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IMAGES OF PERSONIFIED WISDOM

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> She seems to be essentially a changeable being …. It is not really possible to reduce all these identities to a unity.
>
> – Roland E. Murphy

Wisdom (*ḥokmāh*; pl. *ḥokmôṯ*)[1] basically means "effectiveness or mastery in relation to some physical task (skill) or, in the case of intellectual wisdom, life as a whole";[2] the wise person (*ḥāḵām*) is one who possesses such skills. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *ḥokmāh* ranges from technical and artistic skills in building (Exod 28:3; 31:6), skill in the arts of magic (Exod 7:11; Isa 3:3), political and diplomatic *savoir faire* (1 Kgs 3:28; 5:21; Jer 50:35; Isa 11:1–6), knowledge of nature (1 Kgs 4:33) to the judicious choice of words and speech (Prov 12:6, 18; 15:2; 16:21, 23; 18:21; 22:11; Job 12:20).[3]

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[1]Words in the same semantic range are *yāḏaʿ* ("to know"), *daʿaṯ* ("knowledge"), *bîn* ("to understand"), and *bînāh* ("understanding").

[2]Gerald Wilson, "Wisdom," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 4, ed. Willem Vangemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1277.

[3]Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, New International Commentary

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For Israel, its most important component is religious—relationship with God constituting its ground and beginning (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 30:3). In practice, wisdom is discernment; "through perceptive observation and experience … increasingly [knowing] the appropriate human response to each life moment"[4] (1 Kgs 3:16–28). According to the Hebrew sages, wisdom is gained through (1) careful observation and reflection on one's experience with creation and human relationships; (2) learning from one's elders; and (3) encounter with God.[5]

The Book of Proverbs represents a collection of Israel's conventional wisdom. It is "the baseline for all that follows in Judaism concerning the wisdom tradition … provid[ing] a consensus teaching that is the foil for dissenting sapiential statements of … Job and Ecclesiastes."[6] The true achievement of Israel's wisdom movement is allowing conventional wisdom to stand side by side with voices challenging it in the canon. They are not to be read as "opposing views" but as "complementary statements marking out the parameters of faith …. The appropriate stance of faith is to hold these diverse statements of truth together in holy tension so that each is heard …. "[7]

Historical and Social Setting of the Book

General consensus sees the book as the product of a long process of writing, collection, and editing that most likely began as early as

on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 76–78.

[4]Wilson, "Wisdom," 1277.

[5]Leo Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 7–8; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 12.

[6]Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 305.

[7]Wilson, "Wisdom," 1282–83.

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the time of the monarchy (tenth century B.C.E.) and lasting up to the Persian period (third century B.C.E.).[8] A significant portion of the book of Proverbs is believed to have started out as oral tradition which was subsequently collected and put into writing. Solomon, a patron and catalyst for its production but not its author, is named in the book thrice (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). The peace and prosperity enjoyed by Israel during Solomon's long reign as well as international contact with the nations around them served as the backdrop for the spur in literary and intellectual activity. The wisdom texts of Israel show much foreign flavor and influence, among them Prov 22:17–24:34, which evidence heavy borrowing from the Egyptian *Instruction of Amen-Em-Ope,* and material attributed to non-Israelites Agur (30:1) and King Lemuel's mother (31:1). In Prov 25:1, Hezekiah is also named as one who promoted the collection and transmission of wisdom material. Inference can be drawn that by Jeremiah's time, a collection of wisdom material was available along with the torah and prophetic material (Jer 18:18).[9]

While the individual sections most likely originated at various times and in diverse contexts, a structure has been editorially imposed on the book.[10] Owing to its highly theological content and aesthetically stylized composition, Proverbs 1–9 is seen as the final piece that was

[8]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 1.

[9]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 4–5, 17.

[10]See Anthony Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000), 47–48 for evidence of the complex numbering scheme that demonstrates coherent order placed on the diverse material. For example, there are 10 sections, 7 of which bear titles. The consonants of Solomon in Hebrew bear the numerical value of 375; this is the number of single-line proverbs in 10:1–22:16, a section attributed to Solomon (10:1). The same patterns holds true for the section attributed to Hezekiah (25:1) whose numerical value is 140 as well as Solomon, David, and Israel (1:1), the combined values of which (930) equal the total number of lines in the book!

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added to the book during the post-exilic period.[11] It functions as the theological introduction to chapters 10–31.

Both Proverbs 1–9 and 10–31 are united by the prime importance placed on "the fear of the Lord" (1:7; 9:10; 31:30); an exposition of what this entails (1:2–6; 31:10–28) forms an *inclusio* for the whole book as well as for Prov 1–9 (1:2–6; 9:1–18). In both sections, assertive women are prominent, with the final poem on the good wife (31:10–31) echoing the figure of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9.[12]

The primary venue for education in Israel and thus the transmission of wisdom materials was the home where both father and mother taught their children, and this is reflected in the instruction form in Proverbs 1–9. Another significant source of the wisdom material would be the schools for the royal courts and wealthy class as preparation for their assuming positions of public authority.[13]

Literary Genres of Proverbs 1–9

In terms of literary genre, the material in Proverbs can be broadly classified into two types: (1) instructions into which didactic poems or poetic "speeches" have been inserted (Prov 1–9), and (2) various

[11]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 2; cf. Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (NY: Doubleday, 1990), 18–19 for a divergent view.

[12]Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 78. See also Thomas McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10–31," *Revue Biblique* (1985): 25–46.

[13]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 15–23; Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 5. The existence of schools in Israel remains disputed, though not that of the royal courts (Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 306).

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collections of proverbial sayings (Prov 10–31), mostly one-liners with a "random quality" to them.[14]

The personification of wisdom is found in Proverbs 1–9. Extended poems about and "speeches" of wisdom are interwoven into father-son instructions. Fox counts ten such "lectures" or "instructions" (1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12; 3:21–35; 4:1–9; 4:10–19; 4:20–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27) and five "interludes" (1:20–33; 3:13–20; 6:1–19; 8:1–36; 9:1–18). Of the "interludes," only the second and third (3:13–20; 6:1–19) are not cast as first-person poetic speeches of Wisdom.[15]

Personification of Wisdom

Personification is "the assigning of human or divine qualities, abilities, or actions to a non-personal entity or thing, whether it is an attribute (e.g., righteousness), some other sort of abstraction (e.g., Truth), or a thing (e.g., a tree)."[16] It gives an inanimate object or abstract idea "a consciously *fictional* personality"[17] with human traits and qualities such as emotions, desires, sensations, physical gestures and speech. An example would be Psalm 85:10: "Steadfast love and

[14]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 305. Among the latter are proverbial sayings attributed to Solomon (10:1–22:16; 25:1–29:27), "sayings of the wise" closely related to the Egyptian *Instruction of Amen-Em-Ope* (22:17–24:34), and sayings attributed to Agur and Lemuel's mother (Prov 30–31) which contain several graded numerical sayings and refer to the deity as Eloah instead of YHWH (Kathleen Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?: A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, International Theological Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 21; Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 60).

[15]Michael Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:4 (1997): 614, 616.

[16]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 37.

[17]James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification*, Literature, Culture, Theory Series 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6, citing Jon Whitman.

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faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." Other examples in the Hebrew Bible are Job 11:14; Prov 20:1; Ps 96:11–12; and 85:13.

Utilizing this definition, a reading of Proverbs 1–9 shows that Wisdom is personified in the following texts: 1:20–33; 3:13–20; 4:5–9; 7:4–5; 8:1–22, 22–30; and 9:1–6.[18]

Metaphor 1: Wisdom as a Street Prophet (Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–4)

PROVERBS 1[19]

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?
23 Give heed to my reproof;[20] 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,

[18]Roland Murphy ("*Proverbs*," in *Word Biblical Commentary* XXII [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998]) agrees on the personification of wisdom in these texts: 1:20–33 (8, 11–12); 3:13–20 (22); 4:5–9 (29); 7:4–5 (43, 45); 8:1–21; 22–30 (49–55); 9:1–6 (57–63). Fox excludes 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 from his list (Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," 616, 624–33).

[19]All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*) unless otherwise indicated.

[20]Several translations do not agree with the *NRSV* translation in seeing the imperfect verb *tāšûḇû* as an imperative. Murphy (*Proverbs*, xxxii) translates the phrase as "turning away at my reproof?" while the New International Version renders it as the protasis of a conditional statement "If you had responded to my rebuke."

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27 when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like
a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.
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."

This passage is a wisdom speech. It is a unique genre whose only parallels are Proverbs 8–9 and Sirach 24. In all three passages, Wisdom speaks in the first person about her qualities. The genre functions "to undergird the authority of the instructions" in the rest of Prov 1–9 and "to persuade the listener to follow wisdom."[21]

In 1:20–21, personified Wisdom is pictured as a street preacher or prophet who confronts and initiates contact with people in the busiest places of their lives—"in the streets," "in the public squares," "on the highest walls," and "at the entrance of the city gates." "Public squares" are "broad area[s] for commercial trade and public meetings in contrast to the city's narrow streets."[22] "On the highest walls" are the most advantageous points to be seen and heard while "gates" refer to "the monumental edifices shading the narrow passageway through it and the side chambers where the elders sat on stone benches to adjudicate and discuss local affairs."[23] These settings show that wisdom is for

[21]Roland Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ruth*, *Canticles*, *Ecclesiastes*, *and Esther*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature XIII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 55.

[22]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[23]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

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commerce, court, and public governance and not confined to religious settings[24] nor to "some esoteric scholarly pursuit of wisdom."[25]

Not only is her boldness apparent, the manner by which Wisdom calls out shows urgency and fervency. The verb *tāronnāh* (Prov 1:20; 8:3; root *rnn*) signifies a fervent and emotional situation, such as deep human distress (Gen 45:2; Jer 22:20), threat (Ps 46:7 [8]), a lion's roar (Job 2:11; Amos 1:2; 3:4) and the singing of birds at creation (Ps 104:12).[26] The noun *tōḵaḥaṯ* ("correction," "reproof," "rebuke") appears in 1:23, 25 and 30 and unifies the passage.[27] Wisdom is "no gentle persuader. She shouts, pleads, scolds, reasons, threatens, warns, and even laughs."[28]

The figure of Wisdom in these passages has been variously described as that of a town crier going through the village calling out to a large group of people,[29] wisdom teacher,[30] and prophet.[31] The tone and content of 1:20–33 seem to point to the last designation.

Personified Wisdom begins her sermon with a denunciation (vv. 24–25) and ends with a judgment (vv. 26–27).[32] The words *ša'ăwâ* ("panic"), *'êd* ("calamity"), *ṣārāh* ("distress") and *ṣûqāh* ("anguish") in 1:27 are

[24]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[25]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45.

[26]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[27]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[28]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[29]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45.

[30]According to McKane, this image is possibly drawn from the practice of sages who taught in the city gate and called out to draw a crowd (Cited by Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45).

[31]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[32]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 205.

