



## Proverbs - Chapter Two

### **II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father's Invitation to Wisdom (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Two

Men are invited to seek wisdom because it teaches those principles by which they may obtain God's guidance and avoid the society and influence of the wicked, whose pernicious courses are described.

#### **II.c Proverbs 2:1-22 - The Value of Wisdom**

The appeal consists of one long sentence intricately structured in both its grammar (it is a conditional sentence: If, then) and its vocabulary (it contains repeated words as well as sets of words that refer in different ways to the same thing). The function of this structure is to aid in communicating the message of the appeal: setting one's heart on wisdom (vv.1-4) is possible because the Lord gives it, and he does so for the purpose of protecting the path of those who fear him, a path that leads ultimately to the blessed end of the righteous (vv.21-22).

- <sup>1</sup> My child, if you accept my words  
and treasure up my commandments within you,
- <sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;
- <sup>3</sup> if you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding;
- <sup>4</sup> 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.

### Proverbs 2:1-5

My child, if you accept my words. In the first chapter of Proverbs Solomon began to speak to his son, instructing him in the ways of wisdom. Here he continues the teaching, appealing to his son to accept my words and to treasure up my commandments. Wisdom can never benefit if it is not received and treasured. Derek Kidner commented, “The search, strenuous as it must be, is not unguided. Its starting-point is revelation – specific (words) and practical (commandments); its method is not one of free speculation, but of treasuring and exploring received teachings so as to penetrate to their principles.”

On ‘treasure up my commandments’ Adam Clarke commented, “He who has the rule of his duty only in his Bible and in his head, is not likely to be a steady, consistent character; his heart is not engaged, and his obedience, in any case, can be only forced, or done from a sense of duty: it is not the obedience of a loving, dutiful child, to an affectionate father. But he who has the word of God in his heart, works from his heart; his heart goes with him in all things, and he delights to do the will of his heavenly Father, because his law is in his heart.”

And inclining your heart to understanding. This implies effort and application: <<*The words of the wise: Incline your ear and hear my words, and apply your mind to my teaching*>> (Proverbs 22:17), and: <<*Apply your mind to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge*>> (Proverbs 23:12). The heart must be applied to understanding. It will not happen by accident. This wisdom, discernment, and understanding must be sought out as if it were silver and hidden treasures.

If you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding. The protasis, i.e. the if-clause of the conditional, is set out in these verses and calls upon the listener or reader to seek wisdom diligently. Where Wisdom is pictured calling out in the streets in Proverbs 1:20-21, these verses indicate that wisdom is something to be sought after from the Lord: <<*If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you*>> (James 1:5).

On ‘if you seek it like silver’ Humankind has a history of searching for hidden treasure and precious metals and gems. However, they do not always benefit from the search: <<*who long for death, but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures*>> (Job 3:21), yet seeking the right sort of treasure, such as wisdom here, can bring great joy: <<*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field*>> (Matthew 13:44). Clarke

remarked, “How do men seek money? What will they not do to get rich? Reader, seek the salvation of thy soul as earnestly as the covetous man seeks wealth; and be ashamed of thyself, if thou be less in earnest after the true riches than he is after perishing wealth.”

**Then you will understand the fear of the Lord.** Solomon established the principle that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom in Proverbs 1:7. Here he teaches that without the effort to seek out wisdom, people will lack in their **fear of the Lord** and **knowledge of God**: <<*See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!’*>> (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

- 6 For the Lord gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
- 7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
- 8 guarding the paths of justice  
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.

### **Proverbs 2:6-8**

**For the Lord gives wisdom.** The first result of heeding wisdom is that one will <<*understand the fear of the LORD*>> (v.5). This explains why the fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom, and an essential aspect of the pursuit of wisdom: <<*With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding*>> (Job 12:13), and: <<*Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart*>> (Psalm 119:34). True wisdom is found in him, and he gives it. This knowledge is possible only because the Lord gives it to the upright (vv.6-7). Thus, while wisdom is to be sought diligently and cultivated in practice, it is not something merited by the actions of an individual. Verse 8 states that the purpose of the gift of wisdom is to protect the paths of the saints. On wisdom’s foundation in God’s gracious covenant, refer to Introduction: Purpose on the website.

**From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.** The most significant way God gives wisdom is from the words of his mouth. His word reveals knowledge and understanding. In his word **he stores up sound wisdom for the upright.**

**He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly.** God not only gives wisdom in his word; he actively works to defend, guard and preserve those who walk in his ways:

<<*These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God*>> (Genesis 6:9), <<*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly*>> (Psalm 84:11), <<*And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints*>> (1 Thessalonians 3:13), and: <<*For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain*>> (Titus 1:7).

- <sup>9</sup> Then you will understand righteousness and justice  
and equity, every good path;  
<sup>10</sup> for wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
<sup>11</sup> prudence will watch over you;  
and understanding will guard you.

### Proverbs 2:9-11

The second result of heeding wisdom is that one gains an understanding of righteousness and justice and equity because wisdom takes root in the heart and acts to protect the person who embraces it. There is a reversing sequence between v.8 and v.11: guarding, and preserving or watching in v.8; and watch, guard (v.11), that links the 'then' clause in vv.5-8 with the 'then' clause in vv.9-11, and indicates that the means by which the Lord will be: <<*preserving the way of his faithful ones*>> (v.8) is through the wisdom and understanding he will give them.

Clarke commented, "He who is taught of God understands the whole law of justice, mercy, righteousness, and truth; God has written this on his heart. He who understands these things by books only is never likely to practise or profit by them."

Every good path is the Hebrew word *magal* refers to cart tracks or the ruts made by a wagon. While the earth is soft, wagon wheels create the trails that others are obliged to follow after it dries and hardens.

