

Proverbs 1:2-6 “The Power of Words” word study notes

Basic premise of following study: Propose that the following list should be used in order to understand Solomon’s use of words (in priority order):

- 1) How Solomon uses the same Hebrew word throughout Proverbs
- 2) How Scripture uses the same Hebrew word throughout the OT
- 3) How the NT uses the comparable Greek word, in which case the OT Septuagint (LXX) would be the primary resource.

Translators’ commentaries for English translations would be helpful in cases where following the above list leaves us with ambiguity. English word studies would be a last resort if one is to understand Solomon’s original usage and intent (since he did not write in English). However, an English-first approach is the appearance given by several cases when digging further into references provided in class notes (even if not the original intent or actual method followed). In fact, the idea of looking to the NT to understand OT word usage can be suspect unless directly quoted by the authors themselves (and even then, sometimes they are invoking a passage outside the context of the OT authors). The LXX comparison as noted in #3 above is not a sure method either, but should at least be taken into account if applying NT words back to OT usage. This is what these notes will attempt to demonstrate.

In the notes below, the class handout definition and references will be provided, followed by the corresponding Hebrew (OT) and/or Greek (LXX OT or NT) words, followed by some brief commentary.

Word studies following the class notes

(1) “**Know/Knowledge** – Having intimate relational experience and working familiarity; Gen 18:19, Phil 3:10, Ps 1:6”

Proverbs 1:2 (Hebrew) = ידע *yd’*

Genesis 18:19 (Hebrew) = ידע *yd’*

Psalms 1:6 (Hebrew) = ידע *yd’*

Proverbs 1:2 (Greek LXX) = γινώσκω *gignōskō*

Philippians 3:10 (Greek) = γινώσκω *gignōskō*

Notes: Comparisons pan out, though Genesis 18:19 is an interesting one considering most major English translations use “chosen” instead. More time could be spent studying the reasoning behind this... the Hebrew in this case appears to include a purpose behind the intimate knowledge of someone/something (NET translator notes clarify with “to recognize and treat in a special manner, to choose”), which may or may not have further implications for the understanding of Solomon’s use of the word.

(2) “**Wisdom** – Sound judgment and best decision making; Prov 3:19, 4:11”

Proverbs 1:2 (Hebrew) = חֵכְמָה *hāk-mā(h)*

Proverbs 3:19 (Hebrew) = חֵכְמָה *hāk-mā(h)*

Proverbs 4:11 (Hebrew) = חֵכְמָה *hāk-mā(h)*

Notes: Comparisons pan out.

(3) “**Instruction** – Communication of principles and practices, conceptually; Ps 32:8-9, Prov 4:1-2”

Proverbs 1:2 (Hebrew) = מוסר *mû-sār*

Psalms 32:8-9 (Hebrew) = שכל *śkl*

Proverbs 4:1-2 (Hebrew) = מוסר *mû-sār*

Notes: Psalm reference does not match Hebrew used in Proverbs, and as such is a stretch to use as the basis for defining Solomon’s usage (as done in class). Further research of translators’ notes and usage appears that the Hebrew used in Proverbs carries a discipline-oriented type of teaching/instruction (child-rearing term used by LXX Greek translators, for example) while Psalms carries a type that is meant for a person to prosper/have success. Both cases do fit the fairly general class definition of “communication of principles”; however, the Hebrew suggests these are two different types of instruction. For example, the Proverbs word fits much better with Solomon’s exhortation to fathers to not “spare the rod” in Proverbs 13:24 (same Hebrew word, but translated into English as “discipline”). This would be a fine point to note how Solomon’s type of instruction is different from that of the world’s anti-disciplinary methods today. Perhaps the world falls more along the Psalms line of instruction (a less disciplinary type) or perhaps the world doesn’t follow any type of “instruction” found in Scripture?

