

**chapter >**

Demystifying the

Proverbs 31  
*Woman*



## Chapter 7

### Proverbs 8 and Proverbs 31:10-31 The Portrait of Wisdom Completed

**Opening Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Wisdom of God. Grant that we may know You are Wisdom Incarnate and order our lives according to Your Word, that we may be living witnesses of Your Grace and mercy; for you live and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever . Amen.

#### Key Term for This Chapter

***Incarnate:*** To be “incarnate” is to be enfleshed. Literally, to take on flesh. We confess that Jesus Christ took on our flesh in order to redeem us from our sins. We confess Him to be God Incarnate for us. Jesus became incarnate (took on flesh) in the womb of Mary and was born as a human child, both fully God and fully man, so that He could redeem us from our sins. Since Jesus is the Wisdom of God, He is Wisdom Incarnate—wisdom in the flesh—and not just an abstract idea or concept.

#### Introduction

In chapter 6 we unfolded how the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 connects to the themes of the first nine chapters of Proverbs. In those chapters, the two ways (the way of Yahweh and the way of other gods) are portrayed through the imagery of Lady Wisdom versus Dame Folly. It is clear from a comparison that the woman of Proverbs has much in common with the portrait of Lady Wisdom. She is to be sought and is of high value.

This leads us to a discussion of how the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 builds on and completes the portrait of Wisdom as laid out in the first nine chapters. Then, we will take a closer look at one of those chapters, Proverbs 8. By so doing, we’ll see even more clearly the relationship between Wisdom and the woman of Proverbs. Proverbs 8 is the chapter in which Lady Wisdom

is personified and speaks for herself. She discusses who she is and what she shows us about Jesus and ourselves.

### **Building on the Portrait of Wisdom in the First Nine Chapters**

In addition to many overlapping characteristics between Wisdom and the woman of Proverbs, as we have seen so far in the previous chapter, the portrait of the woman in 31:10-31 builds on the portraits of Wisdom as depicted earlier. In the first nine chapters, an important characteristic of Wisdom is her call. When Wisdom speaks, she begins with a call to heed her voice: “Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks” (1:20). Chapter 8, when Wisdom again speaks for herself, begins similarly: **Prov. 8:1-4**. Wisdom goes into the public places to call to a specific audience—the simple, the foolish, those who lack understanding. In other words, Wisdom calls those who do not yet know her. Everyone is in need of Wisdom, so her call is for all. The call in chapter 8 builds on the one in chapter 1. Chapter 8 then goes on to have Wisdom describe herself and her origins. She is of old and was with Yahweh when He established the heavens and the earth. In a sense, her description of herself embodies her, making her more than just the voice that had heretofore been calling out. By chapter 9, Wisdom has built her own house. She is pictured now as a marriageable maiden.

Wisdom begins to prepare a feast and sends her young maidens out to issue an invitation from the heights. Again, the call is to whoever is simple, and now she invites them to her feast, a feast McCreech says is described much like a wedding feast (compare to **Song of Songs 5:1**). Previously, Dame Folly, or the adulterous woman, had invited the young men into her home, but Wisdom had simply called. Now, Wisdom’s house is built and set up in direct opposition: in Wisdom’s house and by Wisdom’s gift, “your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life” Prov. 9:11. Meanwhile, in the house of the woman Folly, the one who enters “does not know that the dead

are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol” Prov. 9:18. Dame Folly’s invitation sounds eerily similar. She, too, calls to the simple and those who lack sense, luring them into her abode. At first glance, it may be difficult for the uninitiated to see the difference between the two and choose the proper path. So, McCreesh notes, the short two-part proverbs that follow in chapters 10-30 initiate one into the ways and teachings of Wisdom.

Finally, in Prov. 31:10-31, McCreesh argues, Wisdom is fully recognizable. Having built her house in chapter 9 and invited in those who have need of her, she has now established her household and is busy there, caring for all those who love her. Steinmann objects to understanding the woman of Proverbs as a personification of Wisdom, seeing her rather as an excellent example of a woman who lives according to the fear of Yahweh. His main argument is that Wisdom is never pictured anywhere else as a wife. However, when one follows the development of how Wisdom is described in the first nine chapters as a woman to be sought in opposition to the adulterous woman, and how she develops from a voice calling to a marriageable maiden settled in her home issuing an invitation, the imagery seems to carry through to this final portrait. McCreesh argues that the development from calling voice to wife at home creates a framework for Proverbs, forming and *inclusio* of sorts.

