

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 6, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 6, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Knut Heim's lecture on Proverbs explores the personification of wisdom in chapters 1-9, using modern metaphor theory to understand this literary device. **Heim examines Lakoff and Johnson's work** on embodied cognition, arguing that metaphor is fundamental to human thought and understanding. He then **critiques Bruce Waltke's interpretation** of personified wisdom, suggesting alternative readings based on metaphor theory. Finally, **Heim offers close readings** of specific Proverbs passages, analyzing how the personification of wisdom functions rhetorically and theologically.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Heim, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Proverbs).



**Heim_Prov_Session
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3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 6, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, Part 1

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript:

Briefing Document: Dr. Knut Heim on Personified Wisdom in Proverbs, Lecture 6

Overview: This lecture (part one of two) focuses on the personification of wisdom as a female figure in the Book of Proverbs (primarily chapters 1-9). Dr. Heim explores this concept through the lens of modern metaphor theory, arguing that the personification is not just a literary device, but a powerful way to engage the reader's emotions and underscore the vital importance of wisdom. The lecture also examines scholarly interpretations of personified wisdom and critiques some aspects of those interpretations, particularly that of Bruce Waltke.

I. The Embodiment Revolution and Metaphor Theory:

- **Shift in Understanding of the Mind:** Dr. Heim begins by outlining a shift in thinking about the nature of the human mind, drawing heavily from the work of George Lakoff. The traditional Western view saw the mind as "abstract, logical, unemotionally rational," and separate from the body. In contrast, the modern view, supported by cognitive science, understands the mind as "embodied" – inextricably linked to our physical bodies and brains.
- **Quote:** "Thought is carried out in the brain by the same neural structures that govern vision, action, and emotion." - Lakoff
- **Figurative Language as Essential:** This "embodiment revolution" impacts how we understand language. Figurative language (metaphor, simile, etc.) is not merely ornamental, but "the essential building blocks for human thought and communication." It allows us to express how our bodies and brains process sensory experiences.
- **Quote:** "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." - Lakoff
- **History of Metaphor Theory:** The lecture traces the history of metaphor theory, noting that until the late 20th century, scholars had limited understanding of how metaphors actually work. The work of Lakoff and Johnson (especially "Metaphors

We Live By," 1980) is credited with revolutionizing the field by demonstrating that metaphors are not just matters of words but are rooted in thought itself and underpin our understanding of the world.

- **Quote:** "After 25 centuries of attention to metaphor...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." - Abrams
- **Critique of Traditional Metaphor Theory:** Dr. Heim summarizes and then rejects some traditional ideas about metaphor:
 - That metaphor is primarily about words, not thought.
 - That metaphors are novel rather than ordinary language.
 - That metaphors are deviations from the proper usage of language.
 - That conventional metaphors are dead.
 - That metaphors express similarities between two pre-existing things.
- **Lakoff and Johnson's Contribution:** Their work emphasized that metaphors help us understand and experience things. Metaphors, particularly conceptual metaphors, are not just ornamental but are "a complex and highly structured system of conventional metaphors." This system is the basis for new metaphors and is also connected to abstract and spatial reasoning.
- **Quote:** "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." Lakoff and Johnson

II. Personified Wisdom in Proverbs: An Overview

- **Central Texts:** Wisdom is personified as a female figure in Proverbs 1:20-33, 8:1-36, and 9:1-6, 11-12. Less developed personification (or animation) appears in chapters 2, 3, 5, and 7.
- **Initial Questions:** Dr. Heim poses that the central question is about how personification of wisdom influences our reading of Proverbs. He will also consider the connection between personified wisdom and the identification of Jesus in the New Testament.
- **Bruce Waltke's Interpretation:** Dr. Heim summarizes Waltke's approach, which views personified wisdom as:
 - A personification of Solomon's proverbs.

- A "unique woman who wears the mantle of a prophet, carries the scrolls of wise men, and wears a goddess-like diadem."
- Prophetic, sapiential, and divine; a "heavenly mediatrix" whose only peer is Jesus Christ.
- Begotten by God in primordial time but not eternal.
- **Critique of Waltke:** Heim finds three "cracks" in Waltke's interpretation:
- Waltke suggests that wisdom originated from God's being. Heim disagrees.
- The idea of wisdom as a "heavenly mediatrix" contradicts the fact that she mediates the earthly teachings of Proverbs. She seems both the mediator and the mediated.
- Waltke's discussion of the relationship of woman wisdom to Jesus Christ argues that Proverbs 8 does *not* validate the Christology of the New Testament. Heim agrees with his assertion that the New Testament authors were influenced by ideas about wisdom, but disagrees that they were not influenced by Proverbs 8.