(4) “**Understand** – Able to discern facts from information/data (interpretation of observations or teachings); Matt 15:16-17”

Proverbs 1:2 (Hebrew) = בין *byn*

Proverbs 1:2 (Greek LXX) = νοέω *noeō*

Matthew 15:16 (Greek) = ἀσύνετος *asynetos* (“without understanding” at end in ESV)

Matthew 15:17 (Greek) = νοέω *noeō* (“do you not see” in ESV; “do you not understand” in NASB)

Notes: In class, since ESV was used, Matthew 15:16’s English word is stressed; however, Matthew 15:17 is the verse containing the matching Greek word. Considering both Greek terms are used in close proximity, they clearly have closely-related meanings. Just thought it is interesting to point out as the English is really translating a single Greek word (*asynetos*) into two English words (*without & understanding*) to bring forward the meaning, as it is referring more to a “fool” (someone who has no understanding). The difficult issue is how is one sure they have captured Solomon’s intended meaning for “understand” if one is comparing English terms rather than original languages? In the case of Matthew 15, at least the same Greek term does show up in the very next verse. However, as a different example, take the usage in Mark 8:17’s “Do you not yet perceive or understand?” “Perceive” is the same Greek as Proverbs’ LXX translation (*noeo*) while “understand” is actually a third (!) word, *syniemi*. How does one “understand” all the nuances here in relation to Solomon’s usage?! ☺ In the end, the class definition does make sense... the path to justifying the meaning feels a bit more problematic.

(5) “**Insight** – Having grasp of cause and effect, unseen principles of operation, consequences of decisions and actions; Eph 3:4-6”

Proverbs 1:2 (Hebrew) = בינה *bī-nā(h)*

Proverbs 1:2 (Greek LXX) = φρόνησις *phronēsis*

Ephesians 3:4-6 (Greek) = σύνεσις *synesis*

Notes: Greek does not match that in LXX for Ephesians reference, so usage as basis for Proverbs definition is a stretch. The Greek word used for insight in Ephesians 1:8 does match that of Proverbs' LXX translation, however. In Ephesians 1:8, the insight in context there is more along the lines of having a tap into God's purpose and will, rather than a tap into how things operate. Does that mean Solomon had a more spiritual intent, tying more closely to God, in Proverbs 1:2? Hard to say looking solely at the context of Proverbs 1, though it is interesting to see him use the same Hebrew word in Proverbs 3:5, translated differently in English in the ESV ("Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding"). In any case, it does not appear the class definition has been properly substantiated.

(6) "**Receive** – Bestowed upon with no initiated action, that which cannot be obtained otherwise; a gift of God; John 1:11-12, 1 Cor 4:7"

Proverbs 1:3 (Hebrew) = **יקח** *iqh*

Proverbs 1:3 (Greek LXX) = **δέχομαι** *dechomai*

John 1:11 (Greek) = **παραλαμβάνω** *paralambanō*

John 1:12 (Greek) = **λαμβάνω** *lambanō*

1 Corinthians 4:7 (Greek) = **λαμβάνω** *lambanō*

Notes: This is a tough one to work through, so hopefully this will make a bit of sense. The Greek term used to translate Proverbs in the LXX would suggest a completely different meaning than the referenced NT passages. The Greek word used in LXX (*dechomai*) matches that used in NT passages such as:

Matthew 10:40 – "Whoever receives you receives me..."

Matthew 11:14 – "and if you are willing to accept it he is Elijah who is to come"

Matthew 18:5 – "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me"

Luke 9:53 – "But the people did not receive him [Jesus] ..."

Acts 7:59 – "And as they were stoning Stephen he called out, 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit'"

The context of these verses fit with a meaning of acceptance of some idea/person/etc. for what it is (who He is), not really some object as a "gift" implied by the class definition. The Greek words used in John 1:11-12 (*lambano/paralambano*) appear to carry a different meaning throughout the NT, more as the taking or receipt of an object (sometimes as a gift, sometimes not). Some examples:

Matthew 8:17 – "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our illnesses...'"

Matthew 25:3 – "For when the foolish took their lamps they took no oil with them"

Matthew 25:16 – "He who had received the five talents..."

Luke 6:34 – "And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive..."

Many of the cases are in stark contrast to the point made in class that the church gets "take" vs. "receive" wrong. This statement does work for English, but it does not necessarily work the same if one apply to Scripture, which has a different basis in the original language. Upon closer inspection of John, it turns out he uses *dechomai* (used in Proverbs' LXX translation) only a single time:

John 4:45 – “So when he came to Galilee the Galileans welcomed him...”

