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The Fear of ADONAI is the Beginning of Wisdom 1: 1-7

Solomon opens Proverbs with a prologue, an overview of what the reader is to take away from the wisdom contained in his writing.

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Unlike other books of the Bible, **Proverbs** contains no direct information about the people to whom it was originally written. It doesn't mention the people to whom it was originally written. It doesn't mention the Hebrew nation, its culture, customs, laws, or history. The TaNaKh and history require us to draw timeless principles from words written to people living far away and long ago; the book of **Proverbs**, however, is timeless and universal. The **wisdom of Solomon** and the other **sages** requires no translation; the truths simply apply to all people living everywhere at any time. Even so, we must consciously exchange our twenty-first-century filter for the worldview of the Hebrew **God**.⁹

Title (1:1): The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Isra'el (1:1 NIV). The first verse is a superscription, which is an inscription or heading placed at the beginning of a text, often providing context or instructions. Superscriptions appear at the beginning of many other books, most consistently with the works of prophecy. The superscription is like the title page of a modern book in that it provides information about the genre, author, and occasionally the subject matter and date of a book (for example **Isaiah 1:1** and **Nahum 1:1**). Superscriptions are found in other wisdom contexts, the one closest to the opening of **Proverbs** is found in **Ecclesiastes 1:1: The words of Qoheleth the son of David, king in Jerusalem**. In **Ecclesiastes**, this is part of the frame narrator's strategy of near identity between **Qoheleth** and **Solomon**. In the case of **Proverbs**, the book's superscription provides the genre (**proverbs**), the authorship (**Solomon the son of David**), and the location (**Isra'el**). While the date is not mentioned, the subject

matter is explained in **verses 2-6**. This introductory passage is jam-packed with words that are important to wisdom literature and are repeated throughout the book. For this reason, we will reflect at some length on their meanings and refer back to this file when these words appear later in the book.

What we identify as **the purpose** statement may be divided into four parts. It begins with a general statement of **purpose** that is directed toward no specific group and therefore should probably be understood as intended for all readers. Then the next two parts are distinguished by reference to the addressee. **Verse 4** addresses **the simple minded**, while **verses 5-6** speak to **the wise**.

Finally, **the seventh verse** states **the motto** of the book.¹⁰

Purpose (1:2-6): An introduction to any book gives a clue to how the author wants the book to be understood. Since **Hezekiah's men** collected some of **Solomon's proverbs** (to see [link click Df - Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah's Men](#)), it is possible that **they**, or someone else, wrote this introduction to summarize the collection of **proverbs**. And it certainly does tell us something about **the purpose** of the book. In addition, the writer used a clever poetic format. Most of the lines begin with an infinitive in the Hebrew. One way of translating these verses would begin with, **"to know," "to teach," "to acquire," "to give,"** and **"to understand."** All of these are short **purpose** statements for the book.¹¹

Their purpose is to know about wisdom and discipline; to help them acquire understanding and insights of the wise (1:2 NLT). The Proverbs are for learning about **wisdom** and **discipline**, which are linked together. **Wisdom** is using and applying **knowledge** intelligently and appropriately. **Discipline** derives from **knowledge** based on experiences, including learning from mistakes. **The proverbs** of **Solomon** include important life principles and wise generalized truths. The term wisdom is prominent in the books of **Proverbs**, **Job**, and **Ecclesiastes**, occurring 189 times in these books out of 346 occurrences in **the TaNaKh**.¹²

The statement of **purpose** begins with the verb **to know** (Hebrew: *yada*). Here and elsewhere in **Proverbs**, the verbal root has the sense of *to acknowledge* or *to recognize* (**3:6a**). It implies more than merely intellectual assent. This verb governs two objects. The first word is **wisdom** (Hebrew: *chokmah*), which is the general term from which all other terms flow. The next word is **discipline** (Hebrew: *musar*) which **Proverbs** links together, is formed from the verb *ysr*, meaning *to admonish* or *to correct*. The verb as well as the noun implies the threat of punishment if one

does not obey the words of **discipline**. As we will see later in the book (**10:13, 13:24, 19:18 and 25, 20:30, 22:15, 23:13-14, 26:3**), corporeal punishment was very much a possibility for the reluctant learner. The parallel colon has a second verb, **understanding** (Hebrew: from *byn*), and it governs the object, which I have translated **insights of the wise**. This verb means to perceive through the senses.¹³

