

## Visual Commentary: Proverbs 8

### Study Notes

The book of Proverbs is all about gaining wisdom. Most of the book is a collection of proverbs, or wise sayings, but it begins with nine chapters of speeches. In these speeches, we meet a cast of symbolic characters—a fatherly king, a wicked man, a wily woman called Lady Folly, and a noble woman called Lady Wisdom. Lady Wisdom is God’s wisdom personified, and she’s a fascinating character in the Bible. In Proverbs 8, we find a long speech from Lady Wisdom, where she stands at a crossroads, inviting you into God’s sacred city. In these study notes, we’re going to look at the structure of the book of Proverbs and see the significance of chapter 8. We’re also going to look at Lady Wisdom’s invitation. There’s a lot to learn, and these study notes will take you deeper into the ideas explored in our video Visual Commentary: Proverbs 8.

### Contents

Proverbs: Composition and Literary Design	2
Literary Design of Proverbs 1-9	3
Literary Design of Proverbs 8	13
Proverbs 8:1-36: Translation and Commentary Notes	14
New Testament Appropriations of Proverbs 8	19
Appendix to Proverbs 8	20

# Proverbs: Composition and Literary Design

## The Macro Design of Proverbs 1-31

In order to understand the significance of Proverbs 8, we first have to look at the structure of the book as a whole.

### Part 1 - 1:1-9:18

1:1 "Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel."

1: 1:2-2:22

2: 3:1-6:35

3: 7:1-9:18

### Part 2 - 10:1-24:34

10:1 "Proverbs of Solomon"

1: 10:1-22:16

2: 22:17-24:22 [22:17] "Incline your ear and hear **the words of the wise ones** (דברי חכמים)."

3: 24:23-34 [24:23] "Also **these are for the wise ones** (חכמים)."

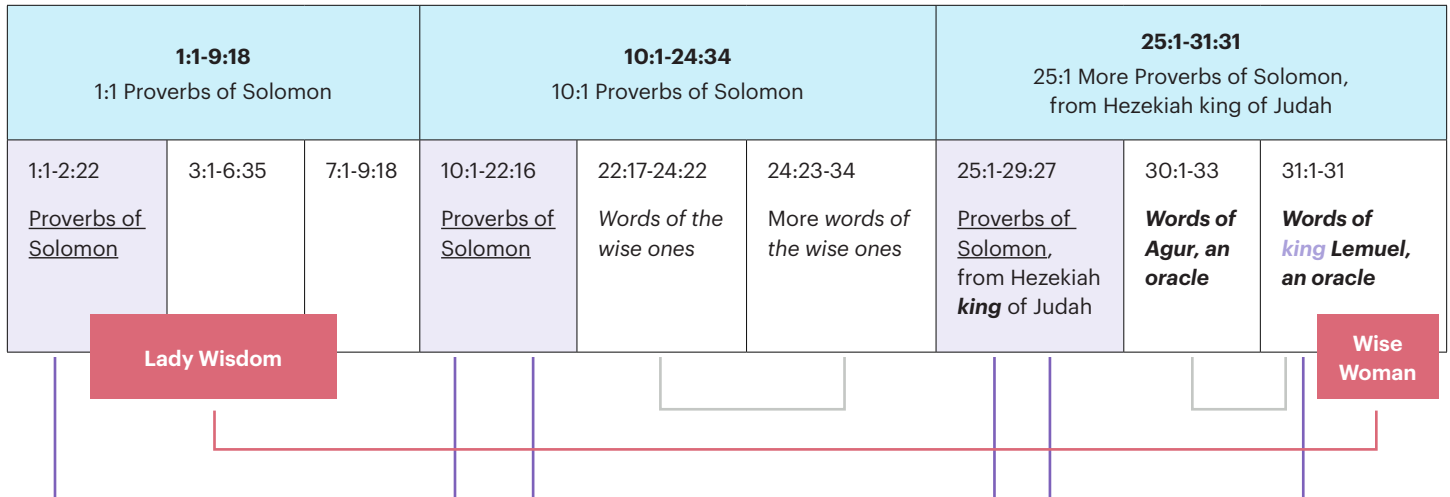
### Part 3 - 25:1-31:31

25:1 "Also these are the **proverbs of Solomon** that the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, assembled."

1: 25:1-29:27

2: 30:1-33 [30:1] "**The words of Agur** (אגור) דברי, son of Jakeh, **the oracle...**"

3: 31:1-31 [31:1] "**The words of Lemuel** (למואל) דברי, a **king, the oracle...**"



## Literary Design of Proverbs 1-9

Now that we understand the structure of the book as whole, we're going to narrow our focus to the first section of Proverbs, the nine speeches that begin the book found in chapters one through nine.