John uses the other Greek words (from John 1:11-12) 48 times, sometimes used in a “take” context in addition to a “receiving” context. For example:

John 6:11 – “Jesus then took the loaves...”

John 19:1 – “Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him”

Why the discrepancy? Perhaps the difference between taking and receiving is not so cut and dry in the original languages as it is in English? That would require further digging to understand.

Further, looking at the LXX use of the words used by John further demonstrate some different meaning is in play when translating the corresponding Hebrew word (lqh) used by Solomon, for example:

Genesis 2:15 – “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden...”

Genesis 28:1 – “...You must not take a wife...”

In fact, if one searches Proverbs’ LXX translation for the same Greek words as found in the John references, one can find a context of “take” as well.

Proverbs 7:20 – “he took a bag of money with him...”

Proverbs 8:10 – “...why should your bed be taken from under you?”

It is interesting that there is so often a context of “taking” for the Hebrew and Greek words throughout the OT/NT, in contrast to the emphasis of “receiving a gift” stressed in class. The usages appear to be very context-sensitive, which is why English translations often switch between the two. Perhaps this is part of why the church can get confused. The main point is that the references used are not a strong basis for applying the class definition to Solomon’s usage.

(7) “**Wise Dealing** – Working through difficult relationships and transactions; 1 Kings 3:28”

Proverbs 1:3 (Hebrew) = שכל *skl*

1 Kings 3:28 (Hebrew) = unclear

Notes: 1 Kings was used as an example of Solomon’s “wise dealing,” though it is unclear in the passage whether “judgment” or “wisdom” was being pointed to as the same usage as in Proverbs 1. Both are different Hebrew words. There does happen to be a use of Proverbs’ Hebrew “skl” in 1 Kings 2:3 (“...that you may prosper in all that you do...”), though that seems to carry a completely different meaning than the class definition. This becomes more clear when reviewing other uses of the same Hebrew word throughout Proverbs, which gives a meaning closer to “decisions for success/prospering.” For example:

Proverbs 10:5 – “He who gathers in summer is a prudent son...”

Proverbs 17:2 – “A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers.”

Proverbs 17:8 – “...wherever he turns he prospers.”

It is unclear how the class definition can be applied to Solomon’s usage in Proverbs.

(8) “**Righteousness** – Doing the right thing (not ‘imputed’ righteousness, but acting in real time); Prov 15:28”

Proverbs 1:3 (Hebrew) = צֶדֶק *sē'dēq*

Proverbs 15:28 (Hebrew) = צַדִּיק *šād-dīq*

Notes: While not the same Hebrew word, 15:28 does appear to be the adjective form of the noun in 1:3. Also, would agree that Solomon's context does not imply some sort of imputed righteousness. However, that could be taken too far throughout the rest of Scripture. For example, the same Greek words used in the LXX in Proverbs 1:3 (*dikaiosyne*) and Proverbs 15:28 (*dikaiois*) are used in the NT in passages such as:

Romans 4:22 – “That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’”

Romans 5:19 – “...so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”

One wonders how to argue that Paul is calling out an “imputed” righteousness in these cases if one only looks at the words used. Again, context must be king to determine the meaning of a word. The class study seems to imply that Solomon (and the rest of Scripture) has one meaning for an English word and sticks with it, which is clearly not the case.

(9) “**Justice** – Attribute of God, to render to each person according to his works and worthiness; Jer 9:24, Rom 2:6”

Proverbs 1:3 (Hebrew) = מִשְׁפָּט *miš-pāt*

Jeremiah 9:24 (Hebrew) = מִשְׁפָּט *miš-pāt*

Proverbs 1:3 (Greek LXX) = κρίμα *krima*

Romans 2:6 (Greek) = no reference

Notes: Romans 2:2 and 2:3 do use the same Greek word (*krima*) as “judgment,” with 2:6 being the conclusion of the passage and the supporting statement to the class definition. No argument here.