III. Detailed Analysis of Key Passages:

- **Proverbs 1:20-33:** Wisdom is portrayed as a scorned woman lecturing those who ignored her.
- She has "attitude" and is not just an embellishment. She demonstrates a powerful emotion and highlights both her urgency and her vulnerability.
- Her speech parallels the "fear of the Lord".
- The impact of the personification is to emphasize the importance of learning.
- **Quote:** "Lady Wisdom's first discourse deals with people's attitudes rather than deeds." - Fox
- **Proverbs 2:1-6:** A mix of personification and reification. Wisdom is initially personified as someone to be sought through a relationship. Then it is reified, or objectified, into silver or hidden treasures – things to be sought through labor and sacrifice.
- The appeal to personified wisdom is ultimately an appeal to God because he is the ultimate dispenser of wisdom.

- This combination emphasizes the desirability of wisdom along with the effort required to attain it, and that ultimately it is a gracious gift from God.
- **Proverbs 3:13-20:** Wisdom is depicted as a woman who grants riches and honor. She is a source of peace.
- **Quote:** "What wisdom can offer is better than silver because money can put food on the table but not fellowship around it." - Waltke
- She is reified into a tree of life, and then presented as one of God's virtues used in creation.
- This passage links wisdom to a divine attribute and to creation, again suggesting a pre-existent attribute of God but emphasizing that it is not an entity separate from Him.
- **Proverbs 4:5-9, 11, 13:** Wisdom is identified with the father's teaching and is personified as a woman who protects and guides those who follow her.
- She is a powerful and dominant figure, reversing traditional gender roles.
- The metaphor of acquisition of wisdom is interpreted through the lens of the "bride price." The relationship between a wisdom seeker and wisdom itself is seen as a romantic pursuit and is a demanding but immensely enriching enterprise.
- The verb "to acquire" (qanah) implies not just obtaining wisdom, but initiating a husband-wife relationship with wisdom.
- **Quote:** "...the beginning of wisdom is to acquire wisdom in exchange for all acquisitions acquire insight..."

IV. Key Takeaways:

- **Metaphor as a Mode of Thought:** The lecture highlights the importance of metaphor as more than just a literary device; it is a fundamental way humans understand and experience the world.
- **Personification as a Powerful Tool:** The personification of wisdom in Proverbs is not just a literary technique, it's a way to make the abstract concept of wisdom tangible and emotionally engaging. This allows readers to not just think *about* wisdom but also to *feel* a desire for it.

- **Wisdom as a Relational Pursuit:** The lecture emphasizes that the pursuit of wisdom is like a courtship, requiring effort, dedication, and a deep desire for knowledge.
- **Wisdom and Divine Attributes:** While personified as a woman, wisdom is ultimately connected to God. She is portrayed as both a distinct entity and a divine attribute and a source of God's wisdom.
- **Deeper Understanding Through Embodiment:** In conclusion, understanding metaphors through the lens of embodiment allows for a deeper appreciation of their meaning and the intention of the speaker.

V. Looking Ahead:

- The lecture concludes with the promise to continue the discussion of personified wisdom in the next lecture, including other texts and implications.
- The next lecture will further explore the tension between literary personification and the divine nature of wisdom.

This briefing document provides a detailed overview of the main points of the lecture transcript. It should provide a good foundation for understanding the complex ways Dr. Heim is approaching the concept of personified wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 6, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, Part 1

Proverbs: Metaphor, Personification, and Wisdom

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Lakoff, how was Western thought traditionally characterized before the late 20th century regarding the nature of the mind?
2. What is the "embodiment revolution" and how does it challenge traditional views of the mind and language?
3. How did traditional metaphor studies, before Lakoff and Johnson's work, view the nature of metaphor?
4. What is Lakoff and Johnson's key definition of metaphor, and how does it differ from traditional understandings?
5. According to the lecture, what is the significance of "conventional" metaphors?
6. According to Waltke, what three characteristics describe personified Wisdom in Proverbs?
7. What is the key tension the lecturer identifies in Waltke's understanding of personified Wisdom as a "heavenly mediatrix?"
8. What does the lecturer mean by "reification" and how does it interact with personification in Proverbs 2:2-4?
9. How does the lecture interpret the use of the verb "to acquire" in relation to wisdom, particularly in Proverbs 4?
10. What is the overall effect of personifying wisdom as a woman, according to the lecture?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Western thought traditionally viewed the mind as abstract, logical, unemotional, and rational, capable of directly representing the world. Language was seen as a logical symbol system that transparently expresses abstract concepts tied to the external world.

