

# **Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Lecture 6, Personified Wisdom, Part 1**

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This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number six, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, part one. Welcome to lecture six on the biblical book of Proverbs.

In this lecture and in the following lecture, lecture seven, I will be looking in each of them at two aspects of the biblical book of Proverbs, all to do with the personification of wisdom in chapters one to nine. So, Lady Wisdom acts as if, well, the cognitive intellectual virtue of wisdom behaving on the pages of this book as if it was a woman, a human being, a female human being. But in order to explore this more fully, I will also, first of all, start with a deeper exploration of modern metaphor theory that will then help us to understand the metaphor of personification with regard to wisdom.

And we will do this in two parts, Metaphor Theory one and personified wisdom one in lecture six, and then metaphor theory two and personified wisdom two in lecture seven. There is a revolution going on, a revolution in our understanding of what it is to be a human being. At stake is nothing less than the nature of the human mind.

So, the words of George Lakoff, a key player in metaphor studies. Summarizing Western thought about thought until the last quarter of the 20th century, Lakoff continues, and I quote, For centuries, we in the West have thought of ourselves as rational animals whose mental capacities transcend our bodily nature. In this traditional view, our minds are abstract, logical, unemotionally rational, consciously accessible, and above all, able to directly fit and represent the world.

Language has a special place in this view of what a human is. It is a privileged, logical symbol system internal to our minds that transparently expresses abstract concepts that are defined in terms of the external world itself. End quote.

Yet, in recent decades, analytical cognitive scientists and computer scientists have compiled empirical evidence which demonstrates that mind and body are inextricably linked. I quote from Lakoff again. Thought is carried out in the brain by the same neural structures that govern vision, action, and emotion.

Language is made meaningful via the sensory-motor and emotional system which define goals and imagine, recognize, and carry out actions. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the evidence is in, the ball game is over, and the mind is embodied. End quote.

The following paragraph summarizes the result of this paradigm shift in our understanding of understanding. The embodiment revolution has shown that our essential humanness, our ability to think and use language, is wholly a product of our physical bodies and brains. The way our mind works, from the nature of our thoughts to the way we understand meaning and language, is inextricably tied to our bodies.

How we perceive, feel, and act in the world. We are not cold-blooded thinking machines. Our physiology provides the concepts for our philosophy.

In my view, these epistemological developments explain that figurative language, especially metaphors, similes, metonymies, and synecdoches, are the essential building blocks for human thought and communication. Figurative language provides us with the means to verbalize mentally how our bodies, through our brains, process what our senses perceive in the world around and within us. The outcome of this embodiment revolution for practical human living is, in Lakoff's terms, relevant to all areas and aspects of life.

I quote again, Every thought we have or can have, every goal we set, every decision or judgment we make, and every idea we communicate, make use of the same embodied system we use to perceive, act, and feel. None of it is abstract in any way. Not moral systems.

Not political ideologies. Not mathematics or scientific theories. And not language.

And not theology, I want to add. Lakoff says all this in his foreword to a book by one of his own students, Benjamin Bergen, entitled *Louder Than Words, The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, from 2012. In that volume, Bergen explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Lakoff's work, and the somewhat triumphant tone of Lakoff's foreword suggests at least some awareness of his own contribution to the epistemological upheaval.

Let me give you a short summary of the history of our thinking about metaphor in the last 35 years or so. The first edition of the *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor*, entitled *Metaphor and Thought*, and edited by Andrew Ortony, had appeared in 1979, one year too early for the breakthrough monograph on metaphor theory by Lakoff and his colleague Johnson. Even in the second edition of the *Cambridge Handbook*, 14 years later in 1993, there was only passing reference to Lakoff and Johnson's breakthrough monograph, *Metaphors We Live By*.

Although that volume at least actually had a contribution by Lakoff, who was now beginning to become recognized as a player in the field. It was not until 2008, when the third edition of the *Cambridge Handbook*, edited now by Raymond Gibbs, appeared, that the full impact of Lakoff and Johnson's work could be felt on almost

every page, and from the hand of every contributor to the volume. Lakoff and Johnson's work was now recognized for what it was.