(10) “**Equity** – Impartial attitude and actions without bias; James 2:1-4, 8-9, 12-13”

Proverbs 1:3 (Hebrew) = מִישָׁרִים *mē-šā-rīm*

Proverbs 1:3 (Greek LXX) = κατευθύνω *kateuthynō*

James 2:1, etc. (Greek) = προσωποληψία *prosōpolēmpsia*

The word found in James is not used anywhere in the LXX “as is,” though it is related to *lambano* (which we saw before = take/receive) and *prosopon* (presence/face/appearance). James word is perhaps better described by some expository notes like NICNT's:

““Discrimination,” i.e., the familiar KJV “respect of persons,” represents an odd, non-LXX Greek compound, going back perhaps to an Akkadian coinage, and “among the earliest definitely Christian words.” Originally of an Oriental ruler's favor in “lifting the face” of the prostrate suppliant, this word, rather like the English “favorite,” “favoritism,” gradually came to mean “to accept the person (Lat. *acceptor personae*) instead of the cause,” and eventually, “to show partiality.” Perhaps here there is a subtle contrast between “receiving the person” in the bad sense, and “receiving the face of the Shechinah.” Also translated “partiality,” “snobbishness,” “flunkeyism,” this compound means all that, but much more, viz., “the failure to oppose injustice for fear of the powerful.”

Solomon uses a very different word, where the Greek counterpart shows up in passages like the following:

Luke 1:79 – “...to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

1 Thessalonians 3:11 – “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you”

This has a “straight/right” sort of meaning instead, which might be why Proverbs 2:9 refers to going down a path when using the same Hebrew word: “Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path.” This is quite different from the definition given in class, and is a good example of why jumping to the NT to explain an OT word is often not a helpful approach when there are plenty of usages within the OT (and even Proverbs) itself.

(11) “**Give** – Bestow with no return payment; Prov 3:6, Luke 12:32, James 1:5”

Proverbs 1:4 (Hebrew) = נתן *ntn*

Proverbs 3:6 (Hebrew) = no reference (assume Proverbs 2:6 was intended, which does use נתן *ntn*)

Proverbs 1:4 (Greek LXX) = δίδωμι *didōmi*

Luke 12:32 (Greek) = δίδωμι *didōmi*

James 1:5 (Greek) = δίδωμι *didōmi*

Notes: Comparisons pan out.

(12) “**Prudence** – Exercising care to observe godly and Biblical principles; Prov 12:16, Amos 5:13”

Proverbs 1:4 (Hebrew) = עֲרֻמָּה *‘ār-mā(h)*

Proverbs 12:16 (Hebrew) = עָרוּם *‘ā-rûm*

Amos 5:13 (Hebrew) = שָׂכַל *śkl*

Notes: The Proverbs reference does pan out, being the adjective form of the noun used in Proverbs 1:4. Amos uses a different word, however, which we’ve seen before as “wise dealing” in ESV’s translation. The class definition does not obviously derive from the usages in Proverbs, though one can see how it would apply to usage in Proverbs. Elsewhere in the OT, it is translated as cunning/crafty, as in Genesis 3:1, applying the same Hebrew word to an attribute of Satan. Again, we must be careful when stating a generality that we can take Solomon’s usage of a word as the way to understand that word throughout the rest of Scripture. This type of approach would not work for Hebrew readers. This type of approach only works for English readers so far as translators of an English version appropriately and consistently distinguish between possible meanings of the original language based on context.

(13) “**Simple** – Untaught, and unaware of deficit in wisdom; Prov 1:32”

Proverbs 1:4 (Hebrew) = פְּתִי *pě-tî*

Proverbs 1:32 (Hebrew) = פְּתִי *pě-tî*

Notes: Comparisons pan out.

(14) “**Discretion** – Speaking and acting in accordance with the level of wisdom one possesses; 1 Chron 22:12”

Proverbs 1:4 (Hebrew) = מְזִמָּה *m^zim-mā(h)*

1 Chronicles 22:12 (Hebrew) = שֵׂכֶל sē·kāl

Notes: 1 Chronicles uses a different Hebrew word than Proverbs, making it a stretch to use as justification of the class definition. The word there shares the same root (skl) as seen for “wise dealing” above. ESV translators more often use the word “sense” when translating the word found in 1 Chronicles where it is found in Proverbs, for example:

Proverbs 12:8 – “A man commended according to his good sense...”

Proverbs 16:22 – “Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it...”

Proverbs usage of the Hebrew word from 1:4 appears different, often used in regards to intentions and plans, not always with wisdom. Some examples:

Proverbs 12:2 – “...but a man of evil devices he condemns.”

