

Wisdom for the World (# 1) Proverbs 1:



Studies in Proverbs prepared by Dr. Bob Bernhardt (RobertBernhardt.com)
Based on the Contemporary English Version of the Bible (provided)

"From these (Proverbs), an ordinary person can learn to be smart, and young people can gain knowledge and good sense." (Proverbs 1:4)

An Introduction to the Book of Proverbs:

In the Old Testament there is a group of assorted poetical and wisdom writings (including Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job and Song of Solomon) of which Proverbs is a part. King Solomon had a reputation for wisdom (I Kings 4:29-34) and much of the material in Proverbs is attributed to him. In Proverbs "Wisdom" is often referred to as though she was a supernatural being. Wisdom is not synonymous with God but God is clearly identified as the source of wisdom.

The material in Proverbs is written in poetic form. Hebrew poetry was not associated with metre or rhyming words but with the way that ideas were presented, repeated and then expanded. Many of the Proverbs are expressed in single verses that are both brief and very vivid in their language. Being short they were easy to remember and they had a direct and practical application to living. However, since each proverb is quite brief and their topics vary it is often difficult to provide a useful outline for some sections of Proverbs.

The text provided here is the Contemporary English Version, released by the American Bible Society in 1995.

Proverbs 1:1-7. How Proverbs Can Be Used

¹These are the proverbs of King Solomon of Israel, the son of David. ²Proverbs will teach you wisdom and self-control and how to understand sayings with deep meanings. ³You will learn what is right and honest and fair. ⁴From these, an ordinary person can learn to be smart, and young people can gain knowledge and good sense. ⁵If you are already wise, you will become even wiser. And if you are smart, you will learn to understand ⁶proverbs and sayings, as well as words of wisdom and all kinds of riddles. ⁷Respect and obey the LORD! This is the beginning of knowledge. ^[a] Only a fool rejects wisdom and good advice.

Proverbs 1:8-19. Warnings against Bad Friends

⁸My child, obey the teachings of your parents, ⁹and wear their teachings as you would a lovely hat or a pretty necklace. ¹⁰Don't be tempted by sinners or listen ¹¹when they say, "Come on! Let's gang up and kill somebody, just for the fun of it!" ¹²They're well and healthy now, but we'll finish them off once and for all. ¹³We'll take their valuables and fill our homes with stolen goods. ¹⁴If you join our gang, you'll get your share." ¹⁵Don't follow anyone like that or do what they do. ¹⁶They are in a big hurry to commit some crime, perhaps even murder. ¹⁷They are like a bird that sees the bait, but ignores the trap. ^[b] ¹⁸They gang up to murder someone, but they are the victims. ¹⁹The wealth you get from crime robs you of your life.

Proverbs 1:20-33. Wisdom Speaks

²⁰Wisdom ^[c] shouts in the streets wherever crowds gather. ²¹She shouts in the marketplaces and near the city gates as she says to the people, ²²"How much longer will you enjoy being stupid fools? Won't you ever stop sneering and laughing at knowledge?" ²³Listen as I correct you and tell you what I think. ²⁴You completely ignored me and refused to listen; ²⁵you rejected my advice and paid no attention when I warned you. ²⁶"So when you are struck by

Wisdom for the World (# 1) Proverbs 1:

some terrible disaster, ²⁷or when trouble and distress surround you like a whirlwind, I will laugh and make fun. ²⁸You will ask for my help, but I won't listen; you will search, but you won't find me. ²⁹No, you would not learn, and you refused to respect the LORD. ³⁰You rejected my advice and paid no attention when I warned you. ³¹"Now you will eat the fruit of what you have done, until you are stuffed full with your own schemes. ³²Sin and self-satisfaction bring destruction and death to stupid fools. ³³But if you listen to me, you will be safe and secure without fear of disaster."

Proverbs, Chapter 1. Notes on the Text.

1:1 The reference to Solomon would place the origins of Proverbs in the tenth century BC.

1:6 The Hebrew translated as riddles can have the meaning of allegories.

1:7 This is very similar to Psalm 111:10 and Job 28:28.

1:16 See parallels in Isaiah 59:7 and Romans 3:15.

Applying the wisdom of Proverbs to our lives in today's world..

The discussion material for this study takes the form of some quotations found on the Internet. Though actual quotations currently posted these are provided without any additional identification. The significance of the quotation does not rest on the author's personal identity or on a particular group or party with which the author is identified. It is sufficient for us to know that these are genuine comments recorded by real people who felt that they were important enough to share on the Internet.

Discussion/ Reflection topic # 1. On the nature or value of the Proverbs themselves

a) The spirit of our times is a very individualistic one. A blogger writing recently (June 2011) made the following declaration: "I have always been prone to be anti-establishment, scornful of labels, of organized religion and institutions." To what extent do you sympathize with what he is saying?

b) In this same post this blogger made another observation. He said, "While running into a great group of people that are like-minded would be swell; or perhaps finding a teacher to help from time to time; nothing is needed outside of our own minds to get to the truth. " Do you agree or disagree with this comment and why?

Discussion/ Reflection topic # 2. On the topic of choosing friends

In a recent blog posting (September 2011) entitled "on Choosing Friends" a writer declared:

"I have come to the conclusion that I really need only two major markers for who to choose as my friends:

- 1) Those who give more than they take, and
- 2) Those who create flow more than they create friction

The first one is simple; Avoid leeches. Associate with people who continually generate positive karma. The second one is also easy to recognize; Avoid unnecessary trouble. Associate with people who make things flow, makes things work, create results. I avoid people who create social frictions more than social positive vibes."

What is your response to these criteria for friendship?

Wisdom for the World (# 1) Proverbs 1:

Discussion/ Reflection topic # 3. Also on the topic of choosing friends

Another writer, writing in December 2010, had this to say about whether one should choose friends who were similar to oneself or different. He said:

"As for me, I prefer to make friends with people who are different from myself, since I always look forward to new and useful experiences. From experience, I find that making friends with people who are different from me helps me enrich my life because from them, I can learn many new things which I can't expect from people who are similar to me."

How important do you think this is as a criteria for choosing friends?

Discussion/ Reflection topic # 4. On God and Wisdom:

A recent writer (March 2010) found the thoughts expressed in Proverbs 1: completely repulsive. He said,

In any case, God pretty clearly states here that if you don't follow his advice, he will allow you to fall into disaster. But if that weren't bad enough, he's going to take a lot of enjoyment from it. You're going to be overtaken by calamity like a storm and he's going to sit back in his easy chair laughing at your misfortune. No, it's not a mistranslation. God's really going to enjoy your suffering. He's going to mock you because you made a mistake like any other human being. Talk about a "loving" god. I hope we can hurry up and get to the New Testament so he will be more forgiving...

What would you say in response?

Thoughts to carry around with you.

These examples for reflection were drawn from recent material posted to the Internet. Similar ideas and opinions frequently appear in comments we hear, or magazine or newspaper articles that we find ourselves reading. Be alert to see the ways that the "wisdom" of Proverbs speaks to the spirit of our times.

Select one of the verses from this first chapter of Proverbs that in some way speaks to your personal challenges in living the faith. Write it out - putting it in your own words if that helps you relate to the verse. Then memorize this brief verse. If you say it over morning and evening for the coming week then this verse will be lodged in your memory for a long time and you will have access to it even when your bible is somewhere else.

Has God blessed you with good friends in the course of your life? If so, thank him regularly for this gift. If you feel a need for friends in your life at this time ask God to bring such people into your life and to give you the wisdom to recognize them and to know how to respond to them.