Their volume, *Metaphors We Live By* since then joined by a follow-up monograph entitled *More Than Cool Reason* from 1989, which Lakoff co-authored with Max Turner, now defined the state of the art of metaphor studies. Having read most of the important contributions to metaphor theory from Aristotle until 1980, I agree with the following summary from Mike Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* from 1999. It is a salutary reminder that while most humans are competent users of the native language and regularly and competently employ metaphors in daily life, our philosophers and our interpreters and scholars of literature, including the Bible, have until recently understood very little about metaphor.

A quote from Abrams. After 25 centuries of attention to metaphor by rhetoricians, grammarians, and literary critics, in which during the last half century they have been joined by many philosophers, there is no general agreement about the way we identify metaphors, how we are able to understand them, and what, if anything, they serve to tell us. End quote.

This evaluation of the history of intellectual engagement with the phenomenon of metaphor is appropriate and instructive. Abrams's verdict is all the more sobering in view of the fact that the question of how we identify, understand, and apply metaphors was the actual foci of inquiry in metaphor studies of the first three-quarters of the 20th century. Here is Lakoff and Johnson's summary of the main tenets of metaphor studies before 1980.

First, metaphor is a matter of words, not thought. Metaphor occurs when a word is applied not to what it normally designates, but to something else. Second, metaphorical language is not part of ordinary conventional language.

Instead, it is novel and typically arises in poetry, rhetorical attempts at persuasion, and scientific discovery. Third, metaphorical language is deviant. In metaphors, words are not used in their proper senses.

Fourth, conventional metaphorical expressions in ordinary everyday language are so-called dead metaphors. That is, expressions that once were metaphorical but have now become frozen into literal expressions. Fifth, metaphors express similarities.

That is, there are pre-existing similarities between what words normally designate and what they designate when they are used metaphorically. Now remember, these five points are really part of the older ideas of metaphor, not what we have come to discover in the last 35 years since Lakoff and Johnson's work. Among many other important insights that I do not have time to address here in this lecture, I want to

highlight the following three errors in traditional metaphor theory and metaphor interpretations.

First, the exclusive focus on so-called novel or bold metaphors was misguided. Secondly, and conversely, so-called dead metaphors are very much alive and do in fact form the backbone of human thought and communication. So, what has been dismissed in older theories, in the new understanding of metaphor theory, is probably the most important thing about metaphors.

Thirdly, the customary treatment of metaphors as somehow being composed of tenor and vehicle, according to Richards, primary subject and secondary or subsidiary subject, black, occasional, and image, Paul Avis, prioritizes the reconstructed meaning of a metaphor over the actual metaphorical expression. And I believe this is a mistake. I now turn to Lakoff and Johnson's work and its impact specifically.

What then is the contribution of Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner's work to modern metaphor theory? What is so special about their work? Since the publication of their seminal book, *Metaphors We Live By*, in 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have exercised a profound influence on the development of metaphor theory. In their book, they make the following problematic affirmation, which is not dissimilar to many other descriptions of metaphor. And I quote, it's just one line.

The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing... Sorry, I start again. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. That's it.

This may seem unassuming and non-controversial at first, but the way they develop this has massive consequences for metaphor theory. There are two realms of meaning. One of these is closer to our experience, while the other is what we are exploring with the help of a metaphoric expression.

And so, this statement inaugurated an increasing scholarly focus on the cognitive aspects of metaphor. Another feature in this definition that I want to highlight is the emphasis on understanding and experiencing. This definition emphasizes that metaphors are more than ornamental, rather they contribute to understanding.

And they do so by helping us not only reflect on what is being said but experience it. There is a multi-sensory cognitive aspect to metaphor. Another important recent insight concerns the relationship between conventional metaphors and so-called novel metaphors.

Drawing on the results of more than cool reason, Lakoff and Turner conclude that most, if not all, metaphors are conceptual in that they belong to a complex and highly structured system of conventional metaphors. And novel metaphors arise

naturally from this system. I quote, The major point to take away from this discussion is that metaphor resides, for the most part, in this huge, highly structured, fixed system.

A system is anything but dead. Because it is conventional, it is used constantly and automatically with neither effort nor awareness. Novel metaphor uses this system and builds on it, but only rarely occurs independently of it.

