PROVERBS

A Hebrew Literary Translation - Pilot Edition

Translation first. Connections second.

This working edition aims to preserve Hebrew parallelism, concrete imagery, and literary texture. Parentheses appear only where a second rendering exposes meaning that the main English line would otherwise conceal. Interpretive and intertextual connections are kept separate from lexical translation.

Current pilot: Chapters 1-3. These establish the house style for the planned complete Proverbs volume (31 chapters).

Divine name: YHWH is retained rather than silently replaced with “the LORD.” Hebrew terms are transliterated only when the term itself matters.

CHAPTER 1

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

2 To know wisdom and disciplined instruction, to discern words of understanding;

3 to receive instruction in wise conduct - in righteousness, justice, and uprightness;

4 to give shrewdness to the inexperienced, to the young - knowledge and discretion.

5 Let the wise hear, and increase in learning; let the discerning acquire skill in guidance,

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

7 The fear *(reverent awe)* of YHWH is the beginning *(first principle)* of knowledge; wisdom and disciplined instruction fools despise.

8 Hear, my son, the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the teaching *(Torah)* of your mother;

9 for they are a graceful wreath upon your head, and pendants about your neck.

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

11 If they say: “Come with us. Let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent for no cause.

12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, whole, like those descending into the Pit.

13 Every precious treasure we will find; we will fill our houses with plunder.

14 Cast your lot among us - one purse shall belong to us all.”

15 My son, do not walk the road with them; hold back your foot from their path.

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

17 For in vain is the net spread before the eyes of every bird.

18 Yet they lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives.

19 Such are the paths of everyone greedy for unjust gain: it takes away the life of the one who possesses it.

20 Wisdom *(literally, “Wisdoms”)* cries aloud in the streets; in the public squares she lifts her voice.

21 Above the clamor she calls out; at the entrances of the city gates she speaks her words:

22 “How long, you inexperienced ones, will you love being inexperienced? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?

23 Turn back at my correction! Look - I will pour out my spirit *(breath)* upon you; I will make my words known to you.

24 But I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid heed.

25 You cast aside all my counsel and wanted none of my correction.

26 So I, too, will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when the thing you dread comes -

27 when the thing you dread comes like a storm, and your calamity arrives like a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you.

28 Then they will call to me, but I will not answer. They will seek me earnestly *(seek me early)*, but they will not find me,

29 because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of YHWH.

30 They wanted none of my counsel; they despised every correction of mine.

31 So they will eat from the fruit of their own way and be filled to fullness with their own schemes.

32 For the waywardness of the inexperienced will kill them, and the complacent ease *(prosperity)* of fools will destroy them.

33 But whoever listens to me will dwell securely, at ease, without terror of evil."

Connections

Fear and beginning. The Hebrew yir'at YHWH carries fear, awe, and reverent recognition. Re'shit can mark a beginning and also a foundational first principle.

Wisdom in public. Wisdom is grammatically feminine and is personified as a public voice. The form ḥokhmot is morphologically plural, giving the opening cry an intensified texture that ordinary English cannot reproduce cleanly.

Fruit of one's way. The judgment in vv. 31-32 is organic: a chosen way bears fruit, and the person eventually eats what that way produces.

CHAPTER 2

1 My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commandments within you,

2 inclining your ear to wisdom, turning your heart toward understanding;

3 yes, if you call out for discernment and lift your voice for understanding;

4 if you seek her like silver and search for her as for hidden treasures,

5 then you will understand the fear of YHWH and find the knowledge of God.

6 For YHWH gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

7 He stores up sound wisdom *(effective 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 faithful ones *(ḥasidim: those of covenant loyalty)*.

9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice and uprightness - every good path.

10 For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will become pleasant to your soul.

11 Discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you,

12 delivering you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks twisted things,

13 from those who abandon the paths of uprightness to walk in ways of darkness,

14 who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the twistedness of evil,

15 whose paths are crooked and whose ways are devious.

16 It will deliver you from the strange woman *(the forbidden woman)*, from the foreign woman who makes her words smooth,

17 who forsakes the companion *(intimate partner)* of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

18 For her house sinks down toward death, and her paths toward the shades *(Rephaim: the dead of the underworld)*.

19 None who go to her return, 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 dwell in the land, and those of integrity will remain in it;

22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be torn from it.

