* Luther: “The fear of God is reverence for God and spiritual worship of Him, for in this meaning Scripture everywhere uses the expression ‘the fear of God.’ For the truest worship of God does not consist in works, no matter how great and holy they may be, but in true and proper respect” (AE 19:13). (TLSB)

אֲזַן־תִּבְיִן יִרְאַתַּיְהוָה—See “יִרְאַתַּיְהוָה, ‘the Fear of Yahweh,’ and יִרְאַ־יְהוָה, ‘One Who Feels Yahweh.’ ” (CC)

“the fear of the Lord” and in “the knowledge of God” are described by one commentator and the poles of awe and intimacy. Martin Luther defines what fearing God means for the believer: “To fear God is simply to serve God with the heart inwardly and with our doing outwardly, and this consists in holding in honor and reverencing Him.” As we grow to know God better, we stand in awe of His greatness and of His love in Jesus Christ. (PBC)

knowledge of God. Involves knowing God as a person (Php 3:10) and knowing what he is teaching us (v. 6). (CSB)

Always means more than mere cognitive awareness. It means an intimate relationship as well. God promises to give understanding and knowledge to those who revere Him as their God and Father. (TLSB)

—In this address the noun דַעַת recurs in 2:6, 10. See “דַעַת, ‘Knowledge,’ and יָדַע, ‘to Know.’” (CC)

Such godly wisdom involves much more than head knowledge; it means to walk in God’s ways. (PBC)

God. Hebrew *Elohim*; occurs elsewhere in Proverbs only in v. 17; 3:4; 25:2; 30:9. (CSB)

2:6 *His mouth.* God equips and enlightens us through His Word. (TLSB)

חַיִּים וְהַבְנֵהוּ—The parallelism between יִתֵּן הַחַכְמָה, “Yahweh gives,” and מִפִּי, “from his mouth,” shows that דַעַת וְהַבְנֵהוּ ... חַכְמָה, divine “wisdom ... knowledge and understanding,” come through faith in the Word of God, spoken by him and recorded in the Scriptures. (CC)

2:7 *stores up.* For those who “store up” his commands (v. 1). (CSB)

—In light of the Gospel assurance expressed with the imperfect in 2:6, יִתֵּן, “Yahweh gives wisdom,” preferable here is the Qere, the imperfect יִצְפֵן, “he stores up,” instead of the Kethib, the perfect יָצַף. (CC)

shield. Associated with victory also in Ps 18:2, 35; cf. Pr 30:5. (CSB)

חֹמַת לְהִלָּכִי—The noun חֹמַת describes God as a “shield” again in 30:5 (see also, e.g., Pss 3:4 [ET 3:3]; 28:7; 115:9–11).

“Those who walk in integrity” is a construct chain formed by לְ on the plural participle of הִלָּךְ, “walk,” in construct with the absolute state noun חֹמַת, “integrity.” The construct relationship here includes an adverbial genitive. The phrase is a synonym of יְשָׁרִים, “upright people.” חֹמַת, “integrity,” is a synonym of “righteousness” and is a highly valued attribute in Proverbs, denoting honesty and blamelessness. It recurs with a participle of הִלָּךְ in 10:9; 19:1; 20:7; 28:6; with דַרְךְ, “way,” in 13:6; and as a substantive, “person with integrity,” in 10:29 (cf. 29:10). In 10:29–30 it is parallel with “righteous person” and is contrasted with its antonyms “evildoers” and “wicked people.” A person who walks/lives with “integrity” is pronounced “righteous” in 20:7 and is guarded by “righteousness” in 13:6. The masculine noun חֹמַת is synonymous with the feminine noun חֹמַת in 11:3. It is cognate to the adjectives (29:10) חֹמַת and חֹמַת, “person of integrity, blameless person.” (CC)

integrity. Those with spiritual and moral integrity. This does not imply sinlessness. (CSB)

Hbr *tom*, “perfection,” “completeness,” “innocence.” God enables His people to make sound judgments rooted in His wisdom rather than in the wisdom and norms of the world. (TLSB)

The adjective יָשָׁר, “straight, right,” occurs twenty-five times in Proverbs. Here and often it is used as a substantive, “upright person, just/righteous person.” It refers to a person whose life displays the result of receiving the gifts of divine wisdom and righteousness through faith. (CC)

2:8 *way of His saints*. God guards and guides. Pr contrasts two paths—the way of righteousness and the way of evil (v 12). *Did*: “There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways” (ANF 7:377). (TLSB)