It is most interesting that this system of metaphor seems to give rise to abstract reasoning, which appears to be based on spatial reasoning. End quote. The third edition of *Metaphor and Thought* was published in 2008, now entitled *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, and it signaled an immense paradigm shift in metaphor studies.

We will explore this in lesson number seven because I think I have shared enough theoretical detail about metaphor theory with you now. And what I want to do in the rest of this lecture, lecture six, is to look at the personification of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. So now in the second part of lecture six, we are going to look at the personification of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

And to a degree, we will also look at, at least touch on the question of what kind of role the personification of wisdom may or may not have played for the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and also then even more than Messiah, as the Son of God in the New Testament. We won't discuss that fully, because this is a lecture series on the Book of Proverbs, not on the New Testament. But at least we need to draw out some of the fundamental underlying hermeneutical, philosophical and theological questions that are related to this.

So how does the personification of wisdom, this metaphor of wisdom as a human being, influence the reading of the Book of Proverbs? In the next few minutes, I will summarize Bruce Waltke's understanding of personified wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. His analyses of the individual texts are to a degree integrated later on with my treatment of the particular texts in Proverbs as they mention personified wisdom. The fundamental assumption in Bruce Waltke's treatment in his fine commentary on the Book of Proverbs is that, quote, personified wisdom in the prologue, that is chapters 1.8 to 8.36, is Solomon's Proverbs, namely Proverbs 10 to 29, to which the inspired sayings of Agur and Lemuel have been appended, end quote.

In detail, Waltke differentiated between her persona or guises and the reality behind them. Outside of the key passages in Proverbs 1.20 to 33 and Proverbs 8.1 to 36, woman wisdom is personified as a guide in 6.22, a beloved sister or bride in 7.4, and a hostess in 9.1 to 6. Waltke interpreted 1.20 to 33 in the light of 8.1 to 36 because only in those two passages wisdom pronounces extended speeches at the city gate

employing similar language, I quote from Waltke. If that possible equation is accepted, she is represented as begotten by God in primordial time and so distinct from him and not eternal, end quote.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a slight tension in Waltke's argument. He rejected other identifications of wisdom as various types of women because, quote, none of these does justice to her prophetic teaching and divine roles, end quote. Waltke enumerated most of the many and varied identifications of personified wisdom that have been made in recent scholarship and concluded that, quote, the sage represents wisdom as a unique woman who wears the mantle of a prophet, carries the scrolls of wise men, and wears a goddess-like diadem, end quote.

And he cited approvingly Michael Fox's comment who in turn had followed the work by Claudia Camp. I quote again, Lady Wisdom can gather a variety of phenomena from the mundane and literary domains without herself representing any single known reality, end quote. The three key characteristics of wisdom in Waltke's understanding are first prophetic, second sapiential, and third divine.

The following extended quote summarizes Waltke's view of the complex presentation of personified wisdom's persona in Proverbs 1 to 9. I quote, The prophetic, sapient, and divine components of her characterization so interpenetrate one another that she emerges as a unique personality whose only peer is Jesus Christ. Her identification as an incarnate heavenly being who in humiliation accepts the rejection of the masses to offer them eternal life functions within the canon as a foreshadowing of him who is greater than Solomon. She preaches and pleads with a prophet's passion, thinks and circulates with intellectuals, and wields the authority of God.

She is no ordinary prophetess like Miriam or sage-like Ethan the Eschatite. Woman Wisdom is a one-of-a-kind heavenly mediatrix who mediates God's wisdom to humanity. Though more closely related to God than to human beings, she rubs shoulders with the masses in the rough and tumble of the city gate in an amazing display of grace that invites unresponsive youths to repent at her rebuke before eternal death overtakes them.

End quote. Now I'm going to criticize much of what Bruce Waltke is doing here but I want to say while I have quite different emphases in a number of interpretations, I do want to say that I'm kind of complaining about Waltke's work at a high level of satisfaction. There's a lot of truth, and a lot of wisdom in his writing.