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common in prophetic and apocalyptic literature to describe coming destruction.[33] The use of *šûḇ* (1:23, 32), regarded as "the most important term for repentance in the Bible,"[34] also resonates with prophetic tones, although the time for repentance seems to be past. Wisdom hurls her condemnation, without inviting the audience to listen or discuss. As Murphy writes, "[s]he is not inviting the audience to listen (as many translations indicate); she is hurling her condemnation at them."[35]

The reasons for the coming destruction are given in language common in the prophets (vv. 24, 28).[36] Calling and not receiving an answer (1:24–25) is a complaint that the Lord makes about his covenant people in the prophetic corpus (Isa 50:2; 65:1–2; 66:4; Jer 7:13, 24–27; Zech 7:13).[37] Judgment will come upon the people for not heeding God's words (1:26–27; Jer 6:19; 11:11); God in turn will not listen to the people when they call (1:28–30; Jer 11:11).

Perhaps most striking is the tone of the speech. The motif of laughing at the calamity of others (1:26) is commonly encountered in the psalms (Ps 2:4; 37:13; 59:8) where it refers to the Lord laughing at the disaster befalling the wicked.[38] Waltke calls it "shock tactics" by which Wisdom seeks to persuade her audience to heed her cry. Wisdom uses the judgment that falls upon the wicked as an object lesson for her audience (1:22, 33). "Truth has a hard edge, and Wisdom does not dull

[33]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 11.

[34]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 203.

[35]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10. Refer to n. 20 on page 108.

[36]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[37]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10; likewise Farmer sees 1:20–33 having similarities with some oracles of the prophets (*Who Knows What is Good?*, 29).

[38]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 207.

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it …. [Thus b]y all sorts of rhetorical devices Wisdom strives to wake up her complacent and unresponsive audience to their dreadful plight."[39]

Yet there remain sapiential motifs in the passage. The failure of the people is described in wisdom language: failure to respond to the fear of the Lord and knowledge (1:29) and to Wisdom's counsel and reproof (1:23–27, 30).[40] Personified Wisdom speaks as a prophet but without any messenger formula. "On her own authority she proclaims that whoever refuses to listen will be struck with calamity and destroyed, whereas the one who does listen will dwell secure without fear of evil."[41] To dissuade her audience from their misguided choices, she offers them life (1:32–33; 8:35–36).

PROVERBS 8

1 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?
2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;
3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
4 "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

In 8:1–4, Wisdom is portrayed in similar fashion, with virtually the same locales and the same verb *tāronnāh* ("cry out"; v. 3) used in 1:20. But there are differences. Instead of addressing the simple and foolish only (1:20–33; 8:5), she expands her audience to humanity in general (*bənê āḏām* in 8:4). Wisdom is not *gnosis* or secret knowledge; it is available to anyone willing to take instruction.[42] In place of the denunciation and announcement of disaster in Proverbs 1, she speaks in chapter 8 of her rewards (8:5–21) and credentials (8:22–31).

[39]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 207–8.

[40]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10–11.

[41]Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 264.

[42]John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 499.

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Significance of the Metaphor

One of the ways personified Wisdom has been thought of is as a sage or wisdom teacher. Parallels have been drawn between the speeches of Wisdom and the parental instructions in Proverbs 1–9. Essentially the speeches of Lady Wisdom are echoed in the parental instructions and not only there, but also in individual proverbs throughout Proverbs 10–31.[43]

Camp has identified the manner of sages, particularly women sages, as marked by indirection, subtle trickery and gentle persuasion to achieve their goals.[44] This indirect manner is forced on women by their lack of power and status in a male-dominated world. Citing the examples of Rebekah, Tamar, Esther, and the wise woman of Tekoa, Camp concludes that "[t]he consistent use of indirect but effective means by the female characters … provide a point of contact with wisdom thought and may, indeed, help elucidate why Wisdom is personified as female."[45]

Taking the narrative of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 14, Moore shows the process of the "wise mediator" in conflict resolution: she fashions a juridical parable, embellishes the parable with revealing metaphors and symbols, then succeeds in inviting David to enter this imaginary world and resolve the conflict which has hitherto paralyzed him.[46] Analyzing Prov 1:20–33, Moore disagrees with Camp that Wisdom is utilizing a mediatorial or indirect style, eventually concluding

[43]Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 191–208.

[44]Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 139–40.

[45]Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 139.

[46]Michael Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman? A Biblical Study of Women's Roles," *Restoration Quarterly* 35.3 (1993): 154–56.

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that "there seem to be few genuine affinities between the real world of the wise women and the literary world of the Wisdom Woman."[47]

How does the description of Wisdom in 1:20–33 and 8:1–4 expand the conventional image of the sage? Where lies the semantic twist that opens the text to new ways of seeing?

In these passages, the wisdom teacher is seen through the lens of a prophet. To be a prophet is to be a spokesperson of God, the virtual "mouthpiece of God" (Exod 4:12, 15–16). In Proverbs 1, there is a preponderance of prophetic terminology and motifs while in Proverbs 8, there is a focus on speech and speech organs—"mouth" (8:7–8) and "lips" (8:6–7).

To be a prophet means to have an intimate relationship with the Lord so as to speak with God's authority. The absence of any messenger formula does not minimize the *gravitas* of these speeches. Just as in Prov 2:6, the sage can proclaim "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his *mouth* come knowledge and understanding," so the sage can also put in the words of Wisdom: "for my *mouth* will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my *mouth* are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge" (Prov 8:7–9; italics supplied). Murphy writes:

> An astonishing feature of Wisdom's speeches is that she speaks like the Lord. The references to prophetic language given above are an indication of this. What was referred to God is now referred to her. It is she who feels rebuffed, and who threatens those who refuse to listen. She has divine authority, and she hands out reward and punishment. She does not mention the Lord; she does not urge conversion to God, but to herself![48]

Similarly Farmer writes: "Nearly everything that is said about wisdom in this speech has been said about God in other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures …. The rejection of the Gift (Wisdom) may be understood

[47]Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman," 157.

[48]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 12.

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as a symbol for the rejection of the Giver."[49] In Prov 1:29, knowledge is parallel to fear of the LORD. "Rejecting what wisdom has to offer is virtually the same as refusing to give reverence to the LORD …."[50]

This is indeed an astonishing claim of the sages of Israel. As the prophets claimed divine authority for their call for the people to return to proper observance of the Torah, the sages claimed similar God-given authority for their observations of life and reflections on experience. Just as the prophets alerted the people to matters of life and death for the nation, so too the sages' instructions concern matters of life and death for individuals (1:32–33; 8:35–36) and the nation (8:15–16). And just as the prophets railed passionately for God and against the enemies of God, so Wisdom shows the urgency of her call by her mocking and indignant manner, particularly in 1:25–27. In this way, she puts forward the urgency of choice.

Yet the tension remains. The sage remains a sage with the use of sapiential motifs and language.

Metaphor 2: Wisdom as Bride and Lover (Proverbs 4:5–9; 7:4–5)

The first picture of personified Wisdom as a strident, angry, mocking prophet who uses shock tactics and negative motivation to get people's attention is balanced by the next picture of wisdom as a wife and lover to be desired and pursued. Proverbs 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 are part of longer passages identified in terms of literary form as "instruction."[51]

[49]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 30.

[50]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 29–30.

[51]Murphy, *Wisdom Literature,* 51. This literary form has three elements: (1) an appeal—usually couched in a father-to-son address, e.g., "Listen, children, to a father's instruction" (4:1), "My child, keep my words" (7:1, 24); (2) counsel or advice—seen in imperative verbs, e.g., "listen," "be attentive," "do not forsake," "get," "do not forget," etc. (4:1–5) and "keep," "store up," "bind," "write," "say," "call," etc. (7:1–4); and (3) motivation—either benefits for obeying or harmful

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PROVERBS 4

5 Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

In Prov 4:1–9, the father's instruction and teaching are equated with wisdom. Just as one is to gain insight and not forsake the father's teaching (4:1–2), so one is to acquire wisdom and not forsake her (4:5–6). The importance of the instruction can be seen in the fourfold use of the imperative ***qənēh*** "get" (4:5 [2x], 7 [2x]). The word ***qnh*** basically is a trade term that means "to acquire moveable goods through a financial transaction"; in other words, "to purchase."[52] It is the same word used for the "transaction" whereby Boaz "acquires" Ruth in marriage (Ruth 4:8–10).[53]

Proverbs instructs its readers to "get," "love," "prize" (or "esteem"), and "embrace" wisdom. Wisdom is likened to a bride for whom a groom pays dowry, no matter how much it costs him. The commands to love, esteem, and embrace her (4:6, 8) reinforce the inference to a husband-wife relationship.[54] "To embrace" (***ḥbq*** v. 8) is the same

effects of disobeying, e.g., rewards of Wisdom (4:6–9), and warning—"to keep one from the loose woman and from death" (7:5–23, 25–27).

[52]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 279.

[53]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 26, n. 7a.

[54]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 279–280; Murphy sees the actions in these verses are the actions of a person, so that personification seems undeniable in vv. 5–9 (Murphy, *Proverbs*, 27).

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word used for embracing a woman (Cant 2:6; 8:3; etc.).[55] The use of the verb *qnh* implies that the pursuit of wisdom entails a cost. But it will be worth it; wisdom will reciprocate by exalting the one who embraces her and adorning him with *liwyāh* ("gracious wreath") and *ʿăṭārāh* ("royal crown") [vv. 8–9]. "To exalt" means "to elevate from a base level, thus to elevate a person in status and authority."[56] In the only other occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Bible, *liwyāh* is used of parental teaching in Prov 1:9.

The word *ʿăṭārāh* appears twenty-four times, the majority of which refer to a royal crown. In Cant 3:11, *ʿăṭārāh* is a crown given to the king on the occasion of his wedding, and thus reinforces the image of Wisdom as a wife.[57] More importantly, the post-exilic text Isa 62:1–5 describing the marriage of YHWH to the new Jerusalem uses the exact phrase *ʿăṭereṯ tip'eret* "crown of beauty/splendor" given to the bride (Prov 4:9; Isa 62:3). Ezekiel 16:12 also uses the same phrase in the context of YHWH's covenant with Israel (cf. Ezek 23:42).[58]

In other texts, *ʿăṭārāh* is used in parallel to "glory" (Job 19:9; Isa 28:1) and refers to what brings someone honor, such as a good wife (Prov 12:4); riches (14:24); gray hair of the wise and righteous (16:31); and even grandchildren (17:6). *Liwyāh* and *ʿăṭārāh* are tangible signs of success and achievement in the world, things all people aspire for as signs of a life well-lived.

Is the pursuit of Wisdom simply seen as a "sound investment," a business transaction yielding a profitable cost-benefit ratio, where Wisdom is seen as "a patroness rewarding her lover," "a life partner

[55]Richard Clifford, *Proverbs*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 62.

[56]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 282.

[57]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 27.

[58]Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, Anchor Bible 19B (NY: Doubleday, 2003), 236.

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… bestowing all manner of benefits"?[59] While admittedly reflective of the patriarchal values of Israelite society, there is something more going on.

"Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you" (4:6) is a command set in covenantal terms. Moran has shown that the command "to love" in the Sinai covenant draws from a rich background in ancient Near Eastern treaties.[60] Love is not simply an affective term but a covenantal one that means "to set one's sincere affections on God as expressed in loyal service."[61] Covenantal love (Deut 6:5; 10:12, 19; 11:1; 13:3; 30:6) is love that can be commanded, is related to fear and reverence, and expressed in unqualified obedience and service.[62] The rewards of such love and service in Prov 4:6—"she will keep (*šmr*) you", "she will guard (*nṣr* = "protect", "preserve") you"—are likewise reminiscent of the language of the covenant (Deut 7:9, 12; 32:10). Therefore, though the metaphor on the literal level is cast in highly personal affective terms of the husband-wife relationship, figuratively it is connected to covenant fidelity.

Against whom or what will Wisdom preserve or guard the hearer? The following chapter, Proverbs 5, issues a stern warning against the temptations of the "strange woman" (*'iššāh zārāh*). In fact, the rhetoric of Proverbs 4–7, located at the midpoint of Proverbs 1–9, is propelled by the contrast between personified wisdom/lawful wife and this "forbidden woman." The word *ḥbq* "embrace" for wisdom in 4:8 finds an echo in the warning against the embrace of an adulteress in 5:20.[63]

[59]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 282; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 62.

[60]William Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1963): 77–87.

[61]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 280.

[62]Moran, "Ancient Near Eastern Background," 78. In the New Testament, it finds expression in such verses as John 14:15, 21 and 15:10.

[63]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 32–33.

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A fuller treatment of the identity of the strange/outsider woman will be given below.

PROVERBS 7

4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend,
5 that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

The likelihood that the reference to "sister" and "intimate friend" here conveys more than kinship is high. In Cant 4:9–10, 12 and 5:1, "sister" occurs four times in parallel to "bride." "Sister" is also a term of endearment for one's beloved in the Ugaritic Aqhat epic, 18th Dynasty Egyptian love poetry (ca. 1500–1200 BCE), and Mesopotamian marriage songs.[64] In the Torah, one also finds the sister-wife motif in the accounts of the patriarchs and their wives (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–16; and 26:1–33).

The parallel term *môḏa'* ("intimate friend") is translated "kinsman" or "relative" in Ruth 2:1; 3:2, where it refers to Ruth's future husband Boaz.[65] Disagreeing that there is a marital context here, Baumann cites that "sister" is not used in Proverbs in the sense of "bride." Murphy counters Baumann's doubts with the observation that clearly erotic language is intended, especially in light of the motivation: "that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words" (7:5).[66] Marriage is seen as the action by which "one may avoid the temptation to illicit lust."[67]

The next passage (7:6–23) confirms this point by presenting the temptations posed by the "strange woman" (*'iššāh zārāh*) and the

[64]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 87; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 370.

[65]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 87.

[66]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[67]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 370.

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"outsider" (*nokriyyāh*). 7:6–23 is a narrative poem[68] of a young man being lured to adultery by a woman identified as an *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* and described in v. 10 as attired like a "prostitute" (*zônāh*). The instruction-warning structure of Proverbs 7 is similar to that of Proverbs 4 and 5 where the instruction to acquire Wisdom is followed by the warning against the same woman *zārāh/nokriyyāh* (5:3; 20).

Whether one takes "sister" as a reference to bride or close kin, the father/teacher exhorts his son/student to love Wisdom and enter into an intimate lifelong commitment with her.

Who is the "Forbidden Woman"?

There is a complex of words used to describe this woman, a composite character who stands for anything and everything that can entice a man from faithfulness to the community's values and relationships. The two words used frequently and interchangeably are *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh*.

'Iššāh zārāh (translated by the *NRSV* as "loose woman") literally means "strange woman." The basic meaning of *zûr* is "turn aside, deviate, go away," hence *'iššāh zārāh* is "someone who turns away, deviates."[69] Seven out of the fourteen occurrences of *zārāh* in Proverbs refer to a sexually promiscuous woman (2:16; 5:3, 10, 17, 20; 7:5; 22:14) while the other seven refer to strangers in general (6:1; 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 23:33; 27:2; 27:13).

Nokriyyāh (root: *nkr* "foreign," "other," "strange"),[70] in majority of its uses outside of Proverbs, occurs in the context of Israel's covenantal

[68]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (NY: Basic Books, 1995), 54–61.

[69]L. A. Snijders, "זור/זר *zûr/zār*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IV, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 53; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 120.

[70]B. Lang, "נכר *nkr*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IX, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 424–25.

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relationship with YHWH. The word refers to people other than Israel, thus it can be translated as "pagan foreigner"[71] (Exod 2:22; Deut 14:21; Judg 19:12; 1 Kgs 8:41; Isa 2:6). Six of its nine uses in Proverbs refer to a woman who, without reference to her ethnic identity, nevertheless becomes an "outsider" because she has disregarded community mores (2:16; 5:10, 20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27).[72]

In 2:16–17, the *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* is someone "who abandoned the companion of her youth" and "forgot the covenant with her God."[73] *Nokriyyāh* is translated as "adulteress" by the *NRSV* in Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27. Aside from 2:16–17, *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* are used in parallel in 5:20 and 7:5.

'Iššāh zārāh and *nokriyyāh* are the primary terms used to describe the "outsider woman" in Prov 4–7. *Zônāh* "prostitute" is used only as a term of comparison, with the "outsider woman" losing out even in the comparison. The prostitute (*zônāh*) is only after money while the other woman "stalks a man's very life" (6:26). In 7:10, the "strange woman" imitates the attire of a prostitute.

Proverbs 6 introduces us to other terms which show the strong emotional and social backlash against the "outsider woman." The *nokriyyāh* is identified as an adulteress in Proverbs 6, being mentioned in parallel with *'ēšet 'îš* "the wife of another man" (6:26); *'ēšet rē'ēhû* "the wife of his neighbor/friend" (6:29); and *'ēšet rā'* "an evil woman" (6:24). The man who is caught in her wiles "commits adultery" (6:32).

Both *zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* are adjectives to designate "a woman who has deserted her place in society."[74] According to Snijders, an implicit air of menace surrounds this woman; she is "loose, unrestrained,

[71]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 121.

[72]The remaining three uses speak of *nkr* as the "stranger" (20:16) and "foreigner" (27:2, 13) in general.

[73]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 119.

[74]Snijders, "זר/זור *zûr/zār*," 56.

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unchaste."[75] Both feared and loathed, she is someone "whose behavior endangers the existence of the group because [she] stands outside the laws of the community."[76]

Personified wisdom and the lawful wife (5:15–19) serves as a foil to the "strange woman"/"outsider"/"adulteress"/"another man's wife." Faithfulness to wisdom as exemplified in the parent's instruction in 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 will preserve the youth from this woman. The way of wisdom will help him walk on straight paths (4:11, 25–27) and avoid her path (5:3–6). In Proverbs 5, following a narrative poem[77] of the charms of the strange woman whose lips drip honey but whose talk leads to bitter results, there is again an exhortation to marital fidelity as a safeguard against the adulteress' temptations. Prov 5:15–19 gives counsel to stay faithful to one's wife and "rejoice in the wife of [one's] youth." An equivalence is introduced here between wisdom and "the wife of [one's] youth" in 5:18; both will protect against the strange woman.

In like manner, Prov 6:20–35 warns against adultery with *'ēšeṯ rā'* "the evil woman," *noḵriyyāh* "the foreigner" (v. 24), and *'ēšeṯ rē'ēhû* "another man's wife" (v. 29). The man who commits adultery is described as *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "without sense" (v. 32). But those who heed the parents' instructions will be spared the dire consequences of adultery.

Proverbs 7 is the tenth and final instruction in Proverbs 1–9, and the fourth of five explicit warnings against the *'iššāh zārāh* (2:16–19; ch. 5; and 6:20–35; 9:13–18).[78] The entire chapter of Proverbs 7 is devoted to the *zārāh* and *noḵriyyāh*. In another narrative poem, the father warns the son by recounting an incident of a youth lured unsuspectingly

[75]Snijders, "זור/זר *zûr/zār*," 56.

[76]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 120.

[77]Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 179–84. Though lacking in narrative development, Proverbs 5 achieves the same purpose by the elaboration of imagery and the use of direct discourse. Alter alerts us to the movement within the imagery: from outside to inside and inside to outside.

[78]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 84.

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to the house of a loose woman through her smooth and deceptive speech. She pretends to be religious and observing her vows, but he unfortunately is just one of many victims (v. 26). Her path will lead to Sheol and death (v. 27) just like in Prov 5:5.

The "Strange Woman" in Israel's Consciousness

Murphy follows Ploger in seeing "the strange woman" as an open-ended character,

> a kind of collective concept or catch word that embraces all the pertinent texts of chapters 2–7, without determining whether the woman is a foreigner or simply the wife of another, whether native or not …. [T]he concept of 'stranger' simply lacks clarity and prevents a specific interpretation.[79]

As a composite of several "women,"[80] she came to represent all forbidden relationships. Yet clearly there is another level of meaning present. The warning against the seductive and alluring prostitute or loose woman is stock wisdom material.[81] The New Kingdom *Instruction of Any* from Egypt warns against "a woman who is a stranger, one not known in her own town" while the Babylonian *Counsels of Wisdom* warns against unsuitable marriage partners. Unlike Proverbs though, the women in these texts do not figure in any life-or-death scenario.[82] For parallels, Clifford looks to ancient Near Eastern epics, such as Babylonian and Ugaritic texts, where a goddess of love makes an offer of love or marriage to a youth (Ishtar in Gilgamesh and Aqhat

[79]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[80]Roland Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 225.

[81]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 37.

[82]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 27.

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in the Ugaritic epic) which in fact will bring him death or transform his human life.[83]

Israel's own historical experience and associations with adultery, however, may be a closer, more potent parallel. Streete attributes sociological and religious factors to how adultery, particularly female adultery, became virtually a code word in Biblical literature for all forbidden sexual behavior and even forbidden nonsexual behavior like apostasy.[84]

By the sixth century B.C.E., the adulterous or sexually promiscuous woman became the symbol of religious and social chaos for Israel. First the northern kingdom, then the southern kingdom were indicted as the unfaithful wife of YHWH by the prophet Hosea in the north and followed by the southern prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah. Those who compiled and edited the Deuteronomistic history attributed the moral collapse of the kingdom to the Israelite and Judahite kings' worship of foreign gods at the instigation of their foreign wives. In the post-exilic period, Nehemiah and Ezra required Israelite men to divorce their foreign wives.[85]

> Female adultery, from the perspective of the exilic and postexilic writers and editors of the Tanakh, thus represents a dangerous

[83]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 27.

[84]Gail Corrington Streete (*The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997], 5–6) relates how in traditional patrilineal and patrilocal societies such as Israel's, ensuring the biological paternity of children was very crucial. Illegitimate children were a threat to the stability and integrity of the family unit. In that context, sexual behavior which could produce an illegitimate male heir was viewed with great disfavor, something that pollutes and defiles. From being a solely private and family concern, it became a public and community concern, with the community being tasked with the responsibility and even obligation to punish it. The further complication in Israel's context was that the threat of producing non-Israelite heirs, i.e. ethnic impurity, was considered a threat to Yahwistic purity.