לְנִצָּר אֶרְחוֹת מִשְׁפָּט—The verb נִצָּר, “to protect,” is a synonym of שָׁמַר, “keep, guard,” in 2:8b. The two verbs recur together in 2:11 and also in 4:6; 5:2; 13:3; 16:17; 27:18. (CC)

Here the noun מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” probably involves an ellipsis that refers to people: “to guard [those who walk on] paths of justice.” This fits with 2:7, since its two clauses refer to people (“upright people ... those who walk in integrity”). It also fits with the next clause about “godly ones” and with 2:9, which uses the same noun to describe people: those who “will understand ... justice.” (CC)

הַיִּשְׁתָּדֵף—The adjective יִשְׁתָּדֵף is used substantivally here. It means “faithful, godly” (HALOT) and occurs only here in Proverbs. The plural קִרְיֵי יִשְׁתָּדֵף is the preferred reading here instead of the singular קִרְיֵי יִשְׁתָּדֵף. (CC)

2:9–11 Those who know the Lord and the wisdom he gives will know what course of action to follow (cf. Heb 5:11–14). (CSB)

The second apodosis continues the metaphor of the path, linking it with three attributes that flow from wisdom: “righteousness,” “justice,” and “uprightness” (2:9). The promise of wisdom is expanded in two ways: it will be pleasant (2:10), and it will offer protection for everlasting life so that the son will not end up on the evil path (2:11–12), which leads to everlasting death and perdition (2:18; see also 5:5; 7:27; 8:36; 9:18). (CC)

2:9 *good path*. See “the paths of righteousness” of Ps 23:3. (CSB)

What David described in the most famous of all psalms as “paths of righteousness,” Solomon speaks of as “every good path.” It’s not that we take a road map and plan our whole life. That’s impossible. No, we simply live each new day with the Lord – paying attention to what he says in the Bible and speaking to Him in prayer. This is way of wisdom. (PBC)

2:10 *wisdom* – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

heart. In Hbr thought, the heart is the center not only of emotions but also of capacities such as insight, critical evaluation, and human will. (TLSB)

הַיִּתְבּוֹא חֲכָמָה בְּלִבְךָ—The “heart” (לֵב or לִב) denotes more than the seat of emotions as in English. In Hebrew the heart is the source of emotions such as joy (Is 24:7), fear (Josh 2:11), and despair (Eccl 2:20), and it is also the seat of intellectual capacities such as insight (Prov 2:2) and critical evaluation (Josh 14:7) as well as the locus of the human will (2 Sam 7:3; 1 Ki 8:17). Here divine wisdom enters the heart of Solomon’s son when he believes and lives according to God’s words. The father’s instruction to his son in Proverbs 1–9 often speaks of the son taking wisdom to heart. “Heart” occurs twenty-one times in these chapters and ninety-nine times in Proverbs as a whole. Wisdom is a desirable attribute of the heart for it can guide a person’s entire existence.

Such a wise person is above all else justified, that is, reckoned righteous by God through faith (Gen 15:6). God grants wisdom to those who believe his Word (Prov 2:6). Wisdom transforms the heart, leading to the sanctified life that characterizes a person as wise in his attitude and behavior. (CC)

pleasant to your soul. Just as the words of a wise man are “sweet to the soul” of another (16:24; cf. 3:17). (CSB)

The verb **נָעַם**, “to be pleasant, delightful,” recurs in a positive sense in regard to divine wisdom in 24:25. Foolishness uses it deceptively to advertise the pleasure of sin in 9:17. The cognate noun **נְעִים**, “pleasantness, pleasure,” refers to wisdom’s ways in 3:17 and to gracious words in 15:26 and 16:24. Solomon’s father, David, desired to dwell in Yahweh’s house and temple all his days to gaze upon Yahweh’s “pleasantness” there (Ps 27:4). Since the Jerusalem temple was not constructed during his lifetime, David probably refers to the beatific vision of God in everlasting life in the heavenly temple (cf. Ps 23:6; Rev 3:12; 7:15). The cognate adjective **נְעִים**, “pleasurable, pleasant” (Prov 22:18; 23:8; 24:4) refers to “pleasures” in God’s presence after resurrection in Ps 16:11 (see also Ps 16:6). Compare **עֵדֵן**, *Eden*, “pleasure, delight,” the name of the first paradise (Gen 2:8, 10, 15). (CC)