I think Waltke's commentary alongside Michael Fox's commentary are the best commentaries we have and have had for a hundred years on the Book of Proverbs. So, I'm not saying that everything Waltke is saying is wrong but what I'm trying to do is to use metaphor theory as we've begun to do earlier in the lecture to enhance an

even deeper understanding of the wisdom personification. Closer inspection then reveals, I believe, three cracks in Waltke's painting of personified wisdom as a one-of-a-kind heavenly mediatrix.

On the one hand, he partially approved of Norman Whybray's idea that wisdom is a hypostasization of God's attribute. For indeed, wisdom is begotten of his very being, he says. While wisdom is indeed begotten by God, according to Aids 22, as we will explore later on, I cannot find any indication in the Book of Proverbs that her origin was from God's very being, as Waltke would have it.

Another crack is visible in Waltke's contention that a quote, holistic exegesis of the prologue, that is, Proverbs 1.8-8.36, shows that wisdom in all her various guises, especially as a heavenly mediatrix, personified Solomon's inspired wisdom, end quote. Waltke's basic hypothesis that woman wisdom personifies the teaching contained in the Book of Proverbs is convincing. However, the idea that personified wisdom is a heavenly mediatrix seems to be in direct tension with the fact, correctly emphasized by Waltke, that what she mediates consists of the earthly teachings contained in the Book of Proverbs.

In Waltke's construal of her identity, she is both the mediatrix and the mediated materials all at once. The third crack in Waltke's representation of personified wisdom appears as a part of his discussion of the theology of the Book of Proverbs, which includes a significant discussion of Christology. His presentation falls into two parts.

The relationship of woman wisdom to Jesus Christ and the superiority of Jesus Christ to woman wisdom. He wants to have it both ways. In a brief survey of how Christians, and theologians, understood the relationship between wisdom and Jesus Christ, Waltke highlighted that since Justin Martyr, AD 125, most Christians identified Sophia, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for wisdom, with Jesus Christ.

A notable exception mentioned without documentation was apparently Irenaeus, who equated wisdom with the Holy Spirit. A very interesting thought. The basis for this equation of wisdom and Christ was the overlap between the two figures in two crucial characteristics.

Both were described in biblical texts as pre-existence and as agents in creation. The texts mentioned as relevant by Waltke are Proverbs 3, 19-20, chapter 8, verses 22-31, John 1, verse 3, 1 Corinthians 8, verse 6, Colossians 1, verses 15-16, Hebrews 1, verse 3. Waltke contended, however, that a grammatical-historical exegesis of Proverbs 8 does not support patristic exegesis. Rather, he expanded on his earlier thesis of the equation between personified wisdom and the content of the book of Proverbs.

I quote from Waltke, Solomon identified woman wisdom with his teachings, not with a hypostasis, that is, a concrete heavenly being who represents or stands for God and is independent from him. Moreover, Waltke continued, the ancient versions of Proverbs 8, 22-31 and Jewish wisdom literature provide no consistent, if any, foundation for the high Christology of the New Testament. He briefly reviewed the Septuagint, Menzirah, Philo, Wisdom of Solomon, and the Jerusalem Targum.

His remark regarding the material in Wisdom of Solomon is worth repeating. This anonymous monotheistic, sorry, this anonymous monotheist represents wisdom as a demiurgic power, to use Origen's term, that mediates between the creator and the creation, end quote. Waltke did not deny the predictability of the New Testament's high Christology, but he denied that this high Christology can be validated by the characterization of personified wisdom in Proverbs 8. I quote again, Jewish writings at the turn of the Christian era may have provided the apostles with a vehicle for expressing the doctrine of the Trinity, with Jesus Christ represented as the agent through whom all things were created, but they do not cite or build their high Christology in Proverbs 8.22-31, end quote.

It is worth unpacking this paragraph, both for what it affirms and for what it denies. First, Waltke affirms that Jewish writings that elaborated on personified wisdom in Proverbs 8.22-31 influenced how the writers of the New Testament portrayed Jesus of Nazareth. Second, Waltke denies that the writers of the New Testament cited Proverbs 8.22-31. Third, Waltke denies that the writers of the New Testament were influenced by Proverbs 8.22-31 when they developed their high Christology of Jesus of Nazareth.

