

WISDOM IN THE CONTEXT OF PROVERBS

by

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The book of Proverbs is not only wise, but relevant and timely, and constantly up-to-date. It deals with some of the finer aspects of our lives, our character, and of our relationships. In this setting, what does wisdom mean? The basic meaning of wisdom (חָכְמָה) is to have a skill. If this basic meaning were applied to Proverbs, it would mean to live one's life with skill, to conform one's life to the character and mind of God who is the author of wisdom.

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of wisdom within the context of Proverbs, to determine its meaning and point out its relationship to Jesus Christ.

The study begins with a brief foundational section on the origin and development of wisdom in Israel's cultural and religious history. A general survey of the structure and contents of the book is required to determine its context. The most consistent and frequent Hebrew word used for wisdom is חָכְמָה. Upon careful examination and analysis of this word, it is seen that it points strongly to a God-given perspective on life, godly cleverness and skill that results in practical action. The key emphasis is that the human will is to be subject to the divine will in all matters of daily living.

Proverbs, chapter 8 is studied in depth and key phrases are examined exegetically to show that the personification of wisdom (though claimed by many to be an hypostasis) is not a specific reference to Jesus Christ. Independent of its immediate context, some of the principles in chapter 8 could be applied to Christ.

The concept of wisdom in the book of Proverbs reveals a personal God who is holy and just, and who expects those who know Him to exhibit His character in the practical affairs of life. Wisdom in this book is not theoretical and speculative, nor does it mean a high I.Q. It is highly practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong to be lived out in daily life.

Furthermore, in Proverbs, wisdom is contrasted with evil, thus it is used as a moral quality. Wisdom in this context brings God into proper focus; seeing life from His viewpoint. In essence, wisdom means patterning one's life after the character of God.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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Master of Divinity

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| BDB | Brown, Driver, and Briggs, <u>Hebrew Lexicon</u> |
| BHS | <u>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</u> |
| CBQ | <u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u> |
| EJ | <u>Encyclopaedia Judaica</u> |
| HBT | <u>Horizons in Biblical Theology</u> |
| Int | <u>Interpretation</u> |
| JBL | <u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u> |
| JNSL | <u>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</u> |
| JTS | <u>Journal of Theological Studies</u> |
| KJV | King James Version |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| NIDNTT | <u>The New International Dictionary of NT Theology</u> |
| NIV | New International Version |
| Ref. | General Reference |
| RE | <u>Review and Expositor</u> |
| SJT | <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u> |
| TOTC | <u>Tyndale OT Commentaries</u> |
| TDOT | <u>Theological Dictionary of the OT</u> |
| TWOT | Theological Wordbook of the OT |
| VT | <u>Vetus Testamentum</u> |

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Maclaren called the book of Proverbs, "A young man's best counsellor,"¹ and certainly it is. The book of Proverbs is a highly practical book for every Christian. However, very little study has been done in it and few scholars have written about it. In fact, it would be true to say that it is one of the most "ignored" books of the Bible.

My study in the book of Proverbs began years ago as a new Christian who was struggling. Since then my interest in the book has developed. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the concept of wisdom within the context and setting of the book of Proverbs, to determine its meaning, and also to find out if there is any relationship between wisdom (in Proverbs) and Jesus Christ.

This study necessitates a brief foundational section on the origin and development of wisdom in Israel's cultural and religious history. It will be essential to study the word "חָכְמָה" because it is the most consistent and frequently used word for "wisdom" in the Old Testament.

¹Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scripture, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 71.

In order to examine a concept, the entire book must be looked at as a whole. In order to determine the meaning accurately, every usage of the word must be examined in its context and analyzed. Since wisdom can have more than one meaning, the context is limited to the book of Proverbs. And since there are extremely large numbers of occurrences of the word wisdom in the book, it seems practical to further limit the study to Proverbs, chapters 1-9.

Proverbs, chapter 8, contains the fascinating personification of wisdom. Since this is a controversial chapter as to its interpretation, much time will be devoted to its examination. Many interpret this passage Christologically. Key verses will be examined exegetically to determine if indeed there is any relationship between wisdom and Jesus Christ.

It will be noted that there is no mention of the similarity between the Hebrew text of the book of Proverbs and the Egyptian work of Amen-em-ope. This is intentional because there has been much excellent work done on the subject. This writer would recommend the work of James McGlinchey¹ and John Ruffle.² In both cases the

¹James M. McGlinchey, "The Teaching of Amen-em-ope and the Book of Proverbs," unpublished Th.D. dissertation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1939).

²John Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connexion with Proverbs," unpublished M.A. thesis (England: University of Liverpool, 1964).

conclusion is that it is extremely difficult to determine whether the Hebrew authors were influenced by the Egyptians. In fact, all indications are that there was no influence at all, and if any, it was from Israel to Egypt.

Religiously the difference is clearly noted. In the latter, there is little or no connection between the wisdom of man and the gods, whereas in the OT wisdom comes right out of the heart of God (Prov 8) and is practically one with Him. Or to put it in the words of the Hebrew authors themselves, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7; 9:10).

Every study in the Word of God must have an affect on the writer on a personal level. This has been the motivational force for this writer. This thesis is intended to let the reader realize that "wisdom" is not some abstract and ambiguous entity, but that it is a highly personal and practical element of one's life.

In the words of Charles C. Ryrie, "Almost every facet of human relationships is mentioned (in the book of Proverbs) and the teaching of the book is applicable to all men everywhere."¹

It will be clear that wisdom in this book does not mean a high I.Q., but it is the skill of living life,

¹Charles Caldwell Ryrie, "Psalms and Proverbs," The Ryrie Study Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 106.

living it with beauty in all of its relationships--speech, finances, marriage, parenting, etc. To live one's life in righteousness. Righteousness means to conform to a standard. Man is by nature contrary to the nature and character of God. This book is designed to quell that and to bring us under the discipline of God.