2:11 *discretion.* Adeptness at good decision making. God guides and empowers this ability through the reading and studying of His Word. (TLSB)

מִן־עֵלְיָךְ—See “מִן־עֵלְיָךְ, ‘Insight, Foresight’ ” in “Wisdom in Proverbs” in the introduction. In this context the word signifies not only insight that allows one to understand the present situation but most importantly “foresight” that allows one to avoid future difficulties (2:12–19). The context here ascribes this quality to God himself since it/he is able to “stand guard over” (**עָלְיָךְ**) the believer and preserve him in salvation. (CC)

watch over ... guard. As God guards the faithful (v. 8). (CSB)

God does not promise that we will never face physical pains and dangers in this life. Wisdom does, however, keep us from those of our own making. Finally, it keeps us spiritually safe forever. (PBC)

2:12–19 Wisdom will save from the enticements of men to follow perverse ways (vv. 12–15) and from the enticements of the adulteress (vv. 16–19). (CSB)

2:12–15 Prov 2:12 begins the first of three sections in the chapter describing the redemptive purpose of wisdom: preservation from this evil path. The evil path is populated by those who have rejected wisdom and adopted the dark ways of sin (2:13–15), in contrast to 2:3–5, where the son is urged to seek wisdom and its enlightenment with understanding and knowledge. The father notes that such wicked people not only enjoy evil, they find joy in its very perversity (2:14; cf. Rom 1:22–32). Their fiendish delight contrasts with the pleasure that the son will find in knowing God’s wisdom, which is “pleasant to your soul” (Prov 2:10). These contrasts are intended to function together to move the son to love wisdom. The promises draw the son toward God and his wisdom, while the description of the evil path is designed to lead the son to reject as harmful the perverse ways of those who engage in the twisted behaviors of sin. This interplay of Law and Gospel is designed to skillfully accomplish the purpose of bringing the son to find comfort and joy in God’s wisdom:

When law and Gospel are opposed to each other, ... the Gospel is ... a comforting and joyful message which does not reprove or terrify but comforts consciences that are frightened by the law, directs them solely to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the delightful proclamation of God's grace and favor acquired through the merits of Christ. (FC Ep V 7) (CC)

2:12 delivering – לְהַצִּילָהּ מִיַּד מְדַבֵּר גַּע—The identical Hiphil (H) infinitive construct with ל and the pronominal suffix -ה and followed by the preposition מן begins 2:16. The Hiphil of לָצַל, “to save, deliver,” occurs ten times in Proverbs. The Niphal (N) in 6:3, 5 has the reflexive sense, “save oneself” from entanglements with one’s neighbor. The meaning of the verb is not always just physical, but usually it is also spiritual and eschatological. It refers to salvation that God bestows already now and that is evident in the life of the redeemed believer. Yet this salvation given by God through the wisdom imparted by his Word (2:6) will continue even after death in the resurrection to everlasting life (e.g., Dan 12:2–3). (CC)

way of evil. Pr often teaches a “two ways” theology: the way of goodness, followed by those who trust in the Lord for salvation, and the way of evil, followed by the ungodly. (TLSB)

מֵאִישׁ מְדַבֵּר תְּהִפּוּכוֹת—Divine wisdom intends to save the believer “from the man who speaks perverse things.” Here the feminine plural noun תְּהִפּוּכוֹת is a true plural, “perverse things.” In 2:14 it is an abstract plural, “perversity,” and it recurs in 6:14; 8:13; 10:31–32; 16:28, 30; 23:33. (CC)

perverted speech. Cf. v. 14. The deceitfulness of men’s speech is also mentioned in 8:13; 10:31–32; 17:20. (CSB)

Literally, “upside down.” (PBC)

2:13–15 These verses are phrased in the plural, referring to evil men and their practices. They give an expanded description of the various kinds of people who are associated with the singular phrase in 2:12b (see the previous textual note). Divine wisdom intends to save the believer also from the kinds of wicked people portrayed in 2:13–15. The translation adds “from” to the start of 2:13 to clarify that the plural participles in 2:13–15, הַעֲזֹבִים, “those who abandon,” and הַשִּׂמְחִים, “those who enjoy,” are loosely in apposition to the phrase with a singular participle אִישׁ מְדַבֵּר, “the man who speaks,” in 2:12b. (CC)

