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**The Significance of Female Imagery  
in the Book of Proverbs:  
Wisdom and Wife Compared**

by Anna Doris Piskorowski  
B. A. (McMaster University, 1983)

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Master of Arts degree

Wilfrid Laurier University

1987

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**Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of parallel female imagery found in the Book of Proverbs, specifically that of Wisdom personified (Chapters 1-9) and the ideal wife (31:10-31). A discussion of their common traits is based on criteria taken directly from the literary text. A brief discourse introduces the reader to the problematic dating of the poetic forms in Proverbs. The main body of the thesis details the various categories of comparison: direct literal parallels, literal and thematic parallels, thematic parallels and differences. The primary aim of this study is to determine the importance of these many points of comparison, to analyze these comparisons, and to discover their significance. The last section of this thesis shows how the Wisdom/wife parallels provided an insight into the relationship men had with Wisdom and with God. This was done by relating that relationship with the one a husband had with his wife.

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## Introduction

The nascent stages of this thesis emerged during the researching process of a term paper. This term paper outlined the positive and negative images of women, as found in the books of Proverbs and Ben Sirach. The book of Proverbs showed two positive female images, one of the ideal wife, and the other of Wisdom personified or Dame Wisdom. On closer examination these two images had more parallels than just their positive attitude to women. In the biblical commentaries on Proverbs, simple parallels were noted, e.g. both women were compared to jewels. Also, some scholars hinted that the significance of Wisdom personified could best be understood by further exploration of female imagery. After the completion of that term paper, and upon the observation of the gap that scholars had neglected to fill, I found two scholars that have made a considerable contribution to this area of endeavour.

Thomas McCreesh in his article "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31" concludes that the description of the worthy wife is the key to understanding the book of Proverbs. In fact, the poem of the ideal wife is the summary of the whole book. It acts as a coda and draws together all the major themes, motifs and ideas which make a statement about Wisdom under the image of the ideal wife.<sup>1</sup> McCreesh makes comparisons between the two female figures.

It is by this method that he justifies his statements about feminine imagery.

Claudia Camp in her published doctoral dissertation *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* focused on the meaning and function of Wisdom in a literary context. Female attributes according to Camp showed how female imagery bound the book together by providing a framework of poems about women.<sup>2</sup> The examination of these feminine qualities and their point of contact with Wisdom's image gave the reader a better understanding of Wisdom's function. By associating her with other females such as the ideal wife, Camp claims that this pairing of images provided a legitimate concept of female roles in a kingless society in the post-exilic era.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the building of a strong home by the woman "symbolically defined an element of society that was governed by wisdom instead of the king."<sup>4</sup> In this kingless society the female image of Wisdom replaced the role of the king, since she was capable of mediating in the divine and human realms.<sup>5</sup> In conclusion Camp takes the many female images—of which the wife is one—and correlates them with Wisdom personified. Her results indicate that Wisdom is to be perceived as a religious symbol.

The two scholars cited have contributed much to the discovery of the role of female imagery and its effect on the significance of Wisdom personified. This particular study will take advantage of the results obtained by these previous scholars. However, one important dimension missing from these studies is a discussion of the relationships in which Wisdom and the ideal wife are involved. This is a significant omission since Old Testament thought in general tends to be rational. The God-man, God-Israel, man-society relationships are vital in the legal, historical, prophetic and psalmic literature. As Von Rad points out in *Wisdom in Israel*, one world of ex-

perience existed for Israel, one in which rational and religious perceptions were not differentiated.<sup>6</sup> The wisdom writers also dealt in rational thinking, they were concerned with man's relationships within society. It is, therefore, possible that the significance of the comparison lies in the relationships of the two women with God and with human beings. It is this possibility which the present thesis explores.

The comparisons of female images in this study utilizes, and at times extends, the previous two scholars' works. At other times, it delves into new perspectives and new parallels. If some parallels seem tenuous or trite it only reflects the method at hand. All correlations have been presented in order to avoid choosing only the parallels which would reinforce the conclusions. Therefore feminine qualities or functions such as wife, mother, lover, and homemaker are examined, but not to the exclusion of other non-feminine parallels such as jewels, treasure, praise, and trust. In effect, the use of female imagery in this paper supplies the reader with a model or mode of understanding the unique relationships man experienced in the realms of the human and divine.

Before proceeding to the exposition of the parallels and their significance, it is important to describe the role of the sages or wisemen who wrote Proverbs, and to discuss the nature of Proverbs and its implications. The function of wisdom literature as post-exilic wisdom writers saw it was to impart information about the concept of God and His relation to man. They were to inform the man-on-the-street how he was to use the knowledge of the Lord in his everyday sphere, in terms of daily life and conduct.<sup>7</sup> The wisdom writers had a deep concern for man's society and understood that to develop an ethical and moral sense in man they would have to give "counsel" and

teach the precepts of the righteous life.\*

A semantic investigation of the Hebrew word *māšāl*, "proverb," indicates various meanings. Basically the term implies "likeness" or "to be comparable to" or "to compare."<sup>8</sup> This suggested meaning invites the reader to question what needs comparing. Are there teachings, symbols, figures and ideas that are alike? Normally proverbs are to be considered as "short pithy sayings" used by wisdom teachers or men to communicate moral or spiritual truths.<sup>10</sup> As well as being a didactic tool, the word *māšāl* is used to describe a literary genre employed by those who "claimed to know something of the mystery of living and the secret of the happy life."<sup>12</sup>

Proverbs 1:6 states that the reader is "to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles." It was the purpose of the wise man to provoke the thought processes of the reader by using wit, paradox, common sense and teasing symbolism.<sup>13</sup> One method of teaching would be to provide the reader with metaphors or allegories (figures), another to provide comparisons or analogies which are intended to enforce a concept once the reader discerns its meaning (riddle).<sup>14</sup> The word *māšāl* implies that one should perhaps seek comparisons. This is exactly what this study endeavours to do. Other external clues signal the reader to note the importance of literary style (e.g. personification and acrostic poetry) and the positioning of pieces within the framework of the whole poem. Camp refers to stylistic shaping, "inclusio", as the repetition of material from the beginning of a unit at the end of the unit.<sup>15</sup> This type of shaping functions in two ways: first, it establishes the literary boundary and, secondly, it enlightens the reader to a possible theological statement in the making.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it provides a guide to interpretation, to meaning.<sup>17</sup> This form of repetition focuses

on central thoughts or contents important to the writers or editors. Emphasizing these thoughts in the beginning and reinforcing them at the end of a literary work gives the reader a sense of unity as to the purpose and composition as a whole. Such is the case for Proverbs, where the similarities drawn between the two female images single out a theological purpose: female imagery provides the context in which to understand mankind's relationship with God. Another device, thematic styling, views wisdom as a hermeneutical construct, whereby wisdom would be the device used for the interpretation of another motif.<sup>15</sup> Gerald Sheppard's work in this field of thematic styling claims that wisdom in the exegesis of deutero-canonical books serves to interpret the Torah.<sup>17</sup>

As previously mentioned, the nature of Proverbs, the stylistic and thematic shaping of this literature, focus on significant factors which can aid in the interpretation of the poetic works. The nature of Proverbs implies that the use of comparisons is a viable method of study. The use of "inclusio", the repetition of material, sharpens one's awareness of a possible theological statement. In the case of Proverbs, the two female figures, Wisdom personified (chapters 1-9) and the ideal wife (31:10-31), have many parallel descriptions which only invite comparisons to be made. These comparisons of Wisdom under the guise of the wife raise two questions. Why is personified Wisdom depicted or expressed in the motifs of a wife? Why is the wife depicted and expressed in wisdom motifs? In answering these two questions the reader is required to draw certain conclusions. If Wisdom is portrayed as a wife then to whom does the wife relate, but, to her husband. Who is Wisdom's husband? If the wife has wisdom-like qualities, then to whom does Wisdom relate, but, to God. How does the wife relate to God? There-

fore the thrust of this thesis is to find all parallel comparisons of Wisdom personified and the ideal wife, in such a way as to clarify the nature and significance of their inter-relationships.

## Chapter One:

### The Chronological Problem of the Relationship between Proverbs 1-9 and Proverbs 31:10-31

The dating of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 is important. It can provide common historical backgrounds for both poetic pieces and also give insight into the ideological and theological backgrounds of the writers and editors. However the dating of Proverbs seems problematic since the exact dates are not known, only rough estimates are given. The following information will reflect the wide range of dating given to the poetic pieces of Proverbs. Proverbs was written in four basic parts 1:1-9; 10-22:16; 22:17-24:22; and 25:1-29:27 including five appendices one of which is 31:10-31, the poem about the ideal wife.

A. Weiser in *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development* dates the first collection of Proverbs 1-9 as post-exilic, probably earlier than the fourth century; chapters 10-22:16 are much older and come into being in the pre-exilic times; in the remaining collections he considers the dating somewhat obscure while the song in praise of the housewife was added to the rest of Proverbs at a later date.<sup>1</sup> In *Old Testament Survey* the editors claim that the last two chapters, 30 and 31, were added during or shortly after the Exile (ca. 500 B.C.). Most likely chapters 20-29 were edited during Hezekiah's time and the introductory and concluding chapters were added

during the following two centuries. Therefore the fifth century is a reasonable date for the final editing although the contents are much earlier.<sup>2</sup>

Comparisons are more viable in literal material which is contemporaneous because the assumption is made that the editors or writers of a similar era had a common world perspective and were molded by the same historical circumstances. Therefore it would also be possible, because of the similar backgrounds of the editors or writers, to successfully compare and analyze contemporaneous material. This study concludes that the proverbial material was probably edited about the fourth century and therefore is similar enough in scope, to make comparisons valid.

Most scholars, for example Toy, Cox, and Skehan<sup>3</sup> believe that Proverbs 1-9 is a post-exilic piece. Toy in his examination of the dating of Proverbs has a chronological sequence that he has devised according to certain criteria. He claims that the collection of aphorisms in chapters 10-22 and 25-29 received their present form between 350-300 B.C.; later sections, chapters 22-24, were inserted between the earlier two sections. The opening chapters 1-9 were probably composed in the middle of the third century. The appendices such as 31 were completed in the second century B.C.<sup>4</sup> He claims that the first main section has to be later than the central chapters 10-29 because of its pedagogic form and philosophical conception alluding to Wisdom personified and the prominence given to certain types of sin.<sup>5</sup> According to Toy the conception of wisdom is more developed in Proverbs than in the book of Job which was written earlier than Proverbs.<sup>6</sup>

Dermot Cox in his commentary on Proverbs suggests that two ideas must be remembered: the actual material and the editing process. The actual material can be from the pre-exilic age or any age. Nevertheless Proverbs

1-9:18 may date from the fifth to the fourth centuries B.C. Even though the material or some of the collections may be old, the book of Proverbs as we have it put together reflects a post-exilic editorial intention to some degree for it shows the usual influence of academic universalism.<sup>7</sup>

Skehan in his article "A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs," provides the necessary evidence that Proverbs 31:10-31 and chapters 1-9 are post-exilic and nearly contemporary in date. If this is so, the interdependence of the two poems becomes possible, or even probable. Skehan proposes the hypothesis that the author of chapters 1-9 was the sole editor of the book.<sup>8</sup> He establishes this fact by examining the structure of the composition, by examining the proverbial sayings numerically. Skehan also suggests that the alphabetic poem about the woman might easily be the work of the editor.<sup>9</sup> Skehan makes a literary analysis and constructs a framework for the first section of the book, then he states how this particular framework can be detected in the rest of the book, thus he concludes the case for single editorship.<sup>10</sup> In Proverbs 2-7 he discovered a 7 columned structure with 22 lines in each section. In Proverbs 10-22:16 he noted that there are 375 single lined proverbs which equates with the numerical value given to the title of this section in 10:1 "Proverbs of Solomon". These numerical values were derived by calculating the numerical equivalents given to the Hebrew letters of the alphabet. Proverbs 25-29 is also described by a title in 25:1 which has the numerical equivalent of 130. There are nearly 130 proverbs in this section.

The strongest evidence against a post-exilic date is presented by Christa Bauer-Kayatz and summarized by Leo Perdue in *Wisdom and Cult*. Perdue postulates another approach to the dating of Proverbs 1-9. He would

assert that Proverbs 1-9 is pre-exilic since it does not emphasize the salvation history motif or Torah as a source of Wisdom, as other post-exilic pieces do. He would agree with the arguments presented by Christa Bauer-Kayatz in *Studien zu Proverben 1-9* that the wisdom motif is invariably a reflection of speeches by Egyptian goddesses, especially *Maat*.<sup>11</sup> He also concurs with Bauer-Kayatz' claim that the personification or hypostatization of Wisdom is not a post-exilic development since there are other examples of personification and hypostatizations in the Israelite literature, one being the personification of Israel as the bride of Yahweh (Ps. 49:15). He thinks that arguments based on theological ideas such as the personification of Wisdom, the role of Wisdom as mediator between man and deity, and the stress on the use of the "fear of YHWH" are not grounds for post-exilic dating, since the use of personifications and the phrase the "fear of YHWH" (Proverbs 10:27; 14:26,27) are found in collections from the earlier time periods.

Although Perdue is correct in asserting that the salvation history and Torah motifs are absent in Proverbs, the first clear indication of the amalgamation of the Wisdom and Torah motifs is found in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach, a book the original of which was produced about 180 B.C. There is plenty of time between 586 B.C. and 180 B.C. to allow for the creation of the Wisdom poem. Moreover, Proverb's Wisdom personified does not have the same simplistic connotation as the personification of Israel being God's bride. G. B. Caird states that the personification of Wisdom is such a complex image because images of her are frequent and varied.<sup>12</sup> Her representations as various people such as mother, bride, taskmaster, hostess or wise teacher form a rhetorical language which the compilers used for didactic purposes.<sup>13</sup> In certain instances (1:20, 8:1, 9:1) she is a wise teacher but in

another instance (8:22) she reflects what God does in his wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

A clearer indication of the literary style used in Proverbs can illuminate the special features given Wisdom personified. Scholars have debated whether use of the female image in Proverbs was personification (attributes of personal qualities given to a thing or abstraction)<sup>15</sup> or hypostasis (the quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings).<sup>16</sup> Both Claudia Camp<sup>17</sup> and Bernhard Lang<sup>18</sup> agree that the female image presented in Proverbs is not a hypostasis. Both concur that this female image is a personification, and that this personification was used as a stylistic device to unite the human and the divine by reminding everyone about the true source of knowledge.