I agree with what Waltke affirms, in statement one. Waltke's first denial is equally non-controversial. The writers of the New Testament indeed did not quote Proverbs 8.22-31. However, I disagree with Waltke's contention that Proverbs 8.22-31 did not influence the New Testament writers' views of Jesus of Nazareth.

We now turn to part two of lecture six, which is the personification of wisdom. And we are going to have a first view of some of the texts in the book of Proverbs about personified wisdom. Wisdom appears as a fully personified female figure in chapter one, verses 20-33, in chapter eight, verses 1-36, and in chapter nine, verses 1-6 and 11-12.

And then it also, or wisdom also, appears as a less developed personification, or perhaps we might call it an animation, in chapter two, verses 1-3, in chapter three, verses 13-20, in chapter five, verses 5-9, verses 11 and 13, and in chapter seven, verses 4-5. I begin now with a kind of metaphorically sensitive interpretation of the personification in chapter one, verses 20-33. Here, wisdom is personified throughout as a woman with attitude.

She lectures the simple ones regarding their failure to respond to her invitation to learn. An invitation that apparently occurred at an earlier stage and is now presumed. Verses 20-21 introduce her appeal.

She cries out, raises her voice, and speaks. Verses 22-33 comprise her actual reproof. Here, wisdom does not only speak like a scorned woman, but she refers to herself in terms of a female human being.

She has a spirit, verse 23, translated thoughts in the NRSV. She has been scorned, although she stretched out her hand, verse 24. She speaks of her intention to laugh, verse 26, and she refuses to answer those who formerly scorned her when they have to suffer the consequences of their neglect of her, verse 28.

The personification remains on the literary level, as verses 29-30 demonstrate. Wisdom parallels her counsel and reproof with knowledge and fear of the Lord. The personification in this passage remains on the literary level.

It personifies the sage's wisdom as a woman. The personification is not simply an embellishment, however. Rather, it has a powerful emotional impact inasmuch as it skillfully portrays how important and urgent the acquisition of wisdom is.

Yet nothing suggests that wisdom is other than simply human, almost too human. Her exasperation, however, does not indicate weakness of character but serves to highlight the danger of refusing wisdom as well as her vulnerability, born out of a deep desire for humans to learn. Wisdom here is not divine, although she is associated with the Lord via the expression, and fear of the Lord, and through her manner of speech, which resembles that of many Old Testament prophets.

What, then, is the impact of this personification? Michael Fox, in his commentary, has a helpful summary. I quote Lady Wisdom's first discourse deals with people's attitudes rather than deeds. The focus here is the inner person.

In all of her speeches, rather than explaining what deeds are good or bad, wisdom demands a basic stance to wisdom herself, or wisdom itself. A loving openness to wisdom's message whether this is sweet or harsh, alongside a dread of the consequences of rejecting it. This attitude is requisite to learning.

It motivates efforts and enables the absorption of the lessons. Without it, even superficial learning is unlikely and knowledge cannot be translated into action. Other interludes will emphasize the right stance.

This one seeks to scare us away from the wrong one. The last sentence in this quotation highlights the rhetorical intention behind personified wisdom's scornful words. The wisdom of the Book of Proverbs is important for life.

And the poet who wrote this beautiful and urgent appeal makes wisdom quite literally come alive in order to motivate the readers to learn with passion and dedicate themselves to the intellectual and religious enterprise. We now move on to Proverbs 2, verses 1 to 3. The whole chapter, chapter 2, contains an extended if clause. In a series of synonyms, the speaker identifies his teaching with wisdom in verses 1 to 2. My son, if you accept my words and my commandments, make your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding.

The prothesis, the consequence of the if condition, continues in verse 3, which then contains the personification. If you indeed cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, and then extends to verse 4, where two similes reify the brief animation of wisdom and its synonyms, namely insight and understanding, by comparing her or it to silver and hidden treasures. There is an interesting interaction between the personifications and the reifications in verses 2 to 4. I should probably just stop here for a moment and explain a reification is a technical term for the opposite of a personification.

A personification makes a thing or an abstract reality into a living being, a human being. A reification turns a living being, often a human being, into a thing. It objectifies.