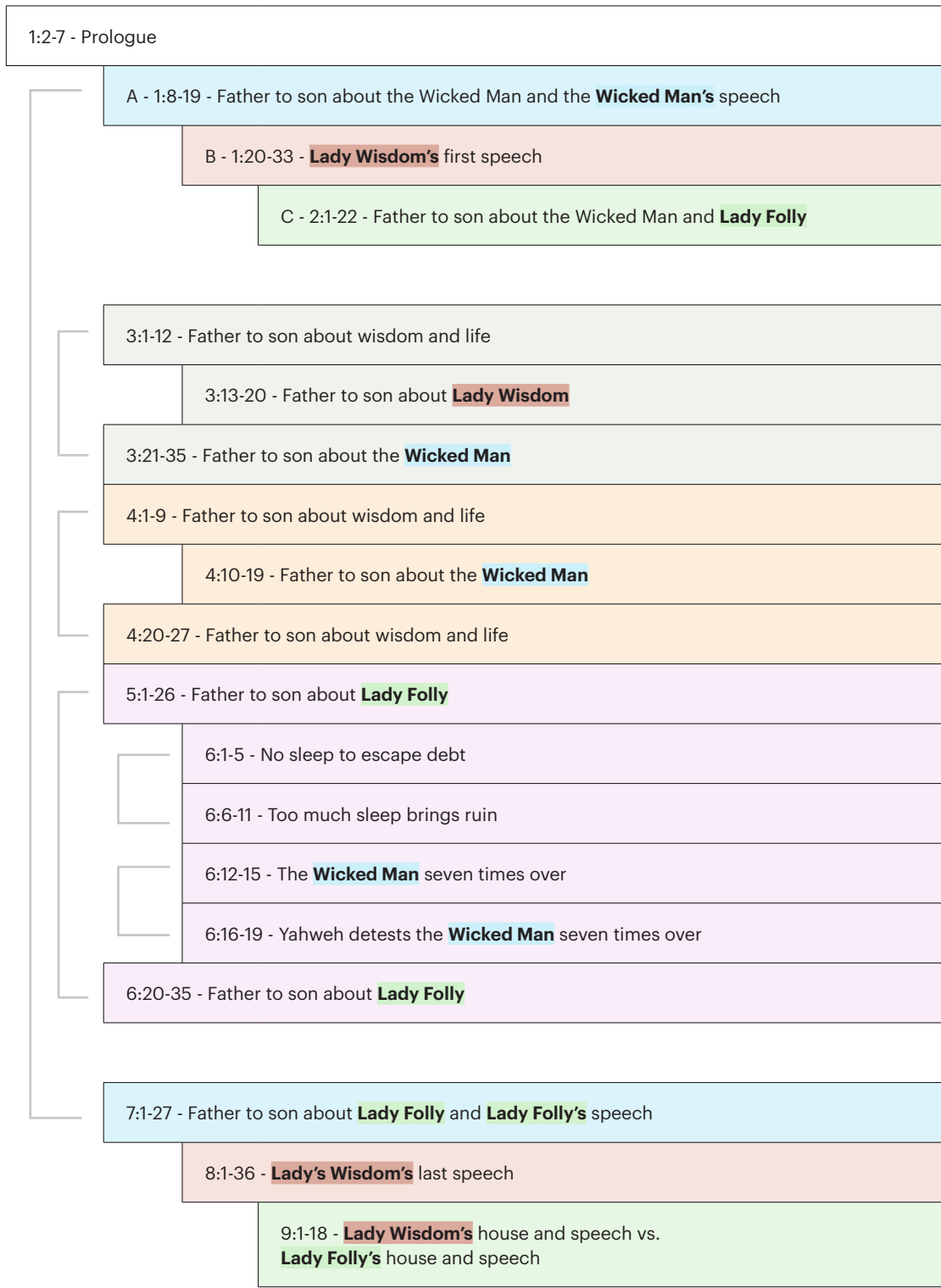
1:1-2:22		3:1-6:35		7:1-9:18	
1:2-7 Prologue	3:1-12 Father's Wisdom	3:13-20 Father and Lady Wisdom	3:21-35 Father and the Wicked Man	7:1-27 Father's Wisdom and Lady Folly's Speech	
1:8-19 Father vs. the Wicked Man's Speech	4:1-9 Father's Wisdom	4:10-19 Father and the Wicked Man	4:20-27 Father's Wisdom	8:1-36 Lady Wisdom's Speech	
1:20-33 Lady Wisdom's First Speech	5:1-26 Father and Lady Folly	6:1-19 Four Parables about the Wicked Man	6:20-35 Father and Lady Folly	9:1-18 Lady Wisdom's House and Speech vs. Lady Folly's House and Speech	
2:1-22 Father vs. The Wicked Man and Lady Folly					

There are three large literary bundles in Proverbs 1-9, organized around the characters and speaking voices in the collection. There are four main characters who are binary contrasts with each other.

The Royal Father and Lady Wisdom	vs.	The Wicked Man and Lady Folly
They offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence</li> <li>• Fruitfulness</li> <li>• Abundance</li> </ul>	Power Sex Money	They offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Pleasure</li> <li>• Silver and gold</li> </ul>

These contrasting voices present a choice between the way of wisdom and life and the way of folly and death for the reader, who is referred to as “my son.”

**Proverbs 1-9: Literary Design in Vertical Format**



## Part 1: 1:2-2:22

The first movement of Proverbs 1-9 consists of four literary units, each one introducing key themes and vocabulary that will be explored in greater depth in the remainder of Proverbs 3-9.

Part 1 of Proverbs can be understood in the following structure:

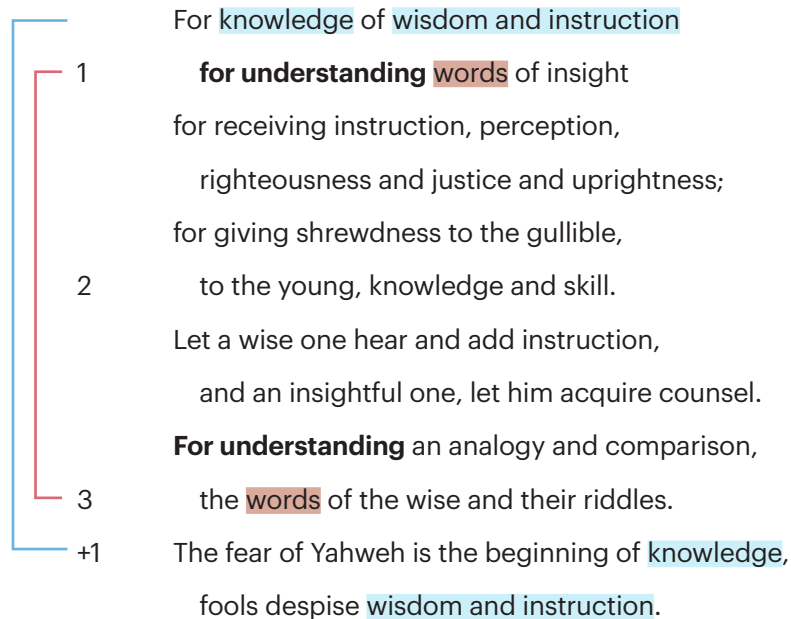
1. 1:2-7: Opening prologue to the book as a whole
2. 1:8-19: Speech from the Father to the son about the Wicked Man
3. 1:20-33: First speech from Lady Wisdom to the gullible
- +1. 2:1-22: Speech from the Father to the son about the Wicked Man and Lady Folly

This outline is helpful to see the structure, but it does not highlight the deep interconnectedness of these four units that becomes clear when the key repeated words and the literary design are explored. The opening prologue is just an introduction of the key terms that express what the author of this book valued most. The following two units focus on the two channels for wisdom from the Father and from Lady Wisdom. The Father also names his opposite, the Wicked Man. The final unit brings it all together by having the Father name both his opposite (the Wicked Man) and Lady Wisdom's opposite (Lady Folly).