In criticism of the Bauer-Kayatz / Perdue hypothesis, it should be pointed out that their arguments lead only to the possibility that the poem personifying Wisdom could be a pre-exilic phenomenon, not to the conclusion that it is in fact of pre-exilic date. In spite of their evidence William McKane, for example, sees convincing evidence in the contents of Proverbs for placing the poem to Wisdom in a post-exilic context. Perhaps a late date (5th century B.C.) should be assigned for a variety of reasons: the *ʾissa zara* theme, Wisdom's mythological background, and the union of wisdom with the fear of YHWH motif.<sup>19</sup> According to Weiser, such themes as the alien woman (*ʾissā zārā*) and the fear of God have marks of later origins.<sup>20</sup> Burton Mack expresses another viewpoint. He points out that the wisdom tradition of chapters 1-9 emerges in post-exilic times because it reflects a certain theological concern. This concern closely parallels the concerns of the post-exilic prophets; they were attentive to the problems of the exile. Proverbs 1:24

"Because I have called and you refused to listen..." illustrates that Israel's refusal to listen to God has become the reason for her exile.<sup>21</sup>

There exists a high probability that the Israelite wisdom thinkers borrowed Wisdom personified from the ancient Egyptian, Babylonian or Persian religions. It is quite possible that some form of assimilation did occur. There are some striking parallels between the Egyptian goddess *Maat*, deity of truth and justice, the Babylonian god *Mummu*, and Wisdom personified. However, the origins of Wisdom personified is not the concern of this study.

The dating of Proverbs 1-9 is problematic and only a rough estimate of the date can be drawn. The most probable conclusion is that while parts of Proverbs may have existed before the Exile the poem achieved its present form after the Exile. It is generally agreed that 31:10-31 is a post-exilic piece. Its format is quite different from the rest of Proverbs in that it is an acrostic poem in which each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. If we accept Skehan's proposal, it is quite probable that the editor used this acrostic poem as a form of summation incorporating all the essentials of didactic wisdom found in chapters 1-9. Acrostic poems were useful memory aids; they summarized the subject matter in a comprehensive form.

In this thesis the following modification of Skehan's proposal has been adopted. There is evidence to support the pre-exilic origin of much of the material involved in the compilation of Proverbs. However, evidence from the content of the book of Proverbs shows that the final edition of Proverbs was produced in the post-exilic period. Both the poem personifying Wisdom and the poem in praise of the good wife were created during the editorial process or the editorial process so transformed the originals as in effect to

produce new literary works.

If Proverbs 31:10-31 and Proverbs 1-9 were essentially, as argued above, the creation of the post-exilic editors, then a comparison of the similarities and differences between the ideal wife and Wisdom personified (Dame Wisdom) would fall within a common chronological and ideological framework. Comparisons made about the two female images in regards to their industriousness, their strength, their functions and their relationships (see below pp. 72-74) with male figures could be drawn and valid correlations made, because of the post-exilic editors' common conception and understanding of their task as wisdom writers.

## Chapter Two: Categories for the Comparison of Female Imagery in Proverbs 1-9 and Proverbs 31:10-31

The conclusion of the previous chapter was that the last pericope in the Book of Proverbs (31:10-31), like the editorial introduction of chapters 1-9, is a late creation, certainly post-exilic. Old Testament writers liked to give a sense of unity to collected works.<sup>1</sup> Blenkinsopp noted that the good wife corresponded to Dame Wisdom because it was "common in antiquity time to end a piece of work in a way calculated to recall its opening."<sup>2</sup> The recurrence of female imagery at the beginning and the end of Proverbs is such a unifying device. The book ends with an engaging portrait of the ideal wife. This portrait is strongly reminiscent of the female imagery to be found in Proverbs 1-9. The ideal wife is "conceived in terms of personified Wisdom," and performs many of the functions of personified Dame Wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

McCreesh in his article "Wisdom as Wife" is one of the scholars who has compared the two female images.<sup>4</sup> This study uses what McCreesh has presented and goes beyond his work in providing the reader with criteria by, and categories in, which the similarities can be seen. In order to clarify the similarities and differences between the two images provided in Proverbs, it is helpful to employ four categories by means of which the dominant characteristics and functions of the figures may be examined.

The criteria used for these categories emanate from the text itself. Standards set for these categories were arrived at by observation of similar words, thoughts or ideas that the text provided. The four categories are entitled: (1) literal parallels-nouns, (2) literal and thematic parallels, (3) thematic parallels, and (4) differences.

The first category, literal parallels-nouns, includes two words: "jewels" and "handmaidens" which are found in both poems. These nouns describe the wife/Wisdom figures. The word "jewels" depicts the valuable aspect of both wife/Wisdom in Proverbs 31:10; 3:15 and 3:10. The word "handmaidens" reflects upon the wife's and Wisdom's domestic nature.

The second category, literal and thematic parallels, entails usages of words such as "house," "sons," "laughter" and "gates" in which these words depict a certain function of the wife/Wisdom images. Although the words used are the same in Hebrew for both figures, the settings and sometimes the contexts of the stories vary. Nevertheless, a prevailing thought is found in the descriptions of both females. The word "house" focuses on the organizational talents of the female images; the word "sons" focuses on their parenting roles. The word "gates" reveals the judicious roles of the female images and "laughter" reflects their judicious outlook as well.

The third and much larger category uses the thematic approach. Here, comparisons cannot be made simply by noting identical words, but by examining congruent ideas and thoughts. For example, the theme of hands discusses the giving nature of the females. The remaining themes all reflect either characteristics or functions of the wife/Wisdom images. The themes and their representations are as follows: the theme of spouses depicts loving relationships, the theme of light reflects upon the females' goodness, the

treasure and philanthropy themes denote the females' generous natures. The themes of strength, trust, skills, praise, authority, and royalty profile a dominant characteristic or ability as indicated by the title of the theme. The "fear of YHWH" theme expresses the women's relationship with God.

The fourth category deals with differences between the two images and to what extent these differences weaken, or strengthen the proposed analysis. The two basic differences are found in the themes of sexuality and creation. Sexuality as examined within the contexts of the poems 31:10-31 and chapters 1-9 do differ. Wisdom personified is described in sensual terms, the wife is not, however a complimentary view of the wife's sexuality as described in 5:15-19 is examined. The creation motif reflects upon the special relationship Wisdom has with God and man.

An examination of all the above categories is the basis on which a conclusion may be drawn as to whether the ideal wife of Proverbs 31 is conceived exactly, casually, or even accidentally—in the terms of Wisdom personified, or vice versa.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Detailed Discussion of Categories**

Before the substance of the comparisons under the categories given in Chapter Two are presented, it will be beneficial to discuss the format. Under each heading there will be several subsections. Within each subsection the verses or pericopes needed for that particular subsection will be taken from the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible. Hebrew transliterations will only be provided if they bring more enlightenment to the subsection at hand. Each verse or verses will be entitled either wife or Wisdom. These titles indicate which verses are being correlated.

#### **Category One: Literal Parallels—Nouns**

##### **Jewels**

##### **Wife:**

A good wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels. 31:10

---

## Wisdom:

She is more precious than jewels,  
and nothing you can desire  
can compare to her. 3:15

For wisdom is better than jewels,  
and all that you may desire cannot  
compare to her. 8:11

Brown, Driver and Briggs' *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* states that *penûm* is a feminine plural noun referring to corals, pearls or a figure of value.<sup>1</sup> The ideal wife and Wisdom personified are the only female images which are described by this particular word. One other description is found in Proverbs 20:15: in this case, the word *penûm* is associated with wise lips. Indeed, this implies that both female figures are valuable, but is there any significance in that the word *penûm* is used in conjunction with these two images?

Since early Egyptian, Sumerian and Babylonian times precious or semi-precious stones made a statement about people's cultural and religious affairs. The Sumerians were noted for their use of lapis lazuli in connection with their death and love goddesses. The Egyptians chose different hues of stones to signify various gods: red carnelian was associated with the Sun god Ra, lapis lazuli with the Sky god Horus, jasper with the vegetation god Osiris. Although there is no direct reference made in the Bible as to the significance of coral, inferences can be made from the Greek application and use of coral in the Mediterranean region. The Greeks used coral to ward off disaster. It was bound to a mast head to prevent gales and tempests, or as personal ornament to preserve the wearer from poison, lightning and defeat in war.<sup>2</sup> To what extent the Israelites adopted these types of ideas can only be speculated. Yet it is fact that semi-precious stones have played an

important part in Israelite religious affairs. Medieval Jewish commentators referred to semi-precious stones and their medicinal, psychological and magical qualities. They noted that Abraham wore a precious stone that could heal all those who looked at it (Bava Batra 16b). Josephus also mentions that the Essenes used precious stones for healing (The Jewish Wars 2:136).

If coral was used as a measure of prevention or source of protection, then the ideal wife and Wisdom personified can be considered as protective and preventive agents. The ideal wife protects her family and husband by making sure that all of life's necessities are present. She allows her family members to live a constructive and productive life. Wisdom personified also leads the members of her family from evil, useless ways and allows for a constructive form of life.

### Handmaidens

#### Wife:

She rises while it is yet night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her maidens. 31:15

#### Wisdom:

She has slaughtered her beasts,  
she has mixed her wine,  
she has also set her table.  
She has sent out her maids to call  
from the highest places in the town. 9:2,3

The word *na'urotheha* or maidens is a direct literal parallel. Both Dame Wisdom and the ideal wife dispatch the maidens to carry out tasks. In case of the ideal wife the tasks are unspecified. In that of Dame Wisdom the task is specifically to issue invitations to the feast. Dame Wisdom is

holding. Although the tasks of the wife's maidens are unspecified, verse 15 is placed closely to the verse dealing with food. Why has this verse been placed there? According to Whybray, "The third line of this verse has been relegated to a footnote by the New English Bible translators as a later addition on the grounds that a three-line verse is very improbable in a poem which otherwise consists entirely of two-line verses." If this line has been added, the question is, why has it been attached? The literal parallel between the wife and Dame Wisdom may provide an interesting point of view. The literary connection between the two poems gives no compelling grounds to decide in which direction influences ran. However, the specified task of inviting the guests to Wisdom's feast fits in naturally in the context of 9:1-4, whereas the general reference to the maid-servants has the appearance of a tag added to 31:15. This situation suggests, although not conclusively, that the portrait of Dame Wisdom influenced the language used of the ideal wife.

McKane offers other interpretations for verse 15. He claims that the Hebrew word *terep* (literally translated "prey") gets translated "food" but must be a corruption of the Hebrew word *tōrah* meaning "work duties."<sup>8</sup> The wife then arises early in order to set the work of the household in motion, to make sure everyone has something to do which fits into her co-ordinated plans." Proverbs 9:1-6 is considered an antithesis to the model of the *ʾissā zarā* or Dame Folly. Therefore, as McKane suggests, the young women sent out to invite the public should be viewed in a different light. McKane states that Bostrom considered the women in 9:3 as devotees of the love goddess, and their invitations are related to acts of sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup> But the women who serve Wisdom cannot be thought of as cult devotees because

Wisdom is never revealed as cultic, thus this lack of coherence may indicate that these female representations may belong in another setting.<sup>11</sup> Lang, who thinks Wisdom is a goddess, derived from the time when the Hebrews were still polytheistic, sees the maidens as helpers. The women are inviting male guests to what Lang thinks is an inauguration of a newly erected house.<sup>12</sup> So, as in a Hittite myth the goddess Ashertu sent out maids to invite a storm god; Wisdom, like any other woman of rank who would have maid servants, did not find it inappropriate to send them out with invitations.<sup>13</sup>

## Category Two: Literal and Thematic Parallels

### House, Household

#### Wife:

She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her maidens. 31:15

She is not afraid of snow for her household,  
for all her household are clothed in scarlet. 31:21

She looks well to the ways of her household,  
and does not eat the bread of idleness. 31:27

#### Wisdom:

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has set up her seven pillars. 9:1

The word *bayit* or "house" occurs four times in 31:10-31, always in the context of the ideal wife's diligent care for her "house." The context of 9:1 is that of a feast being held for the simple-minded: these are invited not only for meat and drink but for the acquisition of knowledge in righteous

ways and happiness. Both women run households, their functions in these households are similar in that they are both providers not only of tangible products (food, tasks) but also intangible items such as wisdom and morality.

McCreesh points out the stylistic repetition of the word "house" carried out in the three verses concerning the wife. The first time the word occurs is in verse 15 where the wife is providing food for her household. The Hebrew word used here is *lebētāh* as is the word in verse 21. The second word in verse 21 meaning household is *bētāh* which occurs again in verse 27. This form of repetition points out the two distinct natures of the ideal wife. The first word is used in connection with tangible materials: the wife provides her household with food and clothing. The second form refers to the wisdom of the wife. It is said that she does not eat the "bread of idleness": refraining from this is an activity of the wise. Since verse 21 starts the midsection of the poem, the repetition of *lebētāh* and *bētāh* in verses 15, 21, and 27 draws the two halves of the poem together. Thus, the repetition of "house" marks the thematic progress of the woman from industrious provider to solicitous sage.<sup>14</sup>

Wisdom's house built upon seven pillars has been enigmatic to some commentators. Some considered the seven pillars symbolic of the world and the planets, and of the seven wisdom books in the Torah. According to Cox the house is a symbol of knowledge and learning, the secular and moral discipline that makes one master of the created universe.<sup>15</sup> Lang adds another dimension to this fascination with the house by considering the architecture of ancient Israelite urban dwellings. Archaeologists have found that the design of a four room house almost always had stone pillars supporting the roof. The number of pillars varied from three to eight depending upon

the social status and financial resources of the owner.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Bostrum, Albright and Ringgren<sup>17</sup> think that verse one describes a temple. They regard ideas such as location, pillars and cultic interpretation of the passage as evidence to support the concept of temple. Gemser disagrees with their outlook. Wisdom is envisaged as occupying a patrician residence and dispensing such hospitality as befits her station."<sup>16</sup>

Skehan has a unique proposal of what Wisdom's house signifies: he claims that it is the book of Proverbs. He states that the composition is laid out in columns which visibly show the design of a house. Each section of the book of Proverbs is assigned certain numbers of columns whereby they in turn represent certain sections of a house. It is perceived in the following manner: the first section, 1-9, the second section, 10-22:16, and the third section, 22:17-31:31, are respectively the porch, nave and cella of the house.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the many various views of the symbolism directed at the significance of Wisdom's house, Wisdom basically runs and organizes the house so that it is efficient. She provides food and drink to nourish the stomach; a roof overhead acts as protection from inclement weather. She instructs men how to avoid Dame Folly (the evil ways) and gain insight, knowledge, and a lengthy life. The ideal wife through her own productiveness and wisdom can also give nourishment, protection and guidance to those that dwell in her home.