The third verse again mentions **discipline**, but this time joins it with **prudence**. **Their purpose is to receive instruction on how to live disciplined and prudent** (Hebrew: *haskel*) **lives (1:4a)**, in other words, **wise** behavior or good sense. The original term translated **receive** carries with it the idea of mobility or taking something along with you. **Proverbs** make us alert for the journey of life. Anyone who has driven long distances can affirm that bad things happen – wrong turns at best, fatal crashes at worst – when the driver is no longer alert. These proverbs in the TaNaKh help us to remain attentive to our surroundings and aware of potential dangers.¹⁴ Perhaps “insight” comes nearest to the original, but in a practical sense. **Prudence** describes one’s ability to navigate the problems of life. **It** carefully considers a situation before rushing in and implies coolheadedness. This concept may be illustrated by the actions of Abigail, the wife of the foolish Nabal (see [the Life of David Bn - Abigail Acted Quickly](#)). It is not merely **knowledge** that the book seeks to impart, but also **righteousness, justice** and **fairness**. The actions of a **prudent** person prevent **wisdom** and **understanding** from being misused (**1:3a Hebrew**).

To help them do what is right (Hebrew: *tsedeq*, meaning *righteous* or *righteousness*). This expresses conformity to a standard, as in **Deuteronomy 25:15**, where weights and measures were required to be **right**. The religious use of the term signifies what is **right** according to the standard of **the Torah (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)**, namely, conduct that conforms to the moral standards of the covenantal community (**Jeremiah 22:13; Hosea 10:12**). **Knowledge** and **understanding** that does not lead to **righteousness** is not wisdom at all. However, those who are **righteous** conform to the principles of both **wisdom** and **the Torah (1:3b Hebrew)**.

Prudent acts will also exhibit **justice** (Hebrew: *mishpat*, meaning *just*), which essentially signifies a “decision” like that of an arbiter (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Dg - Judges**). It is applied to litigation (**Second Samuel 15:2**) and the precedent established by such (**Exodus 21:9**, used as a custom in **First Kings 18:18**). The term also means that which is fitting or proper (**Judges 13:12**). **Proverbs** will develop a life that has a sense of propriety in making decisions (**1:3c**

Hebrew).¹⁵

The third quality is **fairness** (Hebrew: *meisharim*, which is related to *yasar*, meaning *upright* or *straight*). It describes that which is pleasing or liked: **she is the right one for me (Judges 14:3c). Proverbs** will instruct a lifestyle that is **fair**, one that encompasses the most pleasing aspects (**1:3d Hebrew**). So the disciple of **Proverbs** will acquire **wisdom** and **self-control** which will produce a **prudent** life, and that **prudence** will be reflected in a life of **righteousness, justice, and fairness**. These three terms can be found together in the next chapter: **Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go (2:9).**¹⁶

This verse is directed toward **the simpleminded** (Hebrew: from *pethi*, meaning *naïve* or *inexperienced*). The Hebrew concept of **wisdom** doesn't put ignorance and foolishness in the same category. Those who have not experienced much of life or have not yet benefited from education are likely workers without tools or warriors without weapons. Youthful and naïve people approach life poorly equipped. Intellectually empty-handed, they cannot accomplish much as laborers, they remain defenseless against attack. The sages offered this **prudence to the simpleminded so they can learn to be wise, and young people can gain knowledge and discernment (1:4 CEVB)**. The sages offered this intellectual and spiritual equipment to **the simpleminded**, to those who are naïve and **young**.

While some readers and hearers will be older than others, none have "arrived" in life's journey. Regardless of age or experience, each person remains young and naïve in some respect. The book of **Proverbs** – and **Solomon's** section in particular – assures us that these sayings will equip us for life's challenges. To all those who wander aimlessly, lacking purpose and embracing merely a human viewpoint of existence, the wisdom of **ADONAI** offers hope!

These two verses address **the wise person**. **Solomon** invites them to feast on **his** holy food. **Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance by exploring the meaning of these proverbs and difficult sayings, the words of the wise and their enigmas (1:5-6 NLT)**. The repetition of the word **understanding** underscores the necessity of grasping the meaning of words and implies that this skill is learned through diligent study.

These sayings will help us think clearly: divine **wisdom** will give our minds a razor-

sharp edge. Keep in mind such blades require the application of friction if they are to stay sharp. This process of honing causes sparks and is rarely pleasant. Like a hard stone, **the proverbs** prepare our minds to slice through the layers of falsehood to the core of truth in any given situation. Divine **wisdom** gives us the ability to understand more of life's **enigmas**. Before long, the grind of a merely human viewpoint will slowly be replaced by the **wisdom of God**.¹⁷ We will look at the meaning of each of these **four expressions** separately:

1. We begin with **proverbs** (Hebrew: *mesalim*, meaning *to be like*). The resumption of **the purpose** of **Proverbs** here shows that it has not been abandoned, but rather that it takes a new turn at this point. Just as **verses 3-5** unpacked **1:2a's** emphasis on shaping our character, now **verse 6** picks up **1:2b's** emphasis on shaping our thinking. The intellectual **purpose** of the book is that its readers will understand the various types of **"proverbs"** and the meaning they convey.¹⁸ Indeed, many of **the proverbs** use simile and metaphor to communicate important ideas. However, the term *mesalim* signifies that there are many different types of writing. **The proverb** includes sayings (**First Samuel 10:12** and **24:14; Ezeki'el 12:22-23**), didactic poems (**Isaiah 14:4-10**), wisdom psalms (**Psalms 49:4** and **78:2**), and **parables** (**Proverbs 21:12, 25,** and **31**), the comparison (**Proverbs 10:26** and **11:22**), the beatitude (**Proverbs 8:32** and **34**), the better saying (**Proverbs 15:16-17**), the numerical saying (**Proverbs 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 24-28,** and **29-31**), and the abomination saying (**Proverbs 3:32, 6:16, 8:7,** and **11:1**).¹⁹

2. While **proverb** is a broad term, **difficult sayings** (Hebrew: *melitsah*) is more restrictive because it only appears in **Habakkuk 2:6. (1:6d NLT)**. Their precise meaning is unclear, but the context shows that it describes a subgroup of sayings in the book.

3. The words of the wise (Hebrew: *divrei chachamim*) probably does not refer to informal sayings as much as to written **wisdom** collections. These **wise men** are **the sages** who **teach wisdom** to **the young**. This expression occurs in **Ecclesiastes 12:11**, where the unnamed narrator warns his son that **the words of the wise** are like **goats** and firmly implanted **nails**, things that hurt. **He warns his son of them (Ecclesiastes 12:12)**. In this verse, however, there is a much more positive attitude toward **the words of the wise**. The collections of wisdom that follow in **Proverbs** are easily seen in such **words (1:6e NLT)**.

4. Lastly, the prologue refers to **their enigmas** (Hebrew: *chidotam*, meaning a

figure of speech that needs interpretation), the **“their”** being a reference to **the wise**. This word has generated much mystery because it is often translated “riddle,” but as we read on, we see that there are no riddles in the book of **Proverbs**. The word can indeed include riddles and it is used in Samson’s wedding-day riddle (**Judges 14:12-19**) and **the hard questions the Queen of Sheba** posed to **Solomon (First Kings 10:1-2; Second Chronicles 9:1)**. However, the word is to be understood more broadly as an **enigma**. Many **proverbs**, particularly in their original Hebrew, have an element of ambiguity about **them (1:6f NLT)**.²⁰

The motto (1:7): The final verse of the prologue is its climax. **The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline (1:7 NIV)**. This is the most foundational truth in the book and is repeated with some variation a number of times (especially in **9:10**, but also see **1:29, 2:5, 3:7, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:2, 26-27, 15:16** and **33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17, 24:21, 28:14, 29:25, and 31:30**). In the introduction to **Proverbs**, **Solomon** promises to give readers **wisdom and knowledge**. Then, just a few lines later, here in **verse 7**, **he** reveals the critical source of those qualities.

A person might look in many directions for **the beginning of knowledge**. One might look to the royal wisdom of great kings from the past. Royal wisdom abounds in **Proverbs**, both in **Solomon’s wisdom** and in **the wisdom of King Lemuel’s mother (31:1-9)**. Or one might search for **the beginning of knowledge** in the sciences. **Solomon** was, for his day, an expert in this area, able to **discuss trees, wild animals, poultry, reptiles and fish (First Kings 4:33)**. But **Solomon’s** point is this: human discovery is not the beginning place of **knowledge** for **the wise**.

Rather, **knowledge** begins with faith. What does **the fear of ADONAI** have to do with faith? Everything. We need faith to believe that behind the ups and downs of daily life is a **Creator** who sees all and who renders ultimate justice. It is all too easy to attribute the hard knocks and the blessings of life to any number of causes, rather than to the sovereign will of **God**. In **Solomon’s** day, the gods were a popular answer. Those “gods” were nature deities and fertility goddesses whose power was often relegated to the form of **an idol** (see [Isaiah Hy - Worship the LORD, Not Idols](#)). Others suggested fate or random chance as the source of life’s trials.

For the unbeliever, **the fear of ADONAI** is the judgment of **Ha’Shem** and eternal death, which is separation from **the LORD (Luke 15:5; Hebrews 10:31)**. For the

believer, however, **fear** is reverence for **God**. **Hebrews 12:28-29** is a good description of this: **Therefore, since we have received an unshakeable Kingdom, let us have grace, through which we may offer service that will please God, with reverence and awe. For indeed, "Our God is a consuming fire!"** This **reverence and awe** are exactly what **the fear of ADONAI** means for believers. This is a motivating factor for us to surrender to **the Creator of the Universe**.