There is much in the book of Proverbs and this study on wisdom is not intended to be exhaustive in any manner.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF WISDOM IN ISRAEL'S CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY

As a historical phenomenon, biblical wisdom designates a distinctive cultural tradition and scholarly activity in the history of ancient Israel, continuing in early Judaism and Christianity. It was a way of thinking and an attitude to life that emphasized experience, reasoning, morality, and the concerns of man as man, rather than as an Israelite. Its interest was in the individual and his social relationships rather than in the distinctive national religion and its cult. In keeping the religious element present in wisdom's recognition of the rightness of a certain order of life, the wisdom teachers sought to provide rules and examples of personal morals and, on a theoretical level, meanings and values through reflection, speculation, and debate.¹

The origin of the wisdom tradition in Israel can be sketched only in broad strokes because the evidence is slight and often ambiguous. Wisdom is a tradition as old

¹EJ, s.v. "Wisdom," by R. B. Y. Scott, 26:558.

as society itself, a constant factor in its daily life rather than a self-conscious movement.

With the advent of the monarchy, traces of wisdom are seen as royal counselors become influential (2 Sam 16:20ff; 1 Ki 12:6ff) and in effect some were cabinet ministers (1 Ki 4:1ff; Isa 36:3). Professional scribes and a literate elite at Solomon's court were probably mainly responsible for the production of wisdom and other literature later attributed by tradition to the king himself (1 Ki 5:19-24 [4:29-34]; cf. Prov 25:1).¹

In the eighth century, Hezekiah's men were engaged in collecting Solomonic proverbs (Prov 25:1) and probably also in assembling the religious and other writings of Judah and northern Israel. When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the exiled scribes undoubtedly carried with them scrolls around which literary activities were centered in their new community.

After the return, when Judah became a semi-independent temple state under a Persian governor, religious authority was assumed by priests and scribes as custodians of the national-religious tradition. This tradition had now taken form as the Torah and other sacred books, which implied changes in the status of the learned. Ezra the priest bore the official title, "Secretary of the

¹Ibid.

Law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:12). The Torah was both code and creed; it was also the summation of Israel's distinctive religious wisdom (Deut 4:6). Temple scribes and wisdom teachers turned their attention to Torah study, with two results: the two streams of wisdom tradition and covenant theology coalesced, and a new kind of wisdom piety developed (cf. Ps 1, 119). At the same time, the folk wisdom of home and marketplace continued, but with a more positive ethical and religious orientation as in Proverbs 1-9.

According to J. Lindblom,

In earlier times there existed no intimate relation between the Torah and 'the wise' as representatives of wisdom in the special sense. A change came about in post-exilic times. The Torah was then regarded as the epitome of all wisdom and the standard of wisdom; and the teaching in the wisdom schools manifestly also included¹ instruction in the principles and commands of the law.

It is now widely recognized that the history of the figure of wisdom is a complex one. These differences cannot be explained by any simple theory of a development in a series of stages.² Crenshaw concludes that it is "neither possible to write a chronological history of the

¹J. Lindblom, "Wisdom in the Old Testament Prophets," VT Sup 3 (1955):196.

²R. N. Whybray, Wisdom in Proverbs (Chatham, Great Britain: W. & J. Mackay and Co., Ltd, 1965), p. 79.

development of wisdom literature, nor to place each of the forms within its proper setting.¹

The cultivation of wisdom as an understanding of the good and satisfactory life had a long history in ancient Israel. Originally the term had no ethical content, but meant simply a special skill or superior ability. The moral and religious element, broadly speaking, is a later enlargement of its meaning.²

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament is clearly distinguishable both in form and content from the other main types of OT literature such as history, law, prophecy, and Psalms. It occupies indeed an entirely unique position, for whereas the other types are all firmly rooted in the specific religious tradition of Israel and are concerned exclusively with its life and institutions, the wisdom books say nothing specifically about Israel, its history and political vicissitudes. It is obvious that in Proverbs the covenant relationship is assumed; however, man is not seen in these chapters as Israelite man first and foremost. In Proverbs the center of interest is the individual with his needs, ambitions, and problems. The

¹J. L. Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," in Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1976), p. 22.

²EJ, s.v. "Book of Proverbs," 16:1270.

book just shows us that there was more to Israelite life and thought than what the other OT books permit us to see.

According to John McKenzie,

The heavy wisdom flavor in the entire collection of Jewish and Christian sacred books suggests that wisdom is much more than a literary form, much more than a way of life, as it has often been called. It was also a way of thought and a way of speech, which was by no means limited to the schools and the writings of sages. It was the common way of thought and speech in which those who were¹ called wise excelled. It was an approach to reality.

It has been generally recognized that Israel's wisdom is not clearly connected to such theological themes as election, covenant, and the historical traditions of the Hebrew community. And since biblical scholars generally have found the dominating factor of Israel's faith to be her sacred history, they have frequently regarded the wisdom literature as a late addendum to the religion of Israel and not truly characteristic of Hebraic thought.² This is indeed a poor conclusion and is as good as not having dealt with this large body of material.

One of the reasons some writers give for seeing wisdom as late and foreign in Israel has been the quite

¹John L. McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom," JBL 86 (Mar 1967):2.

²J. M. Thompson, The Form and Function of Proverbs in Ancient Israel (Paris: Mouton, The Hague, 1974), p. 96.

proper recognition that the compilation of our biblical wisdom books was postexilic. Yet archaeology has made it increasingly clear that wisdom was already ancient by the time Israel became a self-conscious community; and the biblical parallels to this ancient material lead to the conclusion that much of it had circulated in Hebrew wisdom circles for many years before the writings of the canonical examples. James Barr has a strong linguistic argument as well to support this thesis.¹

From all the possible evidence it seems clear that the views of conventional OT scholarship on the supposed history of the book of Proverbs receives no support whatsoever from the wider range of factual information now available, be it literary, linguistic, conceptual, or other. In fact, the contrary is true. K. A. Kitchen comes down hard on such scholarship:

In the literary realm, the theory of separate origins and dates for Prov. 1-9 and 10-24 is refuted by the direct comparative testimony of some 15 works of all periods, while the supposed 'late' linguistic and conceptual evidence on dating turns out to be fallacious--again, set aside by well-dated external reference--material. When one probes further into reasons offered by conventional scholarship in support of 'accepted' views, the results can be surprising to say the least: not only mistaken, but occasionally hilariously comic.²

¹James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 8-88.