## Literary Design of the Units in Proverbs 1:2-2:22

### Overview

1:2-7 - Translation and Literary Design



1:8-19 - Literary Design

- 1:8-9
- 1:10-16
- 1:17-19

1:20-33 - Literary Design

- 1:20-21
- 1:22-27
- 1:28-33

2:1-22 - Literary Design

- 2:1-11
- 2:12-19
- 2:20-22

## Key Words and Hyperlinks Between the Three Units in Proverbs 1:2-22

- 1:2-7
- 1:8-19
- 1:20-33

The key phrase “wisdom and instruction” (חכמה ומוסר) is repeated in the opening and closing lines of 1:2 and 1:7. It is then distributed over the next two speeches. 1:8 begins with the Father urging his son to “hear instruction” (מוסר שמע), and Lady Wisdom’s speech in 1:20 is introduced by calling her Wisdom (חכמות).

In 1:4, the book’s purpose is to “give shrewdness to the gullible” (פתאים). These gullible ones are then addressed in the following two speeches. In 1:10, we read, “they will deceive you” (lit. “make you gullible” / יפתוך). In 1:22, we read, “how long, gullible ones (פתים) will you love being gullible (פתתי)?”. And in 1:32, we read, “the waywardness of the gullible (פתים) will kill them.”

The Father warns his son against the Wicked Man who will take advantage of his young, gullible character, just as Lady Wisdom addresses her speech to the gullible in an effort to save them from fear and ruin.

In 1:5, the wise one (חכם) is the one who “hears” (שמע), and in both of the following speeches, the son is called by the Father and Lady Wisdom to “hear” their words (1:8 and 1:33).

1:2-7	1:8-19	1:20-33
<p>1:2 “To know <b>wisdom</b> and <b>instruction</b>.”</p> <p>1:7 “Fools despise <b>wisdom</b> and <b>instruction</b>.”</p>	<p>1:8 “My son, hear the <b>instruction</b> of your father.”</p>	<p>1:20 “<b>Wisdom</b> shouts in the streets.”</p>
<p>1:4 “To give shrewdness to the <b>gullible</b>.”</p>	<p>1:10 “My son, if sinners deceive you...” (lit. “make you <b>gullible</b>”)</p>	<p>1:22 “How long, <b>gullible</b> ones, will you love being <b>gullible</b>?”</p>
<p>1:5 “Let the wise <b>listen</b>.”</p>	<p>1:8 “<b>Listen</b>, my son.”</p>	<p>1:33 “The one who <b>listens</b> to me will dwell in security.”</p>

These two opening speeches become the first embodiments of the book’s stated purpose in 1:2-7. It is by means of the twin voices of the Father and Lady Wisdom that the book will impart its wisdom. The two voices are coordinated in these opening speeches and become one in the book’s strategy to impart wisdom and instruction to the next generation.

## 1:8-19 and 1:20-33

These two speeches, one by the Father and one by Lady Wisdom, are themselves coordinated by a number of key words and thematic links.

The Father's speech contains a long quoted speech from the "sinners," who share their plan to murder and steal in 1:11b-14. This plan stands in contrast to the Father's introduction of Lady Wisdom and her speech in 1:22-33, which claims that following her leads to security and peace.

In 1:18-19, the father concludes, after quoting from the Wicked Man, by stating a measure-for-measure principle. This idea is then repeated by Lady Wisdom, who concludes her speech in a similar way.

*"My son, don't walk on the way with them."*

1:15

*"They lie in wait for their own blood; they lurk after their own lives. Such are the ways of all who seek dishonest gain; it takes the life of its possessors."*

1:18-19

*"They will eat from the fruit of their ways (דָּרַךְ), and from their counsels they will be filled."*

1:31-33

## 1:2-7 and 1:20-33

Lady Wisdom's speech repeats a number of key words from the prologue in 1:2-7, showing that her speech is indeed an expression of the book's message alongside the Father's.

## 2:1-22

*"The fear of Yahweh (יראת יהוה) is the beginning of knowledge (דעת)."*

1:7

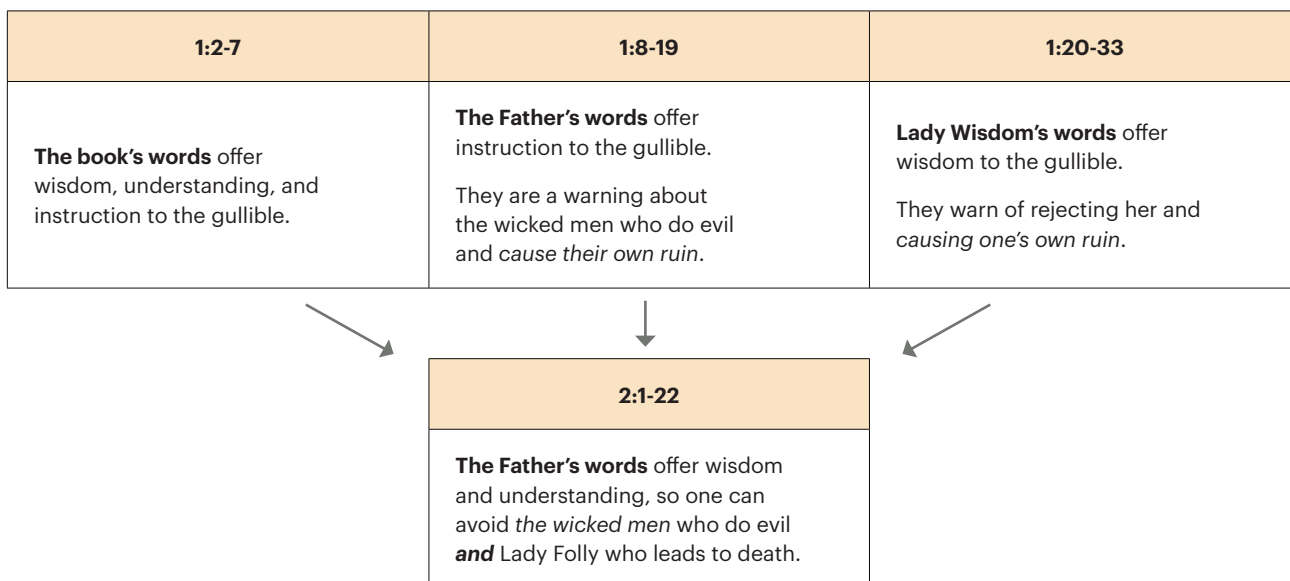
*"How long...will fools hate knowledge (דעת)?"*

1:22

*"Because they hated knowledge (דעת), and they did not choose the fear of Yahweh (יראת יהוה)."*

1:29

This speech by the Father summarizes the themes so far and introduces one last important character in the opening section of Proverbs, Lady Folly.



There are many key word links between 2:1-22 and the three previous units, summarizing and concluding the first opening part.

