

Our study of “*wisdom*” and related words in the Old Testament begins with and is based upon the following passage which Solomon wrote to his son, Jeroboam, desiring that he would acquire skill in righteous living and be prepared to be his successor upon the throne of Judah. It appears that Solomon wrote these Proverbs when he was still a young man and his son just a child; for we know, from Solomon’s writings in Ecclesiastes, the book of his old age, that, even though he was extremely wise and blessed by God, he did not apply many of these Proverbs to his own life. Even so, we find these first verses of Proverbs are so rich in meaning and guidance that God surely inspired and dictated these very words.

Ten different words found in the following verses will be the focus of our study:

*The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*

To know **WISDOM**<sup>2451</sup>

and **INSTRUCTION**,<sup>4148</sup>

to **PERCEIVE**<sup>995</sup> the words of **UNDERSTANDING**;<sup>998</sup>

To receive the **INSTRUCTION**<sup>4148</sup>

of **WISDOM**,<sup>7919</sup> **JUSTICE**,<sup>6664</sup> and **JUDGMENT**,<sup>4941</sup> and **EQUITY**,<sup>4339</sup>

To give **SUBTLETY**<sup>6195</sup> to the simple,

to the young man **KNOWLEDGE**<sup>1847</sup> and **DISCRETION**.<sup>4209</sup>

A wise man will hear, and will increase **LEARNING**,<sup>3948</sup> and a man of **UNDERSTANDING**<sup>995</sup> shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a Proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of **KNOWLEDGE**:<sup>1847</sup>

but fools despise **WISDOM**<sup>2451</sup> and **INSTRUCTION**<sup>4148</sup>

(Proverb 1:1-7).

## STRONGS

**4339** [[meyshar /may-shawr](#)/] masculine noun. From 3474; TWOT 930e; 19 occurrences; AV translates as “*equity*” four times, “*uprightly*” three times, “*uprightness*” three times, “*right things*” twice, “*agreement*” once, “*aright*” once, “*equal*” once, “*right*” once, “*righteously*” once, “*sweetly*” once, and “*upright*” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 evenness, uprightness, straightness, equity. 1A evenness, level, smoothness. 1B uprightness, equity. 1c rightly (as adv).

**3474** [yashar /yaw-shar](#) verb. A primitive root; TWOT 930; 27 occurrences; AV translates as “*please*” six times, “*straight*” five times, “*direct*” four times, “*right*” three times, “*well*” twice, “*fitted*” once, “*good*” once, “*make straight*” once, “*meet*” once, “*upright*” once, and “*uprightly*” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 to be right, be straight, be level, be upright, be just, be lawful, be smooth. 1A (Qal). 1A1 to go straight. 1A2 to be pleasing, be agreeable, be right (fig.). 1A3 to be straightforward, be upright. 1B (Piel). 1B1 to make right, make smooth, make straight. 1B2 to lead, direct, lead straight along. 1B3 to esteem right, approve. 1c (Pual) to be made level, be laid smoothly out. 1D (Hiphil) to make straight, look straight.

**3477** [[yashar /yaw-shawr](#)/] adj. From 3474; TWOT 930a; 119 occurrences; AV translates as “*right*” 53 times, “*upright*” 42 times, “*righteous*” nine times, “*straight*” three times, “*convenient*” twice, “*Jasher*” twice, “*equity*” once, “*just*” once, “*meet*” once, “*meetest*” once, “*upright ones*” once, “*uprightly*” once, “*uprightness*” once, and “*well*” once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 straight, upright, correct, right. 1A straight, level. 1B right, pleasing, correct. 1c straightforward, just, upright, fitting, proper. 1D uprightness, righteous, upright. 1E that which is upright (subst).

## TWOT

930e ([mêšar](#)) *uprightness, straightness*.

The root [yasar](#) is employed in at least three ways.

**1. Literally.** “*To go straight or direct in the way*” (I Samuel 6:12), but more frequently in the intensive (Piel) “*to make* (a way) *straight,*” i.e. direct and level and free from obstacles, as when preparing to receive a royal visitor. This is the work of God for man (Proverb 3:6 KJV “*direct*”), but also of man for God (Isaiah 40:3). It is “*to look straight ahead of you*” (Proverb 4:25), to do something evenly (I Kings 6:35, KJV) as Solomon’s overlaying the cherubs with gold or Hezekiah’s designing the aqueduct bringing it straight (II Chronicles 32:30, KJV) to the west of Jerusalem.

**2. Ethically.** Uprightness as the manner of life is a characteristic of the blameless (Proverb 11:5) and of the man of discernment (Psalm 119:128, “*I have lived uprightly*”). Thus the fact that God has made man upright (Eccl 7:29) is probably to be interpreted as granting him the ability to recognize the divine law, rather than some inborn character as honest or straightforward (so NEB). It is said of the reckless that his soul is not upright within him (Hab 2:4) and this leads to pride and failure.