[85]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 7.

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> subversion of the hegemony of familial, ethnic, and religious male authorities and of the male God of Israel. Even when Israelite males are themselves charged with committing adultery, it is because they are seduced by powerfully alluring "strange" or "outsider" women. When they commit apostasy, the religious crime often spoken of as adultery, the same "foreign" or "strange women" are again responsible …. These are outsiders who are most wholly "other": female rather than male, non-Israelite rather than Israelite, worshipers of "other" gods and goddesses than YHWH.[86]

It is the mark of patriarchal societies that the onus for sexually illicit behavior, regardless of the fact that it requires male participation and may even be initiated by men, falls principally upon the female participants.[87] Accompanying this image in the exilic and post-exilic literature, the portrayal of virtuous women was also uniform—faithfulness to one husband.[88]

Blenkinsopp correlates the portrayal of the "strange woman" in Prov 1–9 with the historical threat of a goddess cult in Israel. The goddess cult continued well into the neo-Babylonian and Persian periods (Ezek 8:5; Jer 44:15–19; Zech 5:5–11) as a popular cult, the practice of the "people of the land" who were not exiled to Babylon, as well as a component of the state or royal cult. Such a cult is depicted in texts such as Isa 57:3–13, similarly post-exilic like Prov 1–9.[89]

Isaiah 57:3–13, a denunciation of a woman who entices to false worship, shares many correspondences in vocabulary with the "strange woman" texts in Proverbs, such as "prostitute" (Isa 57:3; Prov 7:10); "bed" (Isa 57:7, 8; Prov 7:17); "offer sacrifice" (Isa 57:7; Prov 7:14); "door" (Isa 57:8; Prov 5:8; 9:14); "Sheol" (Isa 57:9; Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18);

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[86]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 8.

[87]Peggy Day, "Introduction," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 4.

[88]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 9.

[89]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 165–66.

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"perfume" (Isa 57:9; Prov 7:17); and "journey" (Isa 57:9–10; Prov 7:19). Shared ideas without shared vocabulary include: sleep with lovers (Isa 57:8; Prov 7:16–18); mouth (Isa 57:4; Prov 7:21).

Blenkinsopp sees both Third Isaiah and Proverbs 1–9 as reflecting concerns about the religious and socio-economic consequences of exogamous marriages during the early stages of the reestablishment of Judah, a concern shared by Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9–10; Neh 10). "'The young man who succumbs to the outsider woman's wiles will lose his property to strangers and will end up in all sorts of trouble in the *qāhāl* (Prov 5:7–14)."[90] Wisdom issues a strong warning to avoid the "strange woman" at all costs.

Significance of the Metaphor

The sages took this figure of notoriety—the "loose woman"/"foreigner"/"adulteress"—and turned her into the quintessential opponent of wisdom and fidelity to God against whom the readers of the book of Proverbs are warned. She is the very "personification of the seduction of evil."[91]

In Proverbs 1–9, the same warning against the "strange woman" is given against dangerous deceiving men (2:16–19; 2:12–15); sinners in general (1:8–19), and those called "wicked," "evildoers," and "violent" (4:10–19). Likewise, the language of the "strange woman" in Prov 7 echoes the language of the sinners who entice the naïve and foolish youths in 1:11–14 with such words as "Come!", "lie in wait," and "find," with "Sheol" as the common destination.[92] That the metaphor refers to evil in general is also supported by the fact that the emphasis on

[90]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 166.

[91]This borrows Rick D. Moore's appellation for the female figure in the Qumran text *The Wiles of the Wicked Woman*. The Qumran figure is a midrashic commentary on the strange woman of Proverbs 1–9 ("Personification of the Seduction of Evil: 'The Wiles of the Wicked Woman'," *Revue de Qumran* 10:4 [Dec 1991]: 505).

[92]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 84.

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adultery and sexual excess in Proverbs 1–9 is disproportionate to the references in Proverbs 10–31 to adultery (22:14; 23:27; 29:3).[93]

Murphy explains: "Just as Wisdom is personified as a woman, and is more than the teachings contained in Prov i–ix, so the strange woman is more than sexual seduction, and [later] becomes personified as Lady Folly [in Proverbs 9:13–18]."[94] Thus Murphy connects the figure of the "loose woman" to Israel's historical experience of unfaithfulness to God. She serves as a warning for all to avoid departing from the right path of allegiance to God.[95]

> [Wisdom] clearly stands for the fullness of life promised by the sages to those who follow in her way (viii 35). But the author has also framed her against the background of Israel's sad history by the sexual emphasis, and [later in Proverbs 9] by the contrast between Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly. The issue is now life and death, fidelity to the Lord or infidelity.[96]

Through the use of the metaphor of Wisdom as a wife and lover, the pursuit of wisdom is not confined to intellectual or ethical terms. It engages one's affect and whole being and lifelong commitment. As Clifford quipped, "Living in Wisdom's house is as challenging and rewarding as living with one's spouse."[97]

But likewise, it is not confined to a personal or individual decision on behavior. It involves one's very identity and future destiny as a member of the community of YHWH. Ignorance and neglect of wisdom will yield the same potential dire consequence of chaos and exile as it did for the nation in the 8th and 6th centuries B.C.E.

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[93]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[94]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 225.

[95]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 226.

[96]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 226.

[97]Clifford as cited by Murphy, *Proverbs*, 63.

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Metaphor 3: Wisdom as Royal Adviser (Proverbs 8:14–16)

Proverbs 8 presents readers with the most complex and thought-provoking portraits of personified wisdom. The chapter represents the two prominent roles of the wisdom tradition: "wisdom's role in a historical community as the adviser of kings, as politician and instructress of men in the good life" (8:1–21) and "wisdom's place and precedence in the cosmological context."[98]

Waltke calls the whole chapter a "hymn of self-praise."[99] Mesopotamian hymns in which a deity utters self-praise in the first person are seen as the background for Proverbs 8.[100] Wisdom's longest speech in the book is the companion piece to Prov 1:20–33. As noted earlier, connections can be made between 1:20–21 and 8:1–4 in terms of setting, addressees, vocabulary and conclusions. Wisdom speaks with the same impassioned urgency—*tārōnnāh* "cries out" (1:20; 8:3). But while she spoke harshly in Prov 1 and threatened to walk away from those who reject her, she is more inviting here as she extols her virtues and promises good gifts to all who follow her. In Prov 1, Wisdom gives only one promise among so many threats; here she issues only one threat in the midst of her promises.[101]

Connections can also be made to Prov 7. Unlike the "strange woman" who invites the youth to the privacy of her home at night (7:7–9), Wisdom speaks in broad daylight in the public square for all

[98]Judith Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.

[99]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 392–93.

[100]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 393.

[101]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 93–94.

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to hear.[102] Prov 7 features an extended speech by the "strange woman" (vv. 14–20) in the same way that Prov 8 has an extended first-person speech by Lady Wisdom. The warning against straying over to the path and house of the "strange woman" because they lead to death and Sheol (7:24–25) is contrasted by the appeal to wait by the gates and doors of Wisdom because they lead to life and favor from YHWH (8:32–34).

As in 1:20–33, Wisdom appears in public, addressing all but mentioning in particular the *pəṯā'yîm* "inexperienced" and the *kəsîlîm* "foolish" (vv. 1–5). *Pəṯā'yîm* can be a neutral term in the sense of "untaught" or "inexperienced" (Ps 19:8; 116:6; Prov 1:4; 9:4), but its parallel *kəsîlîm* suggests "culpable ignorance."[103] Still this shows that Wisdom holds out hope even for such people.[104] In Proverbs 1, they are denounced while here Wisdom praises her own excellence and rewards in order to win their allegiance.

After assuring her audience that her words are truthful and righteous (vv. 6–11), she begins to speak more about herself: her royal associations (vv. 12–16) and the material benefits she brings to those who love her—riches, honor and skill to govern (vv. 17–21). Her authority comes from her unique relationship with YHWH and humankind during creation (vv. 22–31) and she urges everyone to wait at her door and gates as her learners (vv. 32–36).[105]

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[102]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94. While there is warrant to Clifford's arrangement seeing Proverbs 7 as forming a chiastic structure with chap. 8–9, with the outer frames (7:1–27; 9:13–18) talking about Wanton Woman and Woman Wisdom forming the inner sections (8:1–36; 9:1–12), this author prefers to group the passages based on the nature of the metaphors used. See Richard Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, CBQ Monograph 26 (Washington: CBAA, 1994), 181–182.

[103]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94.

[104]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94.

[105]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 93; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 49.

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PROVERBS 8

12 I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
14 I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength.
15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.
17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,
21 endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

Murphy identifies two "I" passages here. The second (8:17–21) is framed by the word "love."[106] The relationship between Wisdom and her student is stated in the traditional biblical language of love. "Those who love me I also love" (8:17) conveys reciprocity[107] while "seeking" and "finding" (8:17) echo similar vocabulary in Cant 3:1 and 5:6.[108] This love language continues the metaphor of wife and lover in Proverbs 4 and 7. However, while in these preceding texts, the focus was on humans loving her, here it is Wisdom's love which results in her bestowal of riches, honor, and substance upon those who reciprocate.[109]

[106]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 51.

[107]Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1–9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 601.

[108]Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros," 601; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 95.

[109]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 51.

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The first "I" passage (8:12–16) enumerates an escalation of Wisdom's claims which Murphy calls "mind-boggling."[110] Proverbs 8 starts with "modest" claims such as those Wisdom had already made in earlier chapters: truth, righteousness, value that is more precious than gold or silver. Then there is an escalation as Wisdom claims extraordinary qualities—sound advice and strength that enable her to guide kings and rulers in governing justly (8:14–16).[111] "Wisdom speaks like a stateswoman or counselor to a king or queen … offering more than advice, but also perception and power."[112] In other words, Wisdom increases her arena of influence—from everyday activities to national governance.

Significance of the Metaphor

Wisdom as royal adviser reflects "the traditional association of wisdom with kings and the art of governing (vv. 14–16). Kingship was one of the institutions through which divine wisdom was mediated to human beings (2 Sam 14:20; 1 Kgs 3; 4:29–34; 10:1–10)."[113] Wisdom played a vital role in Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 3:9) and is mentioned first in the qualities of the ideal Davidic king of Isaiah 11:1–9.

Among the qualities mentioned in Isa 11:2 are "wisdom," "understanding," "counsel/advice," "power/might," "justice," "righteousness," and "fear of the Lord," terms also found in Prov 8. Fox sees these attributes, though desirable in a king, are not limited to royalty. He also remarks that wisdom is the common ground shared by rulers of all nations. "The author recognizes that the potentates of all nations have access to wisdom and can exercise it in ruling justly."[114]

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[110]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 54–55.

[111]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 54–55.

[112]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 47.

[113]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 95.

[114]Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, Anchor Bible 18A (NY: Doubleday, 2000), 273–74.

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In this metaphor, Wisdom stakes her claim on being the resource for righteous rulership and effective governance.[115] In Wisdom's self-portrait, she describes herself as "adamantly on the side of righteousness and justice and opposed to evil … she is the one through whom just governance is established on the earth (8:15)."[116] By this, she claims authority to order and guide affairs on earth. This ties in to the next claim of Wisdom in 8:22–31. She claims authority for all areas of life and for all creation.