2:13 who forsake – הַעֲזֹבִים אֶת־תּוֹת לְפָר—Normally the article before ע has *qamets* (עֶ-) but הַעֲזֹבִים is an exception (Joüon, § 35 d). Another exception occurs in 2:17. Both verses have Qal (G) participles of עָזַב, “to abandon, leave, forsake.” This verb occurs eleven times in Proverbs and generally signifies unbelief, apostasy from God, and departure from his ways. (CC)

paths of righteousness. The noun יָשָׁר, “straightness, uprightness,” serves as an adjectival genitive in the construct phrase, hence “upright paths.” It is cognate to יְשָׁרִים, “upright people,” in 2:7 and to מִיְשָׁרִים, “uprightness,” in 2:9. (CC)

The Bible associates straight with what is right, just as it uses light to symbolize goodness and darkness to represent evil. (PBC)

ways of darkness. Men love darkness instead of light (see Jn 3:19–21; see also Job 24:15–16; Isa 29:15; Ro 13:12). (CSB)

2:14 rejoice... delight... evil. Like the sinners of 1:10–16. (CSB)

Those who leave the right path for the way of evil eventually come to rejoice and delight in the way they have chosen. Through the effective working of the devil, what repulses at first becomes interesting, then acceptable, and finally a source of sinful delight. Cf Is 5:20. (TLSB)

At first we may find evil repulsive; then we dabble in it and it doesn't seem so bad; finally we join those who call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20) That's why it's critical not to get involved with wicked men in the first place. Psalm 1:1 says basically the same. (PBC)

2:15 *paths are crooked.* See Isa 59:7–8. (CSB)

אֲשֶׁר אָרְחוּ יְהוָה עֲקוּשִׁים—The adjective “crooked” (עֲקוּשִׁים) is an antonym to the words for “straight(ness), upright(ness)” in the preceding textual note. It recurs in 8:8; 11:20; 17:20; 19:1; 22:5; 28:6. The cognate verb עֲקַשׁ, “to twist,” occurs in 10:9 and 28:18. Elsewhere in the OT the adjective עֲקוּשׁ can describe the corrupt sinful heart (Ps 101:4) or a whole twisted generation of unfaithful people (Deut 32:5; cf. Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15). The advent of God in Christ requires—and causes—“the crooked places” to be made straight (τὰ σκολιά, Lk 3:5). (CC)

Are devious – אֲשֶׁר יִלְוֶיךָ בְּמַעֲלֹתָם—This Niphal (N) plural participle of the verb לָו, “depart, deviate,” is used substantivally to denote “devious, perverted things.” Forms of the verb recur in 3:21, 32; 4:21; 14:2 and the cognate noun לְוֹת occurs in 4:24. Solomon uses לָו to drive home the sinister harmfulness of sin against one’s neighbor. He is teaching his son that sinners make conscious decisions to deceive and injure others. Sin has so corrupted all human thought and deliberation (Rom 3:10–18) that the sinners may actually rationalize and justify themselves as beneficent (cf. Jn 16:2; Rom 6:1). (CC)

2:16-19 These verses (2:16–19) continue the father’s second address to his son (2:1–22). Just as the father’s first example of divine wisdom’s purpose was to keep his son safe from the evil man (2:12b, and evil men in 2:13–15), so this second example mentions safety from the evil woman, the adulteress. Her temptation imitates and mirrors the appeal of divine wisdom, which comes from Yahweh’s mouth through his Word (2:6). Similarly, in the NT when the devil tempts Christ, he cites (but misconstrues) the Word of God (Mt 4:1–11; cf. 2 Cor 11:14). (CC)

It is the words of this seductive woman, not her appearance or her actions, that the father depicts as her appeal (“who makes her words smooth,” 2:16). This woman is portrayed as abandoning her husband and her marriage covenant, made before her God (2:17), just as evil men abandon God’s upright paths (2:13). The father depicts the temptation to adultery as a sinkhole, leading inescapably to death (2:18). This description is intended to horrify the son so that he will flee this trap from which there is no chance of escape to obtain life (2:19). (CC)

While the father’s exhortation is first of all a direct warning against breaking the Sixth Commandment, it also serves as a warning against spiritual adultery, straying from God to worship foreign gods or allowing anything to take God’s place, including (but not limited to) one’s sexual desires. This is signaled by the description of the woman as someone who “forgets the covenant of her God,” which first refers to her violation of her marriage covenant (see the second textual note on 2:17). Yet the phraseology reminds the son that straying from one’s spouse has a spiritual counterpart: straying from one’s God, whose covenant at Sinai made the people of Israel his own (Jer 31:32). God’s people were to remain faithful to him just as a spouse is to remain faithful. Adultery and other sexual sins are incompatible with faith, and unless one repents of them, they will prevent a person from entering the eternal kingdom of God (e.g., Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–20; Gal 5:19–21). (CC)