([yasar](#)). **Upright.** The attributive adjective is used to emphasize an attribute of: a. God, describing his reign over his people (Deuteronomy 32:4), words (Psalm 111:8), especially qualified persons, as a parallel to the righteous (Psalm 33:1) or the perfect (Job 1:1, 8). It is a quality of heart and mind (Psalm 7:11; 11:2, et al.) which enables the upright man to keep loyally to any legally binding agreement (II Kings 10:15). It is not always possible to be sure whether the “*level*” path (Jeremiah 31:9) or “*straight*” foot is to be understood as an ethical appraisal of the way of life or literally. Certainly the nouns meaning “*uprightness*” are used of a moral quality of heart ([yošer](#), Deut 9:5; I Kings 9:4), as often in Proverb (2:13; 4:11) which results in “*right paths,*” i.e. right both morally and practically (Job 33:23). This was a characteristic of David’s life (I Kings 3:6, [yesarâ](#), only here). It is used both of words spoken (Job 6:25) and written (Ecclesiastes 12:10).

**3. As an idiomatic expression with “eyes.”** “*To be right in the eyes* (of a person)” is to have his approval by keeping his commands. It is used of God (Numbers 23:27; Jeremiah 27:5) perhaps also under the figure of the Potter (Jeremiah 18:4). When marriage was so considered by Samson (Judges 14:3, 7), Saul, and David (I Samuel 18:26), it can be rendered “*lawful*” as in Ugaritic ([ysr](#); Van Zijl, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 10:83). Similarly when a treaty (II Samuel 17:4) or religious action (II Chronicles 30:4) was ratified by an assembly.

A fuller phrase “*to do what is right* ([hayvašar](#), the right) *in the eyes of the Lord*” is linked with obedience to his commands (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 6:17–18) and covenant (Deuteronomy 12:28; 13:18). It is commonly used by the so-called Deuteronomist historian in his summary evaluation of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Thus David is said to have followed the Lord’s commands (I Kings 15:5–7) and the laws of Moses (I Kings 14:8) as did Solomon when he followed his father’s statutes, which were the same as those of the Lord (I Kings 3:3, 14). Asa (I Kings 15:11; II Chronicles 14:1) and Josiah (II Kgs 22:2) were similarly described as having done the right.

So Azariah as did Amaziah (II Kings 15:3; cf. II Chronicles 25:2) and Amaziah as did Joash (II Kings 14:3). Hezekiah did the right in that he kept the commandments which the Lord had commanded Moses (II Kings 18:6). Note that this phrase implies the existence and knowledge of the law of God, and that individual kings were thought to have kept it. This was shown by the king taking action (the so-called reforms) to ensure that the people also kept the Law. Such action was marked by public decrees which might include remission of dues, deliverance from oppressive legislation (Joshua 9:23ff.),

**EQUITY** meysnar/may-shawr 4339

and the observance of religious festivals (Passover). Even when a king was said to have done the right, any major omission in his endorsement of the whole law is carefully noted ("except in the case of") Hezekiah's public act was initiated in the first full regnal year. It has been pointed out that there is a somewhat similar practice among Mesopotamian kings who effected the continuity of law and order by issuing mšarm, decrees (Wiseman, D. J., "The Laws of Hammurabi Again," JSS 7:167-68). In this phrase the OT uses yšr with the force of law-keeping, doing justice according to the law, which was the norm (as the Akkadian isartu is used of what is normal in writing).

1 Chronicles 29:17 I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in **uprightness**.<sup>4339</sup> As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

Psalms 9:8 And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in **uprightness**.<sup>4339</sup>

Psalms 17:2 Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things **that are equal**.<sup>4339</sup>

Psalms 58:1 To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David. Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge **uprightly**,<sup>4339</sup> O ye sons of men?

Psalms 75:2 When I shall receive the congregation I will judge **uprightly**.<sup>4339</sup>

Psalms 96:10 Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people **righteously**.<sup>4339</sup>

- Psalm 98:9            Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with **equity**.<sup>4339</sup>
- Psalm 99:4            The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish **equity**,<sup>4339</sup> thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.
- Proverb 1:3            To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and **equity**;<sup>4339</sup>
- Proverb 2:9            Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and **equity**;<sup>4339</sup> yea, every good path.
- Proverb 8:6            Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be **right things**.<sup>4339</sup>
- Proverb 23:16        Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak **right things**.<sup>4339</sup>
- Proverb 23:31        Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself **aright**.<sup>4339</sup>

Song of Solomon 1:4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the **upright**<sup>4339</sup> love thee.

Song of Solomon 7:9 And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down **sweetly**,<sup>4339</sup> causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

Isaiah 26:7 The way of the just is **uprightness**:<sup>4339</sup> thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

Isaiah 33:15 He that walketh righteously, and speaketh **uprightly**;<sup>4339</sup> he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare **things that are right**.<sup>4339</sup>

Daniel 11:6 And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an **agreement**.<sup>4339</sup> but she shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begot her, and he that strengthened her in these times.