Metaphor 4: Wisdom as Companion of YHWH and Humanity (Proverbs 8:22–31; 3:13–20)

PROVERBS 8

22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth;
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

[115]Fox, *Proverbs*, 274–75.

[116]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 264.

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Though scholars cannot agree on the interpretation of several key words in this passage, they do agree on the function of this passage. First, Wisdom stakes her claim to authority on her origin from God and her primacy in creation. Wisdom antedates creation; before everything else was created, she already was. Second, Wisdom also has a claim to authority due to her "comprehensive knowledge of human affairs."[117] She was at God's side during creation. Third, Wisdom's authority is derived from YHWH himself. The same word for God's decrees setting limits on creation (*ḥōq*; 8:29) is used for Wisdom's decrees in human society (8:15). "Just as God's decrees set the boundaries for the whole created order, so Wisdom's decrees give enduring structure to human society …. [C]ivil order reflects in miniature the divine cosmic order."[118]

Scholars dispute the meaning of two words: *qānānî* from the root *qnh* "created"/"possessed" (v. 22) and *'āmôn* "workman"/"child" (v. 30). It may be best to understand these words as polyvalent, with the sages intending word-play or double-meaning, owing to the metaphorical nature of the texts. However, as Hurowitz argues, most likely there is a primary meaning which is determined by asking which meaning suits the context best.[119]

How is Wisdom related to YHWH?

Prov 8:22 "The LORD *acquired/possessed/created* me"

The variety of proposals can be grouped into three, each with its strengths and weaknesses, and utilizing the same biblical texts for support.

[117]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 407.

[118]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 407.

[119]Victor Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? אמון and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, 22–31," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 391–92.

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1. "Acquire"/"possess" (KJV, ASV, NASB, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Jerome)

"Acquire" is the most common rendering of *qnh* in its eighty-two occurrences throughout the Hebrew Scriptures[120] as well as its thirteen other occurrences in the book of Proverbs. A study of its usage in Proverbs[121] reveals the object of the verb is always *ḥokmāh* and its parallel terms *bînāh, lēḇ*, and *da'aṯ*. Only once is it used differently, i.e., in a commercial sense—to purchase (20:14).[122] As discussed earlier, Proverbs 4:5–9 used *qnh* four times as an imperative to express the importance of gaining wisdom.

With this rendering, Prov 8:22 seems to be a play on words. Just as humans are instructed to "acquire" wisdom, YHWH is shown as "acquiring" wisdom also. This interpretation also harmonizes with Job 28 where God is described to have discovered wisdom (28:27), not to have created it.[123] A close affinity is the translation of *qnh* as "possess" which personifies wisdom as an attribute of God.[124]

Those who disagree point to the fact that meaning does not reside principally in etymology as much as in context. The reading "acquire" hardly suits the context where one expects to hear something about the origin of Wisdom.[125] It does not explain the origin of Wisdom except to depict it as a given. In addition, other instances of the root outside of the book of Proverbs make more sense translated as "create" (Gen 14:19, 22; Ps 139:13) or "beget"/"give birth to" (Gen 4:1).[126]

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[120]Bruce Vawter, "Prov 8:22: Wisdom and Creation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:2 (1980): 208; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408.

[121]Prov 1:5; 4:5 [2x], 7 [2x]; 8:22; 15:32; 16:16 [2x]; 17:16; 18:15; 19:8; 20:14; 23:23.

[122]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408.

[123]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408; Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 406.

[124]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54; Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[125]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[126]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

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2. "Create"/"form"/"fashion" (RSV, NRS, NJB, NLT, LXX, Targum, Syriac)

This translation fits the context since the passage speaks of Wisdom and creation as coming into existence. Evidence from Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew texts support "create" as one of the meanings of *qnh*. In Gen 14:19, 22, El Elyon is called "creator (*qōnēh*) of heaven and earth." In Deut 32:6, *qnh* is parallel to "make" and "establish."[127] Several uses of the word outside Proverbs are likewise best rendered in this way (Deut 32:6, Ps 139:13, Gen 4:1; 14:19, 22), with Ps 139:13 being the strongest: "For it was you who *formed* my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb (italics supplied)."[128]

A major difficulty with this view though is that it appears to portray Wisdom as a separate entity from YHWH.

3. "Bring forth" (NIV, Waltke)/"beget" or "be the parent of" (NAB, Irwin)

This view is closely related to the second but adds a biological sense. Wisdom's origin is described in the language of birth. The verb used parallel to ***qānānî*** is ***ḥôlāltî*** "brought forth" (root: ***ḥyl***; used

[127]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 96.

[128]Vawter disagrees, seeing *qnh* in these four texts as "possess" or "acquire." The choice of *qnh* in Gen 4:1 seems to be a pun on the name Cain, a choice for sound rather than precise meaning. He also argues that procreation is different from creation. Deut 32:6 takes up the context of rescuing and adopting a people as God's own, with no mention of creation. In fact, as the ASV translation of Deut 32:6 ("bought") reflects, "[w]hat the Lord has done for Israel has been expressed more than once in Old Testament tradition by the commercial metaphor 'purchase' or 'acquire'" (Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 211).

Likewise, Vawter sees it best to translate Gen 14:19 and 22 as "lord/master" of heaven and earth in the sense of "someone who takes possession of." Even Ps 139:13 can be understood as "you have possessed my kidneys" as "you have understood my thoughts," as how Theodore of Mopsuestia translated it, with "kidneys" signifying the innermost being of a person, particularly his intellectual and emotional life. This is the weakest argument since the context of Psalm 139 is creation and forming of the human person (Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 209–212).

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2x in 8:24–25); it is used to refer to the pain and travail of childbirth contractions (Deut 32:18; Job 39:1; Isa 51:2; Ps 90:2).[129]

Proponents point to the cognate languages of Hebrew for support. The title *'Ēl 'Elyôn qōnēh* translated "God Most High, maker of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19, 22) can be related to Canaanite cultic epithets which mean "be/become the parent of." For example, Ugaritic texts use the epithet *qnyt 'lm* "procreatress of the gods" for the goddess Asherah.[130] *Qnh* as "create"/"beget" also makes sense for Gen 4:1 and Deut 32:6.

Proverbs 8 then is a poetic description of the birth of Wisdom.[131] "YHWH brought me forth" signifies that wisdom comes from God's essential being unlike the rest of creation which is outside of and independent of God's being.[132] Similar to the objection for the second proposal "create"/"form," Wisdom appears to be a separate entity from YHWH.[133]

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[129]Leo Perdue, "Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 112 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1991), 36.

[130]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 209.

[131]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 43.

[132]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 409.

[133]The translation "beget" played into the Arian controversy in the fourth century C.E. about the nature of Christ as created and subordinate to God the Father. The description of Wisdom as pre-existent and a participant in creation had been transferred by New Testament writers to Christ (John 1:1–4; Col. 1:15–17). Prov 8:22–31 was used both to support and refute Arianism, the view that Christ, being equated with the "wisdom of God", was therefore created and therefore subordinate to God the Father. This was eventually resolved by the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) which declared the Son as "begotten, not made" and of the same essence and status (consubstantiality) as God the Father (Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54).

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Evaluation of the Proposals

However this word is understood, what is clear is that Wisdom is present at creation, and this forms the authority and legitimacy of her teachings. YHWH "possessed"/"created"/"brought her forth" as the first of his creative acts. In effect, she says to those who question her credentials, "You can trust what I say about the structures and the intricacies of life, because I was there to see how it was all put together in the first place."[134]

Is Wisdom to be understood as an attribute of God or separate from God? "Acquired" implies that wisdom "pre-existed" and originated outside the created order without any explanation of its origins, an influence perhaps of non-Israelite ideas of an uncreated wisdom separate from YHWH.[135] *Qnh* as "create" or "beget" can also give the impression that Wisdom is an entity independent of God.

"'Possessed me' leaves open the possibility that Wisdom should be understood as a personification of an attribute of God … rather than an entity in its own right."[136] This reading echoes the picture of Wisdom in Prov 3:19: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens."

Here we see an instance of the danger of misreading metaphorical language. The texts of Proverbs themselves give us a clue not to read the metaphors of personified wisdom literally. The metaphors reveal to us different facets of wisdom. They refuse to be harmonized and domesticated. The metaphor opens up to multiple readings.

Whether understood as acquired, established, conceived, formed or created by God, these are all metaphors for YHWH's "act of creation." Whatever interpretation is to be accepted, Wisdom is associated with

[134]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 55–56.

[135]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 205–6.

[136]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54.

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God through some action of YHWH's, either through creation, birth or acquisition.[137]

Vawter "warns against trying to reduce the various figures of wisdom in Proverbs to a single one."[138] If we move away from insistence on a literal understanding of the passage as well as a singular identification of personified wisdom, then it can be easily understood.

Can the use of *qnh* in 8:22 be a word-play, utilized because it can mean both "acquire" as well as "create" or "come out of God"? Metzger argues that "*qōnēh* means both 'owner' and 'creator' in creation contexts, for God possesses (therefore directs and oversees) what he creates."[139] Irwin argues also for double-meaning, with "begetting" as the primary idea and "acquiring" secondary, since "what God sired is his."[140] People are enjoined to *qnh* "acquire" wisdom just as YHWH *qnh* "acquired" wisdom before he created the world.

One implication of seeing Wisdom as metaphorically created by YHWH is Wisdom can be seen as separate from YHWH and thus can be the basis of natural theology recognized by nations outside of Israel.[141]

How was Wisdom involved in creation?

Prov 8:30 "then I was beside him, like *an artisan/child/heavenly mediator*"

'Āmôn as currently vocalized in the Masoretic text is a *crux interpretum* that has been the subject of debate since ancient times. At least five proposals have been put forward, all of which require changes in vowel pointing

[137]Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," 237.

[138]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 215.

[139]Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 34, n. 2.

[140]William Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 30 (1961): 142.

[141]R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation: The *'Amon* of Proverbs VIII 30," *Vetus Testamentum* (1960): 205–6.

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and/or emendations. The two most common proposals have been "artisan"/"master worker" and "nursling"/"ward"/"small child."[142]

1. 'ommān = "artisan"/"craftswoman"

This reading requires changing *'āmôn* to *'ommān*, a word which appears in Cant 7:2 (7:1 EV) translated as "skilled workman" (*ASV*), "master hand" (*NRSV*) or "craftsman" (*NIV*). Jeremiah 52:15 also has what appears to be the word *hā'āmôn* (root *'môn*) "artisans." In addition, the intertestamental work Wisdom identifies Wisdom as *technitis* or "craftsman" (7:22; 8:6).[143] The morphology of the *qāṭôl* form indicates profession. The meaning "artisan" is also supported by the LXX.[144] In this reading, Wisdom participates in creation alongside YHWH.