This is why the woman “sinks down to death” and her pathways lead those who sin with her down to the abode of dead souls (Prov 2:18). Surely both Solomon and his son know that adultery does not necessarily result in physical death immediately (although bodily death may be one of its consequences). Yet 2:18 is not simply hyperbole about the consequences of adultery. Instead Solomon is inviting his son and his readers to contemplate the analogy of marriage to the relationship between God and his people, an analogy that is found throughout Scripture. Abandoning God by losing one’s faith (or never receiving faith) is so serious that perishing in unbelief results in an irreversible state of eternal death (Heb 6:4–6). The father urgently calls on his son to consider what he would lose if he were to succumb to the lure of the temptations presented by the world, the devil, and the sinful flesh. They lead away from Christ and his blessings, and toward death and eternal condemnation. (CC)

2:16 *be delighted* – Saves us from such people. It was godly wisdom that saved a discouraged Asaph, who sighed, “I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3) God led him to understand “their final destiny...How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors” (Psalm 73:17-20). (PBC)

לְהַצִּילֶךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה—This verse begins with the same infinitive construct as 2:12a, expressing the purpose of divine wisdom. The father implored his son in 2:10–12 to allow Yahweh to fill his heart with wisdom “to save you from the evil way, from the man ...” (... לְהַצִּילֶךָ מִדֶּרֶךְ רָע מֵאִישׁ, 2:12). Now 2:16 adds the corresponding promise that divine wisdom intends “to save you from the woman ...” (... לְהַצִּילֶךָ מֵאִשָּׁה). (CC)

adulteress. The Hebrew for these terms occurs again in 5:20 and 7:5. The terms mean lit. “stranger” and “foreigner” (cf. 5:10) because anyone other than one’s own wife was to be considered off limits, like a foreigner who worshiped another god (cf. 1Ki 11:1). “Wayward wife” is parallel to “immoral woman” in 6:24 and “prostitute” in 23:27. (CSB)

Examples of women outside the realm of acceptability for God’s child, yet appealing, attractive, and enticing. Solomon’s instruction here is sadly ironic because he was born of the union of King David and Bathsheba, a relationship that began with adultery. Also, sadly, Solomon “loved many foreign women” (1Ki 11:1–8). (TLSB)

This woman is described as זָרָה, the feminine of the adjective זָר, which may be the participle of the verb זָרָה (so BDB), “be a stranger; be foreign.” Describing a person, the adjective signifies someone who is alien or incompatible in some way, either a foreigner or a person who is unauthorized, prohibited, or illicit (*HALOT*). Often translated as “strange,” the point here is that she is a stranger to the son who is being instructed in divine wisdom. It does not mean that she is a “strange woman” in the sense that something is wrong about her appearance or mannerisms. (CC)

There has been much discussion about the identity of this woman. Is she the same as the other seductive women in Proverbs 1–9? The זָרָה is mentioned again in the similar purpose clause in 7:5a. In 5:3, 20 the woman is simply זָרָה, while in 6:24 we find אִשָּׁת רָעָה, “a woman of evil,” that is, “an evil woman,” and in 6:26 זֹנֵה אִשָּׁה, “a woman (who is) a prostitute,” and אִשָּׁת אִישׁ אֲחֵר, “a wife of a[nother] man,” that is, “a married woman.” Prov 7:10 describes “a woman [אִשָּׁה] ... dressed as a prostitute [זֹנֵה].” זָרָה אִשָּׁה in 2:16 and 7:5; זָרָה in 5:20; and אִשָּׁת רָעָה in 6:24 are all parallel to זָרָה אִשָּׁה, “a foreign woman.” (CC)

These are best understood as varying descriptions of the same type of woman, just as the varying descriptions of knowledge, insight, and understanding in 2:10–11 are all aspects of the same concept, wisdom. In describing this woman as a “stranger” and a “foreign woman,” Solomon is not necessarily describing a non-Israelite woman. In fact, this woman is depicted as participating in Israel’s sacrificial system (7:14). Rather, he is indicating that the woman is not his son’s wife and so is “foreign” to his son, and 2:17 implies that she is another man’s wife. She tempts young men with illicit sex, but this would violate the biblical mandate that the marriage of a man and his wife is the only legitimate and holy relationship in which sexual intimacy is permitted by God. (CC)

smooth words. Equal to the “smooth tongue” of 6:24 and the “smooth talk” of 7:21. Cf. 5:3. (CSB)

