



A PROVERB A DAY
IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

Compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline



“What a marvelously conceived and well-executed project! Follow master teacher Jonathan Kline as he introduces the reader to the too often neglected book of Proverbs, demonstrates the value of its pithy sayings and aphorisms, and teaches Hebrew grammar and vocabulary all in a single stroke. The organization of the book allows all this to unfold in the most pedagogically beneficial way: Kline begins with the verses constructed from the most basic and common words, and only toward book’s end does one encounter those proverbs that include rare lexical items. Students and scholars at all stages of learning will profit from this invaluable companion to the book of Proverbs.”

—**Gary A. Rendsburg, Blanche and Irving Laurie
Professor of Jewish History, Rutgers University**

“Acquiring wisdom requires tedious grappling with proverbs, sayings, and riddles (Proverbs 1:6), many of them terse and obscure—some virtually impenetrable. Having navigated the path ahead of us, Kline is our able tutor on a difficult but rewarding journey. Every bit as clever as the sayings themselves, this book is part Hebrew grammar, part devotional, part poetry, and part introduction to wisdom literature. This little book achieves a style of translation that the eminent Hebrew translator Robert Alter believes is sadly lacking in our modern English Bibles.”

—**Ryan P. O’Dowd, author of *Proverbs*
(*The Story of God Bible Commentary*) and co-author of
*Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction***

“Jonathan Kline breathes new life into the book of Proverbs through this practical, smart guide. Both a devotional and a language tool, *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* gently leads its users through difficult syntax and at times perplexing content, giving us more than enough each day to pronounce in Hebrew, to read, and to think about throughout the day. Students, seminarians, and pastors who have taken even a year or two of Hebrew will be able to track with the language of Proverbs through Kline’s expert guidance. I highly recommend this book both as a language-learning tool and as a year-long devotional journey through the wisdom of Proverbs.”

—**Brian R. Doak
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
George Fox University**

“Thank you, Jonathan Kline, for this helpful and carefully presented guide to reading Proverbs in Hebrew one day at a time. I enthusiastically recommend this book to all who want to keep up and improve their Hebrew skills. Not only will the reader’s language ability grow, but so will their knowledge of the book of Proverbs. If you want to grow in wisdom, read Proverbs; and if you want to grow in your understanding of Proverbs, read *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew*.”

—**Tremper Longman III, Distinguished Scholar and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Westmont College**

“This book has so many good qualities to commend it: it is informed, it will encourage flagging Hebrew readers, it is brief enough to be doable for most of us—and even more, it helps us to tap daily into the glories of the wisdom culture that comes to expression in these proverbs. Ours is a world swamped by everything new, while Proverbs takes us into a world where the old is ever renewable. Daily ponderings of wisdom make for a wise person.”

—**Scot McKnight, Professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary**

“Kline understands that proverbs are meant for daily use, to be read regularly and continually pondered. *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* facilitates that practice and reminds readers of the challenge, the intriguing nature, and the fun of these Hebrew sayings.”

—**Arthur J. Keefer, Chaplain and Teacher of Theology Eton College, United Kingdom**

“*A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* encourages readers to digest select biblical proverbs slowly in order to contemplate their often subtle and multilayered meanings. . . . This handy workbook forces readers to realize that Hebrew texts cannot be read like Twitter accounts, but must be mined carefully for their intellectual depths. It is ideal for beginning students or informed lay readers who want to improve their knowledge of Hebrew and their appreciation for the sophisticated wisdom of the Israelites.”

—**Scott B. Noegel Professor of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies University of Washington**

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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
<i>A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew</i>	1
Alphabetical Index of Hebrew Words	367
Frequency Index of Hebrew Words	379
Index of Verses from the Book of Proverbs	389

PREFACE

A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew has been designed to help you mull over, chew on, and slowly digest one verse from the book of Proverbs on a regular basis (ideally each day, as the book's title suggests).¹ Like the delicious morsels of a gourmet meal (to continue the alimentary analogy, and to play on the image found in 18:8 and 26:22), the proverbs that have been bequeathed to us from ancient Israel are best appreciated and internalized by savoring them slowly and in small quantities. This is true for at least two reasons. First, the primary purpose of these sayings is to shape the reader's or listener's thinking, character, and actions, and an excellent way to facilitate such personal transformation is to reflect on—and, as need be, puzzle over—one of the proverbs in a meditative spirit throughout the course of an entire day (or longer). Second, it is helpful to read the proverbs in a slow and focused manner simply because they can be difficult to understand, on account of the fact that—certainly in the original, and even sometimes in translation—they are terse and at times cryptic, ambiguous, or polysemous in nature.