2. The "embodiment revolution" is the shift in understanding that mind and body are inextricably linked, with thought being carried out by the same neural structures that govern perception, action, and emotion. This challenges the idea of a purely abstract and disembodied mind.
3. Traditional metaphor studies viewed metaphor as a matter of words, not thought, novel and deviant from ordinary language, and expressions of pre-existing similarities. They also considered conventional metaphors to be dead or frozen.
4. Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." This understanding emphasizes that metaphors are cognitive tools for understanding and experiencing concepts and not just ornamental language.
5. According to the lecture, conventional metaphors form the backbone of human thought and communication, operating automatically and unconsciously. Novel metaphors emerge from and build on these pre-existing systems.
6. According to Waltke, the three key characteristics of personified Wisdom are that she is prophetic, sapiential, and divine, functioning as a unique figure with no peer other than Jesus Christ.
7. The lecturer points out that Waltke struggles to explain how personified wisdom can be both the mediatrix (a heavenly figure) and the mediated materials (the teachings in Proverbs), simultaneously.
8. The lecture defines reification as the opposite of personification-- turning a living thing or abstract concept into a "thing" or object. In Proverbs 2:2-4 the text uses personification to describe wisdom and understanding, then uses reification to say that acquiring these things requires great effort, as if digging for precious metal.
9. The lecture interprets the verb "to acquire" in Proverbs 4 metaphorically as a man's active pursuit of a bride. It suggests that acquiring wisdom is not merely a passive act of learning but rather a devoted commitment and effort that mirrors winning a wife.
10. Personifying wisdom as a woman makes the idea of pursuing wisdom more compelling, personal, and emotionally engaging. It highlights her importance, desirability, and the romantic pursuit one should engage in to obtain her.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the "embodiment revolution" in understanding the nature of metaphor. How does this perspective challenge traditional approaches to language and thought, and what are its implications for interpreting biblical texts?
2. Analyze the various ways in which wisdom is personified in the Book of Proverbs, focusing on the literary and rhetorical effects of these personifications. How do these personifications shape the reader's understanding of wisdom?
3. Compare and contrast the traditional view of metaphor with the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson. What are the key differences between these approaches, and how do they impact our understanding of figurative language?
4. Evaluate Waltke's interpretation of personified wisdom in Proverbs 1-9. Discuss the points at which the lecturer agrees with Waltke, and where they depart.
5. How does the lecture interpret Proverbs 4:5-9, focusing on the use of the verb "to acquire"? What are the implications of this interpretation for our understanding of the relationship between the seeker of wisdom and wisdom itself?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, expressing an idea in terms of another.
- **Personification:** The attribution of human characteristics to something nonhuman or abstract, such as an idea, object, or animal.
- **Reification:** The act of regarding an abstract concept or idea as a concrete thing. The process of turning a living being into an object.
- **Embodiment:** The concept that the mind and body are inextricably linked, and that thought and language are rooted in physical experience.
- **Epistemology:** The study of the nature of knowledge, its justification, and the scope of what can be known.
- **Hypostasization:** The process by which an abstract idea or concept is regarded as a concrete entity.
- **Sapiential:** Relating to or characterized by wisdom.
- **Prothesis:** A conditional clause in a sentence; the "if" part of a conditional statement.
- **Apodosis:** The main clause in a conditional sentence; the "then" part of a conditional statement.
- **Macharism:** A type of saying that pronounces happiness or good fortune on someone who embodies a particular quality or action.
- **Tenor/Vehicle:** Terms from traditional metaphor theory. "Tenor" refers to the subject of the metaphor, and "vehicle" is the image used to express the subject.