1:2-33	2:1-22
1:8 <i>"Listen, <b>my son</b>, to the instruction of your father."</i>	2:1 <i>"<b>My son</b>, if you receive my words..."</i>
1:2-3 <i>"To <b>understand</b> (להבין)...righteousness, justice, and uprightness."</i>	2:9 <i>"Then you will <b>understand</b> (תבין) righteousness, justice, and uprightness."</i>
1:20-21 <i>"Wisdom...gives her voice (נתן + קול) in the street; at the head of the noisy places she <b>cries out</b> (תקרא)."         </i>	2:3 <i>"If you will indeed <b>cry out</b> (תקרא) for understanding, and give your voice (נתן + קול) for insight..."</i>
1:24 <i>"I [Wisdom] extended my hand, but no one <b>paid attention</b> (תקשיב)."         </i>	2:2 <i>"<b>Pay attention</b> (הקשיב) to wisdom with your ear..."</i>
1:10 <i>"My son, if sinners deceive you, don't go with them."</i>  1:15 <i>"My son, don't go with them on the <b>way</b> (דרך); keep your foot from their paths; because their feet run to do <b>evil</b> (רע)."         </i>	2:12, 14-15 <i>"To keep you from the <b>way</b> (דרך) of <b>evil</b> (רע)... From those who get joy from doing <b>evil</b> (רע)...from <b>going</b> (ללכת) on the <b>ways</b> (דרך) of darkness."</i>
1:7 <i>"<b>The fear of Yahweh</b> (יראת יהוה) is the beginning of knowledge."</i>  1:29 <i>"They did not choose <b>the fear of Yahweh</b> (יראת יהוה)."         </i>	2:5 <i>"Then you will understand <b>the fear of Yahweh</b> (יראת יהוה)."         </i>

These key word links reinforce the analogy between the words of the book (1:2-7) and the words of the Father (1:8-19) and the words of Lady Wisdom (1:20-33), as they all connect in 2:1-22.

Notice the inversion of 1:20-21 in 2:3. Lady Wisdom is portrayed as "crying out" and "giving her voice" to the gullible, while in 2:3, the Father urges his son to "cry out" and "give his voice" in his search for wisdom.

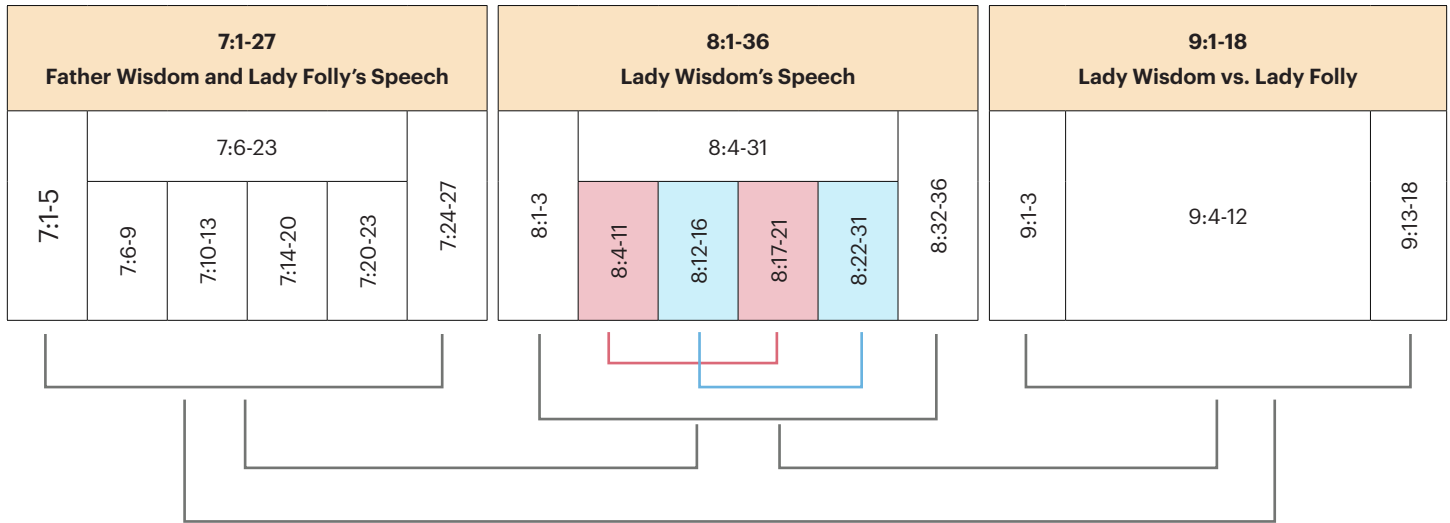


## Part 2: 3:1-6:35

This large central section is made up of three large macro units, which are in turn designed with three medium literary units.

<b>Unit 1: 3:1-35</b>	1. 3:1-12		Father to son: Torah and commandments are life, long days, and peace.	
	2. 3:13-20		Lady Wisdom is a great treasure, leading to life and peace.	
	3. 3:21-35		Father to son: Wisdom is life, and freedom from fear of the wicked, violent man.	
<b>Unit 2: 4:1-27</b>	1. 4:1-9		Father to sons: Get wisdom and find life. She will lead to favor.	
	2. 4:10-19		Father to son: Receive my wise words; they are life. Stay away from the way of the wicked and violent man.	
	3. 4:20-27		Father to son: Keep my words; they are life. Keep away from deceptive men and walk on the straight path.	
<b>Unit 3: 5:1-26</b>	1. 5:1-26		Father to son: Heed my wisdom; it will keep you from Lady Folly, whose speech is smooth; her foreign house leads to the grave.	
	2. 6:1-19	6:1-5	If in debt, don't sleep until paid.	
		6:6-11	Lazy man, too much sleep will ruin you.	
		6:12-15	The Wicked Man is terrible (seven times).	
		6:16-19	Yahweh detests the Wicked Man seven times over.	
3. 6:20-35		Father to son: Keep my Torah and commandments, to keep you from the Evil Woman, the foreign one; adultery with her will be seven-times avenged.		

### Part 3: Proverbs 7:1-9:18



This final literary unit in Proverbs 1-9 brings the competition between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly to its climax.

- Chapter 7: Lady Folly is given the stage for her ultimate seductive appeal
- Chapter 8: Lady Wisdom is given the stage for her ultimate wise appeal
- Chapter 9: Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly each build a house and invite the son inside

These three poems also bring the themes of Proverbs 1-6 to their climax, demonstrated by the dense network of hyperlinks back to the earlier literary units.

#### Links Between 7:1-27 and the Earlier Lady Folly Poems (5:1-23 or 6:20-35) and the Wicked Man Poems (1:8-19)

7:27: “Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the recesses of death.”