מִן־הַזָּרָה אֲמַרְיָהּ הַחֲלִיקָה—The identical clause, literally, “from the foreign woman—her words she makes smooth,” recurs in 7:5b. The Hiphil (H) of חֲלַק, “make smooth, slippery, deceptive,” occurs in 2:16; 7:5; 28:23; 29:5, all referring to words or speech. It could be rendered to “flatter” (so KJV) or to attempt verbally to “deceive, seduce.” The related noun חֲלָק, “smoothness, seductiveness” of speech, occurs in 7:21, and the synonymous noun חֲלָקָה is in 6:24. The adjective חֲלִיק, “smooth, deceptive,” refers to speaking in 5:3 and 26:28. (CC)

2:17 companion of her youth. Her husband, whom she married when she was a young woman (cf. Isa 54:6). (CSB)

הַעֲזָבָה אֶלְיוּהָ וְעוֹגְרָיָהּ—The feminine participle of עָזַב may apply to present time, “who abandons, who is now forsaking, leaving,” in contrast to a verbal construction that would clearly refer to past time. This may suggest that the woman is still married to another man, so she is an adulteress, not a divorcee or widower. “The companion of her youth” refers to the woman’s husband. In the biblical era, marriage normally was after physical maturity but still at a relatively young age. The abstract plural עוֹגְרִים, “youth,” is used with suffixes elsewhere to describe the wife of a man’s youth (Prov 5:18; Mal 2:14–15) and a bridegroom betrothed to a virgin in her youth (Joel 1:8). The word is also used figuratively for Israel as Yahweh’s spiritual bride (Is 54:6; Jer 2:2). (CC)

Literally “the lord of her youth.” In Israel women married at an early age, and the man was the head of the house. (PBC)

covenant of her God. Probably the marriage covenant, spoken in God’s presence (see Eze 16:8; Mal 2:14). Alternatively, the breaking of the seventh commandment (Ex 20:14) may be indicated. (CSB)

Her marriage vow—part of her vow to remain faithful to God. God made a “marriage” covenant with His people when He brought them out of Egypt (Jer 31:32). They were to remain faithful to Him, just as husband and wife are to remain faithful to each other. (TLSB)

וְאֶת־בְּרִית־אֱלֹהֶיהָ שָׁכַחָה—This is the only occurrence of בְּרִית in Proverbs. “The covenant of her God” is her marriage. The marriage covenant is not just between a man and woman, but also between both of them and God. Mal 2:14 refers to marriage as a “covenant” (בְּרִית), and Yahweh testifies against any unfaithful husband because God is the one who has joined the spouses (Mal 2:15). שָׁכַחָה is the pausal form of the Qal (G) perfect. The perfect aspect of verbs of cognition is often used with a present meaning, so it is translated as “forgets.” (CC)

2:18–19 Realities intended to inform and warn. Warnings about unfaithfulness to God in issues of sexuality also apply to other aspects of unfaithfulness to God. (TLSB)

2:18 *sinks down to death*. According to 7:27, “her house is a highway to the grave.” A life of immorality leads to the destruction and death of all who are involved (cf. 5:5; 9:18). (CSB)

Her very house is death, because of the deadly entrapment a young man would certainly find there. (TLSB)

הַבַּיִתָּה אֶל־מְנוּת בַּיְהוָה—This means “therefore, she sinks down to death, [which is] her house.” The rare verb שָׁקַט, “sink down, descend,” probably is related to nouns for a “pit” (שִׁקְוָה, שִׁקְוָה, and שִׁקְוָה). Since שָׁקַט is a feminine perfect, the masculine noun בַּיִתָּה cannot be its subject. The woman must be the subject, even though the result is that it becomes difficult to interpret the syntax of אֶל־מְנוּת בַּיְהוָה. However, the syntactical awkwardness is intentional in order to call the son’s attention to the woman’s deadly abode. The LXX translates this difficult clause as ἔθετο γὰρ παρὰ τῷ θανάτῳ τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς, “for she sets her house next to death.” However, הַבַּיִתָּה, “her house,” should be understood as an appositive to מְנוּת, defining “death.” That is, the woman’s “house” is “death.” This is where she lives once she chooses to commit adultery. This image is intended to frighten the son so that he is not attracted to her. (CC)