5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 6, Metaphors and Personified Wisdom, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Personified Wisdom in Proverbs

1. **What is the significance of the "embodiment revolution" in understanding metaphor and the personification of wisdom?** The "embodiment revolution" highlights that our minds and bodies are inextricably linked, challenging the traditional view of the mind as abstract and separate. This revolution emphasizes that our thoughts, language, and understanding are deeply rooted in our physical experiences. For metaphor theory, this means that figurative language, especially metaphors like personification, aren't just ornamental but are essential to how we think and communicate by allowing us to express how our bodies and brains process sensory information. In the case of personified wisdom, it means that this isn't just a literary device but reflects a deeper connection between our embodied understanding and the concept of wisdom itself.
2. **How has the understanding of metaphor changed in recent decades, particularly due to the work of Lakoff and Johnson?** Traditional views of metaphor saw it as primarily about words, deviations from normal language, and expressions of pre-existing similarities. Lakoff and Johnson revolutionized this view by demonstrating that metaphor is fundamentally about thought, shaping how we understand and experience the world. They showed that metaphors aren't just literary devices but are deeply ingrained in our everyday language and form the basis of our conceptual systems. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of "conventional" metaphors, the ones we use automatically, which are the foundation upon which "novel" metaphors are built. This shift also emphasizes the cognitive and experiential aspect of metaphors, showing that they're not just about reflection but about understanding and experience.

3. **In the Book of Proverbs, how is wisdom personified, and what are some of the different "guises" or roles she takes on?** Wisdom is primarily personified as a female figure, often referred to as "Lady Wisdom." She takes on various roles such as a guide (6:22), a beloved sister or bride (7:4), and a hostess (9:1-6). She is depicted as someone who calls out and pleads for people to learn, sometimes with exasperation when ignored (1:20-33). She also represents an ideal marriage partner (4:5-9). In her roles, wisdom acts with a sense of urgency, and her personification emphasizes the value of seeking after her as a means for living a good life.
4. **How does the personification of wisdom as a woman influence the reading of the Book of Proverbs?** The personification of wisdom as a woman gives an emotional and relational aspect to the concept. It emphasizes that acquiring wisdom is not just an intellectual pursuit, but rather one that engages the whole person, including emotions and desires. By presenting wisdom as an attractive and powerful woman, the Proverbs suggest that one should desire to be in relationship with her. Further, the personification brings out the urgent need to pursue wisdom, portraying the consequences of neglecting it as very grave, while also emphasizing the benefits that come from embracing it.
5. **What is the relationship between personified wisdom and God in the Book of Proverbs?** While personified wisdom is often portrayed as a separate entity or as an agent in creation, the Book of Proverbs ultimately depicts her as an attribute of God. She is begotten of God (though not from his very being) and an expression of his knowledge and understanding (3:19-20). While she has distinct qualities of a person, there is no suggestion that she is a separate divine being. Ultimately, the pursuit of wisdom is synonymous with seeking knowledge of God.
6. **What does it mean to "acquire" wisdom, as described in Proverbs, especially in passages like 4:5?** The concept of "acquiring" wisdom uses the metaphor of buying a commodity or a wife. In this framework, wisdom is presented as a bride that must be pursued with great effort and dedication. The act of "acquiring" wisdom means that a person must make a conscious choice to learn and embrace wisdom, to value it above all else, and to give themselves fully to its pursuit. It also suggests that the act of "acquiring" is not an isolated task but is an ongoing engagement. The "bride price," isn't literal, but is symbolic of total commitment to wisdom.

7. **How does the Book of Proverbs use both personification and reification to describe wisdom, and what's the difference?** Personification is used to describe wisdom as a living being, most often a woman. Reification, on the other hand, turns wisdom into an object, comparing it to silver, hidden treasure, or a tree of life. This interplay between personification and reification highlights different aspects of wisdom's value. The personification emphasizes the relational nature of wisdom as an active agent in one's life, while reification highlights that it is a highly valued object worth pursuing. It also signifies that while wisdom may be sought as if it is an object that we can achieve, it is also very personal and requires a relational dynamic.
8. **How did the understanding of personified wisdom in the Book of Proverbs relate to the New Testament's presentation of Jesus?** While some early Christian thinkers identified personified wisdom with Jesus, the text of Proverbs itself does not directly connect them. Jewish writings that elaborated on wisdom likely influenced the New Testament portrayal of Jesus, who is presented as a pre-existent agent in creation. While the New Testament authors don't cite the Proverbs' passages about wisdom, the parallels in these descriptions likely provided a conceptual vehicle for their ideas. However, it's important to note that the high Christology of the New Testament can't be directly validated by Proverbs 8 because the latter presents wisdom as a hypostasization of God's wisdom and not necessarily a distinct divine being.