### Sons

### Wife:

Her children (sons) rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also and he praises her. 31:28

Wisdom:

And now my sons, listen to me:  
happy are those who keep my ways. 8:32

The children of these female figures are beneficiaries of what the wife and Dame Wisdom have to offer them. When their mothers' knowledge and all of life's benefits are accepted by them then they are thankful, appreciative and happy. Both these women offer physical and emotional security, the children respond to this in a positive manner.

The style of Proverbs usually takes the form of advice, warnings or instructions given by a father to his son. In Proverbs 1-9 there are many occurrences of the word "sons" (1:8,10,15; 2:1; 3:1,11,21; 4:1,10,20; 5:1,7; 6:1,3,20; 7:1,24). McKane thinks that the form of address, "my son," is a regular feature of instruction as indicated in 1:8 where the child is instructed to obey his father's discipline and his mother's teaching.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, 3:1 indicates how the son is to obey God's discipline and reproof. All of the above references are connected with some sort of direction given as though by a wisdom teacher or parents. It is noted that both female figures are adept in giving instructions. Proverbs 31:26 states how the voice of wisdom is emitted from the wife's mouth, while in 8:6-9 the utterances of Wisdom are straight, full of truth and righteousness.

**Laughter**

Wife:

Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come. 31:25

Wisdom:

I also will laugh at your calamity;  
I will mock when panic strikes you. 1:26

Another striking parallel exists between the two female images. The same word for laughing is used in both verses, and with the same overtones. The word *sāḥaq* means to laugh in a particular way with contempt, derision, ridicule or scorn.<sup>21</sup> McCreesh notes that both women laugh at the future. Wisdom laughs scornfully at those who have not prepared themselves for their destruction or bad fate. They were given instructions but refused to listen; later they must pay the consequences. The wife laughs at the time to come. But the wife has prepared herself economically, morally, and spiritually for the days ahead, she needs to have no fear.

Gates

Wife:

Her husband is known in the gates,  
when he sits among the elders of the land. 31:23

Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the gates. 31:31

Wisdom:

On the top of the walls she cries out;  
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks. 1:21

Beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud. 8:3

And now my sons listen to me;  
happy are those who keep my ways,  
Hear instruction and be wise,  
and do not neglect it  
Happy is the man who listens to me,

watching daily at my gates,  
 waiting beside my doors.  
 For he who finds me finds life  
 and obtains favour from the Lord;  
 but he who misses me injures himself;  
 all who hate me love death. 8:32-36

In the Middle East gates were an element in the form of fortification system of a city used to provide safety and defense for the people within the city walls. Since the courtyard within the gateway provided the only extensive open space in the city, gates were also used as meeting places, centers of public life, judicial centers, and a place for town derelicts (see Ps 69:12; Is 21:13).<sup>22</sup> The gates of a city were usually wooden double doors built to protect and defend the city. City gates had other purposes since they served as the main thoroughfare for all who entered the city. They provided a place to meet and assemble, an open space where public life was at its functional peak, where most transactions, business, religious, kingly, political, judicial and educational took place.

Symbolically, gate imagery illustrates diametrically opposite places: the gates of death and the gates of righteousness. Other Wisdom literature makes ample reference to these images. Job 38:17 asks "Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of the deep darkness?" In Psalm 118:19 the contrasting images are expressed, "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord." In the comparisons of Wisdom personified and the ideal wife the gate theme is prominent. It makes vivid their role and function in society.

Claudia Camp in her study of Wisdom imagery perceives the gates as gates of judgment. She states that people who pass through the gates "go

to the gate to be judged and to bring judgment upon those who judge."<sup>24</sup> She argues that the gate is the property of the representatives of justice and social order.<sup>24</sup> Camp comes to this conclusion by examining the feminine figures of Tamar and Ruth and what their activities by the gates implied. Both Tamar and Ruth were foreign women who set examples of aggressive female sexuality in order to maintain the approved social justice and order within society.<sup>25</sup> Both women were disadvantaged members who wanted to guarantee their rightful authority as wives and childbearers.<sup>26</sup> The validity of Camp's examples of Ruth/Tamar to illustrate her point can be questioned; however this should not invalidate the concept of judgement at the gates. To what extent Wisdom personified and the ideal wife play a significant judicial role can only be examined by evaluating the thematic content of gates. It is at the gates that the works of both women become evident. All their work is subject to scrutiny. The community work of the wife, the teaching work of Wisdom personified gets noticed or becomes acclaimed at the gates. Their work allows the women to be placed<sup>12</sup> on pedestals. Though different criteria are used to examine the success of each female, the results of their work at the gates are paramount.

There is a correlation between Proverbs 1:21 and 31:23. Both Wisdom and the ideal wife act as teachers or instigators, thus permitting men to become decision-makers for themselves or others.

Wisdom personified engages herself in the acts of wisdom teaching at the city gates. McKane translates 1:21b as "at the entrance of the city gates she utters her sayings."<sup>27</sup> This is what most wisdom teachers did; perhaps the practise of prophets was similar. However, McKane thinks Wisdom personified in this instance is a teacher. She is selective of her pupils for she

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speaks to the *peti*, the untutored immature youth who can be shaped by an educational process.<sup>28</sup> She also elects to talk to the *lesim* and the *kesil*. The *lesim* are Wisdom's worst enemies, they are arrogant, cynical and defiant. The *kesil* is the fool that is insensible to moral truth and acts without regard to it.<sup>29</sup> The wisdom teacher promises the fool three things, one of which is rebuke. Rebuke or reprimand, reproof, advice or counsel would not be the easiest thing for the fool to accept.<sup>30</sup> Here Wisdom personified is being judgmental, for she chooses to speak to fools who are aware of their problems but have not chosen to amend their ways.

McKane points out that summoning men in public places was not easy. Wisdom operated where the competition was fiercest, not the competition from other orators but from other men making bargains, getting wealth, settling disputes and seeking gregarious enjoyments.<sup>31</sup> Alden states that personified Wisdom has placed herself in sight of all as would a harlot, yet their objectives were totally different.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless Wisdom personified has to compete in the open space. She has to raise her voice to acquire an audience. She has to deliver a speech that will captivate her audience in a place where assorted activities are competing for attention. Her audience will have to decide whether listening to Wisdom personified will be a profitable transaction for them.

In 31:23 the husband (*ba'al*) was a well-known figure at the gates. The man-or-the-wife's husband-sat with the elders to make judicial decisions. DeVaux states that town disputes and trials were settled by elders. Trials were discussed, judgments made and penalties imposed; even the death sentence was carried out.<sup>33</sup> The husband had this place of authority, respect and responsibility because of the wifely contribution to a prosperous

household: one free from domestic worries.<sup>34</sup> "By virtue of her character and sound management the husband could exert his influence on the life of the community."<sup>35</sup> Alden clearly reaffirms that the husband does not loiter his day away, but meets daily to determine questions of the law.<sup>36</sup>

Wisdom personified by her callings and teachings entices men to a path of righteousness, to a life style that is compatible with God and community. The wife, on the other hand, because of her physical and mental activities within her household, allows for her husband to provide and deal out justice. Both females allow the male to make a choice or decision.

Proverbs 8:32-36 and 31:31 show the alternate theme of wickedness or wrongdoing and the result of taking the path to righteousness. References to the gates in these passages will illustrate the concept of the gates of righteousness and gates of death. In the Old Testament entering the gates of death did not necessarily mean a physical death, but a lack of fullness of human existence.<sup>37</sup> Therefore one arrives at Sheol by being subjected to any form of misery.<sup>38</sup> Usually the idea of depth is involved in order to illustrate the distance one is removed or alienated from God and the human community.<sup>39</sup>

Once again in 8:32-36 Wisdom personified acts as a wisdom teacher. Her words take on a more significant dimension. It now becomes a matter of life or death, of gaining or losing God's approval.<sup>40</sup> To find her is to find life; to hate her is to love death. She is the gateway to life, neglect of her leads to the gateway of death.<sup>41</sup> This outlook about seeking the path of righteousness, a gateway to life is reinforced in 8:32-36. This reinforcement is significant and is expressed by the change of Hebrew words. In this passage the word which signifies the city gates in Hebrew is no longer used; rather two other Hebrew words are used indicating doors or entranceways of a house; the door or

entranceway of Wisdom's house. Man's quest for the path of righteousness starts at the city gates, but it is at the door and entrance of Wisdom's house that he can achieve his quest. Wisdom personified allows people to deal with their affirmation of faith and trust in God. They choose the path to the gate of righteousness. Once this path is established a union with God exists and a specific life style is maintained.

The wife in 31:31 deserves credit for all her achievements and these deeds ought to become publicly known at the gates.<sup>42</sup> How does this relate to Wisdom's activities at the gates in 8:32-36? The wife's activities are the culmination of obedience to wisdom's counsel, obedience to the will of God, and adherence to the social order. The ideal wife has thus also acquired the path to righteousness. She is a woman who fears the Lord, who has wisdom and insight. She has become the human reflection of Wisdom personified. Now humankind, the fruit of Wisdom's labour, can praise wisdom at the gates. Now judgment has been passed upon those that have judged. Both female images act in a judgmental way to tasks or people, each in turn are judged by others. The wife makes decisions about daily matters, only to be praised by her family and others. Likewise, Wisdom personified judges simple-minded people, only to be praised by those who judged her worthwhile.

### **Category Three: Thematic Parallels**

The following section will deal with a number of concrete and abstract items that correlate the two female figures. Thus hands, husbands, treasures, and light or lamp will be discussed first, followed by strength, trust, skills, praise, philanthropy, authority, royalty, and finally, the fear of YHWH.

## Hands

Wife:

She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands. 31:13

She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she  
plants a vineyard. 31:16

She put her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle. 31:19

She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy. 31:20

Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her  
in the gates. 31:31

Wisdom:

Long life is in her right hand  
in her left hand are riches  
and honour. 3:16

Proverbs 6:17 maintains that "God hates hands that shed innocent blood." This is in direct contrast to what is given in 3:16: Wisdom's provisions are lavish. Different words express her hands: *yānān* refers to her right hand; *semōl* to her left hand. The contents of the right hand are more worthwhile than the contents of the left hand. This is verified by statements made by the Talmud which considers the left hand a sign of weakness; the right hand distributes length of days, a gift far superior to that of riches and honour.<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that Wisdom will not bring wealth; but an order of priorities is established here, for Wisdom offers life in total fullness; material wealth is secondary.

Another interpretation of this passage is that Wisdom is a representation of the goddess Maat (see below, p. 60), for Maat holds a sceptre in one hand symbolizing wealth, while in the other hand she holds an ankh symbolizing life.<sup>44</sup> Hence, Wisdom mirrors some of Maat's qualities. Nevertheless, all things considered, the gifts bestowed upon those who follow the righteous path directed by Wisdom are beyond measure. Longevity and a good quality of life are offered to those that partake in Wisdom's calling.

The wife likewise provides abundantly for those that rely upon her for their existence. In the verses to be examined, she shows her business acumen, her philanthropic nature, and the diligence which allows her economic prosperity and a prolongation of life not only for her immediate family but for disadvantaged members of the community. The expressions *kap* "palm hand" and *yād* "hand" in the poem dealing with the ideal wife depict some of these earlier observations. In verse 13 *kap* occurs in the description of the work of the woman with wool and flax. *Kap* occurs again in verse 16 but this time it implies her business venture in property in the buying and planting of a vineyard. She accomplishes this by the "fruits of her hands." Perhaps this is done by the sale of items that were produced from the wool or flax, which were made by willing hands, inspired hands, or hands which turn things into a work of beauty. The previous hand descriptions are all acceptable alternatives given by McKane, for he claims that the precise significance of the phrase "with the pleasure of her hands"<sup>45</sup> is difficult to determine. In verse 19 the woman is industrious, working well with tools that aid her in the manufacture of clothing for her household or for profit. Indeed, the woman is indispensable to her family, but the down-trodden recognize her worth as well, for she has a generous nature.

McCreesh points out the chiasmus which occurs in verses 19-20. A chiasmus is an inverted relationship between the syntactic elements of parallel phrases.<sup>46</sup> The chiasmus in verse 19 and 20 involves the inversion of *yād* and *kap*. No longer does the woman's work ethic or knowlege (v.19) of business take prominence in this verse; instead her heed of people in need of economic help and, perhaps, moral support (v.20), dominates the activity of her hands, and the chiasmus reinforces this shift of emphasis.

The illustration of the chiasmus is as follows:

verse 19

*yādēyhā šillēhah bakkisôr (A)*  
*wēkappēhā tamēku pālek (B)*

verse 20

*kappāh parēsāh leūnā (B)*  
*wēyādēhā šillēhāh lāsbyôn (A)*

The stress is placed on the word *yād* which has been associated with the woman's industriousness and business know-how: now it is associated with her concern for others.<sup>47</sup> Verse 31 asserts the fact that the woman should be given credit, or recognition, for all her achievements.<sup>48</sup> She deserves acknowledgement from her family and community for her fine efforts. The thematic use of hands in connection with the two women is clear. Both have in their hands "gifts" of a full and satisfying life for those who stand in close relationship to them.