²K. A. Kitchen, "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East," The Tyndale Bulletin 28 (1977):108.

Kitchen cites the example of Oesterley who could not conceive why Solomon should be so precisely defined ('son of David'; 'King of Israel') in the title-lines of Proverbs (1:1ff). He says, "Oesterley never thought to inquire what ancient usage actually was, in framing titles for works like those in Proverbs."¹

He also condemns Toy when he says,

Equally quaint and fanciful is (e.g.) the view of Toy, that advice on sexual morality in Prov. 1-9 reflected the onset of vice in the growing city life of post-exilic Judea in contrast to earlier periods! Unfortunately for this rather innocent view of antiquity (redolent of rustic idylls??), lust can be documented for most periods and places in human history, including the Near East long before the Persian period . . . scholarship that operates on the basis of this class of speculation can hardly be expected to retain serious credibility.²

Religiously, the difference between the Hebrew wisdom literature and that of the neighboring cultures is clearly marked. In the latter with one or two exceptions, there is little or no connection between the wisdom of man and the gods, whereas in the OT wisdom comes right out of the heart of God and is practically one with Him (Prov 8). Israel's wisdom viewed all problems within the frame of the doctrine of a personal God who could not be capricious, or

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 108, 109.

indifferent, or, worse still, unjust, as the gods of the nations could be.¹

The book of Proverbs appears to have served as a manual for the moral and religious instruction of the young. The teacher's objective and methods are outlined in Proverbs 1:2-6, namely, cultivation of the mind and training in ethical principles. The saying in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 is said to be a foundational and programmatic thesis, on the principle of wisdom. "The goal of learning--wisdom, instruction, understanding, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, discretion, hearing, learning, skill--has as its first principle the fear of the Lord."²

When used in connection with the word "God," "fear" (both verb and noun) referred to a standard of moral conduct known and accepted by men in general. The concept of "fearing Yahweh" thus included every aspect of Israel's relationship to him: obedience, loyalty, worship, sacrifice, and love."³

¹H. Ranston, The OT Wisdom Books and Their Teaching (London: Epworth Press, 1930), p. 27.

²J. L. Grenshaw, "In Search of Divine Presence," RE 74 (1977):357.

³R. N. Whybray, Wisdom in Proverbs, p. 96.

G. Von Rad boldly voices his conviction that it is both Israel's entire theory of knowledge "in a nutshell," and "Israel's most special possession."¹

Wisdom had to be learned, and could be taught. Even so, it remained a divine gift rewarding those who desired it enough to submit to its discipline (Prov 2).

¹Gerhard Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 67.

CHAPTER II

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs is not a portrait-album or a book of manners; it offers the key to life. Wisdom as taught in the book of Proverbs is God-centered and consists of handling one's affairs in God's world, in submission to His will. Chuck Swindoll says, "The book of Proverbs provides the counsel we need to help us make our way straight through a problem. It props up our courage, puts before us a goal, and keeps in our minds 'the way of life' (Prov 6:23)."¹

The book tells us that it is the work of several authors. Three of these authors are named (Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel), others are mentioned collectively as 'wise men,' and at least one section of the book seems to be anonymous (Prov 31:10-31).

The Structure of the Book

The structure of the book is as follows:

1. Title, Purpose of Book and Motto, 1:1-7

¹Charles R. Swindoll, Proverbs (Bible Study Guide) (Fullerton, CA: Charles R. Swindoll, 1983), p. 3.

2. A Father's Praise of Wisdom to His Son, 1:8-9:18
3. Proverbs of Solomon, 10:1-22:16
4. Words from Wise Men, 22:17-24:22
5. Additional Words from Wise Men, 24:23-34
6. Hezekiah's Collection of Solomon's Proverbs,
25:1-29:27
7. Words of Agur, 30:1-33
8. Words of King Lemuel, 31:1-9
9. An Excellent Wife, 31:10-31

The Contents of the Book

The high ethical standard of the book is universally recognized. Honesty and truthfulness in public and private life are throughout insisted upon. The idea of justice is prominent in all parts of Proverbs. Warnings against unchastity constitute a special feature of chapters 1-9. Love is extolled (10:12) as ministering to peace. There is a sharp polemic against slander and malicious gossip (6:12-15, 19; 16:28). Special regard is shown for the interests of the poor (22:22). Irascibility is condemned (14:29) and pride (13:10) is denounced. Modesty or lowliness is approved (11:2). Frank acknowledgements of wrong is enjoined (28:13). Revenge is forbidden (24:17), and kindness to enemies is insisted upon. Industry is praised, sloth is ridiculed, temperance in eating and

drinking is urged. The ideal of family life is high. Parents are the responsible guides of their children, and entitled to their obedience and respect.

Woman is spoken of only in relation to her position of wife, mother, and housewife: she is a power in the house, capable of making home miserable (19:13) or happy (18:22, 31:28); she has not only housekeeping capacity, but also broad wisdom (1:8, 31:2-9). Proverbs speaks of training children at home (1:8). Peter Craigie has written an excellent article examining Proverbs in the context of moral education.¹

Toy says that the frequency with which terms for "instruction" occur in the book makes it probable that a definite apparatus of training existed.²

It is interesting to note that the historical period of the book of Proverbs comes during the period of the kings of Israel and places us in the eighth or ninth century before Christ--a time when Israel was back in the land of promise, after their experiences in the country of Egypt. This was when great glory was coming to the people and the country was in the process of building.³

¹Peter C. Craigie, "Biblical Wisdom in the Modern World: I Proverbs," CRUX 15:4 (Dec 1979):7-9.

²Crawford H. Toy, The Book of Proverbs ICC, vol. 17 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. xiii.

³Charles W. Turner, Studied in Proverbs (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1976), p. 15.