Indeed, there are a number of specific reasons why the biblical proverbs can be hard to comprehend, even for those who are able to read other poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible without too much difficulty. While some of the proverbs speak to us directly on account of their universality (e.g., 12:18, “There's one who speaks rashly, like sword thrusts” [Day 295]), others are more obscure given the cultural and temporal

1. Each page is labeled with a day number (from 1 to 365), a date (from January 1 to December 31), and a week number (from Week 1 to Week 52). The book is thus designed so that you can work through it in a calendar year (whether starting on January 1 or any other date), though of course you need not use it according to this scheme.

gulf that separates us from the ancient Israelites.² Occasionally we come across idioms in these adages whose meanings are not intuitive to us: for example, “hand to hand” (Prov 11:21 [Day 240]; 16:5 [Day 165]) or “to dig evil” (Prov 16:27 [Day 242]). At other times we encounter difficulties of syntax: for example, when a nominal predicate (generally the more narrow category) precedes a nominal subject (typically the broader category), which is the opposite of standard English order (see, e.g., 15:27 [Day 354]). In some instances the basic meanings of the individual words in a proverb are clear enough, but how the words work together to create a meaningful utterance may not be immediately obvious—as, for example, in Prov 20:6a (רַב־אָדָם? קָרָא אִישׁ חֲסִידוֹ), found on Day 51. And on still other occasions, a proverb’s vocabulary and syntax may both be straightforward, but its meaning as a whole may be ambiguous (a well-known example being Prov 22:6 [Day 210]).

As if all this were not enough, a final factor that can make it difficult to understand these ancient adages of the sages is that some, perhaps many, of them (especially the one-verse sayings in chapters 10–29) appear to be largely or even completely unconnected to the others that surround them in their present, canonical arrangement. Hence, unlike in most parts of the Bible, in Proverbs 10–29 context usually does not offer very much help for understanding what vocabulary, imagery, or subject matter to expect in a given verse. That said, scholars do acknowledge the presence of small clusters of sayings in this corpus that are related to each other by sound, vocabulary, or meaning; and occasionally the interplay between two juxtaposed proverbs is in fact essential for grasping their nature.³

2. See, for example, the verses that talk about “standing surety” or making pledges—11:15 (Day 279), 17:18 (Day 198), and 20:16 (Day 333)—or 20:26 (Day 219), which uses the image of the king rolling a wheel over evildoers, as if they were grain undergoing threshing.

3. Most famously, perhaps, 26:4–5—the proverbs about answering a fool according to his folly—reflect the fact that the same action can be wise in some situations but unwise in others. On proverb clusters, see especially Knut M. Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver: An Interpretation of Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10:1–22:16* (BZAW 273; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001); for a brief over-

Nevertheless, most commentators have not been able to discern a large or detailed structure in these chapters.⁴

When all of the aforementioned obstacles are compounded by the normal challenges that most contemporary students of ancient Hebrew encounter when they try to read any portion of the biblical text in its original language, many give up the prospect of ever reading the biblical proverbs in Hebrew. *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* is designed to help you overcome these hurdles by empowering you to read this part of the biblical corpus with confidence and understanding. It does so by providing one verse on each page and everything you need to work through the verse on your own: context-specific glosses for each of the words, parsings for all verb forms (including participles), and a full translation of the verse.

The Verses

This book presents all but ten of the 375 verses that comprise “The Proverbs of Solomon” (10:1), the section that spans 10:1 to 22:16, which is the largest generally recognized collection of sayings found in the book. *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* therefore contains about 40 percent of the text of the book of Proverbs—that is, 365 of the book’s 915 verses. Thus, by the time you have worked through the present volume, you should feel well equipped to read the rest of the book of Proverbs in Hebrew with confidence.

As is well known, some of the verses in Proverbs are identical, or (more often) nearly so, to other verses in the book. In order to whittle down the 375 verses in 10:1–22:16 to fit the present book’s 365-day scheme, I have taken advantage of the existence of (nearly) verbatim sayings by

view, see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 477–83. A helpful recent discussion on this topic, specifically as it relates to the proverbs that speak about pain, is Ryan P. O’Dowd, “Pain and Danger: Unpleasant Sayings and the Structure of Proverbs,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80 (2018): 631–34.

4. O’Dowd, “Pain and Danger,” 631.

omitting from this book the ten verses in this corpus that are identical to (in one case) or most nearly identical to (in the other nine cases) other verses in the corpus.⁵

The verses in this book are presented not in canonical order but rather according to the number of times the words they contain appear in Prov 10:1–22:16. That is to say, the verses with the highest number of frequently occurring words are located at the beginning, and the verses with the highest number of infrequently occurring words are located at the end.⁶ The result of this organizational scheme is that you will continue to encounter the same words over and over as you make your way through the book, with the more frequently occurring ones fronted in the early pages to help you master the vocabulary found in Prov 10:1–22:16 efficiently.⁷ That said, the difficulty of the morphology and syntax

5. Specifically, I have omitted 11:4 (~ 10:2), 11:7 (~ 10:28), 14:27 (~ 13:14), 15:20 (~ 10:1), 15:22 (~ 11:14), 16:25 (= 14:12), 17:22 (~ 15:13), 19:9 (~ 19:5), 20:23 (~ 11:1), and 21:2 (~ 16:2). For a full list of similar verses in the book of Proverbs, see Daniel C. Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 34–59; see also, more recently, Knut M. Heim, *Poetic Imagination in Proverbs: Variant Repetitions and the Nature of Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

6. Specifically, all of the words found on Days 1–3 occur in Prov 10:1–22:16 seven times or more; therefore, you will encounter each of these words repeatedly as you continue through the book. All of the words appearing on Days 4–8 occur in Prov 10:1–22:16 six times or more; the words on Days 9–14, five times or more; the words on Days 15–26, four times or more; the words on Days 27–65, three times or more; and the words on Days 66–151, twice or more. Beginning with Day 152, each verse contains at least one word that occurs only once in Prov 10:1–22:16 (though the other words found on Days 152 through 365 may occur any number of times in the corpus). Nevertheless, these verses too (i.e., the ones comprising roughly the latter three-fifths of the book) are ordered according to how often you will continue to encounter the words they contain (the words on Day 152 having the largest combined total number of occurrences in Prov 10:1–22:16 and the words on Day 365 having the smallest combined total number of occurrences).

7. For those interested in exactly how many times each Hebrew word found in this book occurs in Prov 10:1–22:16, I have included a Frequency Index of Hebrew Words at the back of the book (note that this index groups homonyms together).

of the verses in this book does not proceed from easiest to hardest (indeed, such an organizational scheme would be difficult, if not impossible, to create). Thus, you will notice that, with respect to morphology and syntax, the verses will vary in difficulty as you make your way through the book. From a pedagogical standpoint, however, such variation can in fact be considered an advantage.

The Glosses

When translating aphoristic poetry, there is often more than one legitimate or helpful way to render a given word. Therefore, for many of the Hebrew words in this book, I have provided more than one gloss (using a slash to separate alternatives, or double slashes when a single slash would be ambiguous), in order to give you a sense of the possible meanings or nuances that I believe may be in view in the verse in question, leaving you to ponder and judge their relative value for the context. I have erred on the side of inclusivity in this regard, though to reiterate, I have taken care to include only glosses that I consider to be at least potentially appropriate to the context (even if some may be more relevant than others).⁸

I have also erred on the side of literalness in my glosses, in order to help you engage as closely as possible with the Hebrew text and in order to highlight grammatical features that, being odd or unexpected from an English-speaker's point of view, are sometimes smoothed over or obscured in standard translations. Examples of this include my use of (odd-sounding) English plurals to gloss words that are plural in Hebrew but that English translations tend to render as singulars (e.g., "envoy of faithfulnesses/honesties" in Prov 13:17 [Day 231]), and my use of past-tense glosses for *wayyiqtol* verbs (of which there are only seven in

8. By including a number of glosses for many words in this book, I do not mean to encourage the so-called "illegitimate totality transfer" error, whereby one concludes that all possible meanings of a given word are, or at least might be, relevant for a specific context. Instead, I have provided multiple glosses in order to allow *you* to do the necessary and rewarding work of thinking through which one (or ones) you think best fits the context.

the present book) even when they are found in what appear to be aphoristic statements (e.g., “*then* (he) *came*” for יָבֹא in Prov 11:8 [Day 86]).

For many of the words that occur in this book (especially the more frequently occurring ones), I have provided a relatively fixed set of glosses, typically in a consistent order (e.g., “prudent/shrewd/clever” for עָרוּם), so that you can do the work of determining which gloss you think is best for each context. Nevertheless, for words of this kind I have varied the glosses, or their order, whenever I felt the context called for this.

On rare occasions, I have included a gloss that I think does not actually reflect how a word should be translated or understood (at least in a primary sense) in context but that I nevertheless think might be in the background, for example, as a play on words. I have always set off such glosses in square brackets.⁹

I created the initial draft of the glosses on my own, occasionally consulting a standard lexicon or published translations, and sometimes surveying most or all of the instances of a word in the Bible in order to get a good sense of its semantic range. I then refined the glosses by consulting in detail several standard Hebrew lexicons,¹⁰ various

9. See, for example, Prov 10:4 (Day 132), where I have included the admittedly odd gloss “[golds]” not because I think this is actually the meaning of תְּרוּצִים in this verse, but rather (since תְּרוּץ can mean “gold”) because I wish to suggest that תְּרוּצִים here may *possibly* (though it may not) be punning on the next word, תַּעֲשִׂיר “(it) becomes/makes rich.” Likewise, in Prov 11:28 (Day 265), “One who trusts in his wealth—he will fall,” the word בּוֹטָח clearly means “one who trusts.” However, given that there is another root בָּטַח that means “fall,” and in light of the fact that this poetic line ends with the verb יִפֹּל “he will fall,” my inclusion of the bracketed gloss “[falls]” for בּוֹטָח is intended to indicate that, although I do not think this word should be translated “falls” in context, I wonder whether the sage who wrote this proverb might have intended the word as a pun on יִפֹּל (i.e., “One who falls by his wealth—he will (indeed) fall!”).