So, as I said, there is an interesting interaction between the personifications and the reifications in verses 2 to 4. The phrase is, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding, if you indeed cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, that's the personification in verses 2 to 3, evoke a relationship with a treasured and important person, a relationship that flourishes through two-way communication and active pursuit of the liaison. The phrase is, if you seek for it like silver and search for it like hidden treasures, that is the reifications in verses 4, imply that a great deal of effort and sacrifice must be expended to get the desired result, namely learning. So, verses 1 to 2 equate the Father's teaching with a personification of wisdom that proceeds from God himself.

See verse 6. This teaching view extends beyond the actual words in Proverbs 2. The words in view are the admonitions and sayings in the collections that follow, for there are no commands in this chapter. The apodosis, the consequence of the condition being met, begins in verse 5, which mentions the result of the action proposed in the opening verses. Those who seek wisdom will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

The combination of both being the culmination of wisdom. This promise may be trusted, for ultimately it is the Lord who dispenses wisdom, knowledge and understanding in verse 6. For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

The extended protasis, then, is a rhetorical device that, according to Fox, suggests something of the magnitude of the task before the seeker for wisdom. Wisdom is so exalted and thus remote that access to her depends on her self-revelation in response to a direct appeal, verse 3, a revelation that is possible only through God, verses 6 to 7. In the final analysis, then, the appeal to personified wisdom is an appeal to God himself. The impact of the personification is to combine notions of the desirability of wisdom with an emphasis on the effort that is always demanded of those who seek wisdom and an encouragement that the effort will be rewarded through the gracious intervention of God himself whose granting of wisdom is equated with wisdom's self-revelation.

The literary device of personification ingeniously serves to challenge, promise and encourage the seeker of wisdom by pointing them to God as the ultimate dispenser of wisdom. Knowledge of God, according to Waltke, quote, refers at least in part to entering into a personal relationship with the Creator, end quote. Wisdom is rational and requires effort.

In, using Carol Newsom's words, allegiance precedes understanding. We now turn to Proverbs 3, verses 13 to 20. This passage is an extended macharism, a genre used to encourage a certain virtue by exclaiming the good fortune of its possessor, as Michael Fox puts it.

Happy is so and so because here it is the virtue of wisdom that is recommended. The possessor of wisdom is pronounced happy because through wisdom he will gain honour and riches, verse 16. The comparison, verses 14 to 15, is not between the value of wisdom versus the value of the various precious metals mentioned there, but between what each can produce.

Thus, wisdom is depicted as a woman with hands and feet. She grants her owner long life with her right hand and wealth and honour with her left hand, verse 16. The way she walks, that is, behaves towards those who employ wisdom brings them peace, verse 17.

The statement that personified wisdom is better than valuable commodities emphasizes again the relational aspect of wisdom's value. This is eloquently expressed in Bruce Waltke's comment on chapter 3, verses 14 to 15. What wisdom can offer is better than silver because money can put food on the table but not fellowship around it.

A house but not a home and can give a woman jewelry but not the love she really wants end quote. The personification is short-lived, however. In verse 18, wisdom is reified into a tree of life, and in the climactic verses 19 to 20, wisdom is not an entity

separate from God, rather, the wisdom through which the Lord founded the earth is one of His virtues.

It is by His knowledge in parallel with wisdom and understanding that the world was created. Very similar, by the way, to the equally climactic statement in Psalm 104, verse 24. Thus, the ultimate reason why the wise may count themselves happy is because with wisdom they have in hand the very virtue that God used in creation.

What better guarantee for success? Again, the personification remains on the literary level. The image of wisdom walking gracefully towards those who have sought and found her, holding out riches, honour, and long life to reward them has a strong emotional appeal. Yet, wisdom is neither an independent entity in her own right nor a human virtue independent from God.

Wisdom is here one of God's main character traits and in seeking wisdom, humans seek God's wisdom. Bruce Waltke rightly noted that verses 19 to 20 presuppose that personified wisdom precedes creation, a point to which we will return when we will look at Proverbs 8 in Lesson 7. Here, then, we have a brief literary personification of wisdom where she is a preexistent divine attribute. This point is not emphasized in Proverbs 3, but we will return to this point later when we will look at the significance of wisdom's preexistence in Proverbs 8. I now turn to Proverbs 4, verses 5 to 9, and verses 11 and 13.