### Spouses or Husbands

Wife:

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
 and he will have no lack of gain. 31:11

Her children rise up and call her blessed:  
her husband also, and he praises her. 31:28

Wisdom:

Do not forsake her, and she will keep you:  
love her, and she will guard you.  
The beginning of wisdom is this:  
Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.  
Praise her highly, and she will exalt you:  
she will honor you if you embrace her,  
she will place on your head a fair garland:  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown. 4:6-9

Strong feminine images are used in connection with Wisdom in Proverbs 4. She will love, embrace, guard, and honour those who seek wisdom. The instructions given in this passage are in parent teacher/pupil style. The most important advice given here is to "get wisdom," "get insight" (verse 5). The principal question raised by these verses is whether the images are drawn from a spiritual relationship (Cox), from a patron-protege relationship (McKane), or from a husband-wife relationship (Camp).

Cox thinks that Wisdom is the first priority in life and that she is presented as a feminine vehicle of spirituality through which God presents himself to men. Perhaps this concept stands for a quasi-mystical union, analogous to sexual attraction,<sup>4</sup> and even marriage.

McKane in his understanding of this passage asks whether Wisdom is to be portrayed as a lover or a bride. He proceeds to make an analysis of Bostrom's and Ringgren's conception of Wisdom. Bostrom thinks the passage is laden with love images so as to counter the threat of the *'iššu zārā* who is a prostitute engaging men in improper involvements. Ringgren, on the other hand, alludes to the wedding custom of placing a garland or crown

upon the head of a bridegroom." McKane sees the association of crowning in terms of festive occasions rather than in terms of wedding customs. On the whole McKane thinks that the lover imagery is not consistent enough to imply a marriage relationship. He thinks the word *salslehā*, "exalt", "raise high" (which is sometimes interpreted as "caress"), should be understood to mean "to hold high, in high esteem." In effect, this is not the embrace of lovers but a protege's regard for a patron. McKane translates verse 8 as "Hold her in high esteem and she will get preferment for you; she will get you honour, if you embrace her."<sup>51</sup> Wisdom is a patron who provides for her protege, expecting in return fidelity and adoration.

Camp interprets 4:5-9 as marriage imagery. She counters McKane's argument for the patron/protege relationship by stating that the word *hbq*, in the *piel* form, when applied to a man and woman always refers to an erotic embrace.<sup>52</sup> Camp views the wife's role as a counselor, the result of any advice given by the wife could result in honour for the husband. So when the wife is referred to as his crown this imagery belongs to a marriage relationship (12:4). Therefore the idea of crowns in 4:9 cannot be given the cultic interpretations of the Ishtar rituals involving crowns as Bostrom claims.<sup>54</sup> These crowns are metaphors characterizing the love relationships between a man and a woman. The loving and erotic nature of the wife is not evident in the poem; however, certain sexual behaviours are described about the wife in 5:15-19, which will be discussed later when comparing the sexuality of the two images. Nevertheless it can be inferred that since offspring are mentioned in 31:10-31 consummation of the wife's marriage did occur.

The word used in 31:11,23,28 to describe the husband of the wife is significant. *Bu'ul* is used instead of *'is*. It is interpreted as husband in 31:10-

31 but can mean owner lord as well. The rule of *ba'al* is characterized in this manner: "He is not an isolated despot, but the center from which strength and will emanate through the whole of the sphere which belongs to him and to which he belongs."

In his own right the man is influential and strong. Perhaps this is needed here, because the husband is depicted only in terms of the talents, energies and capabilities emerging from the wife. Impressions are given that his influence at the gates stems from his wife's doings. The choice of the word *ba'al* may indicate the ideal realized; in 4:7 the man is instructed to get wisdom, as of yet he does not possess her, the husband on the other hand does possess a wife, therefore, wisdom.

He appreciates all her work for he rises with his children to praise her economic productivity, and strong moral and intellectual capacities. In many ways there are clear parallels here as to the roles the wife and Wisdom play in the lives of their husbands or prospective husbands. Both female images are caring individuals who provide the essentials towards a prosperous, protective and productive environment. In return they expect love and devotion and recognition.

### Light or Lamp

#### Wife:

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night. 31:18

#### Wisdom:

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
which shines brighter and brighter until the full day.

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness:  
they do not know over what they stumble. 4:18,19

There are no direct connections made to Wisdom with the noun light or lamp, but all is inferred by understanding the contrasts made between Wisdom (Dame Folly) or the foreign woman, the *'iṣṣā zārā*.

It is the wife who works day and night by the light of the lamp. She is diligent and dedicated to the tasks at hand. She, unfailing, totally devotes her attention to the needs of her family. What symbolic significance attaches itself to the image of the lamp? The extravagance of leaving a lamp burning all night could only be customary for a prosperous household. The burning lamp was a sign of a house which was inhabited and where there was ongoing family life; the extinguished lamp was to be found in the deserted house; in other words, symbolically, the lamp indicates that the righteous will enjoy vitality and fulfillment but the wicked will be cut off.<sup>54</sup>

Proverbs 13:9 and 20:20 state that "the lamp of the wicked will go out". Since this did not imply a belief in life after death it signified the opposite of the mature and fulfilled life, a life which was cut short, and without fulfillment.

In 14:18,19 the path of righteousness is compared to light while the wicked path is compared to darkness. Although there is no direct use of the word light or lamp in reference to Wisdom personified there are clear indicators that Wisdom worked in the light and illuminated the path of those that were devoted to her. There are two significant indicators of this supposition. Wisdom's female adversary in Proverbs is known as Dame Folly. In Proverbs 7:9 a man visits Dame Folly "in the twilight in the evening, at the time of night and darkness" and if he continues in this manner his final accomplishment

lands him in Sheol "going down to the chambers of death" (7:27). Since these two images are in direct contrast to each other it has to be assumed that Wisdom personified works in the dawn, in the daylight, at the time of day and light. Earlier works have illustrated the teaching and hostessing tasks Wisdom has done at the gates, and, undoubtedly, in her stately house. It would be difficult to conceive these jobs as adventures of darkness.

The second factor revolves around the end objectives of both females. Poignantly put in 8:36 Wisdom states "all who hate me love death." Death is an eternal darkness. Wisdom provides the opposite of death, long life, riches and wealth. Those who do not chose to listen to her reproofs, her teachings, her understandings are not attracted to light but seek darkness. The woman of folly, on the other hand, represents this darkness (2:18,19).

Examples of the negative images of women are usually juxtapositioned; clearly contrasting with the portrait of Dame Wisdom. Wisdom is different from the (*iššā zārā*), the "foreign" or "strange" woman depicted in Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:3-23; 6:24-35; 7:5-27; and 9:13-18. The woman (*iššā zārā*) in 2:16-19 possess seductive speech. Perdue describes her as an Israelite adulteress who has abandoned her husband and has turned to prostitution or has become a devotee of a fertility cult or a priestess in order to support herself.<sup>57</sup> McKane agrees that his woman is an Israelite adulteress. He claims that the *iššā zārā* can mean foreign (ethnic) woman but it can also allude to a woman that (through ostracism or estrangement) is foreign to acceptable religious and social behaviour.<sup>58</sup> Those involved with this woman forsake their lives. The *iššā zārā* referred to in 5:3-23 is a prostitute or temple priestess. Once again the man is being seduced by "lips that drip honey" and by a voice which is "smoother than oil". Perdue makes reference to the fact

that "oil" and "honey" are metaphors representing the payments made to prostitutes or temple priestesses.<sup>51</sup> This type of woman cannot provide compassion or understanding for any man she encounters, for her own survival is at stake.<sup>52</sup> This encounter leads man on the path to death or Sheol. The young reader is advised to stay away from her (5:8) lest he be caught up in her deceptive charm and waste his wealth on the woman's maintenance "or for compensation to her injured husband".<sup>53</sup>

Proverbs 6:20-35 is definitely identified with an Israelite adulteress. The light versus darkness motif is clearly evident here. The passage is a form of instruction against adultery. Acceptance of this instruction leads the youth on the path to righteousness, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light" (verse 23). The adulterous adventure could end with disastrous consequences. The husband might seek the man's life rather than financial reparation.<sup>54</sup> If physical death does not claim the fool, shame and disgrace will.

Perdue views Proverbs 7:5-27 as the image of a devotee of a fertility goddess. The woman is involved in a religious fertility rite when she invites the man to join her in a type of communion sacrifice (verses 14, 15); then the woman fulfills her vows by the act of sexual intercourse. McKane would argue that this scene is indicative of an adulterous affair: an illicit affair between a man and a married woman who is a prostitute (*zōnā*). The *zōnā* satisfies her sexual pleasures, and the man's, gratuitously. She is a dangerous prostitute using religious practises as means to to justify her sexual promiscuity.<sup>55</sup> The end result of this union is lethal, death and a road to Sheol.

• In Proverbs 9:13-18 Dame folly (the foolish woman) is introduced. She is represented as a fertility goddess sitting at her temple, the gateway to the

realm of the dead.<sup>44</sup> She calls out to the men that pass to participate in a meal involving fertility rites. She lures them with her speech and the thought of illicit sexual pleasures.<sup>45</sup> The foolish woman acts as a hostess offering the "simple" a feast of stolen water and sweet bread. The "simple" in turn forgo their lives to become members of the deepest recess of Sheol.

Thus it can be seen that Wisdom personified is associated with the concept of light and contrasted with the woman of darkness, as is the ideal wife who concerns herself with the well being of her family. The wife works in the day, or by the light of the lamp, to accomplish her tasks so that her family may have a full life. Likewise, Wisdom works in the daylight, but she also represents symbolically ideals associated with light such as the path to righteousness and a long and full life.

### Treasure or Gain

Wife:

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain. 31:11

Wisdom:

Riches and honor are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield is better than choice silver.  
I walk in the way of righteousness,  
in the paths of justice,  
endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries. 8:18-21

Both female images provide abundantly. The husband of the ideal wife has nothing to fear for he lacks nothing. The wife in this instance provides him with gain. The Hebrew word is *šālāl* which has the meaning of booty.

gain made in the aftermath of war. McKane recognizes the fact that the use of this word in this verse is difficult to understand. Why is war imagery prevalent here? McKane proceeds to detail other alternatives, such as reading the word to mean offspring or wool from Arabic. The idea of offspring does not reflect the ambience of the verse where the woman's skills as homemaker are more apparent than her fertility. The idea of the woman working with wool, since wool is not lacking to her is more probable. Perhaps on the other hand booty indicated the varied and abundant riches that would be taken in war.<sup>65</sup> These are provisions acquired only after strength, ingenuity and extra ordinary abilities were used against the foes, or pervasive forces. Another indication of war imagery used in this poem is found in verse 15 where *terep*, normally used to represent prey, is used to signify food the woman supplies for the household. Usually the word prey has been used as a metaphor for military conquest.<sup>67</sup> Military nuances in the poem can only indicate the strength, wisdom and varied experiences of the wife who wins her battles on all fronts, economic, moral, intellectual, social and spiritual. In this regard the husband is not lacking for nearly all of his needs are met directly or indirectly by the actions of his wife.

Wisdom makes accessible wealth and prosperity to those that love her. This wealth which is bequeathed to the initiate is only a by product of the wisdom that constitutes a good life. For it is said that the fruit of wisdom is better than gold or silver. McKane concludes that Wisdom does give wealth and property, but only in association with honour and righteousness, "What Wisdom gives essentially is a way of life which possesses ethical fitness and equity."<sup>68</sup> What is found in the gifts bestowed upon men by Wisdom or on the husband by the wise wife is a quality of wholesomeness. In neither case,

that of the wife or Wisdom, do the recipients of their works lack in anything. Wealth without the appropriate knowledge would not benefit all of society, in these cases the husband because of this wealth can function well at the city gates, the lover of wisdom can function well in his moral and spiritual life.

### Strength

Wife:

A good wife who can find? 31:10  
 Many women have done excellently  
 but you surpass them all. 31:29

She girds her loins with strength  
 and makes her arms strong. 31:17

Strength and dignity are her clothing. 31:25a

Wisdom:

I have counsel and sound wisdom,  
 I have insight. I have strength. 8:14

A first glance at verses 10a and 29 gives the reader concern as to its context and relationship with strength. However, the words "good wife" in 31:10 are not a translation of *'issa tōbā'* literally a good woman, but rather of *'ēšet hayil*; *'ēšet* meaning "woman," "wife" or "female" and the distinctive word *hayil* meaning "ability," "efficiency," "strength" and "wealth." Strength here is usually associated with military power. Other derived meanings of *hayil* are "wealth," "valor," and "sexual power." In association with women, the word *hayil* is used only twice: in Ruth 3:11 and Proverbs 12:4a. The description of Ruth in this context is one of courage and daring for she lies with Boaz to claim him as her kinsman. Remarkable parallels exist between

Ruth and the ideal wife. Both females are very loyal to their families. Ruth leaves her homeland and dedicates herself to her mother-in-law Naomi, and Naomi's religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The wife is always attentive to all needs of her household and family. Both women are very resourceful. Ruth had to secure means of livelihood for herself and her mother-in-law,<sup>8</sup> and ensure heirs for her dead husband by participating in levirate marriage. Both women are always portrayed in terms of their marriages, families and homes. Ruth marries Boaz and provides her kinsmen with a family line in the birth of a son. She builds herself a house; her family thrives into posterity. The ideal wife builds herself a house; she settles with her husband and has offspring. The two women are also praised by their spouses. The husband declares that his wife surpasses all others, Boaz calls Ruth an *'ēšet ḥayil* (3:10-11) and blessed. The portrayal of Ruth is that of the ideal daughter-in-law and wife. Thus much can be said about her and the ideal wife of Proverbs 31. Both women make great contributions to family life and relationships.