10. Especially David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009); Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Study Edition*, trans. and ed. under the supervision of M. E. J. Richard-

translations,¹¹ and, especially for a handful of difficult verses, Michael Fox's excellent commentary.¹²

Despite the fact that I have consulted a number of sources in order to generate my glosses and have tried to present glosses that fit in each context, I have not undertaken in-depth research on most of the verses or words presented in this book. The book is not a technical commentary; instead, it is a language-learning and reading aid whose main goal is to help students, clergy, teachers, and scholars who have not yet read much of the book of Proverbs in Hebrew begin to explore how these sayings work in Hebrew and to think more critically about what they mean than is possible to do simply by reading them in translation. This volume provides you with the basic tools you need to wrestle intelligently with these sayings, but I encourage you to also consult published translations of and commentaries on these texts.

Grammatical Constructions

I have done my best in this book to be as consistent as possible in how I have glossed specific grammatical constructions (e.g., prepositions followed by infinitives construct; participles), but the book naturally presents some variation in this regard, based on the demands of each verse's context and what I thought would be helpful from a pedagogical perspective. I do not have the space here to explain most of the choices I have made in glossing the various kinds of grammatical constructions encountered in these texts, and in any case the majority of my choices should become obvious as you work your way through the book. Nevertheless, I would like to make a few comments here on some of the specifics of my glossing method.

son (Leiden: Brill, 2001); William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).

11. Especially the NJPS, NRSV, NASB, ESV, NIV, and MLB.

12. See note 3 above.

First, I have put parentheses around any grammatical information in the glosses—for example, subject pronouns in glosses for verbal forms—that is an inherent part of a particular Hebrew form but that is inapplicable for translation in context. For example, in Prov 17:2 (Day 130), the pronoun “he” is in parentheses in “(he) will rule” because the clause has an explicit subject, עֲבָדָד “servant/slave.” By contrast, in Prov 16:31 (Day 126), the subject of the verb אָמַץ in the b-line—namely, שֵׁיבָה “old age/gray hair”—is located in the a-line (thus, in a different clause); hence the gloss “it is found” for אָמַץ, with no parentheses around “it.”

Because participles are simultaneously nominal and verbal in character, I had to be thoughtful about how to gloss them. I decided to err on the side of consistency here: that is to say, regardless of their syntax in a particular context (indeed, in order to *prompt* you to think about their syntax), I have glossed participles as “one who . . .” (or, for the occasional participle that refers to an impersonal or non-count entity, “one that . . .” or “that which . . .,” respectively). In keeping with what I said above regarding parentheses, I have put parentheses around “one” or “one who” if these words are not relevant for English translation. However, when a subject and a predicate are both participles, I have used “one who” (without parentheses) for both glosses, in order to leave it up to you to decide which participle is the subject and which is the predicate, something that is not always clear at first and that sometimes is genuinely ambiguous.

Although I have normally placed each Hebrew word on its own line, I have made an exception to this practice in a few kinds of cases, the most common of which is that I have placed the two (or three) words of a construct chain on a single line, given their close syntactic relationship to one another. In accord with this principle, when a participle is a *nomen rectum* (and therefore its nominal character is more pronounced), I have placed it on the same line as the word that is (or words that are) in construct to it. However, when a participle is a *nomen regens* (and therefore its verbal character is more pronounced), I have put the *nomen rectum* of the construct chain on a separate line (since, at

least from an English perspective, the participle in this case effectively functions as a finite verb and the *nomen rectum* as its direct object).¹³

When translating the proverbs, English-speakers often need to supply an indefinite or definite article to denote a general category (e.g., “a wise man” rather than simply “wise man”; or “the righteous,” i.e., “righteous people”). Hebrew has no indefinite article, of course, and I have therefore omitted “a” from my glosses, so that you can decide when you think adding it in English is appropriate.¹⁴ The Hebrew (definite) article rarely appears in Prov 10:1–22:16. In order to reflect this fact and to draw your attention to the occasions when it does appear,¹⁵ I have typically glossed substantive adjectives referring to human beings with a translation of the adjective in question followed by “person” (when the adjective is singular) or “people” (when the adjective is plural), without inserting “the” (or “a”) as part of the gloss (e.g., עֲצֵל “lazy person”; רָשָׁעִים “wicked people”).

For the sake of simplicity, I have typically glossed Imperfect and Perfect verbs with the English present tense when they occur in what in my judgment is a statement of a general or universal principle.¹⁶ I have always glossed *wayyiqtol* verbs with the word “then” (or “but,” in one case) plus a past-tense verb, in order to bring your attention to these forms, which are rare in the proverbs and which indeed are somewhat surprising

13. An exception is that when a participle that is a *nomen regens* is passive, and hence functioning adjectivally, I have kept the *nomen rectum* on the same line as the participle. See, e.g., Prov 22:14 (Day 223).

