

Devoid of Understanding

Proverbs 07:07

⁷ *And saw among the simple,
I perceived among the youths,
A young man devoid of understanding, - (Proverbs 7:7).*

We've looked at Proverbs 7 a time or two before and have seen that basically the entire section speaks of Wisdom's instruction concerning "Restraint against the loose woman". Also, once again we see a continuation of "Wisdom is personified", 4 (cf. 1:20–33).and shown as speaking from the point of view of a human being. In particular here, beginning with the prior verse (v6) we see Solomon speaking in terms of a "crafty harlot" seeking to take advantage of the young man in question.

Solomon gives us a good description to guide our thoughts in a "*Description of the pictured seduction*" (7:6–23). He is particularly definite in talking about "the victim in. (7:6–9)".

In those few verses the narrative unfolds with the observation of an unwary youth strolling along the streets at night. He is described as one of the "simple" (*p'eṯā'yim*, v. 7; cf. 1:4) ones, meaning "a youth who lacked judgment" (*na'ar ḥ^asar-lēḥ*; lit., "a youth lacking of heart," or one void of common sense or understanding). He is young, inexperienced, featherbrained (as Kidner puts it, *Proverbs*, p. 75). His evening stroll takes him intentionally (as *ṣā'ad*, "to step, march," suggests; NIV, "walking along") down the street to her house (v. 8). And then, if all this activity of the naive young man takes place under the cover of night, only trouble can follow (v. 9).

We can look further to enlarge our understanding of what is going on here...

a. *The temptress* (7:10–12)

In verse 10 Solomon, in his narrative, next introduces the seductress who comes out to meet the innocent youth. She has the "attire of a prostitute" (*šīl zōnāh*; NIV, "dressed like a prostitute") and has "crafty intent" (*n^eṣuraṯ lēḥ*). This latter expression is difficult to get hold of; the ancient versions took it with the meaning of causing the youth's heart to flutter or of bewildering or capturing his heart. I've actually heard some commentators describe it as kind of like the bar girls of the old west who dressed and acted in such a way as to entice customers to take advantage of her services. The expression literally means "guarded in heart," but Driver, and ancient Hebrew expert, has shown semantic development from "guarded" to "crafty" or "sly." She has locked up her plans and gives nothing away. This, interestingly, contrasts with her attire, which gives her away. It seems certain the intention of this woman is to take the "simple one" in for the purpose some personal gain.

In verse 11–12 the text further describes this wayward woman as “loud and defiant” (v. 11a), with a roving desire (vv. 11b–12). “*She lurks*” (*te^ʿrōb* from *ʾārah*, “to lie in wait, ambush, with a hostile purpose”) at every street corner, waiting for the gullible young man to pass her way. Commentator Plaut astutely warns, “*Woe to the marriage whose partners cannot find values in their home and must constantly seek outside stimulation!*” (p. 102).

We see that the young man’s father (a common device used by Solomon in Proverbs) begins an account, based on something he has observed by merely watching what went on outside, through his own **window**. The man that he sees is **simple** and **young**. The most obvious characters in the book are the wise, the fool, and the simple. Proverbs urges its readers to be wise, that is, to embrace God’s covenant and to learn the skill of living out the covenant in everyday situations (cf. 2:2). The *wise* person has done that (cf. 10:1); usually Proverbs focuses on the one who has made good progress in that skill, whose example is worth following (cf. 9:8b).

The father tells of an occasion when he actually observed a young man being seduced by an adulteress. He saw it all as he looked out his window, and he had no doubt about what was transpiring. The young man walked toward her house at twilight.¹³⁵ It is not certain whether he was deliberately going there or just passing by (v. 8). The woman’s loud, seductive behavior and open kissing of the man (vv. 10–13; cf. Song 8:1) show her immodesty.

For our purposes, The *simple* is the person who is not firmly committed, either to wisdom or to folly; he is easily misled (cf. 14:15). His trouble is that he does not apply himself to the discipline needed to gain and grow in wisdom.

Just by way of note; The *fool* is the person steadily opposed to God’s covenant (cf. 1:7b). The setting of Proverbs assumes there can be fools even among God’s people. There are three Hebrew terms that are translated “fool” (*kesil*, *ʾewil*, *nabal*), and have little difference among them. This kind of person resists even the offer of forgiveness found in the covenant (14:9; 15:8). These people are dangerous in their influence (13:20; 17:12) and cause grief to their parents (10:1); but they are not beyond hope (8:5).

