

What is the proverbial fool?

1. Contemporary Bible translations provide the means for everyone to read the Bible in their native tongue. Yet one needs to be mindful that the translation may not reflect the subtle meaning of the Hebrew term. The Hebrew term for “fool” is such an example. Consult a contemporary dictionary for the non-biblical definition of “fool.”

The Merriam-Webster dictionary lists four definitions for the noun “fool”:

1. A person lacking in judgment or prudence.
2. A retainer formerly kept in great households to provide casual entertainment and commonly dressed in motley with cap, bells, and bauble.
3. One who is victimized or made to appear foolish, a dupe.
4. A person who is harmlessly deranged, lacking in common powers of understanding, or with a marked propensity or fondness for something.

2. Conduct a word study on the Hebrew terms for “fool” and “foolish” throughout Proverbs to get a sense of what the biblical term means. To help you in your study, include the Strong’s Number.

191 ‘ěvîyl, pronounced ev-veel’, is a term derived from an unused root that means “to be perverse”, or (figuratively) “silly.”

200 ‘ivveleth, pronounced iv-veh’-leth, is a term from **191** ‘ěvîyl and means “silliness, folly, foolish.”

3684 k^ocîyl, pronounced kes-eel’, is a term based on **3688** kâcal, and figuratively means “stupid or silly.”

3688 kâcal, pronounced kaw-sal’, is a primitive root and refers to “to be fat”, and figuratively means “silly” or “to be foolish.”

3687 k^ocîylûwth, pronounced kes-ee;-ooth’, is derived from **3684** k^ocîyl and means “silliness (foolish).”

5036 nâbâl, pronounced naw-bawl’, is based on the term from **5034** nâbêl and means “stupid, wicked (especially impious), or vile person.”

5034 nâbêl, pronounced naw-bale’, is a primitive root meaning “to wilt (generally) to fall away, fail, faint, or (figuratively) to be foolish or (morally) wicked, or (causatively) to despise, disgrace, make vile, wither.”

In contrast to the contemporary definition of the term “fool” as one who lacks judgment or fails to exercise reason, the Hebrew terms of “fool” and “foolish” describe a person who does not believe in God and is ignorant of wisdom based on God’s moral standard. Furthermore the terms indicate that instead of lacking mental capacity, the fool fails to learn from experience and continues to repeatedly make the same foolish mistakes in their life of self-indulgence.

Within Proverbs, various types of fools are described. There are the simple minded, gullible, or naive who are open to instruction to the perverse, hardened, and wicked who delight in wrong behavior. Most of Proverbs’ antithetical parallelisms contrast the wise with the hardened fool, which emphasize how to live through wise behavior and attitude with how not to live through bad or immoral behavior and prideful attitude.

Yet it is not by behavior and attitude alone that determines if one is not foolish. The book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance and priority of God in one’s life and a reliance on God’s guidance in all things.

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