

# WISE UP TO LIVE RIGHT

*Proverbs 1:1-7*

## MEMORIZE THIS WEEK

*“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge,  
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”*

*- 1:7 (NLT)*

## DAY 1 GETTING STARTED

*Proverbs* was written for three kinds of people: *the wise*, *the simple*, and *the fool*.

### THE WISE

The *wise* seek to increase their own personal stock of wisdom as well as convey its insights to others they love, for example, their employees, or the children God has entrusted into their care. We may not be sages, or consider ourselves wise, but do you have the intelligence to understand that wisdom is the key to good living?

### THE SIMPLE

The *simple* are youth that don't know the devious ways of the world. They are *innocent* to the wicked schemes of the gangs and the criminal. They just don't know and what they don't know can hurt them or get them killed.

## THE FOOL

A *fool* checks out mentally on anything that doesn't match what he wants or is just not "fun." He already "knows" and doesn't want to be bothered since what the wise say might conflict with his own will. She certainly doesn't want God's opinion of things.

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*Pray About This*

*Why not ask God to open your heart and mind to wisdom, to remove bad fear and replace it with the Fear of the Lord.*

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**DAY 2    WHAT IS A PROVERB?**

A proverb is ... a short saying that is full of meaning. Every culture on earth uses them because they make truth memorable. Paul Seger in his book, *Chief*, relates the wisdom he gained growing up as a missionary kid in Nigeria by expounding on the meaning of African proverbs. For instance,

*"A large chair does not make a king."*

*"In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges  
and the foolish build dams."*

*"If you want to go quickly, go alone.  
If you want to go far, go together."*

*"The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay."*

Write out a familiar sayings you know:

## Lesson One

### THE WORD

The word *proverbs* refers to the Hebrew word, *mashal*, (מָשָׁל) which can be also be translated *parable*, *allegory*, *byword*, *taunt*, or *discourse* depending on the context and usually the length. It is used both as a verb and a noun. As a verb it has three areas of meaning:

One, has the sense of “*control*” or “*rule*,” as in “A slave who deals wisely *will rule* [*mashal*] over a son who acts shamefully ...” (17:2).

Two, has to do with comparing one thing to another, for example, “Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is *like* [*mashal*] the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:20).

Three is related its use in comparisons, for example, “Behold, everyone who uses *proverbs* [*mashal*] will use this *proverb* [*mashal*] about you” (Ezek 16:44).

Although the Hebrew word is sometimes used in the sense of comparison, which suggests a simile, there are many examples of proverbs, riddles, oracles, allegories, and parables that are referred to by this word, but which contain no comparisons and show no likenesses. For example,

1. A *parable* (Ezekiel 17:2)
2. An *expression of contempt* (Psalm 44:14)
3. A *folk saying* (1 Samuel 10:12).
4. An *obscure manner of speaking* (Ezekiel 20:49)
5. A *lament* (Micah 2:4)
6. A *prophecy* (Numbers 23:7)
7. A *Psalm of Instruction* (Psalm 49:4)
8. An *argument or plea* (Job 27:1; 29:1)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William David Reyrburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 1–2.

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<sup>1.1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

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The beginning of this collection of *proverbial sayings* is headed by a *prologue* which states what we will learn if we put forth the time and mental effort it takes to study it.

Read the following verses from the *New International Version (NIV)* carefully and then answer the questions:

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- <sup>2</sup> for gaining wisdom and instruction;  
for understanding words of insight;
  - <sup>3</sup> for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,  
doing what is right and just and fair;
  - <sup>4</sup> for giving prudence to those who are simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the young—
  - <sup>5</sup> let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance—
  - <sup>6</sup> for understanding proverbs and parables,  
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
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For what purposes were these collected (*1:2-6*)?

What do *you* hope to acquire by studying proverbs?