14. I have omitted “a” even before my glosses for the second or third noun in a construct chain, in which case the omission of the article sounds particularly odd (e.g., “fruit of mouth of man”). This is one aspect of my having erred on the side of literalness in my glosses.

15. Interestingly, in such cases it is sometimes inappropriate to translate with English “the”: e.g., כַּחֲמֵץ לְשֵׁנִים “like vinegar to the teeth” (lit., “like the vinegar to the teeth”) in Prov 10:26 (Day 346).

16. When employing a future-tense English gloss seemed more appropriate to the context, however, I have done so.

to find in sayings that appear to be aphoristic in nature.¹⁷ Finally, I have glossed *weqatal* verbs with either “and . . .” or “then . . .”.

The Parsings

I have provided parsing for all verbs, including participles. Each parsing is presented on its own line, where it is indented and set in a different font than the one used for the glosses.¹⁸

Some Hebrew words can be analyzed in more than one way. For example, some participles that typically have a substantival or adjectival function in the Bible are commonly parsed as nouns or adjectives: e.g., *צֹדֵק* “counselor” (noun or Qal Ptcp ms *צֹדֵק*), *אֹיֵב* “enemy” (noun or Qal Ptcp ms *אֹיֵב*), *שְׂמֵחַ* “happy” (adj or Qal Ptcp ms *שְׂמֵחַ*). In most such cases, I have chosen one parsing rather than indicating both of the possibilities (notwithstanding the fact that both may be equally legitimate). For a handful of words whose parsing is more complex or interesting, however, I have provided more than one option. One of the more striking examples of this in the book is probably the word *עֵד*, which, depending on the context, can be analyzed either as a noun meaning “witness” or as a verb (Hiph Impf 3ms of *עָד*) meaning “he breathes out.” Likewise, when a verb can plausibly be parsed in more than one way in context, I have provided both parsings (or in one case, Prov 18:24 [Day 303], three).

17. In this way, I am attempting to emphasize the “micro-narrative” aspect of verses containing *wayyiqtol*s. (I occasionally also gloss Perfects with past-tense English verbs for the same reason; see, e.g., Prov 22:3 [Day 149].) For a brief discussion of the concept of “micro-narratives” in the book of Proverbs—though not only for verses containing *wayyiqtol* forms—see O’Dowd, “Pain and Danger,” 628–29.

18. I created the parsings found in this book on my own and then occasionally checked them against Clines, *Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*; Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*; and/or Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*.

The following abbreviations appear among the parsings found in this book:¹⁹

1	first-person	Impv	Imperative
2	second-person	Inf	Infinitive
3	third-person	Juss	Jussive
Abs	Absolute	m	masculine
c	common	Niph	Niphal
Coh	Cohortative	p	plural
conj	conjunction	Pass	Passive
Cst	Construct	Pf	Perfect
f	feminine	prep	preposition
Hiph	Hiphil	Ptcp	Participle
Hith	Hithpael	s	singular
Hoph	Hophal	sx	suffix
Impf	Imperfect		

The Hebrew Text

The Hebrew text used in *A Proverb a Day in Biblical Hebrew* has been taken from the Michigan-C Claremont-Westminster Electronic Hebrew Bible, a popular electronic version that is based on the BHS and that has been revised by its creators on the basis of comparison with the Leningrad Codex. This electronic text is in the public domain and has been made available courtesy of the J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research. In a few cases, I have corrected the reading of this text against that of Aron Dotan's *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001) when I judged the latter to be superior (for example, I changed the Westminster text's reading מְרַעֲרֵהוּ in Prov 19:4

19. Note that although I have abbreviated the names of four of the major *bin-yanim* (Niph, Hiph, Hoph, Hith), I have spelled out the shorter stem names (Qal, Piel, and Pual) as well as—for the sake of clarity and because they occur only infrequently in the book—the names of uncommon stems (Polel, Pilpel, Hithpoel, Hithpoel).

[Day 137] to Dotan's reading, מְרַעְרוֹ, which is also the reading found in the Aleppo Codex).

For simplicity's sake, and because this book is a language-learning and reading tool rather than a work of technical scholarship, whenever there is a Ketiv-Qere I have included only the Qere form in the main text.²⁰ However, I have presented all Ketiv forms (of which there are 26 in the book) parenthetically, which is to say, in the same manner in which parsings are marked (on their own line, indented, and in a different font from that of the main text).

Text-Critical Issues

Some of the proverbs found in 10:1–22:16 contain grammatical or text-critical difficulties. Since my goal in creating this book has primarily been to help you engage closely with the Masoretic Text as it stands (specifically as it is attested in the Leningrad Codex), I have made no attempt to solve these kinds of difficulties, and the format of this book has typically not allowed me to draw your attention to them explicitly. I take this opportunity, therefore, to make a few general remarks on this subject.