The only other references made to an *'ēšet ḥayil* is in Proverbs 12:4a where such a woman is considered to be the "crown of her husband." This passage gives an answer to 31:10a: upon reflection a man can acquire an *'ēšet ḥayil* to discover how invaluable she is. The wife is not some unattainable ideal but an individual that is worth grasping. She is the ultimate acquisition, her husband's crown.

Women who practise infidelity, and cause sorrow, ignorance and death do not have *ḥayil*. These are the women that destroy. The woman with *ḥayil* creates, strengthens, nurtures and protects.<sup>9</sup> Although Wisdom is not directly called an *'ēšet ḥayil* she definitely has distinctive characteristics of the good wife. She is contrasted to the *'ēšet keśilūt* a "woman of foolishness,

of stupidity." which is Dame Folly in 9:13. Therefore, this contrast binds Wisdom closer to the wife since both are judgmental of the foolish or evil woman in thought and in action. Wisdom advises all men of the ramifications of intimate contact with this type of woman; on the other hand, the wife provides the precepts that all good women should follow.

The concept of wealth has been mentioned in connection with the ideal wife. The wife is involved in practical endeavours such as merchandizing (verse 18) and selling clothing (verse 24). However, these efforts alone are not as clear an indication of her "strength" as the use of the word *ṣālāl* in verse 11, which indicates that her husband receives gain from his wife. The word usually connotes abundant riches. The word *'ūz* is used in verses 17 and 25 to indicate the sheer strength or force the woman exerts to do her work. "She girds her loins" is an metaphoric expression to indicate that she gathers up her dress for a prolonged effort at vigorous work. The wife is well endowed with physical strength.

The strength of Wisdom personified is somewhat different. The word employed is *gebūrā*. It is associated with war imagery, might combined with valour and military prowess. Both women seem to be fighting forces of idleness, poverty and evilness. Perhaps that is why warlike images such as *gebūrā* and *ḥayil* are conjured up in this depiction of the women of strength.

### Trust

#### Wife:

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain. 31.11

**Wisdom:**

For wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight. 3:5

Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;  
love her, and she will guard you.

Prize her highly and she will exalt you.  
she will honour you if you embrace her.

She will place on your head a fair garland;  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown. 4:6,8,9.

Clearly here, the connection of the two poems in terms of trust is not verbal but strongly thematic. In Proverbs 31:11 the husband places absolute confidence in his wife. It is not a merely casual confidence, but one which arises from the deepest part of existence, his heart. To the ancient Hebrews the heart was the seat of understanding, the organ in which wisdom was apprehended.<sup>72</sup> The word trust *batah* in Hebrew means total commitment to the person who is trusted and is used by the prophets (c.f. Jer. 17:7) to describe the relationship which ought to exist between Israel and God. Proverbs 28:26 states, "He who trusts in his own mind is a fool." Those who do not entrust their hearts to wisdom are like the men who do not trust their wives. Both women were seen as gifts God bestowed upon his male servants. In 3:5 the instruction is to trust the LORD. Wisdom will be given to those who are morally qualified and who are effective in maintaining and guarding the order and way of life as directed by God.<sup>73</sup> But just as the husband is totally committed to the wife he must be just as committed to Wisdom. This commitment is reflected in 4:6-9 in which the husband must love Wisdom, prize her and never forsake her. She in turn will treat him like a husband by guarding him, honouring him, and giving him a satisfying life.

Skills

Wisdom

then I was beside him, like a master workman,  
and I was daily his delight. 8:30

Wife

She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands  
she plants a vineyard. 31:16

She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple. 31:22

She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she delivers girdles to the merchant. 31:24

She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and teaching of kindness  
is on her tongue. 31:26

The focus on skills does not deal with Wisdom's creative enterprises and the wife's worldly endeavours, but on the abilities of these two female figures. The images of these two females are multi-faceted, for they portray a wide variety of roles. The ideal wife has developed many skills and abilities. She is a realtor (verse 16), farmer (verse 16), businesswoman (verse 24), clothing designer (verse 22), manufacturer (verse 24), organizer (verse 14, 15), delegator (verse 15), philanthropist, and teacher (verse 26). On the other hand Wisdom personified plays an important role in God's creative plans. She was there at his side when all the forms of earth and water were created. She was created by God but was a co-creator of the earth.

The Hebrew conception of creation is bringing order out of chaos, rather than out of nothing. In Proverbs 8:27-29 where God establishes the heavens, the skies, the deep oceans, seas, and the firmament of the earth, order is

brought to chaos. In these verses God with Wisdom beside him, as a master craftsman organizes and establishes the order of the universe. Although the ideal wife is obviously not a creator of the natural order, she is a creator of the domestic order. She organizes the household and establishes it firmly. Both females are in a certain sense knowledgeable about different types of skills which they manage to exert upon their environment to influence it with a good degree of success.

Yet another possibility arises since the interpretation of 8:30 is problematic. This possibility will be dealt with in the section dealing with creation. The interpretation of the Hebrew word *ʾāmon* is controversial for it allows completely different images of Wisdom to be portrayed: of a child, an architect, a confidant, a counselor as well as master builder.<sup>74</sup> Since the writer found validity in Cox's explanation of the dual meaning of the word *ʾāmon* (see below p.84), it was then possible to discuss the skills of Wisdom along with that of the ideal wife.

## Praise

### Wisdom:

Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
 and from my lips will come what is right;  
 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 him who understands  
 and right to those who find knowledge.  
 Take my instruction instead of silver,  
 and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
 for wisdom is better than jewels,  
 and all that you may desire

cannot compare with her.  
 I wisdom dwell in prudence,  
 and I find knowledge and discretion.  
 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.  
 Pride and arrogance and the way of evil  
 and perverted speech I hate.  
 I have counsel and sound wisdom  
 I have insight, I have strength  
 By me kings reign,  
 and rulers decree what is just;  
 by me princes rule,  
 and nobles govern the earth.  
 I love those who love me,  
 and those that seek me diligently  
 find me.

Riches and honour are with me,  
 enduring wealth and prosperity.  
 My fruit is better than gold,  
 even fine gold,  
 and my yield than choice silver.  
 I walk in the path of righteousness,  
 in the paths of justice,  
 endowing with wealth those that love me,  
 and filling their treasures. 8:6-21

Happy is the man who gets wisdom,  
 and the man who gets understanding,  
 for the gain from her is better  
 than gain from silver  
 and its profit better than gold.  
 She is more precious than jewels,  
 and nothing you desire  
 can compare with her.  
 Long life is in her right hand;  
 in her left hand are riches and honour.  
 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
 and all her paths are peace.  
 She is the tree of life  
 to those who lay hold of her;  
 those who hold her fast  
 are called happy. 3:13-18

Wife:

Give her the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her  
in the gates. 31:31

Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:  
"Many woman have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all." 31:28-29

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD  
is to be praised. 31:30

Wisdom personified in Proverbs 8:6-21 sings praises of herself. The portrait she paints of herself is arrayed with wonderful colours and hues, for she is no ordinary woman. From her lips are voiced the superior qualities of life such as nobleness, truth, righteousness, understanding and knowledge. She is not boasting about her qualities for pride and arrogance are a source of evil (verse 13). She expresses her own worthiness in order to give of herself to others so that they may profit by her wisdom. These high ideals that she bears are the fruits of her labour. Those that reach out and eat of her fruits are better off than any person with vast amounts of material possessions. Those that gain wealth have only wealth, while those that gain knowledge can amass wealth but also have the insight to sustain themselves throughout their life time. Wisdom not only discusses her worth but her rewards as well. Those that love her and accept her words will have riches, honour, wealth and prosperity (verse 18).

In Proverbs 3:13-18 Wisdom's qualities are being praised by others. To put it succinctly her gift of understanding is the source of all life. This passage reiterates what was stated about Wisdom in the preceding passage only omitting her capacity to help royalty rule their respective domains.

The wife in many ways is a reflection of Wisdom personified. She too is praised by others; and her works praise her, so in some sense this is a form of self praise. In Proverbs 31:31 the fruit of the wife's hands praise her at the gates. Although the woman is not vocal about her own works as is Wisdom, her works speak in lieu of the wife. Just as Wisdom proclaimed her own worthiness and her rewards, so the works of the woman are being noted in public at the gates. The others, who are her children and husband, give her the ultimate compliment; she surpasses all women because she fears YHWH.

### Philanthropy

Wife:

She opens her hands to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy. 31:20

Wisdom:

How long, O simple ones,  
will you love being simple?  
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge?  
Give heed to my reproof;  
behold, I will pour out my thoughts to you;  
I will make my words known to you. 1:22-23

To you, O men, I call,  
and my cry is to the sons of men.  
O simple ones, learn prudence;  
O foolish men, pay attention.  
Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is right; 8:4-6

Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!  
To him who is without sense she says,  
Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
Leave simpleness, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight. 9:4-6

The ideal wife reaches out to the poor and needy (31:20). This implies that the wife has a strong economic base from which to draw resources for these kinds of people. The wife's palm is extended showing her liberality in dispersing goods to the poor.

Wisdom personified has a strong base in the areas of wisdom, truth and knowledge. She also calls out to the poor and needy. She prepares food (9:1-6) not for the economic poor but for the spiritually, morally, religiously, emotionally and intellectually impoverished. This is evident in several passages 8:1-9; 1:22; 9:1-6 where she calls the simple and foolish men to her. Like the wife, Wisdom provides goods to her people (see 8:21) she also provides man with intangible blessings. Unlike Wisdom the wife cannot provide blessings but as verse 26 indicates she does provide guidance or teachings to those that are in need of it.

### Authority

#### Wife:

Her husband is known in the gates,  
when he sits among the elders of the land. 31:23

#### Wisdom:

By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
by me princes rule,  
and nobles govern the earth. 8:15-16

The theme of ruling oneself or others is featured well in both the ideal wife and Wisdom personified. The ideal wife rules over her household well, not only does she take care of the economics of the household (verses 16, 18, 24) but provides the fundamental needs such as clothing, food and emotional

nurturing of the individuals of her household (verse 26). Because she runs such a finely tuned institution, her husband can sit with the elders at the gates. This allowed men to rule wisely over the daily problems of the city.

Similarly in 8:15-16 the kings, princes and governors who accepted Wisdom personified were capable of ruling countries and cities. Their acceptance of her allowed them access to understanding, truth and knowledge. It is clearly stated in 8:15-16 that nobility and the ruling faction of society are given the ability to rule others, but by no means should this activity be limited to the chosen few. 8:4-5 reflects that this ability can be given to all men, the foolish and the simple as long as there is a willingness on their part to accept Wisdom.

The only difference between the two female images is one of opportunity. The wife provides her husband with the opportunity to develop his leadership qualities within the community, but she is not responsible for his ability; on the other hand Wisdom provides men with the ability to govern but they provide their own realms.

### Royalty

#### Wife:

She is not afraid of the snow for her household,  
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.  
She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple. 31:21-22

#### Wisdom:

by me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
by me princes rule,  
and nobles govern the earth. 8:15-16

McKane clarifies scholarly dissension about the choice of words used to describe the ideal wife's clothing and that of her own household. He argues that "scarlet" is the word which would represent the quality of the clothing the wife provides. He refutes the concept of "double" presented by other scholars to be the most sensible word.<sup>77</sup> He thinks that the wife's household did not wear two of everything. In effect, quality not quantity is being stressed in these two verses. The ideal wife is also dressed in purple and fine linen.<sup>78</sup> These are the very best clothing, the clothing of kings.<sup>79</sup> Symbolically, the kingly covering might represent the protection and sound authority exercised by the wife.

Certain virtues such as dignity and strength are associated with clothing as is illustrated in verse 25. By wearing the robes of "scarlet" her household perhaps emulates those same virtues. This type of thought, whereby clothing represents virtues, is echoed in the Psalms; in Psalm 104 God is clothed with "honour and majesty," in Psalm 132 the priests are clothed in "righteousness".

Although 8:15-16 does not deal with clothing, it is under the cloak of Wisdom that royalty rules and reigns wisely. Without Wisdom the earth would not receive the appropriate judgments from those in authority. Royalty would not rule with the necessary virtues. Wisdom provides protection and sound authority to royalty, the wife does the same to her family as though she reigns over a royal household.

### **Fear of YHWH**

Wife:

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD  
is to be praised. 31:30

Wisdom:

The fear of the LORD  
is the beginning of knowledge:  
fools despise wisdom and instruction. 1:7

The wife is a woman who fears YHWH (the LORD), one who is praised for so doing. Here is a woman who has followed the path of righteousness, devoted herself to her family and community, obtained a practical knowledge which enabled her to function at capacity in society. In effect, she has achieved an understanding of her role in the order of the world, her community, her household, and with her husband and children. The wife fulfills the requirements of social, personal, and religious obligations.

McCreech states that the ideal wife is a symbol to be understood allegorically to represent Wisdom personified.<sup>78</sup> The basis for this suggestion revolves around the interpretation of *yirat* in verse 30.<sup>79</sup> There are two interpretations: the first in which the woman is identified with the fear of YHWH, "the woman, the fear of YHWH, she is to be praised"; the second takes fear as the object of praise by the woman, "The woman she is to glory in the fear of YHWH".<sup>80</sup> Many other interpretations of *yirat* have been given in the Babylonian Talmud, but whatever interpretation is taken the woman clearly has "the fear of YHWH," the wisdom which enables people to succeed in life. This knowledge was controlled by God, because the Israelites did not differentiate between their rational and religious perceptions.

Personified Wisdom on the other hand is associated with "the fear of YHWH". She represents the knowledge that man must acquire to function in a secular and religious world. This entails being devoted to, reverent to God, loyal to God's covenant and obedient to his laws.<sup>81</sup> It essentially is a relationship between man and God and the knowledge of one's commitment

to God.<sup>62</sup> This commitment is the base upon which all other knowledge is amassed. Once one acquires the "fear of YHWH," one also acquires wisdom. This fear or source of knowledge is a gift of God.<sup>63</sup> It also dictates the individual's actions in accordance with the order of things.<sup>64</sup>

The fear of YHWH should not only be equated with fear itself, but with love, trust and humility. Another post-exilic book, Ecclesiasticus, illustrates this concept well:

Those that fear the LORD  
will not disobey his words,  
and those that love him  
will keep his ways.  
Those who fear the LORD  
will seek his approval,  
and those who love him  
will be filled with the law.  
Those who fear the LORD  
will prepare their hearts,  
and will humble themselves  
before him. Ecclesiasticus 2:15-17

Order, knowledge, love and fear is what Wisdom personified offers man, when she offers herself to him. In another sense she offers him total freedom for when God is feared all other fears disappear. Man's relationship with God is based on love and trust. Therefore man can freely claim, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Ps. 118:6).