Scott, however, disputes *'āmôn* in Jer 52:15. First of all, it is the wrong form as a plural. Second, the parallel text in 2 Kgs 25:11 has the word *hehāmôn* (root *hmôn*) and translates it as "multitudes." Jeremiah 52:15 in the LXX omits the word entirely.[145] Third and more importantly, the Hebrew Scriptures consistently depict YHWH as the sole creator.

Dahood and Rogers seek to avoid this problem by suggesting that *'āmôn* in 8:30 is in apposition to "beside him," reading the phrase as "then I was beside him, a master worker," since in Hebrew, no preposition appears before *'āmôn*. Thus "master worker" refers to YHWH, not Wisdom.[146] *'Āmôn* is also in the masculine, not feminine,

[142]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 205–6; Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 391; Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 501.

[143]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[144]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 392.

[145]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 214.

[146]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 419; Cleon Rogers III, "The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word אמון in Proverbs 8, 30," *Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109 (1997): 220–221.

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form. In this way, the notion of Wisdom as co-creator is avoided. This view though has not gained wide acceptance in scholarly circles.

2. 'amun = "nursling"/"small child"/"ward"

This reading requires a change to *'amun*, a passive participle meaning "one cared for, reared (as a child)." "Child" seems suited to the context where Wisdom talks about her origins using birth imagery (vv. 24–25). The figure of a little child is appropriate to one who is YHWH's "delight" (*ša'ăšu'îm*) and who "plays" **(***məšaḥeqe*ṯ**)** continually in his presence.[147]

Disputing this, Scott points out that the word for "delight" expresses not only the delight of a father in his child, but also that of a farmer in his vineyard and the pious student for the Torah (Isa 5:7; Ps 119:24). Similarly the word for "play" *šḥq* is not limited to child's play but is also used of worship and cultic singing and dancing (2 Sam 6:5, 21), sporting contests (2 Sam 2:14), the gamboling of beasts, even Leviathan, merrymaking in general, and even the sporting of a practical joker (Job 40:20; Ps 104:26; Jer 15:17; Prov 26:19).[148] In Job 38:7, the divine beings worshipped by singing together and shouting for joy at the dawn of creation.[149] The association with the metaphors of birth and play, for Scott, is merely "superficial." Wisdom derives her claim for authority from her primacy in creation. "For this high claim to grave authority the imagery of gay, thoughtless childhood is inappropriate."[150]

Hurowitz argues though that *'āmôn* is a "life-cycle term" and fits the context where Wisdom is narrating her origins and maturation process. "Since every other statement of hers [in Prov 8:22–31] relates to her gestation, birth, early childhood, and growing up, it seems that

[147]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 217.

[148]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 218.

[149]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 421–22.

[150]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219.

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[*'āmôn*] too should designate some stage or aspect of this process."[151] Wisdom claims authority by virtue of her receiving education and training by watching the creator of the universe at work. "As God's daughter she has inherited His wisdom."[152]

3. 'omen = "binding, uniting" (LXX, Syr, Vulg, Scott)[153]

In this reading, Wisdom personifies the principle of coherence and order in the world YHWH is creating. Support for this comes in later exegetical traditions. It seems to be the only way to account for such verses as Sirach 43:26: "By his word all things hold together"; Wisdom 1:7 which depicts the Spirit of the Lord as "that which holds all things together"; and Col 1:15–17 which declares that Christ is "the firstborn of all creation; … he himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."[154] In this reading, Wisdom is the living link who binds creation and all reality together.[155]

4. 'amen = "continually, steadfastly, faithfully" (Symmachus, Theodotion, Targum)[156]

Reading the root as *'mn* "to be firm, faithful," this translation makes better sense of the parallels of 8:30b–31:

And I was	beside him	*faithfully*	
And I was	delighting	daily	
	rejoicing before him	at all times	
	rejoicing		in his inhabited world
And	delighting		in human beings.[157]

[151]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 396.

[152]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 396.

[153]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219–220.

[154]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219–220.

[155]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 418, n. 134.

[156]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 420.

[157]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 420; Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 220. Because the translation "child" is unlikely, "play" is also unlikely (Clifford, *Proverbs,* 97).

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5. 'ummanu="scribe, sage; heavenly mediator" (Clifford)[158]

Clifford cites Babylonian texts which ascribe the arrival of wisdom and culture to the human race through pre-Flood and post-Flood divine and semi-divine sages called ***apkallu*** and ***ummanu***. Ahiqar in the Aramaic tale is called the last *'ummanu*. If *'āmôn* is a corruption of *'ummanu*, then Wisdom can be seen as a (heavenly) sage, that is, a heavenly figure mediating to humans the knowledge they need to live good and upright lives.[159]

Support for the existence of heavenly mediators who accompany YHWH at creation can be drawn from texts such as Gen 1:26 and Job 38:6 as well as the texts that talk about the divine council of YHWH (1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6; Job 1:6; 2:1; etc.). According to Whybray, the members of the divine council do not assist YHWH in making decisions but in carrying out his commands.[160]

Contextually, Hurowitz also grants that this translation has some support. In 8:4 and 8:31, Wisdom's interaction with humans forms the wider context to interpret Wisdom's "autobiography." In 8:14–16, "Wisdom proclaims her usefulness to kings and other rulers, which is a function of advisors."[161] The concept of YHWH's dominion in the cosmos is also given stress in Prov 8, such that Wisdom as YHWH's mediator or advisor to humanity would fit, although Hurowitz regards this as a secondary interpretation.[162]

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[158]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 100–101.

[159]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 26.

[160]R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah XL:13–14: A Study of the Sources of the Theology of Deutero-Isaiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 84. See also Simon Parker, "Divine Intercession in Judah," *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006): 76–91.

[161]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 398.

[162]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 398.

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Evaluation of the Proposals

Owing to the preponderance of ANE mythological references in Proverbs 8–9, this last translation as "heavenly mediator of wisdom" seems to fit the evidence and context best.[163] In the end, any resolution is at best tentative. Similar to *qānānî* discussed above, this is most likely another word with multivalent meanings.[164]

For the wisdom movement, creation is the rationale for the human quest for wisdom. In the Hebrew Scriptures, creation is consistently associated with the divine attributes of power and wisdom (Jer 10:15=51:15; 32:17; Ps 65:7). Intimate with YHWH, Wisdom "can mediate a like intimacy to human beings."[165] Wisdom enjoys being with God and her position of honor. Her joy is especially intense as she watches God create, just as the heavenly beings in Job 38:7 sang as they watched God create.

As Wisdom delights in God "daily" (v. 30b), so her reader is to wait upon her "daily" (v. 34). The relationship between Wisdom and her followers on earth in vv. 32–34 mirrors the relationship between Wisdom and YHWH in heaven. "The very wisdom by which YHWH created the world is available to all who seek it. Wisdom thus mediates between the all-wise YHWH and the human seeker."[166] As the companion of YHWH, she now offers herself as companion to humanity.

Wisdom as Transcendent Figure

Precisely because 8:22–31 challenges and destabilizes conventional ideas of God and of wisdom, different exegetical traditions have arisen

[163]Cf. Hurowitz ("Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 399) who sees "nursling" or "ward" as primary meaning and "advisor" as only secondary.

[164]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?", 399–400.

[165]Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 179.

[166]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 97; Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 181.

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with vastly different translations of these words. In the same manner, different proposals for the theological meaning of personified wisdom in Prov 8:22–31 have arisen.[167]

Is Wisdom a *personification of an attribute of God*? Prov 3:19–20 says: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew." Is Prov 8:22–31 merely a poetic way of saying the same thing, as Caird contends?[168]

Is Wisdom a *personification of the whole body of wisdom teaching* in Israel's wisdom schools? The figure becomes "little more than a didactic help to impress the male Jewish students with the worth and desirability of their learning."[169]

Metaphor does not possess merely emotive content, nor is merely ornamental, but possesses cognitive content and has the power to redescribe and redefine reality. These first two views cannot account for the subsequent development of the metaphor that enabled "personified Wisdom [to become] a rich source of reflection and expression for the Lord Jesus."[170] From being a personification of a divine attribute, she has become, according to Ricoeur,

> … a transcendent feminine figure. She is a divine reality that has always existed and that will always exist. She lives with God and she has accompanied creation from its very beginning. Intimacy with Wisdom is not to be distinguished from intimacy with God.[171]

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[167]Johnson ("Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 271–74) gives five views in her excellent summary, four of which will be given here.

[168]"Wisdom represented as a master-builder … is a metonymic and picturesque way of talking about what God in his wisdom does" (G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980], 137).

[169]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 272.

[170]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 261.

[171]Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 88.

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How then have scholars attempted to explain the transformation of Wisdom to a transcendent figure approaching divine status? One attempt is to see Wisdom here as a *personification of the cosmic order*, i.e., of the ordering principle God has implanted in creation. In his book *Wisdom in Israel*, von Rad argues that Wisdom is not an attribute of God but an attribute of the world which humans are commanded to seek out.[172] Nevertheless, while it is true humans can scrutinize creation and learn something of the creator's design and purpose in it, personified Wisdom is not to be identified with her effects. This view also fails to account for those passages that speak of Wisdom existing prior to the creation of the world![173]

Another attempt is to see personified Wisdom as a *hypostasis*. Oesterley-Box famously defined hypostasis as a "quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings."[174] Ringgren proposed that post-exilic Judaism developed hypostases as its view of God grew more transcendent and distant. Hypostases like the Spirit, Name, Glory, Word and Law of God were intermediaries that enabled Judaism to maintain contact with God and a way to speak more concretely of God's actions. Yet strictly speaking, Judaism of this period did not achieve full hypostatization, such as what happened later during the trinitarian debates or in later Jewish texts. Ringgren's thesis is that the strict monotheistic belief of Israelite religion did not allow the hypostases to become real deities. Proverbs 8 is a quasi-personification

[172]Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 170–76.

[173]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 42. Other arguments against it are its failure to incorporate other metaphors for wisdom such as wisdom as a prophet (Prov 1 and 8), housebuilder and banquet host (Prov 9), as well as its inability to account for the richness and depth which led to further development of this metaphor in later literature.

[174]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 272–73.

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of one of God's attributes.[175] Currently the hypostatization view has fallen into disfavor with scholars.[176]

Personified Wisdom as a Borrowing of Goddess Imagery

Wisdom's astounding claims in 8:22–31 have led many scholars to believe the only way to account for them is the influence of goddess imagery. Johnson avers that as to her origin, there is "virtual unanimity of scholarly opinion … that an extra-biblical figure of a female deity influenced the biblical depiction."[177] Acknowledging the international influence on Proverbs, personified Wisdom is deemed an adaptation of the goddess traditions of Israel's neighbors. The incorporation of goddess imagery is clearest in the following passage:

PROVERBS 3

13 Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding,
14 for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.
15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

[175]Witherington (*Jesus the Sage*, 37–38, 43) concurs, saying that personification is the best way to describe the Woman Wisdom material in Proverbs, Job, and Sirach, though in the Wisdom of Solomon, the author may have progressed to the stage of hypostatization of Wisdom.

[176]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273.