The essence of the book of Proverbs is that it is highly practical in nature--it contains the teaching of moral and ethical principles. Wisdom is much more than a literary form, much more than a way of life. It was by no means limited to the schools and the writings of sages. It was an approach to reality.

We have already said that the motto or the key verse in the book is, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Here wisdom is more than mere unreflecting fear of God. It is will and comprehensive ability to direct the whole of life. W. Knox says, "There is certainly a context of a possibility of direction."¹ God certainly directs.

In the language of concrete instruction, wisdom establishes what is good and where man has a right to wait for the blessing of God. The wise man is able to say where God will reward (12:2), where He will punish (15:24, 16:4), where He will hear (15:29). From the theology of creation it is clear that wisdom is always subordinate to God's will.²

The book of Proverbs is a highly practical book and therefore its study must be highly beneficial to the Christian who is serious about his daily walk with God.

¹W. Knox, "The Divine Wisdom," JTS 38 (1937):232.

²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

WISDOM (חָכְמָה), AN ANALYSIS OF ITS USAGES IN PROVERBS 1-9, AND ITS CONTEXTUAL MEANING

The word "wisdom" occurs 235 times in the English Bible, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, 182 of which is in the OT. Of these 182 OT usages, 161 (89%) come from the root חָכַם. In examining the book of Proverbs, we find "wisdom" occurs 54 times, of which 40 are from the root חָכַם. Out of the 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs, the first nine chapters (to which we are limiting our study) contain 45% of these occurrences. So it seems legitimate to confine our study to this portion of the book, and to the word חָכְמָה. It occurs even more frequently if all its forms are considered.

At this point, it must be stated that words do not have a single "correct meaning," that a word has a history of development (it can exhibit change), and that the usage in the context is vital to its meaning.¹

Care must be given in order to avoid making the root sense of חָכְמָה or σοφία (the Septuagint equivalent) the

¹John D. Grassmick, Principles and Practices of Greek Exegesis (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), p. 149.

dominant sense and the existing meanings only modifications of it.¹

Therefore, it is important to note the nature and context of the book of Proverbs. According to Laird Harris, the essence of this book is the teaching of moral and ethical principles.² Chapters 1-9 are largely given over to teaching by contrasts between good and evil. The good in this section is dominated by several words, like wisdom, instruction, understanding, knowledge, discretion, etc. However, the key word is wisdom, which is used 18 times in these nine chapters, as compared to 22 times in the remaining 22 chapters.

A Systematic List of Every Occurrence
of חָכָם in All Its Forms

The following is a list of every occurrence of the word חָכָם in all its different forms in the book of Proverbs.

Qal Perfect חָכַם

9:12 If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself.

Qal Imperfect חָכֵם

9:9 And he will be yet wiser

¹James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 102.

²R. Laird Harris, "Proverbs," Presbyterian Covenant Seminary Review 7 (Spring-Fall 1981):67.

13:20 He that walketh with wise (men) shall be
wise.
19:20 That thou mayest be wise
29:1 Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.
21:11 The simple is made wise.

Qal Imperative חָכֵם

6:6 Consider her ways, and be wise.
8:33 Hear instruction and be wise.
23:19 Hear thou, my son and be wise.
27:11 Be wise, and make my heart glad.

Pual Participle חָכָם

30:24 But they are exceeding wise (made wise).

Adjective חָכָם

1:5 A wise man will hear.
1:6 The words of the wise
3:7 Be not wise in thine own eyes.
3:35 The wise shall inherit glory.
9:8 Rebuke a wise man and he will love.
9:9 Give instruction to a wise man.
10:1 A wise son maketh a glad father.
10:8 Wise in heart will receive commandments.
10:14 Wise men lay up knowledge
11:29 Servant to the wise of heart
11:30 He that winneth souls is wise.
12:15 He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.
12:18 The tongue of the wise is health.
13:1 A wise son heareth his father's instruction.
13:14 The law of the wise is a fountain.
13:20 He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.
14:3 The lips of the wise is their riches.
14:16 A wise man feareth.
14:24 The crown of the wise is their riches.
15:2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge.
15:7 The lips of the wise disperse knowledge.
15:12 Neither will he go unto the wise.
15:20 A wise son maketh a glad father.
15:31 Abideth among the wise.
16:14 But a wise man will pacify it.
16:21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent.
16:23 The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth.
17:28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is
counted wise.
18:15 The ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

20:26 A wise king scattereth the wicked.
 21:11 When the wise is instructed
 21:20 Oil in the dwelling of the wise
 21:22 A wise man scaleth the city.
 22:17 Hear the words of the wise.
 23:24 He that begetteth a wise child shall have
 joy in him.
 24:5 A wise man is strong.
 24:23 These (things) also (belong) to the wise.
 25:12 A wise reprover to an obedient ear
 26:5 Lest he be wise in his own conceit
 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit?
 26:16 The sluggard (is) wiser in his own conceit.
 28:11 The rich man (is) wise in his own conceit.
 29:8 But wise (men) turn away wrath.
 29:9 A wise man contendeth not with a foolish
 man.
 29:11 But a wise (man) keepeth it.
 30:24 But they are exceeding wise.

Feminine Noun חָכְמָה

1:2 To know wisdom and instruction
 1:7 Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
 2:2 Incline thine ear to wisdom.
 2:6 For the Lord giveth wisdom.
 2:10 When wisdom enters into thine heart
 3:13 Happy (is) the man (that) findeth wisdom.
 3:19 The Lord by wisdom hath founded
 4:5 Get wisdom, get understanding.
 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get
 wisdom.
 4:11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom.
 5:1 My son, attend unto my wisdom.
 7:4 Say unto wisdom, Thou (art) my sister.
 8:1 Does not wisdom cry?
 8:11 For wisdom (is) better than rubies.
 8:12 I wisdom dwell with prudence.
 9:10 Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
 10:13 Of him that hath understanding, wisdom is
 found.
 10:23 So is wisdom to a man of understanding
 10:31 Mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom.
 11:2 But with the lowly (is) wisdom.
 13:10 But with the well-advised is wisdom.
 14:6 A scorner seeketh wisdom.
 14:8 The wisdom of the prudent
 14:33 Wisdom resteth in the heart.
 15:33 The Lord (is) the instruction of wisdom.
 16:16 Better (is it) to get wisdom than gold.