Occasionally a verse in this book seems to be corrupt or incomprehensible as it stands. The most obvious case of this is Prov 19:7 (Day 104), whose a-line is the length of most of the proverbs' a- and b-lines combined and the meaning of whose b-line (מְרַדְּף אֲמָרִים לֹא־הֶמְרָה) is quite obscure. Fox omits this b-line from his translation altogether, calling it "an unintelligible fragment" and "a meaningless group of four words . . . [that] looks like the mangled fragment of a lost couplet."²¹ For this verse, I have provided a literal (and thus ungrammatical) translation in order to draw your attention to the presence of this difficulty.

20. This does not imply, however, that I always believe the Qere provides the best or most reasonable reading. Indeed, my translations (on which see further below), in distinction to my glosses, occasionally follow the Ketiv: see, for example, Prov 12:14 (Day 69), where my translation "and the deed of a person's hands will rebound to him" follows the Ketiv (יָשׁוּב) rather than the Qere (יָשִׁיב).

21. Fox, *Proverbs* 10–31, 650–51.

In other cases, the basic meaning of a verse seems clear, but a grammatical difficulty is nevertheless present.²² For all such cases that involve verbs, I have placed the siglum “(!)” in the verb’s parsing line in order to indicate the oddity or corruption (e.g., “3ms(!)” when “3mp” would be the parsing of the expected form).²³ Since non-verbs are not parsed in this book, for verses that contain a grammatical difficulty involving a non-verb I have not marked the difficulty with “(!)” (since doing so in the gloss section could erroneously imply that it is the gloss itself that is problematic);²⁴ in such cases, therefore, I have simply left it up to you to notice the difficulty yourself.²⁵

The English Translations

As has been reiterated throughout this preface, the goal of this book is to empower you to work through the biblical proverbs on your own. It is often interesting and helpful while doing so to compare your understanding of a verse to that of other people, however, especially for verses whose syntax or vocabulary is difficult or may involve polysemy; indeed,

22. For example, the number (or gender) of a predicate may not agree with that of the subject (e.g., וְאִהְבֵּיהָ יֵאָכֵל in Prov 18:21 [Day 27]), or the form of a word may be odd or corrupt (e.g., תִּשְׁמְרוּם in Prov 14:3 [Day 196]).

23. Thus, for example, I have parsed תִּשְׁמְרוּם in Prov 14:3 as a Qal Impf “3fs(!)” of שָׁמַר with 3mp suffix, even though the word seems to be a corruption of תִּשְׁמְרוּם, which is a Qal Impf 3fp of שָׁמַר with 3mp suffix (see Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 573, on this parsing of the base form, though note that he states that the suffix is “3 masc. sg.”).

24. I have made one exception to this practice, however, by inserting “(!)” amid the glosses for the last word in Prov 11:25 (Day 287), namely, יוֹרֵא, a verbal form that would seem to be from the root ירה “to teach” but that the context seems to demand should actually be understood as a form of רוה “to water” (hence my gloss “will teach (!)”).

25. Typically such difficulties are rather obvious, as in Prov 12:10 (Day 175), where the adjective אֶכְזָרִי is singular even though it modifies the plural noun רַחֲמֵי “compassions,” and as in Prov 16:33 (Day 216), where the definite direct object marker, אֵת, precedes the *subject*, הַגּוֹרֵל.

in such cases, consulting the translations of others can be essential for thinking through what may be going on in the verse. For this reason, after you work through each verse in this book on your own, I encourage you, as stated earlier, to look at as many published translations of and commentaries on the book of Proverbs as may be helpful.

In addition, and for your convenience, I have created my own translation of each verse in this book. Since I do not wish to bias or influence your initial reading of the text by means of my own translations, however, I have placed each translation not at the bottom of the page for each day's Hebrew verse, but rather two pages thereafter, so that you will always need to consciously decide to turn the page if you wish to see my translation.²⁶

Because for each day's Hebrew verse I have glossed every word on the page for the day (including providing multiple glosses for many words, as mentioned above), the primary purpose of my translations is *not* to help you grasp the basic meanings of the words in the verse but *rather* to help you understand the verse's *syntax* and *overall meaning*—in other words, to help you check if you are “putting all the pieces together” in a way that makes sense. For this reason, as far as word choice is concerned, I have allowed myself to be somewhat creative in my translations. Largely this has involved my drawing deeply from the rich reservoir of English vocabulary and alternating between short words of Anglo-Saxon origin and polysyllabic Latinate vocables. The result is a set of translations that I hope will strike you as fresh, memorable, and—by dint of their novelty—defamiliarizing, thought-provoking, and even fun.