[177]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 267–68. Proposals have ranged from the Canaanite love goddess Astarte (Wisdom depicted as bride, spouse, and beloved sister); the Semitic mother goddess set at YHWH's side by the Jews at Elephantine; the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar; the Egyptian goddess Ma'at who represented law, world order, and justice; a Hellenized version of the Egyptian goddess Isis who praises herself for her mighty deeds and is described as the creator of the universe and presiding over all its elements (Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 237).

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17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.
19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens;
20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

The precursor of the reference to the "tree of life" (3:18) most likely is the Asherah cult image of Canaan, usually represented in ANE iconography by a stylized tree flanked by two ibexes or lions. Traces of Asherah worship have been found in Palestine, specifically Lachish, dating as early as the thirteenth century B.C.E.[178] Asherah is the fertility goddess *par excellence* and given the title of "procreatress of the gods."[179] Another link of Asherah to personified Wisdom is that the former is considered the consort or companion of the progenitor deity and high god El in Ugaritic texts.[180] Asherah (called Astarte) is also the consort of Baal and, like Wisdom, is depicted as bride, spouse, and beloved sister in various texts. Seal impressions, tomb reliefs, and statues depict humans reaching out to touch the tree as well as animals eating the leaves and buds of the tree.[181] The invitation in Prov 3:18 to "lay hold" and "hold fast to" Wisdom, the tree of life, makes allusion to this.

Two other goddesses most commonly associated with personified Wisdom are Ma'at and Isis. Ma'at is the Egyptian goddess of truth and justice—the foundation principle of Egyptian society. Her role in Egyptian religion is described in language that has significant verbal affinities with Proverbs texts.[182] In one Egyptian myth, she is the first

[178]William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 235, n. 70 and 75.

[179]Refer to discussion on p. 136.

[180]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 73.

[181]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 61–62. See fig. 2–4.

[182]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

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creation of the creator god; in other texts, she is both daughter and master plan by which he creates (cf. Proverbs 8). She is often depicted as holding an *ankh*, the symbol of life, in one hand and a scepter, a symbol of power, in the other. In Prov 3:16, Wisdom holds long life in her right hand and riches and honor in her left hand.[183]

The goddess Isis claims "to be the eldest daughter of the sun-god Re, to be the ruler of all lands, to have set down laws for humanity, to control the rise and fall of kings, and many other accomplishments."[184] A Hellenized version of the Egyptian goddess Isis is found in a text to praise herself for her mighty deeds; she is also described as the creator of the universe and presiding over all its elements.[185]

Proverbs 3:13–20 clearly shows borrowing of goddess imagery. The last point of contact in 8:1–31 and 3:13–20 is the shared rhetoric between Wisdom's role in creation (3:19–20; 8:22–31), which grounds the extraordinary claims of her value (3:13–18; 8:1–21), and the subsequent appeal for humans to live with her (3:21–25; 8:32–36). Prov 3:13–20 is the only other passage in the entire book that talks about God's act of creation. In 3:19–20, Wisdom is clearly identified as an attribute of God.

Significance of the Metaphor

To say that the description of Wisdom is modeled after ANE goddesses is not to say that she was thought of among the Hebrew sages as a goddess herself.[186] The biblical writer has borrowed the imagery and incorporated them into a Yahwistic framework.

[183]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 22.

[184]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

[185]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

[186]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 41. For views of Wisdom as a goddess in her own right, see Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," 242–43.

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> The controlling context of meaning remained the Jewish faith, with borrowings being assimilated to that faith, while at the same time through the use of new categories Jewish beliefs about God and God's ways with the world were expressed in a way that matched the religious depth and style of the goddess literature and cult, and counteracted its appeal.[187]

Through the adaptation of goddess imagery, the sages of Israel could be seen to be offering an alternative to the worldview provided by the fertility religions of the region. "[A]ll that one actually sought from these other religions was to be found in YHWH, whose attribute it was not merely to have Wisdom and life, but to bestow it on his creation and creatures."[188]

Israel's sages borrowed goddess imagery in order to transform it. But in so doing, they also transformed the image of Wisdom. The double-back effect of metaphor was to inject an element of the feminine-transcendent in the figure of wisdom. As we shall see later, once the figure of wisdom was connected with the divine in some way, it opened the door for the feminine element to begin to be attached to the divine as well.

Lady Wisdom as a Metaphor for God Immanent

There is a fifth and final proposal for the theological meaning of the transcendent figure of wisdom in Prov 8. For Johnson, she is the *personification of God's own self in creative and saving involvement with the world***.**[189] Here Wisdom is YHWH, the metaphor being a way of asserting the transcendent God's nearness to the world in such a way

[187]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 271.

[188]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48.

[189]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273. Johnson cites James Dunn who similarly used the hermeneutical key of transcendence/immanence to interpret Wisdom's appearance.

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that God's transcendence was not compromised.[190] For support, there is a functional equivalence between the deeds of Wisdom and those of God. How personified Wisdom is described and what she does are also attributed to God.[191]

Two scholars who agree with this view are Murphy who refers to personified Wisdom as a "surrogate for YHWH"[192] and Terrien who explains her as the "theology of presence"[193] of the sages of Israel. Lady Wisdom is how the sages spoke of access to the divine presence. Like the person of Jesus much later, she is "the bearer of a divine presence in a human personality."[194]

To speak of Wisdom is to speak of God's relation to the world, in its nearness and activity and summons. This also makes the attribution to Jesus of Wisdom's many descriptions in the New Testament era that much more meaningful. Jesus is God immanent and incarnate in a way that Wisdom could only hint at!

The multivalent descriptions of Wisdom are not meant to be harmonized. The imagery for wisdom is a complex phenomenon: wisdom in some cases is an attribute of God, in some cases an attribute God has bestowed on creation, and in some cases a gift that God can give to human beings that they are called upon to embrace and live with.[195]

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[190]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273.

[191]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273. Refer also to the discussion on the metaphor of wisdom as a prophet earlier in this article.

[192]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 280.

[193]Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 352, 355.

[194]Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 361.

[195]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 39.

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Metaphor 5: Wisdom as a Housebuilder and Host (Prov 9:1–6)

The imagery of Wisdom as a transcendent figure continues with this final metaphor. Proverbs 9 consists of a two-part wisdom poem (9:1–6, 13–18) that sandwiches an instruction (9:7–12). The wisdom poem contrasts Lady Wisdom (9:1–6) with her archrival Lady Folly (9:13–18). The intervening verses (9:7–12) echo Proverbs 1:1–7 and function as an *inclusio* for Proverbs 1–9 as a whole.[196] The verse that summarizes the whole wisdom tradition—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7; 9:10)—is fittingly found only in these two passages.

PROVERBS 9

1 Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.
2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town,
4 "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says,
5 "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Wisdom is a banquet host inviting people to a feast in the house that she has built. The seven pillars (v. 1) are not decorative columns but supports on which a house rests (Judg 16:25, 26, 29).[197] *ʿAmmûḏ* "pillars" is the same word for the pillars that hold up the tabernacle (Exod 38–40) and the Solomonic Temple (1 Kgs 7). It is also used of the columns founded upon the earth (i.e. the mountains) to hold up the sky (Job 9:6; 26:10–11; Ps 75:4).[198]

[196]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 105.

[197]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106.

[198]Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*: *The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 95.

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Various conjectures have been given for what the seven pillars or seven columns represent.[199] Seven signifies perfection, so the seven pillars can connote completeness and grandeur, which means Wisdom has built the perfect house or home.[200] "Considering the restrictions of space in ancient Israel's cities, seven supporting pillars point to an exceptionally large, grand, and stately structure where numerous guests are expected."[201]

Is a temple in view? The temple of Aphrodite on Cyprus was named "The Holy Place of the Seven within the Stelae."[202] The sanctuary and Temple is referred to as the "house of God" (Exod 23:19; 1 Sam 1:7, 19, 24, etc; 1 Kgs 5–7). If so, this passage has borrowed another goddess motif to depict personified Wisdom as a transcendent figure with cosmic and mythological dimensions.[203]

The Banquet Motif

In the ancient Near East, the banquet symbolizes joy and celebration. A banquet is often held to mark a great victory or success. In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian story of creation, Marduk hosts a great feast to celebrate his victory over Tiamat. Stories of religious and victory feasts are likewise common in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 12:43–47; 1 Sam 9:12–13; 1 Chr 12:38–40). In postexilic prophecy and Jewish apocalyptic texts, the banquet came to symbolize the blessings expected in the end-time, combining the lavish meal with the imagery of divine marriage (Isa 54:1–55:2; 65:11–14). This motif is later taken up in the New Testament

[199]See Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58 for a list by Greenfield of what the "seven" stand for.

[200]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48, n. 145; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106.

[201]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 433.

[202]Stelae represented deities in Canaanite sanctuaries (Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 95).

[203]Personified Wisdom is being presented as an alternative to Aphrodite, the goddess of love (Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48).

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in the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ (Matt 8:11; 22:1–12; the Last Supper texts; Eph 5:31–32; Rev 19:6–21).[204]

Numerous ANE texts associate a feast with the dedication of a building (cf. 1 Kgs 8:62–66). In particular, the scene depicted in 9:1–3 resembles the dedication of Baal's palace in Ugaritic texts where Baal declares: "My house I have built of silver,/My palace of gold." In preparing his feast, Baal slays oxen and other animals, "He calls his brothers into his house … he supplies the gods with rams and wine … while the gods eat and drink …."[205] What this means, according to Clifford, is that

> [s]ince Baal no longer needs to live in El's palace, his house symbolizes his authority. Wisdom's house … symbolizes her great authority and dignity, which was stated so strongly in chap. 8, especially in vv. 22–31. Those who come to her banquet acknowledge her authority and rejoice in her company.[206]

The Guest List

Wisdom celebrates the completion of her house by sending out her maidservants to invite the *peṯî* "simple" and *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "those without sense" to come (9:4).

For the sages of Israel, the world can be divided into four groups of people based on their willingness to learn wisdom: the *peṯî/pəṯā'yîm*[207] "simple"/"youth"/"naïve," the *kəsîl/kəsîlîm* "fool," the *lēṣ/lēṣîm* or *'ĕwîl/'ĕwîlîm* "mocker," and the *rāšā'/rəšā'îm* "wicked." There is frequent overlap among the last three groups.

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[204]"banquet, eschatological (or messianic banquet)," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 75–76.

[205]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 432; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 103.

[206]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 103.

[207]*Pəṯā'yîm* can also be spelled *pəṯāyîm* (Prov 1:22, 32) and *pəṯāyyîm* (22:3).