17:16 Price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom
 17:24 Wisdom (is) before him that hath
 18:4 The well spring of wisdom
 21:30 No wisdom nor understanding
 23:23 Wisdom and instruction
 24:3 Thru wisdom is a house built.
 24:14 So (shalt) the knowledge of wisdom
 28:26 Whoso walketh wisely, he shall be
 29:3 Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth
 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom.
 30:3 I neither learned wisdom.
 31:26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom.

חִכְמָה

1:20 Wisdom crieth without.
 9:1 Wisdom hath builded her house.
 24:7 Wisdom (is) too high for a fool.

חִכְמָה

14:1 Every wise woman (wisdom of women) buildeth
 her house.

Some have made the statement that the Masoretic Text is in bad shape in Proverbs; but this is not so. Here and there there may be a phrase that seems ungrammatical and inappropriate, which could be the result of a copyist's error. However, these are very rare.

It must be remembered that this text consisted only of consonants and the vowels came later by tradition, while Hebrew was a living language, and signs for them eventually were placed above and below the consonants. This consonantal text is our written link with the authors.

Another point to remember is that our understanding of Hebrew is incomplete. In recent years the growing

knowledge of related languages and literature has already thrown light on previously difficult words. As such, one must hearken to Kidner's advice who says, "This should encourage us to treat a hard text more often as awaiting explanation than as needing correction."¹

The NT equivalent for "wisdom" is σοφία. Strong lists 53 references to "wisdom" in the NT and points out that all but one reference use σοφία (Lk 1:17 uses φρόνησις). The Hebrew word חכמה appears 235 times (in all its forms) in the OT. In the Septuagint, σοφία appears 219 times (in all its forms).

Since σοφία and חכמה are so commonly linked together in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, it becomes necessary to determine the significance of their contextual usages and their variations, if any. For our purposes, we will be limiting our study to the book of Proverbs, specifically chapters 1-9.

It seems from most of the noun usages that wisdom is related to a context of individuals who are spiritually regenerate.

It also is evident that there is a strong contrast between human wisdom and divinely obtained wisdom. The same is true when the equivalent Greek word σοφία is examined in the Septuagint. In fact, wisdom seems to be a

¹Derek Kidner, Proverbs (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 28.

form of insight obtainable only by those who are of a regenerate state. This insight is something that the unregenerate heart rejects and cannot comprehend. According to Goldberg, the essential idea is that of a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experience, including matters of general interest and basic morality.¹

The adjectival usages seem to be used in descriptive terms of the spiritually regenerate. There is a precedent similar to that of the noun usages. An appropriation of God's perspective is a vital part of this word's meaning. This is where the intellectual capacity involved goes beyond what mere human effort can achieve. It is a very practical concept, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.²

In examining the verbal usages, the Hebrew verb in the Qal usually refers to the state of being wise.³ On examining the remaining usages in the rest of the book, it is evident that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, was to be subject to divine causes.

The Septuagint usage of σοφία is closely linked to the Hebrew root חָכַם. Even though there are exceptions to

¹TWOT, s.v. "חָכַם," by Louis Goldberg, 1:282.

²Ibid., p. 283.

³TDOT, s.v. "חָכַם," trans. David Green, 4:370.

the similarities between these two words, for the most part their usages are identical. The σοφία of the Septuagint is God-given and practical in the areas of daily living and moral decisions. The σοφία is also intimately linked to God's written revelation. Emotionally and fundamentally, wisdom is the fear of God; intellectually, a knowledge of the manifestations of the divine wisdom; and volitionally, obedience rendered thereto.¹

Contextual Meaning of חֵכֶם

The significance of חֵכֶם points strongly to a God-given perspective on life from which only a regenerate heart can benefit.

The essential idea of חֵכֶם represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experiences, including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the Lord.²

Because God revealed Himself to Israel, their sacred literature has the effect of a divine imperative; חֵכֶם refers to godly cleverness and skill, which results in practical action.

¹G. Campbell Morgan, An Exposition of the Whole Bible (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 279.

²Louis Goldberg, "חֵכֶם," p. 282.

Therefore, in conclusion, it can be said that the contextual meaning of wisdom ("חָכְמָה") is one where the human will was subject to the divine will in all matters of daily living. It is highly practical. The key emphasis seems to be to view life through the perspective of God.

CHAPTER IV

IS THERE ANY RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST?

Chapter eight is the most controversial section in the book of Proverbs. It contains the personification of wisdom. The question that this writer will seek to answer is, "Does 'wisdom' in this chapter refer to Jesus Christ?" There are a number of scholars that stand on both sides of the question. This made it an interesting subject to research, but a difficult question to answer.

Chapter eight is the climax of the book of Proverbs and the wisdom literature in general, of which this book is a prime example. Divine wisdom is described in more detail in this passage than in any other passage in all of the wisdom literature.¹ There is perhaps no one who does not recognize a new section of Proverbs eight beginning with verse 22. Yahweh is the first word of that verse, and the principle agent in the ten lines that follow.²

Douglas McC. L. Judisch, in his *Homiletical Studies*, says, "Almost all modern exegetes assume that the Divine

¹Douglas McC. L. Judisch, "Homiletical Studies: Proverbs 8:22-35," Concordia Theological Quarterly (July 1983):49.

²Patrick W. Skehan, "Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24," CBQ 41 (July 1979):368.

Wisdom who speaks in Proverbs 8 is merely an instance of poetic personification--a rhetorical device employed to describe an attribute of God."¹ Judisch does not mention any names nor does he give any examples of such exegetes probably because this is not his view. But some that would subscribe to this view would be Laird Harris, Derek Kidner, and especially Charles Ryrie, who calls this merely the eternal character of wisdom."²

Then there are others (mostly Catholic, Lutheran, and your basic conventional scholarship) which interpret this passage Christologically.