- 5:5: “Her feet lead down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol.”
- 1:12: “Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, even whole, like those going down to the pit.”
- The wicked men of the Father’s speech are likened to Lady Folly, who also leads people to Sheol and death. The two characters are joined, as in the parallel design strategy in chapter 2.

7:25: “Don’t let your heart turn to her ways; don’t go astray onto her paths.”

- 5:8: “Let your path stay far from her, and don’t go near to the door of her house.”
- 1:15: “Don’t go on the way with them; keep your feet from their paths.”

## Links Between 8:1-36 and the Earlier Lady Wisdom Poems in 1:20-33 and 3:13-20

Only 1:20-33 and 8:1-36 have direct speeches from Lady Wisdom.

- 1:20-21: "Wisdom shouts in the street; in the open squares she gives her voice; at the head of noisy places she cries out, at the entrances of the gates in the city, she speaks her words."
  - 8:1-2: "Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding give her voice? At the head of high places on the roads, at the joining of paths she stands; beside the gates, at the mouth of the city, the entrance of the gates, she shouts!"
- 1:22-23: "How long, gullible ones, will you love being gullible...and [how long] will fools hate knowledge? Turn to my correction; look, I will pour my spirit upon you; I will make known my words to you."
  - 8:5-6: "Understand shrewdness, you gullible ones, and fools, understanding in your heart! Listen, for I speak upright things, and the opening of my lips is straightness."

Many themes in 8:1-36 link back not to Lady Wisdom's first speech in 1:20-33 but to the Father's description of Lady Wisdom in 3:13-20.

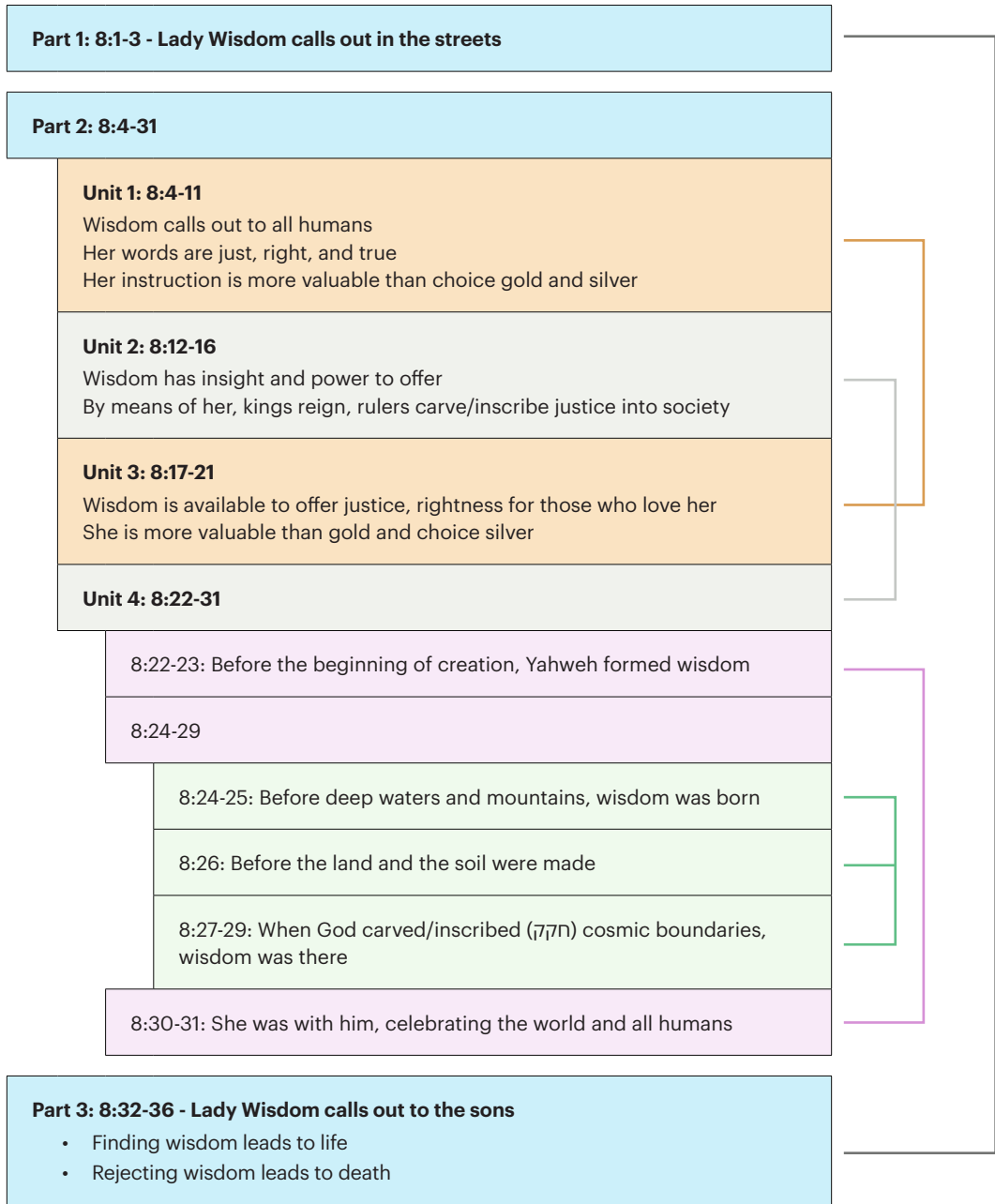
- 8:10-11: "Take my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than pure choice gold; for wisdom is better than pearls, and all desires do not compare with her."
  - 3:14-15: "For better is her [Wisdom's] profit than profit of silver, and her revenue more than pure gold; she is more precious than pearls, and all your desires do not compare with her."
- 8:18: "Wealth and honor are with me; enduring capital, and justice; better is my fruit than pure gold and refined gold; and my revenue more than silver."
  - 3:16: "Length of days is in her right hand, and wealth and honor in her left."
- Creation Imagery in Proverbs 8:22-31 and 3:19-20
  - 3:19-20: "By means of wisdom Yahweh founded the land; he established the skies by understanding; by his knowledge the deep waters were split, and the clouds drizzled dew."
  - 8:27-28: "When he established the skies, I was there; when he inscribed a horizon line on the deep waters; when he made firm the clouds above, when he overpowered the springs of the deep."
  - 8:29c: "...when he carved the foundations of the land."
  - 8:32b: "...How fortunate are those who keep my ways."
  - 8:34: "How fortunate is the man who listens to me."
  - 8:35: "For the one who finds me finds life, and he obtains favor from Yahweh."
  - 3:13: "How fortunate is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who obtains understanding."
  - 3:18: "She is a tree of life for those who grab her, and the one who takes hold of her is the fortunate one."