With its central focus and overall goal of presenting the fear of Yahweh and His Wisdom so that all may walk in the way of life, the Book of Proverbs builds to a culmination wherein a clear portrait of Wisdom and her household is displayed with Wisdom now pictured as a wife. The many similarities between Wisdom and the woman of Prov. 31:10-31 further support the argument that she is Wisdom as wife: her incomparable worth, her gracious words and activities, the fact that she fears the Lord, her gifts of riches and honor, her trustworthiness, her security in the Lord, her laughing at the time

to come, her teaching of knowledge and understanding, her industriousness, her car for the marriage bed, and her faithfulness in marriage.

**Reread Proverbs 31:10-31 and read thru chapters 1-9.**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 1:** How does the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 build on the earlier portraits of Wisdom, especially in Chapters 1, 8 & 9? What is the progression that we noted, and how does the Proverbs woman complete that progression?

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### **Proverbs 8 & Proverbs 31:10-31: More Support for Seeing the Woman as Wisdom**

In the first twenty-one verses of Proverbs 8, Wisdom’s description of herself contains many characteristics in common with Proverbs 31:10-31. The woman of Proverbs 31 is shown through her activity and the description of her to be incredibly similar to Wisdom in Prov. 8. Like the similarities we saw between her and Lady Wisdom throughout the first nine chapters, these similarities hint at a specific understanding of who she is. Let’s take a look at Proverbs 8 and Proverbs 31 side by side.

When read side by side, the two poems contain many commonalities in subjects concerning the two entities that are being described—Wisdom and the woman of Proverbs 32. The woman of Prov. 31 looks, sounds, and acts as Wisdom does in her self-description:

- Both are described as “more precious/better than jewels”  
**Prov. 8:10-11a; 31:10b)**

- Both are described as having strength/worth—**8:14; 31:17, 25**
- Both have a locus (location)“in the gates of the town: in some sense or another **8:3; 31:23, 31b**
- Both poems mention other value of the words of their mouths—**8:6-8; 31:26**
- Both focus on the fear of the Lord—**8:13; 31:30**
- Both mention the fruit of their works—**8:19, 31:31a**

Other interesting correlations include the idea of being sought. Wisdom says that she loves those who love her and that those who seek her find her (8:17). Meanwhile, the narrator of Prov. 31:10-31 observes that the wife of strong character should be sought and implies that she is difficult to find. Yet found her we have in the periscope then laid out, just as Wisdom promises she can be found. Those who love the wife of Prov. 31—her maidens, her husband, her children—are settled at home with her. They have sought her and found her, despite her rarity. Additionally, both Wisdom and the woman of Proverbs bring wealth and riches to those who seek them. Wisdom promises this in **8:18**, while the entirety of Prov. 31:10-31 demonstrates how the woman brings both material and spiritual wealth and riches to her household.

All told, the similarities between the woman of Prov. 31 and Wisdom’s depiction throughout the first nine chapters, as well as the great deal of overlap between Wisdom’s self-description in chapter 8 and those final verses of the book, point to the conclusion that the wife of chapter 31 is Wisdom herself. Her actions, words, worth, strength, service on behalf of her household, fear of the Lord, and how she is treated by others all come together to show how she is Wisdom. So then, the question is who is Wisdom?

## Echoes of Proverbs 8 in Proverbs 31:1-9

You may have noticed that Proverbs 31:1-9 also has similarities to Proverbs 8 in that Proverbs 31:1-9 has to do with how a king should conduct himself. In Proverbs 31:1-9, you will recall, the mother is instructing the king concerning his proper role and duties as king. He is to rule justly for the poor and the downtrodden, and he should seek diligently the wife who will not steal his strength, but rather support and help him. In Proverbs 8:15-16, Wisdom asserts, “By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.” Just rulers are guided by Wisdom herself. This is precisely who the mother intends for the son to seek and how she intends for him to rule. As we showed in chapter 5 of this study, the woman of Prov. 31:10-31 fulfills the requirements set out by the mother for her son in verses 1-9. She is the one whom he should seek, the perfect daughter-in-law. by her, by Wisdom, King Lemuel can reign justly.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 2:** What similarities between the personification of Wisdom in chapter 8 and the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 further the thesis that the woman is Wisdom?