The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of knowledge. Until we understand who **ADONAI** is and develop a **reverential fear of Him**, we cannot have true **wisdom**. True **wisdom** comes only from understanding who **ADONAI** is and that **He** is holy, just, and righteous. **Deuteronomy 10:12** and **20-21** records: **So now, Isra'el, all that ADONAI your God asks from you is to fear ADONAI your God, follow all His ways, love Him and serve ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being. You are to fear ADONAI your God, serve him, cling to him and swear by his name. He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things, which you have seen with your own eyes. The fear of ADONAI** is the basis for our walking in **His** ways, serving **Him**, and, yes, **loving Him**.

Some redefine **the fear of ADONAI** for believers to "respecting" **Him**. While respect is definitely included in the concept of **fearing ADONAI**, there is more to it than that. A biblical **fear of ADONAI**, for the believer, includes understanding how much **God** hates sin and the consequences that sin will have in our lives if allowed to fester. **ADONAI** disciplines **His children** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**), and even though it is a **fearful** thing, it is done in love (**Hebrews 12:6**). When we were children, our fear of discipline from our

parents no doubt prevented some sinful actions on our part. The same should be true in our relationship with **ADONAI**. We should fear **His discipline**, and therefore seek to live our lives in a way that pleases **Him**.²¹

Unbelievers *should* fear the wrath of **Messiah** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**). As **He Himself** said: **don't be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell (Luke 12:4-5).**

Elsewhere in the TaNaKh, **Deuteronomy 32:22** talks about a burning **hell**; **Second Samuel 22:6**, **Psalm 18:5** and **Psalm 116:3** show that **hell** is a sorrowful place; **Psalm 9:17** says that the wicked go to **hell**; and **Job 26:6** shows that **hell** is a place of destruction. However, believers are never judged. Yes, one day all believers **must all appear before the bema of Messiah, so that each one may receive what is due them for the things done while in the Body, whether good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10)**. The basis of blessing at the bema will be the believer's works **done in the Body of Messiah** after salvation. This is illustrated in the parable of the Bags of Gold (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Jx - The Parable of the Bags of Gold**). Some were faithful and were rewarded, and some were not and lost their reward. The believer's sins cannot be judged, because they have already been forgiven at the cross, and **there is no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua (Romans 8:1)**. At the bema, it will not be a question of the believer's sins, but a matter of reward to determine degree of authority in the Messianic Kingdom (see the commentary on **Revelation Cc - For We Must All Appear Before the Bema Seat of Christ**).

Believers are not to be scared of **ADONAI**. We have no reason to be scared of **Him**. We have **His** promises that **nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39)**. We have **His** promise that **He will never leave us or abandon us (Hebrews 13:5)**. **Fearing God** means having a reverence for **Him** that greatly impacts the way we live. **The fear of ADONAI** is respecting **Him**, obeying **Him**, submitting to **His discipline**, and worshipping **Him** in awe.

As you review the purpose **Proverbs** prepared and preserved in this body of **wisdom**, which one most applies to you and your needs? How has a lack of **wisdom** affected your life? Before we dig into **the wisdom of Proverbs**, write a few words down on a blank card about how the lack of **wisdom** has impacted your decisions. Keep the card handy and make it a matter of prayer as you dig deeper in each day.²²

Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** steadfast love that works with Your holiness and all-knowing **wisdom** which guide me, helping me to grow wiser as I love **You** and walk in holy **fear** of **You** as I follow **Your** path of righteousness.

Wisdom chooses to love and to follow you in all that is done, said and thought. You created people not as robots; but with the ability to make choices as to which path they would choose to follow. **Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, but as for me and my household, we will worship Adonai (Joshua 24:15)!**

On the path of life there are many and various opportunities to make all kinds of choices. Some choices bless and honor you, while other choices are selfish choices chosen for gratifying selfish desires.

You desire to give abundant life which requires making the right and wise choice to love and to follow you. **I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10c)!**

Wisdom chooses life by obeying **You**. **Moses** spoke to **the Israelites** urging **them** to choose life by loving and following **ADONAI**. **"I call the heavens and the earth to witness about you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live, by loving ADONAI your God, listening to His voice, and clinging to Him"** (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a).

Thank you for being such a wonderful heavenly **Father**!

It is a comfort and joy to seek to follow **You** for **You** are such a wonderfully **wise** and loving heavenly **Father** who always desires to bless me with life in abundance and eternal peace! In **Messiah's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen