

Proverbs: Personified Wisdom, Part 2

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Session 7

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Knut Heim explores modern metaphor theory and its application to the personification of wisdom in the biblical book of Proverbs. He critiques traditional 'ornament' theories of metaphor—such as G.B. Caird's lens analogy—and proposes the meta-metaphor of a 'train of thought' to highlight the intrinsic cognitive necessity of metaphoric expressions. Heim then conducts detailed exegetical readings of key wisdom texts, including the relational language in Proverbs 7, Lady Wisdom's cosmic origin and delightful presence at creation in Proverbs 8, and her architectural banquet in Proverbs 9. Ultimately, he demonstrates how personified wisdom functions not as a literal deity or static ornament, but as a dynamic, highly motivational call to lifelong learning and virtuous character.

Outline

I. Introduction and Development of Modern Metaphor Theory

A. The Paradigm Shift in Metaphor Studies

1. Publication of the Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought (2008, ed. Raymond Gibbs)
2. Ubiquity of metaphor across everyday language, abstract thought, emotional experience, art, and music
3. Shift from viewing metaphors as rare artistic ornaments to fundamental components of human cognition
4. The 'Paradox of Metaphor': simultaneously ordinary (rooted in bodily experience) and spectacular (creative and novel)

B. Meta-Metaphorical Reflections and Critique of Traditional Views

1. Critique of G.B. Caird's 'Lens Metaphor' (1980)
 - a. Caird's view: Metaphor is a lens to look through and ignore
 - b. Heim's objection: Reduces metaphor to a dispensable ornament or magnifying glass
 - c. Failures of the lens analogy: Metaphors describe known yet complex concepts rather than unseen objects, and lenses do not capture cognitive transformation
2. Defense of Metaphoricity: Metaphorical expressions are intrinsic and indispensable to meaning and thought

C. Heim's Meta-Metaphor: Metaphor as a 'Train of Thought'

1. A journey of the imagination along predetermined tracks and landmarks (associated commonplaces)
2. The concept of the 'return ticket': freedom to explore imaginative boundaries and retrace steps
3. Mental relay stations: knowing when to disembark or transition to other tropes (similes, metonymies, synecdoches)

II. Personified Wisdom in Proverbs 7:4–5

A. Relational Exegesis of Wisdom as 'Sister' and 'Intimate Friend'

1. Comparison with preceding parental imperatives (Proverbs 7:1–3)
2. Michael Fox's perspective: Relating to wisdom 'as if' she were a person without full imagery
3. Language of intimacy: Term of endearment in Song of Songs and Egyptian love poetry
4. Absence of the term 'bride' mutes explicit eroticism, emphasizing familial affection and blood relationship

B. Literary Function in Context

1. Contrast with the illegitimate attraction of the 'loose/strange woman' in Proverbs 7
2. Egalitarian relationship among equals vs. the asymmetrical exalted relationship in Proverbs 1, 8, and 9

III. Lady Wisdom's Encomium in Proverbs 8

A. Overview and Structural Framework

1. Longest and most auspicious personification in Proverbs (36 verses)
2. Parallels to Mesopotamian self-praise hymns
3. Intertextual connection between Proverbs 1:22–33 and Proverbs 8:1–36
4. Seven-part structure: Introduction (vv. 1–10), Main Lesson/Encomium (vv. 11–31 in two 10-verse halves: historic time vs. primordial time), and Conclusion (vv. 32–36)

B. Location, Audience, and Universal Scope (Proverbs 8:1–5)

1. Positions at city gates, crossroads, and public markets where competition for attention is fiercest
2. Generic address to humanity ('sons of Adam'): inclusive of all genders, classes, and backgrounds
3. Contrast with cloistered academic or monastic esoteric circles

C. Value, Virtues, and Communicable Attributes (Proverbs 8:6–21)

1. Uncompromising truth, self-discipline, and moral sound guidance vs. sweet-talking folly
2. Dwelling with shrewdness, knowledge, and discretion (vv. 12–16)
3. Theological alignment with the Spirit of God (Job 12:13, Isaiah 11:2) and Christological resonance (1 Cor 1:30)
4. Social and reciprocal relationship: 'I love those who love me' (v. 17)

IV. Wisdom's Primordial Origin and Cosmic Role (Proverbs 8:22–31)

A. The Origin of Wisdom Before Creation (Proverbs 8:22–26)

1. Analysis of Hebrew qanah (v. 22): Multivalent meanings (created, acquired, begotten, birthed)
2. Meaning of reshith: First in time, quality, principle, or virility

3. Birthing imagery in qul (vv. 24–25): Explicit birth metaphors and implicit maternal agency of God
4. Critique of Bruce Waltke's overly literal restrictions vs. appreciation of multivalent metaphoric depth

B. Wisdom's Delight and Presence During Creation (Proverbs 8:27–31)

1. Wordplay on oman (v. 30): Master worker/architect, ward/nursling, growing up, or faithfully
2. Playful celebration and frolicking before the Creator (parallels to Ma'at and Hathor)
3. Climax of self-praise: Wisdom's special delight in humanity (bne 'adam) as a powerful motivational force

V. Conclusion of Wisdom's Appeal and the House of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:32–9:18)

A. Maternal Appeal and Practical Invitation (Proverbs 8:32–36)

1. Shift from sister/peer to maternal affection ('listen to me, my children')
2. Invitation to watch at her gates and wait by her doors as preparation for her feast

B. The Banquet of Wisdom in Proverbs 9

1. Architectural symbolism of Wisdom's House (Proverbs 9:1–3)
 - a. Hewing of the seven pillars: Symbolic of perfection, grand scale, and completeness
 - b. Demythologized allusions to ANE mythology (Assyro-Babylonian Apsu / House of Wisdom)
2. The Preparation of the Banquet (Proverbs 9:2–6)
 - a. Slaughtering meat and mixing wine: Dedicated feast for completing Proverbs 1–9
 - b. Education as a banquet: Lodging and feasting as metaphors for lifelong learning
3. The Role of Servant Girls (Proverbs 9:3)
 - a. Rhetorical function: Depicting widespread societal invitation to virtue
 - b. Idealized representation of reputable women attracting young men toward wisdom and character