For wisdom will come into your heart. Solomon mentioned the idea of protection relevant to wisdom (vv.7-8). Now he explains that something happens when a person gains wisdom: <<*Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding, but it is not known in the heart of fools*>> (Proverbs 14:33), when they value God's knowledge, i.e. it is pleasant to your soul.

Prudence will watch over you or discretion will preserve you. Everyone needs God's protection to gain wisdom (vv.7-8), but wisdom also protects them. Understanding will keep them from many foolish and harmful consequences in life: <<*Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you*>> (Proverbs 4:6).

### Introduction to Proverbs 2:12-20

Following the description of the wisdom that the Lord grants (vv.9-11), this section gives three statements of its purpose: it delivers from the deception of those on the evil path (vv.12-15), it delivers from being flattered into unfaithfulness (vv.16-19), and it directs one instead to walk in the way that is both true and good (v.20).

- 12 It will save you from the way of evil,  
from those who speak perversely,  
13 who forsake the paths of uprightness  
to walk in the ways of darkness,  
14 who rejoice in doing evil  
and delight in the perverseness of evil;  
15 those whose paths are crooked,  
and who are devious in their ways.

### Proverbs 2:12-15

It will save you from the way of evil. Wisdom will keep a person from evil ways, and from associating with those who speak perversely. Fallen human nature may be attracted to perverse things, but wisdom will guard people from that path, from those who leave the paths of uprightness or righteousness.

Those who walk the wicked path are described as those who speak perversely (v.12), who rejoice in what is ultimately harmful (v.14), and thus deceive themselves while seeking to entrap others; refer to Proverbs 1:10-19.

Who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil. Fallen nature is not only attracted to what is evil and perverse, it rejoices and delights in it. Shame is cast away and what is wrong and twisted is celebrated. This celebration of perversity is not unique to modern times, but it certainly marks this present age.

Those whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. Wisdom protects a person from these evil men. If not protected by wisdom, their crooked ways will come to harm them, and they will suffer from their devious character:

<<*The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is right*>>  
(Proverbs 21:8).

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

#### Proverbs 2:16-20

You will be saved from the loose woman. Like those who walk the crooked path in the preceding description (vv.12-15), a woman who seeks to entice a man to adultery both practices deception, i.e. she flatters with smooth words, and is herself deceived for her way leads down to death. Here Solomon especially spoke to his son (v.1), who could be easily deceived and trapped by a loose woman. Wisdom could protect him from her: <<*I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:26).

On smooth words Clarke remarked, “*Hechelikhah*, she that smoothes with her words. The original intimates the glib, oily speeches of a prostitute. The English lick is supposed to be derived from the original word.”

**The usual transliteration for ‘smooth words’ is amarayha hechelika.**

Loose woman is literally ‘strange woman’ and adulteress is literally ‘foreign woman.’ ‘Strange’ is likely used here in the sense of ‘forbidden’ or ‘unauthorised’ (the use of the same word in a different context in Leviticus 10:1) since the description that follows in v.17 refers to someone who has forsaken another relationship. Likewise, ‘foreign’ is probably used not in the sense of being a member of another nation but rather of being a member of another household.

The parallel description of forgetting her sacred covenant along with forsaking the partner of her youth indicates that the covenant being referred to here is her

marriage vow: <<*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*>> (Genesis 2:24), and: <<*You ask, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant*>> (Malachi 2:14). The immoral woman Solomon had in mind had a past record of disloyalty and unfaithfulness.

Some commentators believe the sacred covenant to refer to the woman breaking her vow to the Lord as seen in: <<*When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord’*>> (Hosea 1:2).

For her way leads down to death. This is an important part of wisdom’s protection, to see where a path leads. Time with the flattering seductress seems wonderful, but wisdom helps a person to understand where it leads and that is down to death: physical, moral or spiritual may be in view. Clarke recorded, “The woman who abandons herself to prostitution soon contracts, and generally communicates, that disease, which, above all others, signs the speediest and most effectual passport to the invisible world.”

Those who go to her never come back. As with many statements in the Proverbs, this is not an absolute promise, but a true principle. Solomon had seen many go down the path of death with an immoral woman, never to return to the way of wisdom. ‘Who go to her’ is translated <<*go in to*>> her in Genesis 16:2 and <<*went in to*>> them in Genesis 6:4 as specifically referring to sexual intercourse.

Nor do they regain the paths of life. Jesus teaches of the necessity to find and remain on the right path of life: <<*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it*>> (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Bible’s wisdom is much more sophisticated than much of popular thinking in today’s world. Today there is the tendency to view things without nuance; for example, to think of all women as victims of all men. This rejects the idea of the immoral woman, thinking that if there is a sexual liaison between a man and a woman, he must be the perpetrator and she must be the victim. The Bible recognises that human beings and human relationships are far more complicated than that. Kidner observed, “Both these terms literally mean foreigner or stranger; i.e. in such a context (17b), ‘one who is outside the circle of [a man’s] proper relations, that is, a harlot or an adulteress’.”

<sup>21</sup> For the upright will abide in the land,  
and the innocent will remain in it;

22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

### Proverbs 2:21-22

As vv.18-19 refer to the paths of death and life to indicate where these paths ultimately lead, the upright will abide in the land also looks not simply to the possibility of long life on earth but to the inheritance to which the path is headed; this is contrasted with the wicked being cut off from the land. For a similar reference to the land used in the context of wisdom language referring to the way of the wicked and the righteous, refer to the comment made on Psalm 37:11. Solomon reminded his son of the consequences of the path of the seductress. It invites the discipline or the judgement of God, who according to his covenant with Israel promised that the upright will abide in the land, but the wicked will be cut off from it. These consequences give a person a clear choice - one or the other: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).