Proverbs 14:17 – “...and a man of evil devices is hated.”

Proverbs 24:8 – “Whoever plans to do evil will be called a schemer.”

Solomon’s usage of words often provides contrasting definitions for the same Hebrew words. These are fine examples of the difficulty of translation work into English. What do these types of examples have to tell us about the meaning of words? It’s not the words themselves that are important, but how those words are understood in context.

(15) “**Youth** – The ‘natural man,’ simple from conception; Gen 8:21”

Proverbs 1:4 (Hebrew) = נָעַר nā·’ār

Genesis 8:21 (Hebrew) = נְעֻרִים n^o·ū·rîm

Notes: While the Hebrew words are different, they do share the same root, Proverbs referring to a young person (boy) and Genesis referring to a time period in a person’s life. It is unclear how the class definition follows from either case. “Natural man” like in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is a theologically-loaded term that is a stretch to justify as a definition for “youth” based on the context of either verse.

(16) “**The Wise** – Those who have learned to discern between good and evil, and who exercise sound judgment as a result; Eccl 2:14, Prov 20:26”

Proverbs 1:5 (Hebrew) = חָכָם ḥā·kām

Ecclesiastes 2:14 (Hebrew) = חָכָם ḥā·kām

Proverbs 20:26 (Hebrew) = חָכָם ḥā·kām

Notes: Comparisons pan out.

(17) “**Hear** – Cause to consider in one’s thinking; Mark 8:18, Luke 8:8”

Proverbs 1:5 (Hebrew) = שָׁמַע śm’

Proverbs 1:5 (Greek LXX) = ἀκούω akouō

Mark 8:18 (Greek) = ἀκούω akouō

Luke 8:8 (Greek) = ἀκούω *akouō*

Notes: Comparisons pan out.

(18) “**Increase** – Progressing from simple toward wise state; Prov 1:5, Hos 14:9”

Proverbs 1:5 (Hebrew) = יָסַפּ *yasp*

Hosea 14:9 (Hebrew) = no reference

Notes: Hosea reference on the handout does not show any usage of word. Instead, found usage in Hosea 13:2: “And now they sin more and more,” which provides a much different meaning than the class definition (definitely not “toward a wise state”). The same applies to usage within the rest of Proverbs, sometimes a “wise” increasing, sometimes “unwise.” For example:

Proverbs 23:28 – “She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind.”

Again, the same meaning even for an English translation does not always hold in Proverbs or throughout all of Scripture.

(19) “**Learning** – Changes in thinking that effect changed behavior as well; 1 Tim 1:20, Heb 5:8”

Proverbs 1:5 (Hebrew) = יָקַח *lā-qāh*

Proverbs 1:5 (Greek LXX) = σοφός *sophos*

1 Timothy 1:20 (Greek) = παιδεύω *paideuō*

Hebrews 5:8 (Greek) = μανθάνω *manthanō*

Notes: Neither NT verse contains the same Greek word used by the LXX translators, which is most often translated into English simply as wise throughout the NT. 1 Timothy’s word carries a meaning more like disciplined training and happens to be the word used by the LXX translators in Proverbs 19:18 (“Discipline your son...”). Hebrews’ word carries a meaning more like learning from experience and happens to be the word used by the LXX translators in Proverbs 22:24-25 (“Make no friendship with a man given to anger... lest you learn his ways...”). It is unclear how the class definition of Solomon’s word can be justified from the referenced passages, though perhaps it is high-level enough to cover all of them.

(20) “**Guidance** – Providing external direction in paths of thinking and action; Ps 119:105”

Proverbs 1:5 (Hebrew) = תְּהַבִּילֶנּוּ *tāh-bū-lōt*

Psalms 119:105 (Hebrew) = no reference

Notes: Though there is no reference in Psalm 119 to the same Hebrew word (or English, for that matter), would agree the definition makes sense given the typical English meaning of guidance. It is interesting the Greek word used by the LXX translators is a nautical steering term (*kybernesis*). This could provide some rich meaning to the usage. It is also interesting that Proverbs 12:5 shows Solomon again contrasting usage of the same Hebrew word (“...the counsels of the wicked are deceitful”). Again, context must be king.