**Links Between 9:1-18 and the Earlier Lady Folly Poems in 2:1-22, 5:1-23, 6:20-35, or 7:1-27, and the Entire Literary Unit of 1:2-2:22**

- 9:1: "Wisdom (חכמות) builds her house, she hews her seven pillars."
  - 1:20: "Wisdom (חכמות) shouts in the street" [note the unique plural form].
- 9:4: "Whoever is gullible, turn aside here, those who lack heart, she speaks to him."
  - 1:22: "How long, gullible ones, will you love being gullible?"
- 9:4, 16: "The one who lacks heart"
  - 6:32 and 7:7
- 9:6: "O gullible ones (פתאים), leave off and find life!"
  - 1:4: "To give shrewdness to gullible ones (פתאים)" [the *plene* spelling with 'aleph occurs only in 1:4, 7:7, and 9:6 in Proverbs 1-9, all the other plural occurrences of this word are spelled 1:22 פתים].
- 9:18: "He does not know that the spirits of the dead are there, in the valleys of Sheol are her guests."
  - 2:18: "For her house descends to death, and her patches to the spirits of the dead."

# Literary Design of Proverbs 8

Proverbs 8 features Lady Wisdom’s big speech, summarizing the main ideas of the opening section of Proverbs and posing a vital question to the readers. Let’s take a closer look at the literary design of this chapter.



## Proverbs 8:1-36: Translation and Commentary Notes

Doesn't wisdom cry out,  
 and understanding raise her voice?  
 At the head of high places, by the road,  
 at the junction of roads, she stands.  
 By the side of gates, at the entrance of the city,  
 at the entrance of the doors, she shouts.

Proverbs 8:1-3

Wisdom is depicted as standing at a crossroads that leads into the city gate. This is similar to her position in her opening speech in 1:20-21, where she stood in the busy roads near the city gate.

City gates: The gates were (and still are) the hub of market activity in many eastern cities with walls. But just as important, the gates were the meeting place of city leaders (see Ruth 4:1-3).

### Proverbs 8:4-11

	<p>To you men, I cry out,              and my voice is to the sons of human!              Gullible ones, understand shrewdness,              and fools, understand in your heart!</p>
a	<p>Listen, for I speak things that are right (בְּיָדַיִם),              and I open my mouth for upright (מִיִּשְׁרָיִם) things.              For my mouth whispers truth (אֱמוּנָה),              and wickedness is detestable to my lips.              All the words of my mouth are with righteousness (צְדָקָה),              there is nothing twisted or crooked.              All of them are right (בְּיָדַיִם) to the understanding one,              and upright (יִשְׁרָיִם) to those who find knowledge.</p>
b	
c	
d	
c'	
d'	
a'	
b'	
	<p>Take my instruction, and not silver,              and knowledge, more than choice pure gold.              For wisdom is good, more than pearls,              and nothing desirable can compare with her.</p>



This opening movement repeats many motifs from Lady Wisdom's earlier speeches, where she offers insight and shrewdness that will open up the way to abundance (see 1:4, 22).

But lest she be misunderstood, she is not offering her wisdom as a transactional means to wealth. Rather, what she offers supersedes wealth and is, in fact, more valuable (8:10-11, 3:14-15).

In an elaborate symmetrical composition, 8:4-6 portrays Lady Wisdom's offerings as the embodiment of true justice (אֱמוּנָה + צְדָקָה) and uprightness. This moral and social focus opens the way to the next movement of the speech, as she will claim to be indispensable to humans who are leading and ruling.

I, **Wisdom**, live with shrewdness,  
 and I discovered knowledge of strategy.  
 The **fear of Yahweh** is hating evil,  
 pride and arrogance and the evil path,  
 and the twisted mouth, I hate.  
 To me belongs counsel and planning,  
 I am understanding,  
 to me belongs power.  
 Through me kings reign,  
 and rulers carve decrees that are just;  
 Through me, princes rule,  
 and nobles, all who judge with justice.

Proverbs 8:12-16

12-13: Wisdom quickly identifies herself with the particular brand of wisdom that's promoted in Proverbs, a moral discernment whose true north is defined by the wisdom and will of Yahweh. Living in "fear of Yahweh" is true wisdom and the beginning of true understanding (echoing the theme statement back in Proverbs 1:7).

14-16: Wisdom steps up the rhetoric, claiming that she is not only identical to moral wisdom but also the indispensable principle by which humans live and rule and organize their societies. Rulers lead by "carving decrees" and "judging with justice."

The phrase "carving decrees" comes from the Hebrew word *khaqaq* (קָחַק), which means, literally, to carve inscriptions into stone, or to carve away raw materials to make a sculpture (see Ezekiel 4:1 and Isaiah 22:16). Because rulers often carved their decrees into stone, the verb "carve" became a metaphor for "enact decrees" (see Isaiah 10:1; Proverbs 31:5).

This is the root word for one of the common terms for the commands of the Torah, "statutes" or "decrees" (תּוֹרָה, see Exodus 12:24; Deuteronomy 4:40).

*"Verses 15-16 are not claiming that all kings and princes actually rule wisely or mandate righteous laws—no one would suppose that—but rather that wisdom is the principle of rulership, and effective governance depends on it... The universalism of 8:12-16...is remarkable. The author recognizes that the potentates of all nations have access to wisdom and can exercise it in ruling justly... Although not assuming that all rulers are righteous, [Wisdom] does flatter gentle leaders in assuming that the principle of their rule is wisdom."*

Michael V. Fox, "Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary," Vol. 18A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 274.

I love those who love me,  
 and those who seek me will find me.  
 Wealth and honor are with me,  
 enduring abundance and righteousness.  
 My fruit is good, more than pure gold,  
 and my income more than gold, more than choice silver.  
 I will walk in the path of righteousness,  
 in the middle of roads of justice,  
 to give a substantial inheritance,  
 and I will fill up their storehouses.

Proverbs 8:17-21

This paragraph repeats the themes of 8:4-11 and amplifies them. Wisdom is more valuable than wealth.

