



Proverbs - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

After the title the writer defines the design and nature of the instructions of the book. He paternally invites attention to those instructions and warns his readers against the enticements of the wicked. In a beautiful personification, wisdom is then introduced in a most solemn and impressive manner, publicly inviting men to receive its teachings, warning those who reject, and encouraging those who accept, the proffered instructions.

I Proverbs 1:1-7 - Prologue

Although perhaps originally written as the prologue to the first major division of Proverbs (1:1-9:18), these verses now effectively introduce the reader to the entire book in its final shape. After the title (v.1), there is an introduction that describes the goal of the whole book (vv.2-6) and the motto that underlies every instruction in the book (v.7). As discussed in the Introduction, this enables one to read the book properly.

¹ The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

Proverbs 1:1

The proverbs of Solomon. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of practical life wisdom given mostly in short, memorable statements. Although part of a larger body of wisdom literature that includes Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, the Book of Proverbs is unique. It is unique in its structure, being mostly a collection of individual statements without much context or organisation by topic. It is unique in its theology, being concerned with practical life wisdom more than ideas about God and his work of salvation. Proverbs is also unique in its connection with the secular literature of its time. Neighbouring kingdoms had their own collections of wisdom literature, and in some places there are significant

similarities to these writings. For the origin of Proverbs in the reign of [Solomon](#), refer to the Introduction: Author and Date on the website.

There are several sections of Proverbs that seem to be borrowed from The Teaching of Amenemope, an ancient Egyptian writing. There is debate as to who borrowed whom, but most scholars believe Amenemope is earlier. Derek Kidner commented, “If Proverbs is the borrower here, the borrowing is not slavish but free and creative. Egyptian jewels, as at the Exodus, have been reset to their advantage by Israelite workmen and put to finer use.”

Solomon was the king of Israel famous for his wisdom. In 1 Kings 3:3-13 Solomon asked God for wisdom to lead God’s people, and then Scripture presented a remarkable demonstration of his wisdom in 1 Kings 3:16-28. It also says of Solomon that: *<<He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom>>* (1 Kings 4:32-34).

The opening ‘[the proverbs of Solomon](#)’ should not be taken to mean that Solomon was the author of all these proverbs. There are a few other authors specifically mentioned. Yet, it may well be that Solomon collected all these other proverbs and set them in his book. Whether Solomon was the collector or some unnamed later person, cannot be known for certain. Kidner remarked, “The book tells us that it is the work of several authors. Three of these are named (Solomon, Agur and Lemuel), others are mentioned collectively as ‘Wise Men’, and at least one section of the book (the last) is anonymous.” Yet, the prominence of Solomon in these wonderful statements of wisdom gives the reader pause. It is known that this remarkably wise man did not finish his life in wisdom, as recorded in the books of history and the Book of Ecclesiastes.

- 2 For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
- 3 for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
- 4 to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young —
- 5 let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,

- 6 to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

Proverbs 1:2-6

These verses give the purpose and benefit of the book: it instils wisdom in the reader. The wisdom offered here is practical (instruction in wise dealing), intellectual (gain in learning), moral (righteousness, justice, and equity), and probing (to understand a proverb and their riddles). It is for all people, be they naive and ignorant (the simple and the young), or already experienced in life (let the wise also hear).

For learning about wisdom and instruction. In the opening of his collection of proverbs, Solomon explained the purpose of these sayings of wisdom. They were and are to give the attentive reader wisdom, instruction, perception, and understanding.

It is helpful to remember the difference between wisdom and knowledge. One may have knowledge without wisdom. Knowledge is the collection of facts; wisdom is the right use of what is known for daily living. Knowledge can tell one how financial systems work; wisdom manages a budget properly. James Montgomery Boice commented on Psalm 111, “It is probably a safe bet to say that most people today are not much interested in wisdom. They are interested in making money and in having a good time. Some are interested in knowing something, in getting an education. Almost everyone wants to be well liked. But wisdom? The pursuit of wisdom is not a popular ideal.”

For gaining instruction in wise dealing. Proverbs is something of a school of wisdom. The reader should come to it with an open heart and mind, receiving its teaching. If they do, it will show as righteousness, justice, and equity flowing from their lives.

To teach shrewdness to the simple. The simple one is uneducated and needs instruction. The wisdom of this book will make the young, inexperienced one know what to do and how to do it in life. It will give the young man knowledge and discretion. One characteristic of the simple is that they are gullible: <<***The simple believe everything, but the clever consider their steps***>> (Proverbs 14:15).

Let the wise also hear and gain in learning. The great virtue that this book seeks to instil is teachability, the willingness to grow in wisdom no matter how far along a person already is. The Book of Proverbs is not only for the simple and inexperienced. Even a wise person will find much to help and guide them, if they will only hear and receive its teaching. Even a person of understanding can attain wise counsel from Proverbs.

To understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.

The wisdom of the Book of Proverbs can also help solve difficult problems and some of the riddles of life.

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

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. This is the core maxim of the book: the quest for wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord: <<*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practise it have a good understanding. His praise endures for ever*>> (Psalm 111:10), and: <<*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight*>> (Proverbs 9:10). Knowledge and wisdom are closely tied together in Proverbs: knowledge tends to focus on correct understanding of the world and oneself as creatures of the magnificent and loving God, while wisdom is the acquired skill of applying that knowledge rightly, or ‘skill in the art of godly living.’

On the fear of the Lord, refer to the comments made on Acts 5:5 and 9:31, Romans 3:18, Philippians 2:12-13, 1 Peter 1:17 and 1 John 4:18. The reason that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom is that the moral life begins with reverence and humility before the Maker and Redeemer.

The idea of a quest for knowledge sets biblical wisdom in the broad context of the ancient Near Eastern quest for truth, and this verse also validates such a quest as legitimate and good. Thus it affirms a kind of ‘creational revelation,’ the idea that one can find moral and theological truth through observing the world. At the same time, it distinguishes the biblical pursuit of knowledge and wisdom from those of the surrounding cultures, for it asserts that submission to the Lord is foundational to the attainment of real understanding.

By using the covenant name ‘the Lord’ in preference to the more generic ‘God,’ this verse makes the point that truth is found through Israel’s God. (For fearing the Lord in Proverbs as the right response to his covenant, refer to Proverbs 1:29, 2:5, 3:7, 8:13, 10:27, 14:2, 14:26-27, 15:16, 15:33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17, 24:21 and 31:30; refer also to the comment made on Psalm 19:9.

In addition, the verse asserts that fools despise wisdom and instruction, thus setting up the alternative between the two ways of wisdom and folly. This contrast dominates the entire book, as the way of wisdom, righteousness, and the fear of the Lord is set against the way of folly, evil, and scoffing.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. The Book of Proverbs focuses on practical life wisdom more than theological ideas. Yet it is founded on a vital theological principle - that true knowledge and wisdom flow from **the fear of the Lord**. This **fear of the Lord** is not a cowering, begging fear. It is the proper reverence that the creature owes to the Creator and that the redeemed owe to the Redeemer. It is the proper respect and honouring of God. Several writers give their definition of **the fear of the Lord**, including:

- “A worshipping submission to the God of the covenant” (Derek Kidner).
- “The fear of the Lord signifies that religious reverence which every intelligent being owes to his Creator” (Adam Clarke).

God should be regarded with respect, reverence and awe. This proper attitude of the creature toward the Creator is **the beginning of knowledge and wisdom**. Wisdom cannot advance further until this starting point is established. If true wisdom could simply be gained by human effort, energy, and ingenuity, like the rare and precious metals of the earth, then **the fear of the Lord** is not essential to obtaining wisdom. However, if it comes from God’s revelation, then a right relationship with him is the key to wisdom.

The beginning of knowledge. Solomon probably meant knowledge here mostly in the sense of wisdom. The idea that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom is also found in Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10 and Ecclesiastes 12:13. Kidner observed, “The fall of man was a choosing of what bid fair ‘to make one wise’ (Genesis 3:6) but flouted the first principle of wisdom, the fear of the Lord.”

II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father’s Invitation to Wisdom

This major section describes the two paths implied in v.7: the wise (grounded in the fear of the Lord) and the foolish (despising such wisdom and instruction). The appeals consist of:

- 1. Father (and mother in v.8 and Proverbs 6:20) exhorting a child to seek wisdom, e.g. Proverbs Chapter 2, and warning him against the ruin that comes from folly, e.g. Proverbs 6:1-19.**
- 2. Wisdom (personified as a woman) calling on all who will listen to seek her (vv.20-33 and Proverbs Chapter 8).**
- 3. A final contrast of the two paths represented by Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in Proverbs 9:1-18. The purpose of the section is to instruct the young and simple to embrace wisdom and to instil in them the desire to discern and persevere in the path of wisdom.**

II.a Proverbs 1:8-19 - Warnings against Evil Companions

The appeal opens, like most of the paternal addresses, with a personal address and an encouragement to heed the instruction as a prized and beneficial possession

(vv.8-9). This first appeal is a warning against those who might seek aid in unjust gain and consists of two parts: the hypothetical invitations of those who seek to <<**ambush the innocent**>> (vv.11-14), bordered by warnings to reject such pleas (v.10 and v.15) and the grounds for doing so (vv.16-19). The purpose of the warning is to instil the wisdom to recognise that while such plots offer companionship and immediate gain, they lead down a path that ends in destruction.

- ⁸ Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;
⁹ for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck.

Proverbs 1:8-9

Hear, my child, your father's instruction. This is a warm and appropriate scene. A father speaks to his son, encouraging him to receive the wisdom of his parents. It is often the nature of the young to be slow to receive the wisdom of their older generation. The mention of a son in the Hebrew is a reminder of another tragedy or irony regarding the life of Solomon. The man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines left record of only one son, Rehoboam, and he was a fool whose lack of wisdom led to the division of Israel into two kingdoms; refer to 2 Chronicles 10:12-17.

My child or my son. On the address to a particular child, see the discussion of 'concreteness' in Introduction: Literary Features.

Your father's instruction, your mother's teaching. Coming directly after the prologue (vv.1-7), this verse begins the first section by indicating that the training in wisdom referred to in Proverbs includes instruction in the home by father and mother; refer also to Proverbs 6:20, 23:22 and 31:26. This is in keeping with the fifth commandment: <<**Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you**>> (Exodus 20:12). Because both the father and the mother are mentioned, it is known that teaching the children wisdom is the responsibility of both parents.

The mention of instruction shows that Solomon understood that children are not to be taught only or even primarily through physical or mental punishment. Children are regarded as capable of thought, learning, and obedience beyond blind submission.

For they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck. The idea is that the instruction and law given from parent to child will adorn the life of

their children, if they will only receive it. Like a crown on the head or chains about the neck, such wisdom will be a reward to a younger generation.

- ¹⁰ My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.
- ¹¹ If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
- ¹² like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to the Pit.
- ¹³ We shall find all kinds of costly things;
we shall fill our houses with booty.

Proverbs 1:10-13

My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent. Solomon first warned his son about the danger of bad company. The actions of some people clearly reveal them to be sinners, more than in the general sense in which all are sinners: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23). These are those whom the young must resist their enticements. Significantly, this first instruction and warning in the Book of Proverbs speaks to the company people keep and the friendships they make. There are few more powerful forces and influences upon a life than the chosen friends. It has been said, “show me your friends and I can see your future.” It speaks to the great need for God’s people to be more careful and wise in their choice of friends. Clarke commented, “They can do you no harm unless you join in with them. Not even the devil himself can lead a man into sin until he consents. Were it not so, how could God judge the world?”

Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood. When the wicked plot their evil actions, the wise son will not consent. He will distance himself from them, no matter what the promised or potential gain may be, i.e. we shall fill our houses with booty. Solomon described the words of sinners in terms of their real meaning and effect, and not what they actually said. Surely such sinners would appeal to riches and quick gain, and not merely invite this one to shed blood. Solomon tells his listeners and readers to hear what people mean with such promises of quick and easy riches, not only what they say.

The temptation for precious goods or costly things and plunder or booty is one of the ways in which <<*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*>> (1 Timothy 6:10a).

- 14 Throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse' —
- 15 my child, do not walk in their way,
keep your foot from their paths;
- 16 for their feet run to evil,
and they hurry to shed blood.
- 17 For in vain is the net baited
while the bird is looking on;
- 18 yet they lie in wait — to kill themselves!
and set an ambush — for their own lives!
- 19 Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors.

Proverbs 1:14-19

My child, do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths. The guidance from father to son was simple and clear. Stay away from the wicked and all their plotting, for their feet run to evil. Tragically, Solomon's company with sinners - in the form of his wives given to idolatry - became a trap he himself was caught in.

Yet they lie in wait — to kill themselves! Ultimately, the gain promised by the wicked can never be fulfilled. They say: <<**let us lie in wait for blood**>> (v.11a), but in fact they are the hunted. They seek to take the life and livelihood of others, but it takes away the life of its possessors.

These verses conclude the first appeal by contrasting the sensible actions of a bird with the foolish actions of those who seek unjust gain. A bird that sees a fowler spreading a net will flee the danger to its life rather than take the bait. However, those who seek to trap the innocent do not recognise that although they may gain the desired prize (the goods and plunder of v.13) they foolishly overlook the full consequences of their actions: in setting the trap, they ultimately set an ambush — for their own lives. Unlike the sensible flying away of the bird, they take plunder, further forming their character on their way to ultimate peril. Their own words highlight their blindness. In v.12 the sinners refer to capturing the innocent in ambush by saying: <<**like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit**>>, comparing their actions to the physical effects of death. However, when v.19 speaks of the result of the ways of all who are greedy for gain — that it takes away the life of its possessors — it is not saying

simply that their actions will bring about their own death, although they may. Rather it says that such actions lead to the ultimate end of the way of the wicked, an even more profound loss of life, with all that that involves: <<***Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them***>> (Proverbs 22:22-23).

II.b Proverbs 1:20-33 - The Call of Wisdom

Wisdom is personified here as a woman and is pictured appealing to simple ones, scoffers, and fools to heed her words. Other personifications appear in Chapters 8-9. Since wisdom in Proverbs is set out in the prologue as a quality rooted in the fear of the Lord (vv.1-7), it should not be surprising that in its personification, Wisdom speaks in a way that evokes the words of the Lord, e.g. <<***I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you***>> (v.23). The appeal consists of a description of Wisdom's pursuit and plea (vv.20-23), a warning about the consequences of refusing to heed her call (vv.24-31), and the grounds for listening to her (vv.32-33).

- ²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
- ²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
- ²² 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?

Proverbs 1:20-22

Wisdom cries out in the street. Solomon presents Wisdom as a person, a woman who offers her guidance and help to the world. Her cry is out loud, but is too often ignored. This answers Job's question: <<***But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?***>> (Job 28:12)

In the street; in the squares; at the busiest corner; at the entrance of the city gates. Wisdom presents herself to everyone in every place. She offers her help to anyone who will give attention to her words. Kidner noted, "Here the open proclamation to make it clear that the offer of wisdom is to the man in the street, and for the business of living, not to an élite for the pursuit of scholarship."

How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? Wisdom begins her appeal by addressing those who most need her help - the simple ones, those who are

untrained in the ways of wisdom. Wisdom challenged those without wisdom to give account for their lack, asking “How long?” How many more weeks, months, or years will the simple ones reject or neglect wisdom’s help? The problem with these simple ones was that they loved their simplicity. They preferred their foolish ignorance rather than make the effort and correction required by the love and pursuit of wisdom.

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? This scorn describes those who boastfully reject and despise God’s wisdom. They love their simplicity and scorn, and they hate knowledge. A downward spiral is in view. They started gullible, then became a fool, and ended up a scorner or mocker.

- 23 Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
- 24 Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
25 and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
- 26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
27 when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.

Proverbs 1:23-27

Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you. The embrace of wisdom begins with a turn. One must be willing to change direction from the pursuit of foolishness and scorn, and turn towards God and his wisdom. This response to wisdom’s rebuke invites wisdom to pour itself out. The term translated ‘thoughts’ in the NRSVA is translated as ‘spirit’ elsewhere. It seems that the description here is of the spirit of wisdom, not specifically the Holy Spirit. The two concepts do not contradict each other, but they are also not exactly the same.

Because I have called and you refused. This is the reproof that wisdom offered. She promised that if she were rejected, she would laugh at your calamity. Rejected wisdom has nothing to offer the fool when destruction comes like a whirlwind: *<<I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to*

the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my sight, and chose what I did not delight in>> (Isaiah 65:12), and: <<Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem every disaster that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered>> (Jeremiah 35:17).

- 28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
- 29 Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
30 would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.
- 32 For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
33 but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.'

Proverbs 1:28-33

Wisdom declares that when calamity falls upon the scoffers, they will call upon me, but I will not answer. Although the language is similar to texts such as: <<*And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day*>> (1 Samuel 8:18), actual prayer is probably not in view here. Lady Wisdom here is not God but simply a personification. The meaning is that fools and scoffers, when disaster overtakes them, will frantically seek the wisdom to get out of trouble. However, it will be too late for them.

The content of vv.24-25 is repeated in v.28 and v.30 as the foolish refusal to listen to instruction is reflected back to the wayward one in his distress. The effect of this repetition is to highlight the additional comment of v.29, which warns that the foolish refusal to heed Wisdom's call manifests hatred of knowledge and rejection of the fear of the Lord (v.7).

Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way. Proverbs refers to the way of wisdom and the way of foolishness as sharing this reality: each works according to its nature. A person's actions both manifest the state of the heart and also shape it further in the way a person will walk. The direction of each path indicates the end to which it is headed. Those who refuse to listen to Wisdom's reproof walk in a way that will ultimately produce for their own consumption the very fruit they offered to others: the fruit of calamity, terror, and destruction. For a similar description of the paths and their ends, refer to Jeremiah 6:16-19.

But those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster. Those who do listen to wisdom's call **will be secure**, without fear of evil. Their fear of the Lord resulted in their having no **dread of disaster**.