Wisdom personified is involved with the order of the world and of her people, those that follow her instructions. The ideal wife has acquired this particular order because she gained the "fear of YHWH" and all that this implies.

### Category Four: Differences

There are only two major differences between the ideal wife and Wisdom personified in Proverbs. Wisdom personified is portrayed in sexual, sensual terms and is involved in the creation of the world while the ideal wife is not portrayed in the same way.

### Sexuality \*

#### Wife:

Drink water from your own cistern,  
 flowing water from your own well.  
 Should your springs be scattered abroad,  
 streams of water in the streets?  
 Let them be for yourself alone,  
 and not for strangers with you.  
 Let your fountain be blessed,  
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,  
 a lovely hind, a graceful doe.  
 Let her affection fill you at all times  
 with delight.  
 be infatuated always with her love. 5:16-19

#### Wisdom:

Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;  
 love her, and she will guard you.  
 The beginning of wisdom is this:  
 Get wisdom,  
 and whatever you get, get insight.  
 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;  
 she will honour you if you embrace her.  
 She will place on your head a fair garland;  
 she will bestow on you a beautiful crown. 4:6-9

Not one verse in the poem of the ideal wife makes reference to her sensuality, sexuality or eroticism. Conversely, the nature of Wisdom's sensualism

is evident, although not blatantly. Chapter 31 does not in any instance presume that the wife is alluring, provocative or enticing; on the contrary, the discussion of grace and beauty in verse 30 designates those feminine qualities as a form of vice. Grace or beauty are not enduring characteristics and soon pass and fade away. What is stressed in the poem is the woman's fecundity; her ability to bear children within the confines of marriage. The order and stability of family life are of great importance and consequently are asserted in the poem. <sup>85</sup>

However a positive regard for sexual pleasure of one's wife was developed in 5:15-19. It may have been developed to dissuade men from committing adultery; nevertheless the metaphors used in this section allude to a sexual wife. The wife is considered to be a "cistern and well," indicating to the husband that he should have intercourse only with his wife.<sup>85</sup> His sperm should not be wasted on others, for in doing this he does not establish and edify a house. Numerous offspring would be considered the blessing referred to in verse 18. In verse 19 the wife is described in erotic terms similar to the eroticism found in the Song of Solomon (see 2:7,9,17; 3:5; 4:5,12-15; 7:4). Another interpretation of verse 19 would read "the wife is a lovely doe.... Let her be your companion, let her breasts satisfy you continually.... Be intoxicated with her love."<sup>86</sup> Love within marriage was filled with passion, but, since marriage was a dynamic relationship, bonds grew beyond the ones created by physical attraction.<sup>87</sup>

A hint of eroticism can be detected upon in 4:8 when the word used to describe embrace implies an erotic embrace as found in 5:20: "Why should you be infatuated, my son with a loose woman and embrace the bosom of an adventuress?" or in Songs 2:6; 8:3: "O that his left hand was under

my head, and his right hand embraced me." Perhaps Wisdom is regarded in this manner to indicate her desirability by man, alluding to the sexual intensity, passion, felt by a man for his wife. This intensity and desire for Wisdom is only superceded by the love, devotion and faithfulness man should manifest for God. In return, the man is offered love, protection, honour and esteem. The sexual nature of Wisdom brings to the forefront the reciprocal relationship of man and wisdom. This reciprocal relationship is not evident in the erotic poetry of 5:15-19 nor is it evident in 31:10-31.

### Creation

#### Wisdom:

The Lord created me at the beginning  
of his work  
the first of his acts of old.  
Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning  
of the earth.  
When there were no depths  
I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs  
abounding with water.  
Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth;  
before he had made the earth with its fields,  
of the first of the dust of the world.  
When he established the heavens,  
I was there;  
when he drew a circle on the face  
of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains  
of the deep,  
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,  
then I was beside him, like a  
master workman:  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the sons of men. 8:22-31

Prior to discussing the creation motif, it is essential to clarify how Wisdom personified is viewed in this passage. She is more than a personification in this instance; she is a hypostasis (see above, p.10). She is a concrete being, self-existent beside God.<sup>88</sup> This is a significant factor, as the rest of the discussion will illustrate, for it helps define her relationship with God and man.

This poem connecting wisdom and creation, raises many questions concerning the significance of Wisdom personified. Queries have been made about her function within the cosmos, about her state (child, queen, or goddess), about her origins and about her reflection of Egyptian mythology. These questions must be examined to understand the various views. But more specifically, her relationships with man and God will become better outlined.

Camp reviews Bauer-Kayatz' treatment of the influence of Egyptian religion upon the formulation of the Wisdom figure. However, direct dependency of Proverbs 1-9 on Egyptian texts is not advocated by Bauer-Kayatz; merely the influence of thought. Many correlations are evident between the Egyptian goddess *Maat* and Wisdom. Both female figures were known to carry, symbolically, life in one hand and riches in the other. Both women could bestow protection and life upon their believers. It is in Proverbs 8 that Wisdom becomes imprinted heavily with the characteristics of *Maat*.<sup>89</sup>

*Maat*'s and Wisdom's existence were both proclaimed before the creation of the world; both were considered to be darling children, Wisdom before Yahweh, *Maat* before Re-Atum. Darling children that were loved and loving agents whom the gods considered effective within their rule.

These correlations do not necessarily mean that Egyptian thought greatly influenced Israelite Wisdom thought since in certain areas the differences between the two female figures outweighs the similarities in importance. Wisdom, unlike *Maat* is never considered to be the divine order but rather "the effort to learn from life the secret orders by observation, and to respect them in the execution of life."<sup>60</sup> The Egyptian gods had to live within the order of *Maat*. Yahweh is independent of Wisdom. It is she who is under his control. She is the gift given to human beings. She is God's representative to mankind. Another point of issue is the Israelite concept of life-death. In Egypt life after death was the prize to be won from *Maat*. In Israel there was no meaningful life after death.<sup>61</sup> Was, then, Wisdom's function different from *Maat*'s? Obviously so, but this did not stop the authors of Proverbs from presenting their poem in a literary style of their time.

Lang, in his study of Wisdom, supports the goddess motif. He claims that there was in Israel a familiarity with royal ideology, with the concept of the "goddess of the king," which played a part in shaping the images presented in Proverbs 8.<sup>62</sup> During ancient times it was customary for a king to have a goddess as his patroness. This was said of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal II and Ishtar, and of the Egyptian kings and the goddesses *Maat*, *Hator* and *Isis*.

Lang sees Wisdom as a witness to creation, he considers her to be older than all things. She was not made; she was born, brought forth by birth.<sup>63</sup>

Controversy reigns over the meaning of verse 22, especially the word "create," *qānan*. McKane claims this word to be contentious, for the translation given can mean "created," "begotten," or "acquired."<sup>4</sup> The more common usage of the word *qānan* as it occurs in the bible is interpreted to mean "acquiring" in the sense of possessing.<sup>5</sup> This is used in Proverbs 1:5; 4:5; 15:22; 16:16; 18:15; and 23:23.<sup>6</sup> With this idea of acquiring, to acquire Wisdom meant to possess her. However, this does not indicate to the reader how Wisdom originated: saying that God acquired her only indicates that she existed prior to the time of creation.

But it is important to distinguish whether Wisdom was created or begotten. Oesterley states that the word *qānām* is best translated as "begat me."<sup>7</sup> McKane concurs that this is a possibility since there are two words in the same passage which indicate a birthing process.<sup>8</sup> In verse 24 wisdom is brought forth in labour (*hōlālī*); in verse 23 *n sakkōtī* could be translated as "I was hidden in the womb of antiquity."<sup>9</sup> Lang translates verse 23 as, "I was fashioned in the womb."<sup>10</sup> Irwin, in his study of the usage of the word *qānām* in Proverbs, thinks the translation of "begotten" has wrong overtones. Some commentators take verse 30 and the word *amōn* to mean "little child," thereby, in their estimation, validating the idea of birth. Dahood, in his translation of Proverbs 8:22-31, reflects on the possible borrowing from Canaanite mythology and on the likelihood that the term "begotten" should be understood in this context. Yahweh is never considered to be a biological father as is the Canaanite god, El. However, verbs used in this Proverbs passage describe the roles of the mother and father in the Canaanite pantheon, and, therefore, are implied in God's role.<sup>11</sup> In Ugaritic texts El's consort, Athirat, is known to be the "mother of the gods."

speculatively speaking, she could also be the mother of Wisdom.

To shed light upon understanding whether Wisdom was "created" or "begotten", verse 22 might have given substantial clues. But the verse is riddled with complications in the interpretation of *rešit darkō*. Various translations are given, such as "the first of his ways,"<sup>133</sup> to be explained as the first of his creative modes. Alternatively, Wisdom is called the beginning of God's work or the first of his acts.<sup>134</sup> Cox would regard this verse as indicating that Wisdom was Yahweh's first born in time. Regardless of which view is accepted, it is not clearly established whether Wisdom was begotten or created.

The other option is to understand *qānan* to mean "create." However, this idea has also been disputed. Irwin found eight occurrences of the concept "create" in the Old Testament: Gen 4:1; 14:19,22; Exod 15:16; Deut 32:6; Ps 74:2; 78:54; 139:13. He thinks that most of these occurrences tend to reaffirm, not the "create" motif, but what he considers "to be, become a parent" motif. A few illustrations will best explain his point. In Gen 4:1, Eve became the parent of Cain but did not create him, for the Hebrews did not think of birth in this fashion.<sup>134</sup> Deut 32:6, Exod 15:16, and Ps 74:2 can be interpreted as God being the parent of his people. Ps 78:54 shows the concept of possession. This understanding does not eliminate the problem because these passages could also convey the idea of bringing into existence as a parent (Gen 4:1) or as a founder or maker (Gen 14:19,22; Ex 15:16; Deut 32:6).

Another problematic area of the creation poem lies in the translations of verse 30. Lang in his study of the problem gives five possible translations.

1. I was at his side as an infant.
2. I was at his side as a confidant.

3. I was at his side as master builder.
4. I was at his side as counselor.
5. I was at the side of the master builder.<sup>110</sup>

Each of these translations hinge on the word *'āmôn*. Lang states that all versions do have syntactical and etymological support, but that the first and the last are the most viable.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, God is the master builder and Wisdom is the child. Both Lang and McKane argue that *'āmôn* refers to Wisdom as the child of Yahweh.<sup>111</sup> But McKane also refutes other scholars' arguments about the meaning of this word. One argument proposes that *'āmôn* means "mother official," in which case Wisdom would be considered the queen mother, playing the role of the influential counsellor.<sup>110</sup> Besides the fact that the form is expressed in a diminutive fashion, "little mother" is hardly appropriate for a queen. Other references to the playfulness and jesting of Wisdom contradict the image of a wise counselor, and make this translation not a viable one.<sup>110</sup> McKane also argues that the concept of Wisdom being the masterworkman does not have the support of 8:22-31.<sup>111</sup> Therefore he concludes that *'āmôn* (darling) or *aman* (ward) refers to the child of Yahweh, who, at this time, is "one without care, her brow unfurrowed by anxiety, a vivacious playmate of God and man."<sup>111</sup> Lang gives reasons for supporting the "child" translation. Several reasons are expounded: the first being that the translation has had a long exegetical tradition; the second that terms such as "frolicking" and "delight," usually referring to children, are used to describe Wisdom.<sup>112</sup> Lang concludes that Wisdom is the child of the creator. Wisdom watches as the world is established, she takes no active part in its creation: she is just a spectator. But Lang considers that being present at the the creation of the world endows her with superior and superhuman knowledge.<sup>113</sup> Man, on the other hand, does not understand

the mysteries of creation (see Job 38:4-5, 19, 21).<sup>114</sup> Therefore Wisdom is far superior to man, though fashioned by the same creator. Wisdom in verses 30 and 31 is described as God's child, frolicking and playing before him, before mankind as well.

Yee, who examined the structure and style of this section, discusses the active role Wisdom plays within society. He makes a crucial contribution to the understanding of Wisdom's relationships. By examining the rhetorical and stylistic features, Yee exposes the mediating role of Wisdom between God and mankind. This interpretation is given because Yee sees the chiasmus in verse 31 which highlights Wisdom's role. Wisdom is God's child, but also his daily delight. She plays before him continually but she also plays in the created world. She is the one who relates to men. No mention is made of God's relationship with man: only of Wisdom's relationship with man.<sup>115</sup>

Cox, in his analysis of verse 30, suggests an innovative way of understanding this verse. He claims that the author or compiler of the section wanted to express a double meaning, both of "child" and "master workman." Since the word *'ūmōn* is ambiguous, it can mean "foreman" in Akkadian<sup>116</sup>; Cox's explanation is plausible. This is the explanation which this study finds acceptable, for it provides an interesting compromise between the two disputed views. Given this understanding, the image of Wisdom takes on a broad spectrum. Wisdom could indeed have been God's child and a master builder. Therefore her role in the world is one of co-creator or organizer of nature's world as well as man's world.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the many comparisons between the two female images, Wisdom personified and the ideal wife. More importantly, it attempts to explain why these comparisons are relevant to understanding the editors' intentions. Two approaches, chronology and literary dependence, are found lacking in making a proper analysis of the mirrored images of the two women. No certainty can be reached in the dating of Proverbs' poetic pieces. However, there is a high probability that the first nine chapters of Proverbs and the acrostic poem of 31:10-31 were written within the same time period. A similar time frame can imply that the editors of these poetic pieces had used a common denominator while editing, that the two passages are united by an overall prevailing thought. An examination of the chronological approach illuminates only the possible dating of these female imagery parallels and the potential intentions of the editors. Post-exilic editors would be concerned with a kingless society, while pre-exilic editors would be concerned with a monarchical society.