## Lesson One

As the opening verses tell us, these proverbs have been collected and written for those who:

1. need to acquire the *ability to gain understanding*
2. to learn *prudent behavior*
3. to know how *to do what is right, just, and fair*
4. are too *young* to have learned by experience
5. need *more wisdom* to face life's challenges

If you fit in one or more of those categories, it will be well worth your time to meditate upon the words written in this book.

Remember we are *reading wisdom*, which is not the same thing as *living wise*. Knowing is not the same thing as doing. Look at the following Scriptures and record the unwise things that Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, did:

*1 Kings 11:1-11*

*1 Kings 12:4*

*Nehemiah 13:26*

Solomon is a prime example of giving good advice, but failing to follow his own wisdom. We need to be sure that we allow this study to not only make our thinking wise, but change our foolish actions into wise ones.

### Pray About This

*Ask the Lord to show you where your life doesn't match up with the wisdom you already know and for the courage and wisdom to do the works of repentance.*

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## DAY 3 INTERPRETATION & MISTAKES

### THREE STEPS

We use a method of approaching Scripture which is sometimes called *literal*, but is really just coming to the text seeking to *decode the meaning* that the author placed in the text as written. We read to **observe** the words, the grammar and literary structure.

Next, we seek to **interpret** the meaning the author placed there for his original hearers. Who was the original audience for Proverbs? You should note within the text indications of to whom the author was speaking. Also consider the history of Solomon's times and the Hebrew language. The greater context is the Law (Torah – *Gen. to Deut.*).

Once we know what Solomon meant, only then are we able to discern how it would have been applied in his day and then seek guidance to **apply** its wisdom to our lives. In this we are greatly helped by seeking out other passages which address the same subject area both in Proverbs as well as the rest of the Scriptures.

## Lesson One

### THREE MISTAKES

There are some common mistakes that people make when trying to interpret a proverb: *proof-texting*, *misdefining words*, and *failing to discern the form*.

#### ***Proof-texting***

A person studies a subject without taking the time to consider the context and to correlate what is said with others. After chapter 10, verse 1, there is a temptation to assume that all that follows is simply a collection of individual proverbs with no arrangement whatsoever. That is not true! A good example of this is in the interpretation of Proverbs 26:5,

<sup>5</sup>Answer a fool according to his folly,  
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

Some will take this to mean that God wants us to answer a fool according to his folly, i.e., we are to correct foolish people by being foolish ourselves. Observing the immediate context would correct this. Note the preceding verse, Proverbs 26:4,

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you yourself will be just like him.

#### ***Misdefining Words***

Sometimes we refuse to use the author's definitions of words and substitute instead our own. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, (p.188) give the following example from Proverbs 14:7,

Stay away from a fool,  
for you will not find knowledge on their lips.

“Does this mean that the Christian should not associate with the retarded, the uneducated, the mentally ill? Not at all. In Proverbs, ‘fool’ ... refers to an unbeliever who lives life according to selfish, indulgent whims, and who acknowledges to higher authority than himself.... If you are seeking knowledge, you should not seek it from an infidel.”

### ***Failing to Discern the Form***

Solomon spoke and these proverbs were written in the Hebrew poetic form known as *parallelism*. Because we use translations we are not able to discern *audible clues* that are impossible to reproduce faithfully in translation. What we can do is observe the arrangement of thoughts and meanings which can be brought out faithfully in all translations. Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, (p.181) says,

*Parallelism* is best defined as two or more lines that use different words but similar grammatical form to express the same idea. ... The phrase *thought couplet* ... is a good synonym for parallelism in the Bible.

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### *Pray About This*

*Have you been guilty of misusing a proverb? Maybe you used it as an excuse to do what you wanted, or as a device to manipulate someone else?*

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## DAY 4 MORE ON PARALLELISM

Parallelism is a way of structuring the thoughts and ideas normally in a *couplet*, two lines, but this can be in a *triplet* and even a *quartet* of lines. The amount of parallelism can vary from, *complete parallelism* where every part of the first line has its counterpart in the second line to *incomplete parallelism* which has only some parallel terms. *Formal (form) parallelism* has no terms in common, but the couplet style is followed.

It will be helpful to know some major classifications of the parallelism that occur in Hebrew poetry:

1. *synonymous*
2. *antithetical*
3. *emblematic*
4. *synthetic*

As we go along each of these will be illustrated from Proverbs, but for now read over these definitions:

*Synonyms* are different words which have the same meaning. In this type of poetry at least some of the terms in the second line reinforces the thought of the first line by using synonyms for the words or phrases in the first line (1:2; 2:11).

*Antithetical* means that the second line of the couplet balances the first line through *contrast* or *opposition*. The truth expressed *positively* at first is given *negatively* in the second (10:1; 11:1).

*Emblematic* involves the use of a comparative figure of speech such as a *simile* or a *metaphor* to complement the meaning of the first line (10:26; 25:12).

*Synthetic parallelism* is where the second line completes or expands the thought of the first line without parallelism or repetition (3:6; 6:12; 12:9).

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*Pray About This*

*Do you tend to ignore things like structure preferring to just get on with application?*

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## DAY 5 ARE YOU A FOOL?

No offense is intended. I am not implying that you are a fool, merely giving you the opportunity to do a self-analysis. If you discover you *despise* something you are reading or that is being taught in Proverbs, you are being prompted to recognize that you are being foolish!

The first piece of wisdom that we are given is in our memory verse 1:7,

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

– Proverbs 1:7

What does ‘fear the Lord’ mean to you?

As we go along in our study of Proverbs, we should come to a much better understanding of this concept. I would suggest that God knows more about everything than you do, even more than the collective wisdom of

## Lesson One

every person on earth. He not only knows, but He is right about everything. How is your record compared to God's? If you fail to get God's wisdom and put His knowledge into practice in your life ... regret will follow, perhaps eternally.

### **ADDITIONAL HELPS**

This structural outline will serve as signposts to mark the major parts of this work:

#### **Introduction (1:1–7)**

#### **Wisdom Poems (1:8–9:18)**

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Exhortation One (1:8-19)
2. Interlude (1:20-33)
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> Exhortation (2:1-22)
4. 3<sup>rd</sup> Exhortation (3:1-12)
5. 4<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (3:13-35)
6. 5<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (4:1-9)
7. 6<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (4:10-19)
8. 7<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (4:20-27)
9. 8<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (5:1-23)
10. Appendix (6:1-19)
11. 9<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (6:20-35)
12. 10<sup>th</sup> Exhortation (7:1-27)
13. Interlude (8:1-36)
14. Epilogue (9:1-18)

#### **Collections (10:1–31:31)**

1. Solomon's Proverbs (10:1–22:16)
2. The Great Thirty (22:17–24:22)
3. More Sayings (24:23–34)
4. Hezekiah's Collection (25:1–29:27)
5. The Words of Agur (30:1–33)
6. Lemuel's Learning (31:1–31)

## INSIGHT ON HISTORY

While the primary speaker of proverbs was Solomon, the book itself was put together in at least two different centuries, perhaps three. This chart of Hebrew kings will help us get our historical bearings.

King	Dates of Reign	
<b>David</b>	1010-970	<i>4:1-9 (content)</i>
<b>Solomon</b>	970-930	<i>Chs. 1-24</i>
Rehoboam	930-913	Kingdom Divided
Abijah	913-910	
Asa	910-869	
Jehoshaphat	872-848	
Jehoram	853-841	
Ahaziah	841	
<i>Queen Athaliah</i>	841-835	
Joash	835-796	
Amaziah	796-767	
Uzziah	792-740	
Jotham	750-732	
Ahaz	735-715	
<b>Hezekiah</b>	715-686	<i>Chs. 25-29, 30-31</i>
Manasseh	697-642	
Amon	642-640	
Josiah	640-609	
Jehoahaz	609	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Deportation to Babylon</i>
Jehoiakim	609-598	
Jehoichin	598-597	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Deportation</i>
<b>Zedekiah</b>	597-586	Final Deportation