

Proverbs 2:16-19

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-2/proverbs-216-19/>

*Temptation threatens to drive us away from reality, from truth. Its falsity leads to deadness.
Wisdom can save us from believing in the seduction of the flesh.*

Solomon personifies temptation as a *woman*. She is partnered with the “man who speaks perverse things” ([see notes on Proverbs 2:12-15](#)) as a sort of antithesis to the “instruction and teaching” of “your father and mother” in Proverbs 1:8. In that eighth verse of Chapter 1, Solomon implores his young audience “do not forsake” these valuable teachings from positive parental voices. Here in Chapter 2, he personifies forces that try to allure us to forsake wisdom. This personified *strange woman* or *adulteress* also resonates as the forsaken alternative to the honored woman in Chapter 31 and, most directly, to Lady Wisdom ([see notes on Proverbs 1:20-23](#)).

Just like in the previous section, God’s wisdom will *deliver* its student from the perverse way. Temptation’s goal is to draw us away from what we are created to be. The two words to describe this woman are similar in nature—*strange* and *adulteress*. The words (“zuwr” and “nokriy” in Hebrew) both have the root of *strange* or *unfamiliar*. So temptation is personified here as something alien or other. She *flatters with her words* in an effort to pervert and derail us from the proper path that leads to our true benefit.

The *adulterous woman* has *left the companion of her youth* and *forgets the covenant of her God*. The *adulteress* was married as a young woman, as would be typical of Jewish girls in that era. But she has left the companionship of the husband she married in *her youth*. She now seeks companionship among strange men. In doing so, she breaks God’s laws. God set up Israel to be self-governing, a society where individuals police themselves, and focus on mutual care and respect for one another. Family stability is one of the core requirements for self-governance. Adultery disrupts family stability, and therefore was forbidden. The seventh of the Ten Commandments prohibits adultery explicitly.

Accordingly, by leaving her husband for a life of adultery, the *adulteress forgets the covenant of her God*. She is breaking the *covenant* between God and His people. A covenant that was for their good. A covenant that set up a society with mutual cooperation and service toward one another. A society where children and homes are honored and cherished, and families are secure. A society free from envy, theft, and violence. That is the kind of society that stems from keeping God’s *covenant*. The alternative is to prioritize our own appetites. To focus on extracting from others for our own pleasure. This leads to abuse and violence. It is the way of evil.

Temptation alters the natural order of things, God’s design for the world is based on harmony and mutual cooperation. This way of evil is a *stranger* to true reality. The *adulterous woman* has *left* the truth and gone her own way. She has *forgotten* God’s promises for her and proclamations of reality. Instead of seeking life, her ways lead to *death*. And, if Solomon’s audience is not careful, she will tempt them away also.

God's design for life is for His people to be in communion with Him by being in communion with one another. This self-governing community is created by following God's covenant laws. The *adultery* of this personified temptation is a turning away from God's true design of reality.

Lady Wisdom represents the Spirit and the truth. This *strange woman* represents the flesh, our sin. The way of the world. Solomon is setting up the nature of discernment and wisdom, the key to living life well—we must choose between these two paths.

Temptation's *house sinks down to death*. She builds on a worldly foundation and her ways lead to destruction and decay. No matter how *flattering* her words, the rotten foundation dooms the *house*. In the same way, *her tracks lead to the dead*. Her path and the wake she leaves behind is one of *death*. So not only is she doomed but those who follow her *tracks* are *dead* as well.

Death is separation. Adam and Eve were separated from Eden as a result of their sin. Exile is a form of death. There are many other forms of death. The passage does not specify numerous ways the *adulteress'* path can bring forth *death*. But it seems apparent that *death* of marital fidelity could be expected. And with it a *death* of familial harmony. A *death* of mutual focus on the best interest of children would be replaced with a focus on "my passions." The entire *house* will experience *death*.

The stakes could not be higher. *None who go to her return again*. Like Lady Wisdom's harsh words in Chapter 1, Solomon is not pulling any punches here—those who choose this *strange* path distort reality and walk in darkness. Once they give themselves to a false reality, they are lost and they *do not reach the paths of life*. Solomon seems to be saying to his young audience, "Don't leave thinking you can just come back any day. It is hard to change courses when you have built a foundation. It is hard to detach from a master to whom you have entrusted yourself."

Wisdom is baked into the DNA of reality. If we ignore it or choose against it, we disqualify ourselves from living in the fullness of *life*.

Will Solomon's reader choose to *forget* God and turn away from wisdom? If one chooses the path of the flesh, they will not *return* from *death* or *reach the paths life*.

Biblical Text

**To deliver you from the strange woman,
From the adulteress who flatters with her words;**

**17 That leaves the companion of her youth
And forgets the covenant of her God;**

**18 For her house sinks down to death
And her tracks lead to the dead;**

**19 None who go to her return again,
Nor do they reach the paths of life.**