### Proverbs 8:22-31

a b a' b'	Yahweh <b>brought me forth</b> at <b>the beginning</b> (ראשית) of his way, <b>earlier than</b> (קדם) his acts of old; in the remote past <b>I was formed</b> , from <b>the beginning</b> (ראש) from <b>the earliest times</b> (קדם) of the land;
a b a' b' a'' a''' a b a' b' a' b' c	when there were no <b>deep waters</b> , <b>I was birthed</b> (חוללת), when there were no <b>springs</b> , heavy with <b>water</b> ; before <b>mountains</b> were sunk deep, before the <b>hills</b> , <b>I was birthed</b> (חוללת), before he made the <b>land</b> and open fields, and the first clumps of <b>soil</b> ; when he established <b>the skies</b> , I was there; when he <b>carved</b> (חקק) a horizon on the face of the <b>deep waters</b> ; when he made firm <b>the clouds</b> above, when he strengthened the <b>springs of the deep water</b> ; when he set a <b>carved</b> (חקק) boundary for the <b>sea</b> , so the <b>waters</b> would not cross his command, when he inscribed the foundations of the <b>land</b> ;
a b c c' b'	I was growing up beside him; and I was daily an object of delight; celebrating before him, the entire time; celebrating the inhabited world of the land, delighting in the sons of human!

Wisdom now plays the ultimate authority card. The universalism of her claim in 8:14-16, that it is by means of her that all wise rulers operate, is now superseded in the only possible way. She was with Yahweh in the beginning, at the origins of creation. This is a claim of cosmic centrality.

### 8:22-23: She Was with God in the Beginning

The language of Genesis 1 and 2 is activated to signal that Lady Wisdom was operative and with God even before his creative works.

at <b>the beginning</b> (ראשית) of his way,	In the <b>beginning</b> (ראשית), Elohim created the skies and the land. Genesis 1:1
from <b>the earliest times</b> (קדם) of the land	Yahweh Elohim planted a garden <b>from the earliest time</b> (מקדם) / or: <b>in the east</b> . Genesis 2:8



## “Brought me forth” = Hebrew: *qananiy* (יָנַק from הִנִּיךְ / *qanah*)

The discussion in Bruce K. Waltke’s *The Book of Proverbs*, Chapters 1-15, p. 408-409, is helpful.

“Three interpretations of *qananiy* merit consideration.”

1. Some scholars contend that *qānâ* means “**to acquire or possess**,” for good reasons.

- This is its meaning in the other occurrences in Proverbs and more specifically in connection with acquiring wisdom/knowledge/truth (1:5; 4:5, 7 [2x]; 16:16 [2x]; 17:16; 18:15; 23:23) or of acquiring sense (15:32; 19:8), and once in a commercial sense (20:14).
- “To possess” is the normal use of *qānâ* in the rest of the Old Testament.
- Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion (early translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek) began a translational tradition that was continued by the Latin Vulgate and the Syro-Hexaplar, so interpreted it.
- This interpretation best harmonizes with the statement in Job 28:27 that God discovered wisdom, not that he created it.

2. The second interpretation... “**to create**.”

- This is precisely the meaning of *qnh* in contexts where creation or procreation is in view, as in Deuteronomy 32:6 and Psalm 139:13, and probably also in Genesis 4:1 and 14:19, 22.
  - Deuteronomy 32:6: Do you thus repay Yahweh, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who **qanah’d** you, who made you and established you?
  - Psalm 139:13 (ESV): For you **qanah’d** my inward parts; you **knitted** (נִסְכַּתִּי) me together in my mother’s womb.
  - Genesis 14:19 (ESV): And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by Elohim Most High, who **qanah’d** the skies and the land.”
- It better suits the other verbs in Proverbs 8:22-26 that speak of wisdom as coming into existence.
- The Septuagint, Aramaic Targums, and the Syriac Peshitta rendered *qanah* as “create.”
- The derivative Hebrew noun *qinyān* in Psalm 104:24 most probably means “creatures,” for its parallel is *ma’āseyka* (“your works”).
  - Psalm 104:24: O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the land is full of your **creatures** (= “what you have **qanah’d**).

3. More precisely, *qnh* probably specifically means “**to beget**,” “**to bring forth**,” in Proverbs 8:22. This third interpretation rests on these philological and contextual arguments.

- In Genesis 4:1, *qānâ* has a biological sense, “to give birth to.” A birth context, and so a similar sense, is also found in Deuteronomy 32:6, where God is compared to a begetting Father, and in Psalm 139:13 (cf. Exod. 15:16; Ps. 74:2).
- The notion of “create” is possible in Genesis 14:19, 22, but *’Ēl ’elyôn qōnēh* is related to a Canaanite cultic epithet meaning “be/become parent of.”
- Of the nine occurrences of this root in Ugaritic having the possible meaning “create,” as cited by Cyrus Gordon, once it means “obtain,” once “create,” two are uncertain, and five times it occurs in the epithet of Asherah as *qnyt ’Im*, probably meaning “procreatress of the gods.”

- Above all, this meaning best suits the parallel verbs in 8:22-26, “I was formed” (v. 23) and “I was brought forth” (vv. 24-25). As Procreator, the Lord also acquired Wisdom, but this is a derivative thought... The metaphor “brought me forth” signifies that Solomon’s inspired wisdom comes from God’s essential being; it is a revelation that has an organic connection with God’s very nature and being, unlike the rest of creation that came into existence outside of him and independent from his being. Moreover, since this wisdom existed before creation and its origins are distinct from it, wisdom is neither accessible to humanity nor can it be subdued by human beings, but it must be revealed to people and accepted by them.”

## 8:24-29: The Carving of the Cosmos

The imagery used to depict cosmic origins reflect the biblical cosmology found in Genesis 1 and assumed throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. This is the three-tiered cosmos of the waters above (the skies) and the waters below.

The horizon line was “carved” (*khaqaq* / קָרַח) and so was the boundary between the sea and the dry land.