Similar to Proverbs 2, 1 to 3, wisdom is identified with the Father's teaching in verse 5 since wisdom and insight are parallel to the words of the Father. In verses 6 to 9, wisdom is depicted as a woman who places a garland and a crown on the one who acquires, verses 5 and 7, cherishes, verses 6 and 8, embraces, verse 8, and keeps her, verse 6. Verses 11 and 13 are also part of the personification since the feminine pronominal suffix in verse 13 refers back to the word wisdom in verse 11. The imagery speaks of the relationship between a man and a woman, but it is not typical of a husband and his wife as traditionally perceived in Israel.

Contrary to modern stereotypes of ancient attitudes, wrote Fox, it is the metaphorical woman who is the protector, the one who keeps and guards and shields her protégé. Personified wisdom takes the dominant role, but this is not an indication that ancient attitudes traditionally reckoned women on a par with men or envisaged women as their husband's patronesses on a regular basis, as Fox seems to think. Rather, personified wisdom's role in the relationship constitutes a deliberate role reversal to indicate her worth and so to kindle the young man's admiration for her.

Lady Wisdom's dominance may suggest a mother figure, especially if the personification only begins with verse 6. Nonetheless, the fact that the son is to acquire her is a metaphorical statement that suggests he should instigate a husband-

and-wife relationship with her, as the following thoughts will demonstrate. Now I'm going to talk about a new metaphor in this passage, which is not very well understood. There are many different opinions and arguments over this, but I will try and present a fresh interpretation of the verb based on my analysis with the help of modern metaphor theory.

Initially, the acquisition of wisdom signaled via the verb to acquire in verse 5 does not seem to favor her identification as a person, since normally it is commodities rather than persons that are up for sale. Yet a number of reasons suggest otherwise. First, in much of the ancient Near East, females were seen as their fathers or their husbands' possessions.

See, for example, Exodus 21.7, 22.16-17. Second, the verb to acquire is also used in Proverbs 8.22, where personified wisdom herself states that God has acquired her in the beginning of his way. Third, the verb to acquire also appears in Proverbs 4.7, where wisdom definitely is personified. The circumstance that this coincides with the appearance of the word *reshit*, beginning or essence, or most important part, in Proverbs 4.7 as well as in Proverbs 8.22 further strengthens the close connection between Proverbs 4.5-9 and Proverbs 8.22. Fourth, the usage of the verb to acquire in the Hebrew Bible can denote the instigation of a husband-wife relationship by means of paying a bride price.

Most frequently, the verb means to buy various commodities. On occasion, however, it is used with humans as a direct object. For example, in Genesis 4.1, Eve declares that she has acquired a son.

Another example is attested in passages like Leviticus 25 verses 44-45, where male and female slaves are bought. Such an acquisition of female slaves would sometimes have entailed them becoming the buyer's concubine or wife. But the indiscriminate use of the verb for both male and female slaves indicates that the aspect of purchase is noteworthy.

Most relevant to our discussion is Boaz's purchase of Ruth in Ruth 4. In Ruth 4.10, Boaz declares I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife. Here, a man's acquisition of a female is explained and explicitly stated as leading to a husband-and-wife relationship, and for the speaker the aspect of marriage is clearly in the foreground. Nonetheless, as the wider context makes clear, even here the aspect of purchase for a price is implied and explicitly stated.

Earlier in the transaction, Boaz had told his relative I feel from the hand of Naomi you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance. Ruth 4.5. The acquisition of the woman Ruth is part of a deal involving the sale of land in line with Levirate Law. The verb to acquire

is used indiscriminately of commodity and of a woman, even though the acquisition of the woman clearly entailed that the purchaser would marry her.

The same entailment can be seen in Boaz's own declaration of purchase. He publicly declared Today you witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. The reference to all that belonged to the three deceased men here included Ruth who, as his wife, had been in the possession of Elimelech's son.