In OT times, adultery called for the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10). While that isn’t the case today, our newspapers recount many a case where an angry spouse takes matters into his or her hands and commits murder. Even that doesn’t happen, there is always the pangs of conscience adulterers must live with. (PBC)

paths to the departed. The deceased are in the grave (or Sheol), “the chambers of death” (7:27). (CSB)

Emerton proposes that שָׁקַט be repointed to the noun שִׁקְוָה, “pit,” so that the clause would be nominal and mean “for her house [is] a pit (leading) to death.” The implication of the passage would be the same, but it is better to follow the awkward syntax of the clause rather than emend in order to eliminate it. (CC)

הַמְּגֹלְתֵי הַמַּצְפָּאִים—The noun מַצְפָּאִים, which recurs in 9:18 and 21:16, is always plural in the OT and denotes the dead (*HALOT*, b) whose souls have departed their bodies for (9:18) לְאִשׁוֹ. (CC)

2:19 *go to her*. A common euphemism for sex. (TLSB)

כָּל־בָּאֵיָהָּ—The verb בָּא with the preposition אֶל, “to go into, enter,” is a common euphemism for sexual intercourse. The pronominal suffix on the plural participle here serves as an indirect object in lieu of a preposition; כָּל־בָּאֵיָהָּ means “all who go into her” (CC)

Nor do they regain – As usual in Hebrew, the participle is continued by finite verb forms (Joüon, § 121 j), the two negated imperfects later in the verse: לֹא יָשׁוּבוּ, literally, “they will not return,” and לֹא יִשְׁגְּבוּ (from שָׁגַב), literally, “they will not attain, reach.” (CC)

2:20-22 The father’s third and concluding purpose clause (2:20–22) in the chapter once again uses contrast to draw the son to God’s promise. Life, as opposed to the seductress’ trap of death (2:16–19), is the destination of the path that the son is urged to take (2:20–21). At the same time, the son is once again led to reject the sinful behavior of wicked people by the portrayal of their

rejection by God in violent terms: “cut off” and “torn out” (2:22). Unlike God’s active role in conferring the blessing of wisdom in 2:6, the passive verb in 2:22a and the impersonal construction in 2:22b only hint at God as the one who will mete out everlasting punishment to sinners. In this way Solomon emphasizes that God’s desire is to lead the son and all people to wisdom. The God of grace takes no delight in punishing the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32). God is “our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3–4; cf. 2 Pet 3:9). Yet when the wicked refuse to repent, God will judge them according to his justice. (CC)

Remaining in the land or being torn out of it implies more than physical life or death; it points to eternal consequences. Prov 2:21–22 are the first two verses in the book to refer to ארץ, which can refer more narrowly to the “land” or more broadly to the whole “earth.” Solomon’s immediate focus likely is on the land of Israel—the promised land, which Yahweh had graciously given his covenant people as their home. It was in this land that Yahweh dwelt incarnationally in the midst of his people through his temple, where he furnished the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life (see 1 Kings 8). During the era of Solomon, life in this land meant life with the God of Israel, and to be cut off from this land meant separation from God and loss of spiritual life. (CC)

Yet this passage also has universal and eschatological implications. Israel would forfeit the promised land during the exile, and the covenant nation would end forever in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple, never again to be rebuilt. In the NT era, Jesus the Messiah redefined the kingdom of God as his worldwide kingdom of grace: the universal church, the body of Christ. In this light, ארץ points to the whole “earth,” as the Hebrew term is usually understood in Ps 37:11: “the meek/humble will inherit the earth.” Jesus employs the Greek equivalent γῆ in the beatitude:

Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth. (Mt 5:5)

The real goal of God’s people is not any land or city on this earth, nor any position or possessions in this life. Rather, believers look forward to the new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 11; 65:17–25). They “desire a better land, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11:16; cf. Heb 12:22, 13:14; Revelation 21). (CC)

2:20 *walk in the way of the good* – One blessing is walking the same way with others who are headed in the right direction. (PBC)

2:21 *inhabit the land*. Israel had been promised the land of Canaan (Ge 17:8; Dt 4:1), and Ps 37:29 says that “the righteous will inherit the land” (see Ps 37:9, 11; Mt 5:5). (CSB)

integrity. ישרים—For “straight, upright people. (CC)