Proverbs also uses other terms, both positive (e.g., righteous, upright, diligent, understanding, prudent) and negative (e.g., wicked, lazy, lacking sense). These do not designate different groups of people from the wise and the fools; rather, the terms are commonly “co-referential,” i.e., they apply to the same people looked at from different angles. The *righteous* is the one who has embraced the covenant, seen from the perspective of his faithfulness to God’s will; the *wise* is the same person, seen from the perspective of his skill in living out God’s will; the *prudent* is the same individual seen as one who carefully plans out his obedience. Likewise, the *wicked* is the one who rejects God’s covenant, seen from the angle of his opposition to God; the *fool* is this same person, seen from the angle of the stupid course of life he has chosen.

As 6:20–35 expands on the consequences of adultery described in 5:9–14, this appeal plays out the way in which the reckless stumble into adultery by

putting themselves in the wrong place (**passing ... near her corner, taking the road to her house**) at the wrong time (**twilight, evening, time of night and darkness**) in contrast to the clear instruction of 5:8 to “keep your way from her, and do not go near the door of her house.”

Looking back at our verse, the second phrase - “I perceived among the youths” is really just a restatement of the first phrase. The only differences are, first, that in the first phrase he is merely noticing, in the second phrase he is perceiving the significance of what he saw in the first. As we said, “simple” in the first phrase refers to one young and lacking in the experience and capability that comes with growing and aging. It seems certain that Solomon is not talking about a child or even someone of teen age. But we can also be sure that he is what we could call a “young adult”. So it is the immaturity and lack of experience and living knowledge that Solomon has in view here. Just how the father actually knew this is unsure, but we can assume that this, to, is a device that Solomon is using to advance his point.

The use of the word “youth” suggests that we are, indeed, talking about someone who is below what is normally thought of as the becoming of an adult in life. But, as we said, the emphasis is on the lack of knowledge and understanding in life that is the mark of this one being viewed. We can also infer this from the use of the word “devoid” in the second phrase. The idea in this word is that the one in view does not have the understanding (mentioned at the end of the phrase) that he ought to have had were he one who had sought it and/or grown normally. This young man had not pursued or failed to gain the normal experience of life. Thus he was unable to guard himself when a time of trouble came.

The point that we can assume that Solomon is seeking for us to get hold of is to see that we do all that is necessary to gain the knowing and maturity to guard us against the variety of events that we will face as we progress through life. Without that knowing, that growth, we can be taken in by any manner of deception that comes along; even ones that ought to have been obvious!

We can summarize our interpretation in this fashion: The narrative may be treated as literal or as allegorical. In the first sense it represents a young man void of understanding or heart, *i.e.* of principles such as might have been acquired in a godly home, led captive by a wanton woman. Mystically, it portrays the fascinations of error, by which the soul of an inexperienced and unstable one becomes ensnared and ultimately destroyed, and all for the lack of that foundation of true wisdom in head and heart which a religious education lays. In either fashion it is extremely useful and instructive, even challenging to use as we seek to be prepared to walk in a godly fashion through life.

By way of illustration we can see in several in the Bible that underscore our point:

- Dinah, though of the opposite sex, illustrates well the peril to a young person’s virtue of idle gadding about in the neighborhood of temptation.

- Joseph illustrates the strength of true religious principle in the moment of strong temptation.
- By the prophet Ezekiel (16) the corruption of truth is set forth under the image of the Church, the Bride of Jehovah, become an harlot. And many a strong man, much more many a “a young man void of understanding,” has been seduced into heresies and schisms (as in the case of the Nicolaitanes of old) by the wiles of this Jezebel, a Church that has apostatized from the faith (Rev. 2:20, etc.).

Just to think for a moment by way of application. - We can see what a great need of parental advice to be both given and taken on a temptation which has cast down so many as that to fleshly sins! One writer said: Happy is the young man who, being forewarned, forearms himself with the whole armor of God, and so is able to stand in the day of trial. Such a one will not have a mind vacant of profitable subjects of thought, nor a heart devoid of right affections towards God. Guided by others' experience, he will be alive to the dangers which always beset youth. He will know the importance of spending his evenings well; will avoid sauntering at unreasonable hours and in questionable company or neighborhoods; will shrink and flee from a temptress, however plausible, however fascinating; will not dally with temptation, however specious; will bethink himself of baptismal vows and the eye of God; will lift up the heart in prayer. Thus he will be saved in time from that sin which has wounded many, yea, given the death-wound to souls without number. Or, if it be to schism, or heresy, or infidelity the young man is tempted by persuasions addressed to his intellect, and backed by the seeming authority even of the Church itself, or of some sect professing to be the Church (for Anti-Christ can simulate Christianity), the young man who imbibed truth at his mother's knee and his father's lips will know how to resist this temptation also, and will prove himself not “void of understanding,” because not void of heart.

O my God, from fornication, and all other deadly sin; from false doctrine, heresy, and schism,—deliver me!