Charles Fritsch says, "One of the most perfect pictures of Christ to be found in the OT is in Proverbs 8:22-31."³ Harmut Gese puts it in slightly different words when he says:

The potent form of personification of wisdom as found in Proverbs 8 where wisdom introduces itself are so significant that an interpretation does not do them justice which considers them to be fortuitous poetic personifications of a merely poetic and aesthetical nature. . . . The highly conscious, theologically intentional personification of wisdom which like a prophet in divine authority, calls people to repentance, threatens them with judgment, and admonishes them to turn around (Prov 1:20-33), can no longer be understood

¹Judisch, "Homiletical Studies," p. 49.

²Charles C. Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 912.

³Charles T. Fritsch, "The Gospel in the Book of Proverbs," Theology Today 9 (1950):4.

as a poetic₁ trick. One speaks correctly of an hypostasis.

McKane agrees with Von Rad regarding this chapter. He says that there are two different passages in this chapter (vv. 12-21 and vv. 22-31) that do not have an intrinsic connection, but rather different contexts. He says:

In the one it is Wisdom's role in a historical community, as the adviser of kings, as politician and instructress of men in the good life which is being described. In the other, attention is riveted on the place and precedence of Wisdom in a cosmological context. I would hold with Von Rad that the intention here is to emphasize the vast intelligence of Wisdom by assigning to her an architectonic function in the ordering of the created world. This constitutes, as Von Rad notes, a differently oriented, a more comprehensive and philosophical recommendation of Wisdom than the one which appears in vv. 12-21. The aim is still to magnify the authority of Wisdom, but this is now done in a cosmological dimension from different apologetic presuppositions and with a more sophisticated reflective audience in view.²

H. A. Ranston says that chapter eight comprises a set of divine principles and "to this system of principles consciousness is attributed; it is personified as Wisdom, in whom are summed up the principal attributes of God. Thus there is no thought of a duality in the Godhead, an archetypal hypostasis emanating from God."³ Furthermore,

¹Hartmut Gese, "Wisdom, Son of Man and the Origins of Christology," HBTh 3 (1981):29-30.

²William McKane, Proverbs: A New Approach (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 351.

³Harvey Ranston, The OT Wisdom Books, p. 78.

his emphasis is that the endowment of wisdom with personal qualities is merely poetic and literary.¹

Derek Kidner sees the personification of wisdom as an abstraction, made personal for the sake of poetic vividness.²

The remarkable picture of the role of wisdom in creation in Proverbs 8:22-31 is significant both for its place in the Old Testament thought of wisdom, and for its subsequent influence on the language and substance of Jewish and Christian theology. R. B. Y. Scott says:

These verses form a distinct section of one of the gnomic discourses which distinguish Prov. 1-9 from the following collections of pithy maxims. Sometimes in these discourses wisdom is personified as one who will reward those who love her, and in particular as a gracious hostess inviting the ignorant to her banquet (3:15-18; 4:6,8-9; 7:4; 9:1-6). In chapter 8 the stress is laid first on the intrinsic worth and blessings of what wisdom has to offer, and then--in verses 22-31--wisdom declares that the source and ground of her authority are to be found in her primacy in the creative work of God.³

In this writer's opinion, there are two key verses that must be interpreted correctly in order to reach the right conclusion: Proverbs 8:22 and 8:30.

¹Ibid.

²Kidner, Proverbs, p. 79.

³R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," VT 10 (1960):213.

An Interpretation of Proverbs 8:22

Proverbs 8:22--"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way." NASB

"The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works." NIV

"The Lord created me at the beginning of his work." RSV

The question is what does the verb יָבִיט mean? Some possible meanings are:

- a. possess
- b. acquire or get
- c. create
- d. buy

The Latin Vulgate, along with the authorized version, translates יָבִיט as "possessed," whereas the LXX, Targum, and the Revised Version translate the verb as "created." Specifically what is the force of the word יָבִיט?

Concerning this particular debate, William A. Irwin says:

Confronted with such age-long accumulation of scholarship, it may well appear that everything relevant has already been said. Yet the task of scholarship is never finished; new knowledge and differing points of view demand constant re-appraisal. And indeed the very continuance of debate shows that the issue is not yet settled.¹

¹W. A. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found," JBL 80 (1961):133.

There are a total of 84 occurrences of the verb in the Hebrew Bible, and it needs to be noted that "the verb קָנָה always seems to possess the sense 'get,' 'acquire,' never the sense 'possess,' 'own,' simply, apart from the idea of possessing something which 'has been acquired' in one way or another. This clearly appears from examination of the usages of the verb in Hebrew, and through comparison of the cognate languages."¹

Our concern is with the word's normal meaning, and with the general sense of the passage. Upon examination of all the various occurrences of the verb, we find that the verb predominantly means 'get' or 'possess.' This is clearly seen in Proverbs 4:5,7, where wisdom is the object, as is here in Proverbs 8:22.

The Arians, during the Arian controversy (i.e., denying the deity of Christ), appealed to the LXX's translation of 'created' to prove that Christ, the Wisdom of God, was not eternal. He was created and therefore had a beginning.

Of all the 84 OT occurrences, only six allow the sense 'create' (Gen 14:19,22; Ex 15:16; Dt 32:6; Ps 74:2; 139:13) and even these do not essentially require it. "The

¹C. F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," JTS 27 (1926):160.

derived nouns still more strongly emphasize possession," according to Kidner.¹

It is generally recognized that the great majority of occurrences of the verb carry the idea of acquiring. In fact, C. F. Burney argues that the meaning is always the act, never the result, of acquiring; that is, possession.²

It would be wise to consider the use of this verb elsewhere in Proverbs. These passages are 1:5; 4:5; 15:22; 16:16; 18:15; and 23:23. Of these verses, 16:16 is especially significant. It would be inane to claim that the author meant the actual process of acquiring, *קָנָה*, is better than gold. Surely he intended to say, "possession of wisdom is better than that of gold." W. A. Irvin says:

The idea of possession is implicit in acquisition; it is improbable that the ancient Hebrews, who were not remarkable for logical discrimination, drew a hard line between the two. And indeed, how else could biblical Hebrew have said, 'Possess wisdom,' except by *קָנָה*?³

It may be relevant at this point to turn to other passages that deal with the origin of wisdom. Most famous is Job 28, which after a literary device of futile search

¹Derek Kidner, Proverbs, p. 79.