So, then this brief survey of how the verb to acquire was used in the Hebrew Bible shows that the verb could and regularly did refer metaphorically to the instigation of a husband-and-wife relationship. But it also shows that the aspect of paying a price to establish the relationship is usually present. We will return to this dual aspect of the verb later when we consider its precise meaning in Proverbs 8, verse 22.

For now, it suffices to point out that the father's recommendation to acquire wisdom is a metaphorical statement urging him to pay whatever bride price necessary to obtain wisdom for his bride. The statement acquire wisdom, acquire insight, do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth in Proverbs 4, verse 5 therefore envisages that the son should win wisdom for his bride. Since Wisdom is not a real woman, however, the bride price is not to be taken in a literal sense.

Rather, the implied payment is a metaphorical way of saying that the son needs to give his all, as verse 7 makes clear. The beginning of wisdom is to acquire wisdom in exchange for all acquisitions acquire insight in line with the metaphorical use of to acquire. This statement is hyperbolic and not meant to be taken literally.

The son needs to make the utmost effort to obtain wisdom through a conscious effort to remember and obey the father's words. The same idea is expressed in a number of other passages in the book of Proverbs where the verb to acquire is used to express the process of becoming wise. So, for example, in Proverbs 23, verse 23, it says to acquire truth and do not sell it.

Acquire wisdom, instruction, and understanding. And here the verb carries the exclusive connotation to buy, as its contrast with to sell shows. Nonetheless, here the verb is entirely metaphorical since the items for sale are abstract entities that cannot be purchased in a literal sense.

The implication is that serious effort is required and this kind of effort is well expressed in Proverbs chapter 15, verse 32. Quote, those who heed admonition acquire understanding. The acquisition of wisdom requires paying attention.

Note the similar use of economic transaction even in the English idiom. And it requires obedience. Furthermore, in Proverbs chapter 17, verse 16, and Proverbs 18, verse 15, here they claim intelligence as a prerequisite for obtaining wisdom.

Thus, ancient and recent customs and the usage of the verb to acquire in the Hebrew Bible both support the idea that wisdom is personified from verse 5 onwards and this leads to the conclusion that the relationship envisaged here is not between mother and son but between husband and wife with the woman as the dominant partner. Waltke proposed that Proverbs 4, 5 to 9, I quote, probably features woman wisdom as a bride to be acquired and loved in the admonitions and as a patroness who rewards her lover in the motivations, end quote. This captures much of the lesson's meaning but wisdom's portrayal cannot be neatly compartmentalized into a bride of the admonitions and a patroness of the motivations as Waltke attempted.

Rather, the lesson presents wisdom as a powerful patroness whom the son is to court. The envisaged relationship is complex. Personified wisdom here is a powerful and influential woman of high social standing and substantial financial means.

In order to win her for his bride, the son must show himself worthy of her throughout their courtship and beyond. And, paradoxically, if he acquires her, she will not be his possession. He will be hers.

In the relationship, it is not he who protects her. She is the one who protects him. The relationship between the student of wisdom and the subject of his study is portrayed as a successful and happy marriage in which the traditional gender roles are reversed.

In the lecture, the figure of wisdom operates on the level of a vivid literary personification. She portrays the father's teaching in the form of a powerful patroness, an authoritative but generous and attractive woman who shows the young man's affection, namely his obedience, and rewards her protégé husband's loyalty. The literary strategy is to appeal to the feelings of the young man like affection, admiration, respect, trust, and honor.

Wisdom is portrayed as an excellent match and the son is shown that he can count himself lucky if he is to win her for his bride. So why then did I go through all this detailed analysis of the metaphor of the personification of wisdom here? I think what I wanted to show in this part of the lecture is that the acquisition of wisdom then and now is perhaps best expressed in the ideas of a romantic pursuit. There is something about romance, about desire, of an almost sexual nature involved in the pursuit of true wisdom.

Such an enterprise is hugely demanding. It is complex. It is immensely enriching.

But it isn't just about the acquisition of knowledge. Wisdom is much, much more than that. We'll draw this part of the lecture now, to a close, and we'll continue in the next lecture with other personifications of wisdom in the book of Proverbs.