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The *peṯî* are considered the "mildest" sort of fools. In qal, the root *pty* means "being easily misled." These people are "malleable, capable of being shaped and improved by education (1:4; 8:5; 12:25; 21:11) and still have hope of joining the company of the wise (1:22; 9:4)."[208] In other words, they are still teachable. In various texts, they are described as young (1:4; 7:7), *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "lacking in sense" (7:7; 9:4, 16), not shrewd (14:15, 18) nor insightful (19:25) nor wise (21:11), but weak-willed (22:3; 27:15), and easily seduced (7:7, 21–22).[209] However, their ignorance carries moral and religious culpability and danger to themselves. "[U]ntil they opt no longer to remain uncommitted to wisdom, they are wayward …. Until they repent, they are grouped with morally culpable fools and mockers (1:22, 32; 8:5)."[210]

Compared to the *peṯî* who is still teachable, the *kəsîl*/*ʾĕwîl* "fool" is fixed in the correctness of his opinion and lifestyle and despises discipline and correction (15:5, 20).[211] There is an escalation with the *lēṣ* "mocker/scoffer," who is more hardened in his ways than the fool,[212] and the *rāšāʿ* "wicked," regarded as the opposite of the *ṣadîq* "righteous."[213]

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[208]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[209]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[210]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[211]Fools lack wisdom (10:14, 21; 14:33), have poor speech (10:8, 10; 17:28; 27:3; 10:18; 12:23; 15:2; 19:1), lack self-control and are hot-tempered (12:16; 20:3; 19:11), morally insolent, intractable, and incorrigible (12:15; 24:7; 15:14; 17:10; 18:2; 26:5, 11; 28:26) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 112).

[212]He hates the wise (9:7–8; 15:12) and even takes pride in getting away with his deviation from wisdom (14:6; 21:24). He is destructive of community values (29:8) and needs to be driven out for order to be restored (22:10). In the end, the tables are turned as Wisdom scoffs at him (Prov 1:26) and the Lord cuts him down, along with tyrants and evildoers (Isa 29:20) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 114).

[213]His thoughts, deeds and lifestyle are characteristically self-serving at the expense of his community. *Rāšāʿ* appears in parallel with terms such as "perverse"

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In Prov 1:22, Wisdom addresses the *pəṯā'yîm* "simple ones," *lēṣîm* "mockers," and *kəsîlîm* "fools." In Prov 8:5 as in chapter 9, she narrows her audience to the *pəṯā'yîm*, holding out hope that they can learn wisdom. However, she is not the only one targeting them.

A Rival Invitation

PROVERBS 9

13 The foolish woman is loud; she is ignorant and knows nothing.
14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town,
15 calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way,
16 "You who are simple, turn in here!" And to those without sense she says,
17 "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
18 But they do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

A second woman presides at her private "house" (9:14) and issues dinner invitations.[214] The identity of Lady Wisdom's rival is unmasked as Lady Folly in verse 13: "The foolish woman (*'ēšeṯ kəsîlûṯ*) is loud; she is ignorant (*pəṯayyûṯ*) and knows nothing." She is described with the abstract noun forms of the same words for *kəsîl* "fool" and *peṯî* "ignorant"/"simple"/"naïve."

The description of the meal is weighted in Wisdom's favor. She offers meat, wine and bread (9:2), signifying the best.[215] In contrast, the meal offered by Lady Folly consists of "stolen water" and "bread eaten in secret" (9:17). This points back to the stolen tryst the "strange

(10:32), "treacherous" (2:22); and "evildoer" (6:18; 14:19; 24:20). They are described as "greedy (10:3; 21:10), violent (10:6), threaten innocent life (12:6; 24:15), practice deceit (12:5) and cruelty (12:10) and speak perversely (10:32; 11:11; 15:28; 19:28). The Lord detests them and their ways (15:9, 29), including their sacrifices (15:8; 21:27) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 110).

[214]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58.

[215]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 49.

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woman" in Prov 7 enticed the young man with. Lady Folly's invitation for the youth to partake of "stolen water" (9:17) is seen as having sexual overtones, water being a common Hebrew euphemism for sexuality (Prov 5:15–17). "Stolen water" refers to the stealing of sexuality belonging to another, in other words, adultery. This constitutes another connection to the forbidden woman of chapters 2, 5, and 7.[216] In Prov 4:17, the bread and wine of the wicked and evildoers is described as wickedness and violence.

Described with the same traits of the forbidden woman of chapters 2, 5 and 7, Lady Folly is *hōmiyyāh* "loud" (9:13; 7:11), without *da'at* "knowledge" (9:13; 5:6), and her path leads to death and Sheol (9:18; 2:18; 5:5; 7:27).[217] Other shared vocabulary are "house" (7:6, 8, 11, 19, 20, 27; 9:1, 14); *'ōbēr* "passing by" (7:8; 9:15) and *derek* "way" (7:8, 25; 9:15).[218]

As Proverbs 1–9 reaches its climax, Lady Folly merges with the figure of the strange woman of chapters 2, 5 and 7 to serve as the foil or nemesis of Lady Wisdom.[219] Lady Folly represents "the essence of the opposite of wisdom."[220] Both compete for the attention and allegiance of the simple and those lacking in sense (9:4, 16). Both utilize the same strategy of inviting them for fellowship and hospitality in their house. Even the invitation is couched in similar language (9:4–5, 16–17), but the similarity ends there. Accepting Wisdom's invitation leads to life (v. 6); accepting Folly's invitation leads to death (v. 18).

The structure of this chapter, with the first six verses about Lady Wisdom and the last six about Lady Folly, highlight this life-and-death choice between Wisdom and Folly. Even the structures of the two

[216]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 107; cf. R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes,* Anchor Bible (NY: Doubleday, 1985), 76.

[217]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 104.

[218]Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 182.

[219]Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros," 603.

[220]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 57.

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stanzas are parallel. Both start off with a third-person description of the personified figures, followed by invitations to the unlearned in first-person speech. The stanza about Lady Folly though returns to the third-person description, detailing the surprise that awaits the youth who accept Folly's invitation. They discover that those who attend Folly's banquet are the dead.[221]

Proverbs 1–9 ends with this summons to a final decision regarding wisdom or folly. Depicting Wisdom and Folly in close similarity dramatizes the need for discernment. Because "folly can be disguised as wisdom"[222] and "use Wisdom's ways to lure the unwary,"[223] people need discernment to distinguish the right path. Not only is Proverbs 9 a fitting conclusion to Proverbs 1–9, it also serves as introduction to the second major section of the book, which consists almost entirely of short sayings from which truth needs to be carefully sifted.[224]

Significance of the Metaphor

Derek or "way" is one of the primary motifs of the wisdom movement.[225] "Way" connotes movement. In Prov 1–9, *derek* is accompanied by verbs of motion such as *hālak* "walk"/"go" (1:15; 2:20; 3:23), *bô'* "go in/enter" (4:14), *'āšar* "go straight, walk" (4:14), *rāḥaq* "depart" (5:8) as well as the noun form of *'āraḥ* "wander, journey" (2:8; 9:15).

"Way" is also a metaphor for customary behavior or way of life that one must preserve or keep oneself in (6:23; 8:20; 9:6). "A path

[221]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 94.

[222]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 57.

[223]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 59.

[224]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 59.

[225]Norman Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," *Interpretation* 26:2 (April 1972): 133.

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is a social product, made by many feet over a period of time"[226] and connotes a destination and a will.

> A path does not … exclude movement in any direction. It only makes its own direction the easiest, most natural, most logical way of proceeding. As each individual "freely" chooses to walk the path, that act incises the path more deeply. Finally, a path orders the world in a particular way as it establishes relations between place and place ….[227]

Just as important, "way" implies destination. The destination of the way of wisdom is the house of wisdom, where there is rest and feasting. There is a sense of coming home after the culmination of a journey; there is celebration, joy, abundance, and a warm welcome to be found at home. In contrast, the way of Folly leads to Sheol and death (7:27), hence, the warning not to go near the door of her house (5:8).

What is this house or Temple of wisdom? Various suggestions have been made: the world, the wisdom tradition, the book of Proverbs, and the poem itself. The world metaphorically presented as a building, even a sacred one, is not uncommon in the ancient Near East.[228] "The house which Wisdom builds is but another way of describing the world she has constructed through her divine counsel (in 8:22ff), or what is more likely, that her house, like ancient temples, is the earthly counterpart of the cosmic superstructure."[229]

Perdue cites other suggestions which see the house of wisdom as the wisdom school where students study and live, or even the poem of Proverbs 9 itself for its "imaginat[ive] construct[ion] of reality in

[226]Carol Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 147.

[227]Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 147.

[228]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 96.

[229]Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom," 156.

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which wisdom and folly struggle for domination and rule."[230] For Murphy, the book of Proverbs is the only house of Woman Wisdom (Prov 14:1 and 24:3).[231] But most likely the whole Wisdom tradition is considered by the sages as the house of Wisdom. "The wisdom tradition does not consist merely of learned insights by intelligent people or practical advice about how to get on in life, but is a teaching that is grounded in the fundamental structures of the cosmos and the nature and character of God."[232]

People are asked to enter the door of Wisdom's house (8:34), and not the door of the house of the strange woman (5:8) or Folly (9:14). The metaphor of the pathway thus "maps" both the instruction (the way of wisdom) and the response to it (how one walks), imbuing them with a sense of dynamic, mutual engagement.[233]

Conclusion

While the five metaphors of personified wisdom have been isolated for the purpose of analysis, interconnections among them can be discovered so that Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 comes out as a "complex, composite, and highly stylized"[234] figure.

Prov 1:20–33 is connected to Prov 8 by the image of the street prophet. The personification of Wisdom as bride and lover in Prov 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 intersect with the banquet host and house builder in

[230]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 97. An alternative proposal is that of Skehan who sees the seven pillars of wisdom as the seven poems in Proverbs 2–7 (Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 356, n. 72).

[231]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58–59.

[232]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 96.

[233]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 33.

[234]Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman," 157.

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Prov 9, not only because of the gender-stereotyped roles described but also because of the protection she provides against another stylized feminine figure—the "strange woman" in Prov 4–7/Lady Folly in Prov 9. In Prov 8:1–21, personified Wisdom engages in self-promotion of her benefits, recalling the language of Prov 4. The figure of Wisdom as royal adviser in Prov 8:14–16 is echoed by the image of the transcendent figure-companion of YHWH in Prov 8:22–31 and 3:13–20.

While saying that the various depictions of wisdom are not to be harmonized, we nevertheless have found that Lady Wisdom unites the various metaphors for wisdom in a way that does not lead to reductionism. Camp calls Lady Wisdom a "root metaphor."[235] Root metaphors are "dominant" images that organize metaphorical statements into metaphorical networks rather than leave them isolated.[236] Some examples are God as King, Father, Husband, Lord, Shepherd, and Judge as well as Rock, Fortress, Redeemer, and Suffering Servant.[237]

Root metaphors have the affective depth and structural power to generate and organize other metaphors.[238] They bring together the partial metaphors borrowed from our diverse experiences in a way that gives them both stability and conceptual diversity. By carrying a whole constellation of associations, the use of a root metaphor evokes the

[235]Claudia Camp ("Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, JSOT Supplement Series 58, ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al. [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], 45–76) calls Lady Wisdom the root metaphor for wisdom, although for R. C. Leeuwen, it is not Lady Wisdom but the polarities of Wisdom/Folly, good/wicked, life/death, which reflect the limits God has placed on life (Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 22).

[236]Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University Press, 1991/1997), 244.

[237]Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 64.

[238]Camp, "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor," 49.

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whole network. They assemble and scatter—"assembl[ing] subordinate images together … [and] scatter[ing] concepts at a higher level." This enables the continuing vitality of the metaphor that leads to an unlimited number of potential interpretations at a conceptual level.[239]

[239]Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 64; Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 244.

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