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### **Proverbs 8:22-36 and Selected Passages from the New Testament: Wisdom’s Origins and Identity**

Now that we have determined that a comparison with the first nine chapters of Proverbs, and especially with Proverbs 8, demonstrates that the woman of Prov. 31:10-31 can be seen as another portrait of Wisdom, we look again to chapter 8 to tell us who Wisdom is. She moves from describing “herself” to describing “her” origins: **Proverbs 8:22-36**

Wisdom's self-depiction makes it clear that Jesus is Wisdom Incarnate. Wisdom is described as the first of the Lord's acts and possessed by Him from the beginning. Wisdom states that it was present when the Lord created the heavens, and we know that Jesus Himself is the One who was present and through whom all things were made (**John 1:3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 4:11**). Jesus delights in the created world and in man, so much so that He comes to rescue the world and all its inhabitants from the clutches of sin, death, and the devil. In Christ, we are blessed. In being found by Him through His call to us in Holy Baptism, we can "find Him". We receive life and blessing and the favor of the Father. Only through Him can we be in favor with the Father. Wisdom's self-description is clearly a description of Jesus.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 3:** What elements of Wisdom's self-description point us to understanding Wisdom as Jesus Christ?

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In the New Testament, the idea that Jesus is Wisdom Incarnate, in other words that Wisdom is a person and not merely a concept, is echoed in several passages. Most important, Jesus describes Himself as the Wisdom of God:

**Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34-35**

**Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:49**

**Luke 11:49**

In these passages, Jesus makes it clear that He is Wisdom. In Matthew 11:19, He counters the claims of the Pharisees, who find any excuse to accuse and dismiss Him. He says however, that wisdom is justified by her deeds. He is using the feminine pronouns here because the Hebrew word is in the feminine



case, yet He is not calling Himself a woman. He is saying that He is that Wisdom from God that was portrayed throughout the Scriptures in passages such as in Proverbs. He is that which was to be sought. He works the “deeds” of righteousness, salvation, and life eternal. Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate, may appear foolish to the Pharisees, but He is justified by His death and resurrection on behalf of the whole world, and to an extent also by all the “deeds” he performs in His earthly ministry—healing, preaching, forgiving sins, performing miracles, and so on. In the parallel passage in Luke, Jesus says that Wisdom is justified by her “children”. This is an interesting difference. It points to us as those “deeds” Christ does and by which He is “justified”, or shown to be true Wisdom. We are the fruits of His labor, the deeds He has performed, the children whom He has called.

Furthermore, the apostles understood Jesus as the Wisdom of God. Paul builds specifically on Proverbs 8 when he describes the difference between the wisdom of God and the “wisdom” of the world: **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**.

Paul makes it clear that Jesus is “the wisdom of God”. Understanding this, the Early church identified Wisdom in Proverbs 8 as the preincarnate Christ speaking.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 4:** Who in the New Testament testifies to the fact that Jesus is Wisdom?

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## Conclusion

The opening verse of Proverbs 31:10-31, in addition to being a rhetorical question that expects a no answer, also uses the word that means “riddle” in other places, such as **Judges 14:18**. On account of this, McCreesh asks if it is possible that the woman is also a riddle, something to be solved. He compares this to **Proverbs 1:6**, the introduction to the Proverbs. While many want to see her simply as an example of a godly woman, it seems clear that unraveling the riddle of her identity leads to another conclusion. This woman, whom it is nearly impossible to find, is in fact, Wisdom. She has made herself to be found, has called to herself all those who love and are in need of her, and is settled at home with her own, caring for and continuously instructing them in the fear of Yahweh.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other Helpful Passages</b> <b>Connecting Jesus to Wisdom</b> <b>1 Corinthians 1:30; Luke 2:52</b></p>
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There is a further riddle to unravel, and it is this: who is Wisdom? Proverbs 8 identifies Wisdom as the one who has been with God from the beginning, through whom the creation was made. This is how the New Testament speaks of Christ: **Colossians 1:15-16**. This, then, is a portrait of Jesus. Jesus is the Wisdom of God, and in Him all wisdom is found. **Colossians 2:3**. Jesus is Wisdom Incarnate. This does not mean that He is a female, although Wisdom is pictured this way in Proverbs. He is the God-man. The picture of wisdom in Proverbs is depicted in a feminine way because the word for wisdom in the Hebrew is in the feminine case (as are most conceptual terms). It does mean, though, that the woman of Proverbs 31, being a portrait of Wisdom, is then a portrait of Jesus. It is He who works tirelessly on our behalf, who secures for us long life and eternal life, who invites us into His household who is more precious than jewels.

In McCreesh's final paragraph, he notes that Wisdom is not a remote ideal, but rather present in this world to guide those who are members of her household, rejoicing in us while also dwelling with the Creator. This is Jesus! He instructs us in the ways of Yahweh and delights in us, making His home with us by dwelling in the flesh to live and die on our behalf. He has set up His household, the Church, to care for us, and He calls His own unto Himself to live with Him forever.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 5:** When viewed as a portrait of Jesus, how might our understanding or perspective of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 change? How might it change how we understand ourselves in relation to the passages?

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