²C. F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," p. 162.

³W. A. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?," p. 134.

comes in vv. 23-28 to a positive statement. The very same thought is seen here in Proverbs 8:22-31: the beginnings of wisdom take one all the way back to creation. It was then that God "saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out." It should be observed that in the work of creation, God "saw" and "declared" wisdom; that is, he looked at and spoke of something already in existence. The origin of wisdom was long antecedent to God's work in creating the world and is sharply contrasted with it; before the mountains and hills, before earth or heavens were made, then wisdom existed. According to W. A. Irwin, "The emphasis is not that wisdom came into being, by whatever process, as the first of God's creative activities, not at their beginning, but long before them."¹ This is especially seen in verses 22b and 23.

Good exegesis always demands good theology and a serious consideration of the context of the passage. Therefore, if יָצַק in Proverbs 8:22 means 'create,' then it is clear that the passage has no connection with Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ was never created. He is eternal. Theology would also dictate that the sense could not be 'create,' because then it would imply that God at one point did not have wisdom if He had to create it.

¹Ibid., p. 140.

Furthermore, in the context, wisdom is certainly not pictured as something originally external of God.

From the data gathered, the best wording for Proverbs 8:22 is clearly seen. Both "get" and "beget" have wrong overtones; "form" and "create" are out of the question; "possess" carries the least objections and should be the clear choice. The intent of the author is that wisdom always existed as an attribute of God. Therefore, in conclusion, the best interpretation of the verse would be, "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way."

An Interpretation of Proverbs 8:30

"Then I was beside him as a master workman." NASB

"Then I was by him, as one brought up with him." KJV

"Then I was the craftsman at his side." NIV

The question here is what does the word בְּיָדָי mean?

There is considerable uncertainty about this word and its use. Some possible meanings are:

- a. architect, master workman
- b. cherished child
- c. living link, vital bond
- d. as one brought up alongside

The word occurs only once in its exact form. There is a variant that occurs in Jeremiah 52:15, בְּיָדָיָה . Therefore it is difficult to determine its exact meaning and the reason translations differ.

J. B. Scott prefers the meaning of an 'artificer' or 'one true in hand and skill.'¹

Those who see a hypostasis in this passage prefer the meaning 'master workman' or 'cherished child,' because apart from these there is no ground for suggesting that wisdom is thought of as an hypostasis by the author of this passage.²

In analyzing the context, it seems most likely that wisdom was a link or bond between the creator and His creation, especially in view of what is said in verses 30-31. Wisdom is Yahweh's delight and in turn finds her delight in the sons of men. Therefore Proverbs 8:30a may be interpreted: "Then was I at his side, a living link" (or "vital bond"). This interpretation illuminates the immediate context and accords with the role of wisdom as presented throughout Proverbs 1-9. R. B. Y. Scott says, "What we have here is simply a poetic personification of the thought in Proverbs 3:19-20a."³

Even if חָכְמָה were translated as "craftsman" as is supported by tradition (LXX, Vulgate), this writer would consider that interpretation to be the aspect of wisdom's instrumentality in the process of creation (Kidner agrees

¹TWOT, s.v. "חָכְמָה," by J. B. Scott, 1:53.

²R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," p. 223.

³Ibid.

with this as well).¹ Therefore, both interpretations make good sense. This writer would prefer the former, but would not completely rule out the latter.

Wisdom originated in some way with God long before His work in creating the world, in which then it associated with Him as חֵכֶם and took delight in all, but especially in mankind. If it is assumed (with C. F. Burney)², that חֵכֶם modifies יְהוָה, the conclusion is inescapable; but it is still valid if we associate the word with its immediate context; as something in priority to His works in former ages, prior to eternity I was established, prior to first things, prior to the earliest things of the earth.

Wisdom is ultimately a divine quality, existent in the being of God long before creation, in accord with which God made the world.

The whole point of the passage is the importance of wisdom. The author is exhorting the reader to realize that if God used wisdom in His work of creative activity then how much more do we need wisdom in the activities that we are involved in. It is part of the admonition from the father to his son to embrace the way of wisdom.

¹Derek Kidner, Proverbs, p. 81.

²C. F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," p. 168.

The Relationship Between Jesus Christ
and Wisdom

The question could be raised, "If wisdom refers to Jesus Christ in this passage, then why is wisdom in the feminine form?"

The personification of wisdom as a woman is first seen in Proverbs 3:15. Actually, in the Hebrew text the pronouns referring to wisdom in Proverbs 3:15-18 could be translated "it" as well as "she," but the personification is accepted because of later references. Proverbs 7:4 opens the way for the personification, "Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister." It is complete in chapters eight and nine. It is only in Proverbs and only in the first third of the book that wisdom is thus personified.

Laird Harris says, "It is essential to the understanding of this first part (chapters 1-9) to recognize the personification."¹ To answer the question already raised regarding the use of feminine grammatical forms, for one thing grammatical gender is not equivalent to sexual nature in Hebrew (and other languages).² It should be noted that since "wisdom" in Hebrew is a feminine noun, it therefore is naturally and readily personified as a woman. Even more important is the point that the author

¹Laird Harris, "Proverbs," p. 67.

²Judisch, "Homiletical Studies," p. 50.

is contrasting--wisdom, "the virtuous woman," with folly or the harlot, "the strange woman." And just as wisdom stands for all virtue, so the strange woman typifies and includes all sin.