ישרים—In 1:12 this means “whole.” Here is the first time in Proverbs that the adjective ישר is used substantively in the theological sense of “person of/with integrity, blameless person,” as also in 11:5; 28:10, 18 (cf. 11:20). It connotes forensic justification and so is a synonym of יצחק, “righteous (person),” in 2:20. It implies that all sins are forgiven by grace alone, and it also involves a sanctified life with righteous behavior. ישר is synonymous with the adjective ישר in 29:10. Both are cognate to the noun ישר and ישרות, “integrity, blamelessness,” for which, see the second textual note on 2:7. The NT uses several terms to call believers “blameless.” See, for example, ἄμωμος in Eph 1:4; Col 1:22; Jude 24; Rev 14:5 and ἄμειπτος in

Lk 1:6; Phil 2:15 (cf. 1 Thess 3:13). These passages reveal that this involves both justification and sanctification. It is the work of God in Christ (not human striving) that renders a person blameless and with integrity. See also ἄμωμος, “blameless, without blemish,” applied to the whole church in Eph 5:27. (CC)

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made a similar promise, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Those who humbly entrust their lives to God enjoy His blessings in whatever land they live. Indeed whole nations prosper and grow strong where the gospel flourishes. (PBC)

2:22 wicked – וְרָשָׁעִים מֵאַרְצָא יִכָּרְתוּ—This is the first of seventy-eight occurrences of the adjective רָשָׁע in Proverbs. It means “wicked ... guilty of hostility to God or his people ... guilty of sin, against either God or man” (BDB). Usually the adjective is used as a substantive, as here: “wicked people.” (CC)

rooted out of it. In Dt 28:63 God warned that if the people refuse to obey him, they “will be uprooted from the land.” Evil men and their offspring will be cut off (Ps 37:9, 28). (CSB)

In Proverbs כָּרַת is always used in the Niphal (N), which has the passive meaning “be cut off” (2:22; 10:31; 23:18; 24:14). The eschatological implication of the verb is clear in 23:18 and 24:14, which refer to future, end-time hope. For the wicked to be “cut off” refers not only to temporal death but also to everlasting separation from God and his life (cf. Gen 17:14; Ex 31:14; Num 15:30–31). (CC)

Treacherous – וְיִבְזֹנְדִים יִסְתְּרוּ מִמְּנֵהָ—The verb בָּגַד means “deal treacherously with” (HALOT, 1) or “act deceitfully, faithlessly.” In Proverbs it always occurs as a participle used substantively, “treacherous people” (also 11:3, 6; 13:2, 15; 23:28; and the singular in 21:18; 22:12; 25:19). The verb can refer to violating the covenant with God (Hos 6:7; cf. Is 48:8); to acting treacherously toward other members of God’s people so as to violate his covenant (Mal 2:10); or to being unfaithful to the marriage covenant, which is an offense against God (Mal 2:14–15; cf. Jer 3:8, 11, 20; Prov 2:17). (CC)

rooted out of it – The verb הִסִּיף, “tear away/out,” occurs elsewhere only in the covenant curse in Deut 28:63 that unfaithful Israel will be torn from the promised land; in Ps 52:7 (ET 52:5); and again in Proverbs in 15:25. The Qal (G) imperfect here יִסְתְּרוּ, with an active meaning, is preceded by its direct object, וְיִבְזֹנְדִים, literally, “they shall tear out the treacherous (people) from it [the land].” The impersonal verb is best translated as a passive (GKC, § 144 g; cf. Waltke-O’Connor, § 23.6.1d) with its object as the subject: “treacherous people will be torn out from it.” (CC)

Some five centuries after Moses and following the death of King Solomon, the people’s disregard for the warning bore dreadful fruit. The nation fell from God’s ways, was torn in two, and eventually saw both the northern and southern kingdoms carried into exile – the northern never to return. (PBC)

Ch 2 Two roads exist for every person—the way of righteousness and the way of evil. The way of evil is populated with those who reject God and His good and gracious will. The way of evil leads to certain and eternal death. The way of righteousness is traveled by God’s forgiven children through faith in Christ Jesus, kept on the narrow path (Mt 7:13–14) by the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The path of righteousness leads to certain and eternal life.
• Lord, keep us faithful in reading and studying Your Word and in receiving Your grace through the Sacraments. Amen. (TLSB)