To give you a sense for the style I have used, here are a few randomly selected examples of my translations: “The commencement of contention is a crack in the dike; so before a fight flares up, stop” (17:14 [Day 329]); “The lot puts an end to litigiousness, and it splits up strong men” (18:18 [Day 361]); and “Every shrewd man acts with skill, but a numbskull disseminates stupidity” (13:16 [Day 197]). As these examples illustrate, in addition to using the technique of combining terse and ornate

26. E.g., my translation for Prov 12:15, the Hebrew verse found on Day 6, is located at the bottom of the Day 8 page; and so on.

vocabulary, I frequently employ soundplay and rhythm for poetic effect.²⁷ In a few instances I have taken more than a little poetic license in this regard: e.g., Prov 17:12 (Day 233), “Better to meet a bereaved bear than a boor on a bender” (the b-stich here in Hebrew reads “but not a dolt in his folly,” which is clear from the glosses I provide two pages earlier, hence my indulgence in a rather creative rendering here). For fun, I have occasionally employed other varieties of wordplay in my translations as well.²⁸ Finally, on rare occasions, I have used vocabulary that serves to transpose the biblical text into a modern conceptual framework, in order to give the proverb contemporary relevance; an example is 16:8 (Day 61), which I have translated “Better limited assets acquired honestly than an immense net worth amassed by mendacity.”

As a counterbalance to my creativity, and to respect the proverbs’ concision and the fact that some are ambiguous, I have attempted to err on the side of literalness and underinterpretation of the text, especially with

27. This is in part an homage to the biblical writers themselves, whose penchant for using soundplay as a productive compositional factor in fashioning their writings is well known. For brief overviews of this topic, see Scott B. Noegel, “Ponomasia,” *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3:24–29; Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* (SBLAIL 28; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), esp. 6–17 (with relevant bibliography on p. 8 note 19). A thorough survey of scholarship on this subject can be found in Arthur Keefer, “Phonological Patterns in the Hebrew Bible: A Century of Studies in Sound,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2016): 41–64. On the use of soundplay in Proverbs in particular, see Arthur Keefer, “Sound Patterns as Motivation for Rare Words in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 43 (2017): 35–49; Thomas P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10–29* (JSOTSup 128; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

28. Examples include my use of Janus parallelism, via the word “capital,” in Prov 10:15 (Day 145), and my appreciative nod to the wordplay (specifically, polysemy) created by the use of the Hebrew word בָּר “clean/grain” in Prov 14:4 (Day 344) through the use of a pair of paronomastic English words, “barn” and “brawn,” both of which contain this word’s consonants, /b/ and /r/, and which thus play on its sound. (“Barn” is, of course, not a literal translation of טֹרֵף, which means “trough/manger,” though the concepts are related by means of synecdoche.)

regard to rendering pronouns. An example of this is Prov 14:32 (Day 187), which I have translated “A devilish man is overthrown by his evil, and a righteous man takes refuge in his demise.” To whom does “his” in the b-line refer—the righteous man or the devilish man? Some published translations (e.g., NJPS, ESV) retain this ambiguity, but others (e.g., NRSV, NIV) make the more theologically comfortable of the two possible interpretations explicit, sometimes by effectively emending the text.²⁹ For this verse, I have decided to reflect the ambiguity of the Hebrew in my translation in order to draw your attention to it and to prompt you to think through the possible interpretations and their implications. For other ambiguous verses, however, the act of translating has forced me to make an interpretive choice;³⁰ at the very least, my glosses (i.e., the ones found two pages prior to my translation) should make the ambiguities in such cases clear.³¹

In sum, I hope that my translations encourage you to heartily embrace the interesting and rewarding, if sometimes difficult, task of crafting your own renderings, a process that can help these sayings come to life for you in new ways and make them more meaningful for your own experience.

Gendered and Gender-Neutral Language

In this book I have tried my best to provide glosses and translations that are faithful to the Hebrew text as well as clear and interesting in English, and

29. NRSV: “but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity”; NIV: “but even in death the righteous seek refuge in God.” See also NASB: “But the righteous has a refuge when he dies” (in theory, though, this translation could be considered ambiguous).

30. See, for example, Prov 13:13 (Day 144), where scholars and translations disagree about how to render the verb חָבַל and where I have simply chosen one of the options for my translation.

31. In some cases of this sort, I have chosen a translation that reflects a minority or nonstandard interpretation, not necessarily because I believe it is always the best one, but in order to present you with a different point of view from that offered in most published translations. An example of this is found in my translation of Prov 22:6 (Day 210): “Give a youth over to his path; then, when he’s old, he won’t turn away from it.”

that are also, as often as seemed possible and reasonable, gender-neutral. Nevertheless, since this book is primarily a language-learning tool, I have erred on the side of reflecting the gender-specific nature of the Hebrew in English whenever I thought this would help you understand the original text better. In addition, since the book of Proverbs was written primarily for the consumption of elite young men in a culture in which the majority of power was held by males,³² I hope that when you encounter gender-specific English terms in both my glosses and my translations, this will prompt you—as it has me—to think more deeply about and wrestle with the assumptions and worldview espoused by the authors and original intended audience of this book.