The second approach, literary dependence, does not show in which direction the influences ran, e.g., the case of the handmaidens (see above, p.19). It cannot be said that the literary images at the beginning of the book gave

impetus to the images presented at the end of the book or vice versa. What can be said is that these images have specific meanings and functions. They are used as didactic tools to influence the reader's understanding.

A third approach, that of "inclusio", signals the reader to a relevant theological aim and literal unity of the proverbial work. It clearly outlines that there is some form of repetition in the poetic pieces that the reader needs to observe. In this particular case repetition of female imagery leads the reader to a better understanding of inter-relationships among men and women, men and Wisdom, and finally men and God.

It was customary for Proverbial writers to be concerned with relationships found in society. Therefore, an understanding of the editors' intent, their obvious choice in female correlations, can best be explained by the examination of relationships. Certain descriptions of the two female images accent their femininity, perhaps this is to increase awareness of the other correlations. Nonetheless, all comparisons when carefully examined revolve around relationships. These relationships involve the family, society and the cosmic world.

In an attempt to understand the female imagery of Proverbs, there are four basic relationships that need be considered. They are the man/God relationship, the man/Wisdom relationship, the Wisdom/God relationship and the wife/husband relationship.

The man/God relationship revolves around God's love for his creation, thereby providing man with laws and ways of living and his demanding that man be obedient to them. Man gets rewarded for being obedient to the demands made by God. What is most significant in this relationship? It is not totally based on rewards but on the love and trust man experiences in his

regard for God (Proverbs 3:3-5). This relationship is based on obtaining the "fear of YHWH": when man obtains this, he can relate to God. In return, God grants him wisdom. However, it is Wisdom who leads man to the "fear of YHWH".

The man-Wisdom relationship as shown in Proverbs 4:6-9 describes how man is to love Wisdom and be obedient to her teachings (see above, p.34-35). Wisdom is to direct man in the proper path to life and reward him when he chooses to do so (3:13-18) (see above, p.49). She will always provoke men to listen to what God has to offer (2:3-15).

The Wisdom-God relationship depicted in Proverbs 8:22-31, shows what God expects of Wisdom. Her mediating role to mankind is essential (see above, p.64); Wisdom is God's representative on earth. Wisdom gets to participate in God's creative endeavours as an observer or as a participator.<sup>1</sup> She is shown God's affection.

The wife-husband relationship is developed in Proverbs 31:10-31. The husband trusts, and praises his hardworking wife. Her children also praise her (see above, p.50). She is his most valuable asset for she provides him with children, a well organized house (see above, p.22) and time for his judicial tasks within the community (see above, p.28). He, on the other hand, as Proverbs 5:15-19 shows, is to provide her with children and love.

Prior to accessing these relationships and examining how well they may explain the editors' use of female imagery, it is necessary to examine the concept of subordinate roles. All relationships that have been discussed fall into a pattern of subordinate versus authoritative figures. The wife is the husband's subordinate; Wisdom is God's subordinate; man is Wisdom's and God's subordinate. God has an authoritative role in the world, being its

creator and organizer of order. Wisdom under the authority of God dictates to man how he is to function within the world. Man expects a certain order within his household which he entrusts to his wife.

A problem of negativity surfaces with the concept of subordinate figures. The assumption is easily made that the subordinate figure is the underdog, the one who loses out in life's lot. Further examination of the four relationships shows that the subordinate figure is not under total subjection to the authoritative figure. In fact, one views reciprocal actions occurring between these relationships. These relationships are not one-sided, each participant is expected to give and receive. Therefore, even the subordinate figure can find meaning and fulfillment in the relationship. The fulfilled man realizes his full humanity in his relationship to God, while remaining in the subordinate role.

The reciprocal nature of each relationship will be considered. Wisdom delights herself with man who is God's gift to her (Prov. 8:31). On the other hand, Wisdom is God's delight (8:30). Wisdom gives man a path to follow, a direction in life (8:1-21), not at all detrimental to him. Man's obedience to, and his love of Wisdom makes Wisdom delighted with mankind (8:35). The wife provides man with affection, love (5:15-19), and life's staples (31:10-31). The man returns his wife's affections and love and provides her a just environment to reside in. Man is to love God, as God loves man (1:7).

Due to the reciprocal nature of these relationships, a positive outlook should be maintained. Although the wife was subordinate to her husband, she was on an equal footing with her husband in regard to her relationship with Wisdom and God. Ideally, the husband treated his wife with affection and love and thus her subordinate role is fulfilling. She, subjected to man's

dominance, has a belief in the idealized union; she hopes for a nurturing, caring relationship. It is not the purpose of this paper to examine whether the ideal relationships expressed in Proverbs are historically factual. Rather, the purpose is to examine these reciprocal relationships and interpret their significance.

To understand the motivations of the post-exilic editors in their use of female imagery, a brief historical background of the treatment of relationships between men and women must be considered. An historical background can explain how these editors perceived and understood society. The Old Testament makes it clear that society in that time period was male-dominated and male-orientated.<sup>2</sup> Women were seen as men's subjects, under the domination of their fathers or husbands. However, women played significant roles in their family life and in community life. More importantly, their relationship with God made them equals in the religious sphere. God, a non-sexual<sup>3</sup> entity, functioned as a form of salvation for both sexes, not for man alone.<sup>4</sup>

Women were placed under the authority of men. They were considered sexual property because the continuation of the male line, the births of sons, was vital. Their legal and economic rights were safeguarded by the men under whose authority they were at the time.<sup>5</sup> Yet they were their own persons. They were responsible for their own morality and obedience to the law.<sup>6</sup> They were capable of leadership in Hebrew society as prophetesses (2 Kings 22:14) and judges (Judges 4:4).<sup>7</sup> Significantly, they were members of the covenant community, prepared for the acceptance of blessings and responsibilities delegated by God.<sup>8</sup>

Even though women were considered subordinate in the male-dominated society of biblical times they were not deprived of their relationships with

God in any way. Both men and women had to keep the laws. Women were allowed to bring gifts to the temple. Usually sacrifices were brought by the males of the household, but Leviticus 12:6 and 15:29 show that women were expected to participate.<sup>2</sup> Women were able to attend feasts, if they so desired. They came before God in the same manner as the men, with prayers and vows. Women, though subordinate, were equal in the eyes of God.

This thesis has illustrated the many points of contact the two female figures share. Their characteristics are similar in that they are strong (8:14; 31:10,17), wise (1:7; 31:26), independent, loving (4:6-9; 31:26-28), female figures. They function as organizers, givers of gifts and instructions, parents, lovers, and teachers.

Given this vision of the roles women played in society, female images were useful devices to explain to men the purpose and the function of Wisdom and man's relationship to Wisdom and God. Learning and understanding by precept their own relationships with their wives, men could then, by comparison, understand their relationship with God and Wisdom.

The tables below expose two basic relationships and reflect on a third. The first relationship is the wife husband relationship in which the wife plays the subordinate role. She by her own behaviour fulfills the essential needs of the husband. The second relationship is the Wisdom God relationship. Wisdom is God's subordinate; she is, like the wife, playing a role to entice men to her side, not for her own gratification (see 8:30-31), but as God's agent. It is in God's plans to make Wisdom achievable and accessible to man. It is by God's plan that a third relationship evolves, that of man and Wisdom. Man in this role is the subordinate one, interacting with Wisdom who is mediating God's blessings upon man. But man has to meet the

demands made of him by Wisdom. As the tables show, the two subordinate female figures have closely parallel characteristics and functions.

## Tables of Correlations

### Wisdom/wife Parallels: 1. Characteristics

#### Wisdom's Characteristics

1. wise (1:7.)  
(see discussion of sons,  
praise, laughter)
2. loving (4:6-9)  
(see discussion of spouses)
3. strong (8:14)  
(see discussion of strength)
4. trusting (2:10, 3:5)  
(see discussion of trust)
5. giving (3:16, 8:18-21)  
(see discussion of praise,  
treasure, hands, philanthropy)
6. valuable (3:15, 8:11)  
(see discussion of jewels,  
treasure)
7. hard working (1:20-21, 8:3)  
(see discussion of gates,  
strength, hands)
8. powerful (8:35-36)  
(see discussion of authority,  
strength, and creation)
9. independent (8:21-33)  
(see discussion of royalty)
10. religious (8:30-31, 1:7)

#### Wife's Characteristics

1. wise (31:26)
2. loving (31:26,27,28)
3. strong (31:17,25,10)
4. trusting (31:11)
5. giving (31:11,12,20)
6. valuable (31:10)
7. hard working (31:13-19,24,27)
8. powerful (31:10-31)
9. independent (31:10-31)
10. religious (31:30)

(see discussion of "the  
fear of YHWH")

## Table of Correlations

### Wisdom/wife Parallels: 2. Functions

#### Wisdom's Functions

1. teacher (1:20-33, 1-21)  
(see discussion of sons,  
gates)
2. parent (8:32)  
(see discussion of sons)
3. provider (3:16, 8:8-21)  
(see discussion of hands,  
treasure, and praise)
4. organizer (8:6-21)  
(see discussion of  
authority, handmaidens  
skills, house)
5. hater of evil (8:13)  
(see discussion of light,  
praise)
6. lover (4:6-9)  
(see discussion of spouses)
7. maintainer of order (8:30-31)  
(see discussion of authority;  
"fear of YHWH", praise)
8. mediator (8:30-31)  
(see discussion of creation  
and the "fear of YHWH").

#### Wife's Functions

1. teacher (31:26)
2. parent (31:28)
3. provider (31:11-27)
4. organizer (31:14-16, 18, 24)
5. hater of evil (31:27, 30)
6. lover (31:28)
7. maintainer of order (31:13-24)
8. mediator (31:10-31)

In the further presentation of these data, the following abbreviations will

be used: characteristics 1-10 are expressed as C1 (wise) C2 (loving) etc. The functions are expressed as F1 (teacher), F2 (parent) etc.

### **The Relationships**

In order for the husband to function properly in society, the husband relied upon his wife for his physical and emotional well-being (C6). She did this by being a strong (C3), independent (C9), intelligent (C1) individual. For the man's physical comfort, as well as his children's, the wife organized the household (F4), and set up the home to be efficient (F6). Money, food and clothing were not lacking (F3), for the woman partook in enterprises that provided the basic necessities. She was earnest in her undertakings, for she was never idle (C7, C8). It was by her efforts (F7) that the man was able to participate in leadership activities, for a bad wife would have set the house in turmoil. Not only did she provide for his needs but also for the needs of those members of the community that were not as fortunate (C5). For the man's emotional well-being the wife provided the man with children (F1, F2) to continue the family line. She was kind, loving (F6, C2), and wise (F1), and the husband could trust (C4) and confide in her. The husband must have gained satisfaction from seeing his wife honoured and blessed by the community and his children. The greatest satisfaction must have come from the understanding that all that was given to him was done through the efforts of a wife who "feared YHWH". If the wife did not have the proper religious attitude (F5, C10) she would not have been very successful in her endeavours on behalf of her husband and children. All of the wife's successes and good qualities originated because of her "fear of YHWH" (F8) which gave her access to the wisdom she possessed. However,

the man had to possess his own wisdom which would provide him with the proper religious attitude and understanding. This was something that had to be done individually.

Wisdom is God's mediator. Her role is to communicate with man on God's behalf. To accomplish this task Wisdom becomes like the image of the good wife, similar in character and function but incorporating a religious aspect to her role.

Wisdom, like the wife, promises to provide the man with all his physical needs. The provisions are generous beyond measure, in riches, honour and long life (F3). The wife cannot because of her human nature, in contrast to the semi-divine nature of Wisdom, guarantee these types of provisions. Her provisions are adequate but more mundane. Wisdom presents to the man worldly order (F4, F7). Life is not chaotic but certain values and ideals (F5) are expected from those that conform to the standards demanded by Wisdom. To the men that are responsible for an orderly country or state, Wisdom gives knowledge and ability to rule (C1, C8). The wife, on the other hand, does not have this type of power. Wisdom is the earnest seeker of men (C7, C9). She preaches (F1) to them at the city gates or at her home so that the wise man might hear and reach out to all Wisdom has to offer (C5, C6). She is persistent (C3, C9) in her discussions of what is good and evil, and in her hopes that some men will trust (C4) her implicitly.