Laird Harris further states that:

The contrast is a studied and artistic one. Wisdom cries in the streets (8:3). Her invitation is, 'whoso is simple, let him turn in hither' (9:4). In contrast, the foolish woman, who invites to stolen waters and whose guests are in the depths of hell (9:17,18), issues the identical invitation, 'whoso is simple let him turn in hither' (9:16). Wisdom calls the simple to forsake sin; the harlot calls him to its indulgence.¹

Concluding Answer

In conclusion, it can be clearly seen that the intent of the author is to exhort the reader to embrace the way of wisdom and reject the way of folly. The principles found in chapter eight could be easily applied to Jesus Christ, but there is no evidence that Christ is spoken of here. In like manner the principles of the evil woman in chapter seven could be applied to Satan.

We know that "in the New Testament God's Wisdom is declared to be incarnated in Jesus the Messiah."² By leaving the immediate context and considering a wider setting, we find that the New Testament makes allusions to

¹Ibid.

²J. Warwick Montgomery, "Wisdom as Gift," Int 16 (1962):48.

this passage (Col 1:15-17; 2:3; Rev 3:14) that the personifying of wisdom was a preparation for its full statement, since the agent of creation was no mere activity of God, but the Son, His eternal Word, Wisdom, and Power. However, as Charles Ryrie says, "While Christ is the revelation of God's wisdom (1 Cor 1:24) and possesses all wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3), there is no clear indication that Christ is revealed here."¹

Louis Goldberg, in TWOT, says, "In proverbial fashion, the Bible personifies divine wisdom so that it seems to be a hypostasis of God, but stops just short of giving it separate existence."² The figure of wisdom in the OT never came to be regarded as a deity independent of the Lord, though some would see Proverbs eight as being one such passage. Granted that wisdom did attain a degree of personification, with features which were by no means abstract. Wisdom should not be regarded as God, but it does belong to God.

Proverbs eight in its context does not necessarily have any direct relationship to Jesus Christ, but certainly, independent of the immediate context, the principles could apply to Him.

¹Charles Ryrie, "Psalms and Proverbs," p. 116.

²Louis Goldberg, "חָכְמָה," p. 282.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Wisdom in the OT is distinct from any other ancient world view. Reflected in OT wisdom is the teaching of a personal God who is holy and just and who expects those who know Him to exhibit His character in the many practical affairs of life. Hebrew wisdom was not theoretical and speculative. It was practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.

"True wisdom for man involves knowing the Holy One. So, men are to listen to the wisdom of God with attentive ears (Prov 2:2). In fact, inner happiness only comes when man attains this wisdom (Prov 3:13) through a strenuous search (Prov 2:4), which is actually a search for God Himself (Prov. 2:5)."¹

Dr. Biddle says that we must recognize that wisdom is hid in God, not to keep it from us, but to keep it safe for us. God has revealed (Prov 2:6) and reserved (Prov 2:7) wisdom for those willing to seek it.²

¹Louis Goldberg, "חֵכֶם," p. 283.

²J. R. Biddle, "Pedagogy: A Perspective from Proverbs," The Christian School Administrator and Teacher (Summer 1981):12-13.

The Israelite who knows the Creator knows the fear of God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Here wisdom is more than mere unreflecting fear of God. It is will and comprehensive ability to direct the whole of life. According to Walther Zimmerli,

Wisdom does include a strange inner tension. Its theology of creation knows clearly that the reality to which it has access is always subordinate to God's will. In Proverbs we often hear: 'man thinks, God directs' (Prov 16:1,9, 19:21). God controls and reserves his right to decide even where man thinks that his own way is quite right (16:2, 21:2). In God's hand is the heart of the king (21:1). He keeps his secret to himself (25:2). There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord' (21:30).¹

In Proverbs 1-9 (the section pertaining to this thesis), sin is contrasted with righteousness. The words "wisdom," "instruction," "understanding," etc. used throughout this section, do not mean merely human intelligence and skill; but rather they are contrasted with that which is evil. Therefore wisdom is used here as a moral quality. This would be classified as a special usage. In most of the OT wisdom is mere skill or sagacity. According to Laird Harris, even in Ecclesiastes, where wisdom is also emphasized, it is mere human intelligence and therefore is included with folly as vanity

¹Walther Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of Old Testament Theology," SJT 17 (June 1964):153.

(Eccl 2:12-15).¹ Only in Job 28 and in certain Psalms (37:30; 51:6; 91:21; 111:10) is this concept of wisdom noticeable. Even the wisdom for which Solomon was famous in the historical books is not exactly this wisdom. He was famous for his skill in natural science (1 Ki 4:33) and jurisprudence (1 Ki 3:16-28) and for his high intelligence (1 Ki 10:1-9).

Laird Harris makes another observation by saying, "Proverbs adds to the concept of mental acumen the moral rectitude that alone makes intelligence worthwhile."²

Harry A. Ironside makes some very moving comments on this subject:

In the wisdom literature of the Bible, we have, as everywhere else in Scripture, the very breathings of the Spirit of God. And this is amazing grace; to think that He who spoke worlds into being, who wrought out redemption when man had fallen, who shall eventually bring in a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; to think, I repeat, that He, the high and loftly One that inhabiteth eternity, should stoop in grace to give instruction for the very details of His creatures' lives down here, is cause for worship and admiration for ever.³

Wisdom (חָכְמָה) commonly means to have a skill. Even if this simple basic meaning were applied to the context of Proverbs, it would mean we are to live our lives with

¹Laird Harris, "Proverbs," p. 68.

²Ibid.

³Harry A. Ironside, Notes on the Book of Proverbs (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1946), p. 9.

"skill," to be able to discern between good and evil, right and wrong. Wisdom in this context brings God into proper focus; seeing life from His viewpoint. Proverbs 1-9 is a group of hortatory admonitions and exhortations from a father to his son. The intent of the author is to teach us how to live our lives well, to learn the skill of living life. It exposes a fundamental truth about living life. It touches morals, ethics, the very heart of man. It teaches us to conform our lives to the wisdom of God, what was in the character and mind of God who is the author of wisdom. And, as J. Warwick Montgomery puts it, wisdom means "a continuing, direct, personal experience with the God of the universe."¹

In one sentence this writer would venture to say that "Wisdom is patterning our lives after the very character of God."

¹John Warwick Montgomery, "Wisdom as Gift," p. 44.

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