A few specific comments on my use of gender-neutral language are worth making here. First, in my glosses, I have tried whenever possible to render generic words such as אִישׁ, בֵּן, and אָבוֹת both with a standard gender-specific term and with a gender-neutral equivalent (e.g., “man/person,” “son/child,” “fathers/parents”). In addition, I have glossed substantive masculine singular adjectives, such as צַדִּיק “righteous,” in a gender-neutral fashion—that is, as “righteous *person*” rather than “righteous *man*.” Likewise, and as noted earlier in this preface, I have rendered masculine (as well as feminine) singular participles as “*one* who . . .” (rather than “*he* who . . .” or “*she* who . . .”).

In contrast to this, in my translation of any given verse I was naturally unable to provide both a gender-specific and a gender-neutral rendering of a single Hebrew word. For this reason, when translating words that in Hebrew are gender-specific I have alternated between gender-neutral terms such as “person” or “one” and gender-specific terms such as “man” or “he,” depending on what I thought made the most sense in context and also for stylistic reasons (e.g., for the sake of rhythm or to create soundplay). In addition, because (again) this book’s main purpose is to help you understand what the Hebrew text says, in my translations I have attempted as much as possible to retain singular and plural

32. One facet of this is the rarity with which women are even mentioned in Prov 10:1–22:16.

distinctions that are present in the Hebrew. This has meant that, unlike some published translations, I have chosen not to render singulars that are gender-specific (e.g., “man,” “his”) with gender-neutral plurals (e.g., “people,” “their”), since—although this has the merit of communicating the meaning of the text in a gender-neutral fashion—it obscures the grammar of the Hebrew.

* * * * *

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my friend and intrepid colleague Phil Frank, who expertly typeset this book and (as he also did for previous language tools of this kind that I have created) offered camaraderie and invaluable advice and constructive criticism that helped strengthen the volume. I am also grateful to my colleague Tirzah Frank for her incisive editorial eye and for her helpful criticisms, which improved the book in a number of respects, as well as to my colleague Amy Paulsen-Reed for suggesting various useful revisions.

I offer this book in friendship to you, the reader, and with the hope that as you work through the proverbs it contains you will grow in wisdom and humility and that you will develop a more profound love for truth and a more expansive compassion for others—especially the poor, the needy, and the oppressed, who are continually mentioned in these pages. May we all seek to deepen these essential character traits in ourselves and in each other, which are so vital for the flourishing of our families, our communities, and our world.

—Jonathan G. Kline, PhD

קָנָה-לֵב אֱהָב נַפְשׁוֹ

קָנָה- one who acquires/gets/gains/obtains
Qal Ptcp ms קנה

לֵב heart/mind/understanding/conscience

אֱהָב one who loves
Qal Ptcp ms אהב

נַפְשׁוֹ his soul/life/self

שָׁמַר תְּבוּנָה לְמַצָּא-טוֹב:

שָׁמַר one who guards/keeps/heeds
Qal Ptcp ms שמר

תְּבוּנָה understanding/discernment

לְמַצָּא to find/discover/gain/obtain
Qal Inf Cst מצא + prep לְ

טוֹב good/goodness/benefit

חִכְמַת עָרוֹם הַבֵּין דְרָבוֹ

חִכְמַת עָרוֹם *wisdom of
prudent/shrewd/clever person*

הַבֵּין *to understand/discern/perceive/
comprehend*

בֵּין Inf Cst Hiph

דְרָבוֹ *his way/path*

וְאִוֵּלַת בְּסִילִים מְרָמָה:

וְאִוֵּלַת בְּסִילִים *but folly of
fools/dolts/idiots*

מְרָמָה *deceit/treachery*

גַּם-לְרֵעֵהוּ יִשְׂנֵא רֵשׁ

גַּם *even/also*

לְרֵעֵהוּ *by his neighbor/friend/companion*

יִשְׂנֵא *(he) is hated*

שנא Impf 3ms

רֵשׁ *one who is poor*

רוש Ptcp ms

וְאִהְבִּי עָשִׁיר רַבִּים:

וְאִהְבִּי *but ones who love*

אהב + conj

עָשִׁיר *rich person*

רַבִּים *many*

He who attains insight loves himself;
he who safeguards understanding obtains virtue.

תועבת יהוה דרך רשע

תועבת יהוה *abomination of*
YHWH

דרך רשע *way/path of*
wicked person

ומרדף צדקה יאהב:

ומרדף *but one who pursues*
Piel Ptcp ms רדף + conj ו

צדקה *righteousness/truthfulness/justice*

יאהב *he loves*
Qal Impf 3ms אהב

A shrewd man's wisdom lies in perceiving his path,
but the folly of dolts is deceit.