On an emotional level the man acquires a sense of righteousness and a feeling of security in knowing that his days ahead are filled with happiness and satisfaction. In fact he learns to trust Wisdom's kind and loving ways (C2, F6). Another sense of security would be aroused by knowing that one has a relationship with God. But when it comes to having the fear of

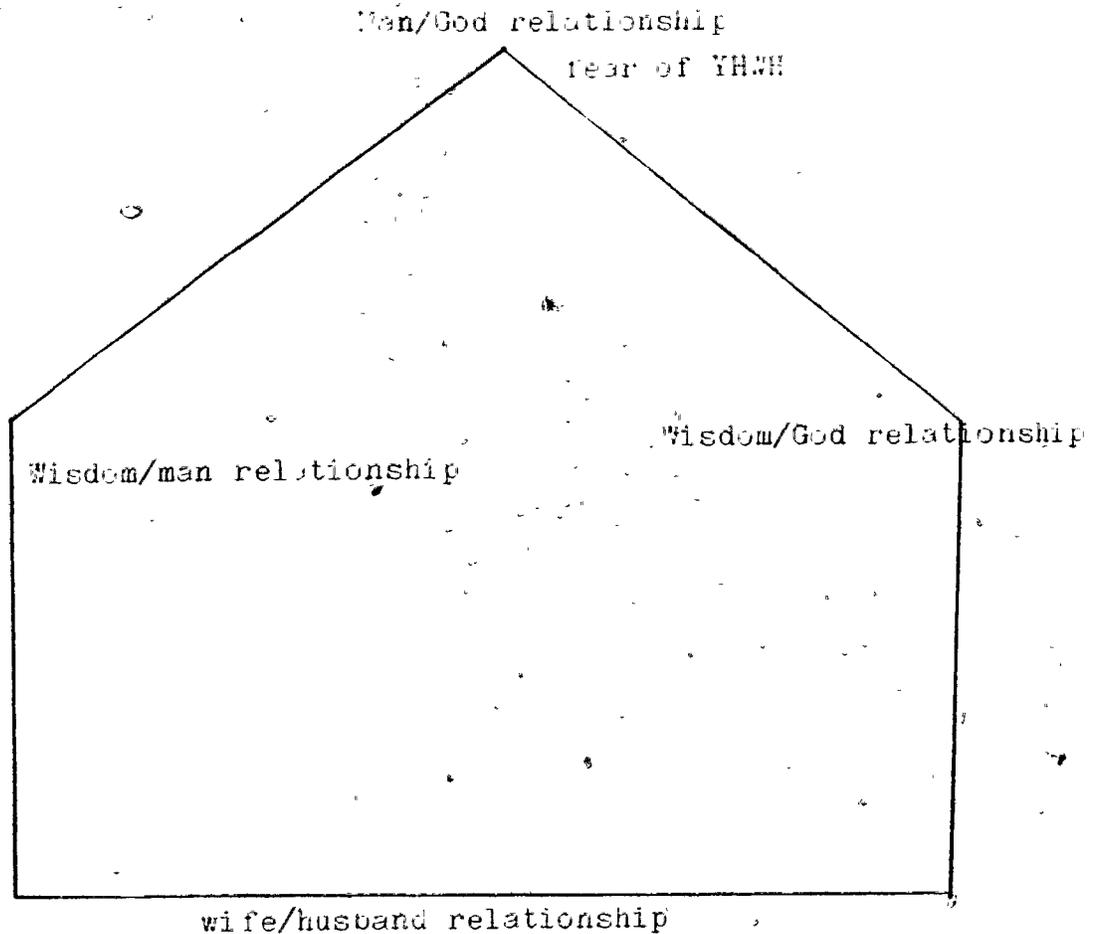
YHWH" the man must seek out Wisdom, for she is the basis of that fear (C10, F8). Here the affinity between the wife and Wisdom ends. The wife acquired Wisdom, Wisdom is an intrinsic part of the "fear of YHWH." It is the decision of the man to emulate his wife in seeking out Wisdom, and to achieve success.

The tables show that wisdom has all the characteristics and functions that a husband finds endearing in his wife. Like the wife, she fulfills his need for a relationship with God.

By making this Wisdom wife comparison the editors of Proverbs intended to bring man's relationship with God to the level of concreteness instead of abstractness. Wisdom writers made use of everyday experiences as didactic tools. The following three proverbs might illustrate this concept. The proverbs, "Like a dog returning to its vomit is a stupid man who repeats his folly" (Prov. 26:11), "As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed" (Prov. 27:14), "Like a bird who strays from his nest is a man who strays from his home" (Prov. 27:8), make use of daily occurrences to establish an understanding, a reasoning by analogy. Man's everyday experience with his wife should have been well understood by him. The representations of life in the acrostic poem of Proverbs 31:10-31 were by any measure idealistic, since they reflected the values of the upper class but this experience remained meaningful. It reflected the basic husband wife relationship which is not confined to any social boundaries but is experienced by all.

The husband, by examining his relationship with his wife, his interactions with her could than better conceive his relationship with Wisdom. He could reason by analogy. In other words, the forms of affection, action, communication and expression that the husband had with his wife could be transposed

to his relationship with Wisdom. The husband had a means of understanding his relationship to Wisdom and through Wisdom to God, since these relationships were similar to his own relationship with his wife. As Wisdom mediated God's blessings upon man, the wife of the husband acted as a mediator of God's blessings upon the husband and herself. In understanding his own marriage relationship man then could conceive how Wisdom and God, and Wisdom and man interacted with each other. The most significant factor now is that man has a clearer view of his own relationship with God. It would be far fetched to view man's role as wifely in regard to God. That is why the concept of subordination is an important one. Man is subordinate to God. As the previous discussion about subordination shows (see above, pp. 69-70), its positive aspect needs to be considered. God, rather than man, is the greater of the two, for He founded the universe. However, their relationship shows a reciprocal nature. God's gift to man is "the fear of YHWH." What does this imply? It means that the man who "fears YHWH" has access to all that wisdom has promised man (see discussions of treasures, hands). What is man's gift to God but the "fear of YHWH?" Man's fear of God is what Rudolph Otto<sup>10</sup> would consider basic to all religion. This experience would be considered "as terrifying ranging from sheer demonic dread through awe to the sublime majesty; and fascinating, with irresistible attraction, demanding unconditional allegiance."<sup>11</sup> But, as previously noted (see above, p. 55), this type of fear was equated with love and trust. Therefore man's relationship was based upon his obtaining the "fear of YHWH." He saw how his wife acquired it, how Wisdom embodied it, how God gave it, and how much he needed to seek it out.



Relationship Pentagon

If the four relationships were to be diagrammed to represent a picture of the interplay among all the principal actors, it would be best represented by an irregular pentagon. The base would represent the wife/husband relationship. This is the concrete relationship upon which the other relationships are built and understood. Emerging from the base line are two lines at either end. One line represents the Wisdom/God relationship, the other repre-

sents the man-Wisdom relationship. The two important aspects of both of these relationships are firstly, man understands how each of these relationships function because they resemble his own (idealized) relationship with his wife. Secondly, both of these relationships function on a specific premise. The Wisdom-God relationship tells of a wifely association not between God and Wisdom, but rather between Wisdom and man. It is God's intent, in his relationship with Wisdom to use her as wife for his servant, man. Wisdom, man's mediator, has, probably by the editors' intentions, cloaked herself in the guise of a wife. The man-Wisdom relationship measures itself against the wife/husband relationship and is significantly parallel. The basic premise upon which these two relationships revolve is "the fear of YHWH". Both relationships, that of man/Wisdom or Wisdom/God, either offer the "fear of the LORD" to man or wish to bestow it upon man through an intermediary. Therefore, the remaining two lines that are drawn from the side lines to form an apex, and make the pentagon complete signify the man-God relationship. Since the previous two relationships were based on the "fear of YHWH" premise, any lines drawn from them must meet at the apex. This exposes the culmination of all wifely activities, when man finally realizes that he can have or has "the fear of YHWH" and a loving relationship with God.

In conclusion, the use of female imagery, the comparison of the Wisdom-wife figures, is crucial in uncovering two dominant ideas. It was the intent of the editors to captivate their readers with a religious axiom. They emphasized the importance of a relationship between society and God. This was done convincingly by the use of female images. Why were these relationships important? The editors brought a specific relationship, that of man and his God, down to a level of comprehensibility. Man's relationship with

God was defined in every day terms. Man could comprehend and accept God in the same manner in which he understood and accepted his relationship with his wife and Wisdom.

All literary uses of personification of divine wisdom or the hypostasis of her<sup>12</sup> (see above, p.10), the form of inclusio (see above, p. 4), the short but explosively informative acrostic poem, were placed purposely in Proverbs to bring to the forefront man's everyday experiences with Wisdom. As it was customary for the wisemen of that time to teach by analogy (see above p. 78), the wife Wisdom parallels made man's everyday experience more meaningful to him. Man could transfer the attitudes, emotions and feelings he had for his wife to Wisdom. When this was accomplished man then could broaden his base of experiences to incorporate his relationship with God. These literary forms were powerful didactic tools.

More importantly, man's understandings of his feelings and actions towards his wife instigated similar actions and feelings towards Wisdom. Now, man could by this knowledge easily interact with God. Therefore, when man comprehended these correlations his knowledge of God became, not some sort of fantasy removed from real life, but a life filled with substance and fulfillment.

The evident correlations between the Wisdom wife figures led to man's discovery of what his relationship should be with God. Although he was subordinate within the relationship, it was the most significant relationship man could have, since it shaped his very existence.

## Notes

### Notes to the Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Thomas McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31," *Revue Biblique*, January 1985, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Decatur, GA.: The Almond Press, 1985), p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956), p.73.

<sup>8</sup> A.R. Johnson, "Māšāl," *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1955), p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1976), p. 59.

- <sup>14</sup> Herbert May and Bruce Metzger, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (RSV)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 769.
- <sup>15</sup> Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* p. 184.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 185.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

### Notes to Chapter One

- <sup>1</sup> A. Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development* pp.297-298.
- <sup>2</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 558.
- <sup>3</sup> Crawford Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899); Dermot Cox, *Proverbs* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glacier Inc., 1982); Patrick W. Skehan "A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs" *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971).
- <sup>4</sup> Toy, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, p. xxx.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxviii.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxix.
- <sup>7</sup> Cox, *Proverbs* p. 30.
- <sup>8</sup> Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* p. 15.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Dianne Bergant, *What Are They Saying About Wisdom Literature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 37.
- <sup>11</sup> Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 143.
- <sup>12</sup> C. B. Caird, "The Language and Imagery of the Bible in *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism*, eds., Alex Preminger and Edward Greenstein (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Henry Woolf ed. et al., *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Toronto: Thomas Allen and Son Ltd., 1977) p. 857.

<sup>16</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom* (Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1947), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 222.

<sup>18</sup> Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development* (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> Burton L. Mack, "Wisdom Myth and Myth-ology" *Interpretation*, January 1970, p. 56.

### Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Cox, *Proverbs* p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and the Laws in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, *Proverbs* p. 253.

### Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> Francis Brown et al., eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 819.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Anderson, *Riches of the Earth* (New York: The Rutledge Press, 1981), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> "Precious Stones and Jewellery," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971 ed.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> *Proverbs A New Approach* p. 668.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Boström, *Proverbia: die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr. 1-9*, as cited in McKane, *ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

#### Notes on Literal and Thematic Parallels

<sup>14</sup> Thomas P. McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31." *Revue Biblique*, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Cox, *Proverbs* p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 362.

<sup>18</sup> Gemser, "The Instructions of Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature" *VTS* vii (1960), pp. 102-28, as cited in McKane, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> Brown et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 965. It also indicates that this type of laughter is done with lack of fear.

<sup>22</sup> "Gates" *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 1982 ed., p. 408.

<sup>23</sup> Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 129-30.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129-30.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 131.

- <sup>37</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 273.
- <sup>38</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964), p. 39-42.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 128.
- <sup>41</sup> McKane *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 345.
- <sup>42</sup> Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, p. 70
- <sup>43</sup> Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel Vol.1: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 152.
- <sup>44</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 152.
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, p. 221.
- <sup>47</sup> N.J. Tromp. *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), p. 129.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 358.
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 670.

#### Notes on Thematic Parallels

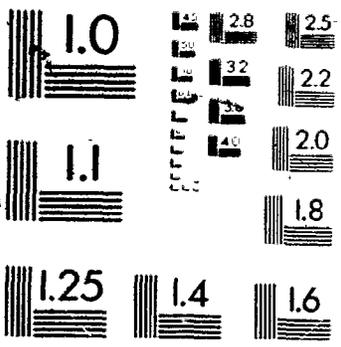
- <sup>43</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, *Proverbs* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961), p. 59-60.
- <sup>44</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 295; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, p. 30.
- <sup>45</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 667.
- <sup>46</sup> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 192.
- <sup>47</sup> McCreech, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31," p. 32.
- <sup>48</sup> McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, p. 670.

- <sup>49</sup> Cox, *Proverbs*, p. 127.
- <sup>50</sup> Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, as cited in McKane, p. 305
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 306.
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* p.94.
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.
- <sup>56</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 461.
- <sup>57</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, p. 147.
- <sup>58</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 285.
- <sup>59</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, p. 148.
- <sup>60</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 314.
- <sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 315, 317.
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 331.
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 336-39.
- <sup>64</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, p. 154.
- <sup>65</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 366.
- <sup>66</sup> McCreech, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31," in *Review Biblique*, p. 41.
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 350.
- <sup>69</sup> McCreech, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31."p.38.
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>72</sup> W. Osterley, *Book of Proverbs* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1929), p. xxvii.
- <sup>73</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 282.
- <sup>74</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 65.

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7 McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 669.

7 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*

7 McCreech, "Wisdom as Wife: 31:10-31," p.28.

7 *ibid.*, p. 29.

7 *ibid.*

81 Kenneth Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), p. 14.

81 Cox, *Proverbs*, p. 69.

81 *ibid.*, p. 68.

81 *ibid.*, p. 69.

#### Notes on Differences

87 McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 318

87 *ibid.*, p. 319.

87 Plaut, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, p. 78

88 Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* p.36.

88 *ibid.*, p. 30.

88 *ibid.*, p. 31.

88 *ibid.*, p. 32.

89 Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 61.

89 *ibid.*, p. 63.

90 McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 352.

90 William Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, p. 134.

90 *ibid.*

90 Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs*, p. 61.

90 McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 352.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> M. Dahood, "Proverbs 8:22-31" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, p. 513.

<sup>103</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 354.

<sup>104</sup> Cox, *Proverbs*, p. 154.

<sup>105</sup> William Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom be Found" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, p. 141.

<sup>106</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> McKane, *Proverbs A New Approach*, p. 356.

<sup>109</sup> DeBoer, "The Counsellor" *VTSjii* (1955), pp. 42-71, as cited in McKane, *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*, p. 66.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Yee, "An Analysis of Proverbs 8:22-31 According to Style and Structure" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, p. 65.

<sup>117</sup> Cox, *Proverbs*, p. 155.

### Notes on Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> The issue of whether she is a craftsman of child (see discussion of creation) is irrelevant here. One way or another she is involved in the creation.

<sup>2</sup> Mary J. Evans, *Woman in the Bible* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press Ltd., 1983), p. 31.

2  
90  
ibid., p. 21.

4  
ibid., p. 32.

5  
ibid., p. 26.

6  
ibid.

7  
ibid., p. 30.

8  
ibid., p. 27.

9  
ibid., p. 28.

10 Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923)

11 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 3.

12 Used to better develop the relationship motif between God and Wisdom, whereby it is man who is God's concern, but placed under the authority of wisdom.

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