Connections

Heart. In Hebrew anthropology the heart is not merely the seat of emotion; it is also a center of thought, intention, judgment, and will.

Land and embodiment. Eretz means land/earth, not body. Yet within the larger scriptural web, land, dust, embodied humanity, life, exile, death, and return continually echo one another. Adam and adamah belong to that wider network even though eretz is a different lexeme.

Descent. The strange woman's house descends toward death and the Rephaim. The imagery makes her path an approach to the underworld, not merely a bad social choice.

CHAPTER 3

1 My son, do not forget my teaching *(Torah)*, but let your heart keep my commandments;

2 for length of days and years of life and peace *(shalom: wholeness, well-being)* they will add to you.

3 Do not let steadfast love *(ḥesed: covenant loyalty)* and faithfulness leave you; bind them around your neck, write them upon the tablet of your heart.

4 Then you will find favor and good understanding in the eyes of God and humankind.

5 Trust in YHWH with all your heart, and do not lean upon your own understanding.

6 In all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear YHWH and turn away from evil.

8 It will be healing to your body *(literally, your navel)* and refreshment to your bones.

9 Honor YHWH with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;

10 then your storehouses will be filled with abundance, and your vats will burst with new wine.

11 My son, do not reject the discipline of YHWH, and do not loathe his correction;

12 for the one YHWH loves, he corrects, as a father the son in whom he delights.

13 Blessed *(deeply flourishing)* is the human who finds wisdom, the person who gains understanding,

14 for her profit is better than the profit of silver, and her yield better than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; in her left, riches and honor.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace *(shalom)*.

18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

19 By wisdom YHWH founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens.

20 By his knowledge the deeps were split open, and the clouds drip down dew.

21 My son, do not let these slip from your sight; guard sound wisdom and discretion.

22 They will be life to your soul *(nephesh: your living self)* and grace around your neck.

23 Then you will walk your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.

24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

25 Do not fear sudden terror, nor the devastation of the wicked when it comes,

26 for YHWH will be your confidence, and he will keep your foot from being caught.

27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due *(those who possess a claim to it)* when it is within the power of your hand to do it.

28 Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back; tomorrow I will give it,” when you have it with you.

29 Do not devise harm against your neighbor while he dwells securely beside you.

30 Do not contend with someone without cause when he has done you no harm.

31 Do not envy a violent man, and do not choose any of his ways;

32 for the crooked are an abomination to YHWH, but his intimate counsel *(confidential friendship)* is with the upright.

33 The curse of YHWH is upon the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.

34 Toward scoffers, he himself scoffs, but to the humble *(afflicted)* he gives grace.

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

Connections

Written on the heart. Ḥesed and faithfulness are bound to the person and written on the heart. Instruction is becoming inwardly embodied rather than remaining merely external.

Navel and bones. Verse 8 is strikingly physical. The Hebrew names the navel and the bones, locating wisdom's healing in embodied life.

Tree of life and creation. Wisdom is a tree of life in v. 18, and immediately afterward YHWH founds the earth by wisdom. Edenic life and cosmic ordering are placed side by side.

Nephesh. Nephesh is the living self or living being, not simply an immaterial soul. Genesis 2:7 describes the earth-formed human becoming a living nephesh when divine breath enters him.

Translation Method

1. The Masoretic Hebrew text governs the translation. Familiar English Bible phrasing is not treated as controlling where the Hebrew can be heard more directly.

2. Beauty matters. Hebrew poetry works through parallelism, repetition, concrete images, sound, and compressed syntax. The English should read as literature, not as a word-for-word decoding exercise.

3. Parentheses must earn their place. A parenthetical alternative is included only when a materially important Hebrew sense would otherwise disappear.

4. Literal meaning and scriptural connections are distinguished. A word's lexical meaning is not expanded merely because another biblical image is theologically suggestive. Connections such as Adam/adamah, land, dust, embodiment, Eden, temple, exile, Wisdom, and tree-of-life imagery are explored after the translation.

5. This is a working translation. Difficult readings should remain open to revision as the complete volume is built and terminology is harmonized across the book.

Source text note

The translation is oriented to the Masoretic Text. For textual checking, the Hebrew-English presentation of Mechon-Mamre and the public-domain JPS 1917 tradition are useful comparison witnesses; the English wording here is intentionally recast according to the translation method above.