

Fools of Proverbs

Most translations of Proverbs have the word “fool” about 80 times, along with other words like “sluggard,” “wicked,” and “simple.” Behind these words lie several Hebrew words which convey nuanced meanings.

rasha – wicked

This is the most common word contrasted with the wise person, occurring some 80 times in Proverbs and over 260 times in the Old Testament. It’s simply a wicked, evil person. The verb describes one who is condemned.

*Prov. 4:14 - Do not enter the path of the **wicked**, And do not walk in the way of evil.*

kesil – stupid

Appearing about 50 times in Proverbs, this conveys both intellectual and moral dullness. These fools are characterized by poor decisions, and their folly is obvious in the consequences of their actions.

*Prov. 18:6 - A **fool's** lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating.*

luts/lets – scoffer

Represented by words like “scoffer” and “scorner,” this fool is arrogant and mocks those who are wise and righteous. He lacks the humility to learn.

*Prov. 3:34 - Toward the **scorners** he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*

ewil – perverse, stubborn fool

This kind of fool hates and rejects wisdom. He does not want to learn or change his wicked ways. *ewil* is pronounced “ev-eel,” which is quite fitting for this evil fool.

*Prov. 1:7 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; **fools** despise wisdom and instruction.*

pethi – naïve, simple

There is hope for this fool. *pethi* is paralleled with “youth.” It literally means “wide open,” as in too open-minded and gullible. This folly can come from mere inexperience, but we must grow out of it. If it persists, it becomes dangerous. The book of Proverbs is addressed to the *pethi* to make him *chakam* (wise).

*Prov. 1:4 - to give prudence to the **simple**, knowledge and discretion to the youth*

nabal – morally dull, rebellious

This fool is particularly deficient in spiritual wisdom. He does not consider or care about what is right, and lives as if there are no consequences for his sins. He may also be intellectually lacking, but even someone with worldly knowledge can be *nabal*. This folly is demonstrated in the man named Nabal, who repaid David’s kindness with merciless callousness in a time of need (1 Sam. 25).

*Psa. 14:1 - The **fool** says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.*

atsel – lazy

This fool lacks work ethic. He is described by words like “lazy,” “sluggard,” and “slothful.” A common depiction in Proverbs is one who lays in bed when he needs to get up and go to work, resulting in poverty and starvation. He can change his ways, but it’s difficult to motivate him to do so.

*Prov. 20:4 - The **sluggard** does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.*