*He established the earth  
upon its foundations,  
So that it will not totter forever and ever.  
You covered it with the deep as  
with a garment;  
The waters were standing above  
the mountains.  
At your rebuke they fled,  
At the sound of your thunder they  
hurried away.  
The mountains rose; the valleys sank down  
To the place which you established  
for them.  
You set a boundary that they may  
not pass over,  
So that they will not return to cover the land.*

Psalm 104:5-9

*“Where were you when I laid the  
foundation of the land? Tell me, if you have  
understanding, Who set its measurements?  
Since you know. Or who stretched the line  
on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who  
laid its cornerstone, when the morning  
stars sang together and all the sons of  
God shouted for joy? Or who enclosed  
the sea with doors when, bursting forth,  
it went out from the womb; when I made  
a cloud its garment and thick darkness its  
swaddling band, and I placed boundaries  
on it and set a bolt and doors, and I said,  
‘Thus far you shall come, but no farther;  
and here shall your proud waves stop?’”*

Job 38:4-11

*“Do you not fear me?” declares the Lord.  
“Do you not tremble in my presence?” For  
I have placed the sand as a boundary for  
the sea, an eternal decree, so it cannot  
cross over it. Though the waves toss,  
yet they cannot prevail; though they  
roar, yet they cannot cross over it.*

Jeremiah 5:2

## “Before the deep abyss, I was birthed”

*“The abyss, tehom, is the primeval ocean, which, according to Genesis 1:2, preceded creation. In Genesis 1, it does not belong to the process of creation, because creation there means giving form and structure, while the tehom is chaotic and formless. In Proverbs 8, however, their formation is a step in creation, apparently the first after wisdom’s. Another possibility is that the tehomot here are the deeps of the ordinary seas (cf. Exod 15:5; Isa 63:13; Ps 106:9). But Proverbs 8 exhibits some unusual notions and need not be assimilated to other biblical texts.”*

*“Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,” Vol. 18A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 282.*

## 8:30-31: Wisdom's Relationship to God

"I was beside him as an **'amon** (אִמוֹן)."

The debate: What is the meaning of this Hebrew noun, which appears only here in all of ancient Hebrew literature? There are related Hebrew words that give an angle on its meaning, and the modern English versions all go different directions.

"Artisan" or "craftsman"	ESV/NASB: Then I was beside him, like a <b>master workman</b> NRSV: Then I was beside him, like a <b>master worker</b>
"Nursling" or "young child"	KJV: Then I was by him, <b>as one brought up with him</b>
"Continually" or "faithfully"	NIV: Then I was <b>constantly</b> at his side.

For the details, see the discussions of Waltke and Fox below. But for our purposes, "continually" is the most likely option, though the others are possible. It could also be that this word was chosen because it could be understood to have more than one meaning. "Continually" fits the precise patterns of parallelism at work in the entire line.

And I was	beside him	<b>faithfully, constantly</b>
And I was	delighting	daily
	celebrating before him	at all times.

## New Testament Appropriations of Proverbs 8

There are numerous texts in the New Testament that assume a connection between Jesus' pre-incarnation identity and relationship to God, and they use the language and imagery of Proverbs 8 to express it.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

John 1:1-3

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, both in the skies and on the land, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Colossians 1:15-17

*God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world.*

Hebrews 1:1-2

## Appendix to Proverbs 8

Excerpts from the Proverbs commentaries by Bruce Waltke and Micheal V. Fox on Proverbs 8:30 and the meaning of *'amon*.

### Bruce Waltke:

The text and meaning of **constantly** (*'āmôn*) has been canvassed many times. There are four feasible interpretations.

1. The majority of scholars (cf. NIV, NRSV, HALOT) favor the meaning “artisan,” “craftsman,” or the like.
  - Many allege that *'āmôn* occurs as a collective with the meaning “artisans” in Jer. 52:15, speaking of those who went into the Babylonian exile in 586 b.c., but this claim is dubious. It is based on the questionable assumption that *'āmôn* means “artisan” in Prov. 8:30, making the argument circular. Moreover, the text and/or meaning of *'āmôn* in Jer. 52:15 is uncertain because the synoptic passage in 2 K. 25:11 reads *hehāmôn* (“multitude”) and a parallel text in Jer. 39:9 speaks of “the rest of the people.” According to 2 K. 24:14, 16, “all the artisans” (*kol-heḥārāš*) went into exile in 598 b.c., implying that none was left to go into exile in 586 and that if the narrator meant “artisan” in 2 K. 25:11 he would have used *ḥārāš*, the normal Hebrew word for “artisan.” C. F. Keil draws the conclusion that *he'āmôn* is a by-form of *hehāmôn* “the multitude.” In sum, there is no lexical evidence for this meaning without arguing in a circle. This interpretation may find support in Prov. 3:19, which can be understood to mean that God used Wisdom as an agent in creation, but more probably it means that wisdom was his instrument. It is one thing to be an instrument in a creator’s hands; it is quite another to be the artisan who advises and/or does the work. Finally, possibly the ancient versions (LXX, Syr., Vulg.) as well as the Wisdom of Solomon (ca. 40 a.d.; cf. 7:21–22; 8:4–6) so interpreted the text, but not Ben Sira (ca. 130 b.c.; cf. 1:4, 9; 24:9).
  - In addition to lacking good lexical support, the interpretation “artisan” contextually diffuses the message of Prov. 8:22–29 that the Lord is the Creator of all things and the Procreator of Wisdom. A claim that she is in fact the artisan would come unexpectedly out of the blue and then just as unexpectedly be dropped. Up to this point in her argument Wisdom has been building her case to have grave authority by claiming to being begotten by God before the creation came into existence and by being present at the time when the Lord established the heavens, the seas, and the earth (vv. 25–29). If she intended to represent herself as an active agent in creation, one would expect her to make such an important contribution to her argument that she would know everything because she designed and/or made them and therefore people should listen to her (8:32). Also, this interpretation offers a poor parallel to “delighting/playing” and “celebrating/dancing” in his work; one would expect for this interpretation “teaching,” “conversing,” “making,” and the like (cf. Isa. 40:14). Finally, it would be unique and against Hebrew poetry for Woman Wisdom to describe herself by a male image, unless one argues that this is an unattested epicene noun.

2. Others retain the meaning “artisan” for *’āmôn* but take it either as an apposition to the pronominal suffix (i.e., “beside him, the Craftsman”) or as an accusative of state (i.e., “beside him as a Craftsman,” meaning “who is a craftsman”), not to the subject as in the previous interpretation. They thus avoid the contextual and theological objections of introducing Wisdom as a co-creator with the Lord.

- But this interpretation suffers from the objections that this meaning of *’āmôn* lacks strong historical support, suggesting that the grammatical analysis is improbable, and from the fact that it adds nothing to the argument.

3. Many, appealing to Aquila, emend the MT to *’āmûn*, a *Qal* passive participle II *’mn* meaning “to be looked after;” “to nurture” (cf. Lam. 4:5).

- The meaning “ward,” “nursling,” fits both the imagery of the Lord giving birth to Wisdom (vv. 22–24) and the parallels of “delight” and “laughs.” Kayatz defends it from the Egyptian parallels about Ma‘at, a close Egyptian equivalent of *ḥokmâ*, who is likened to a child playing and dancing before the deity (cf. Isa. 11:8; Zech. 8:5).
- But one expects a feminine form corresponding to the *Qal* active participle *’ōmenet* “nurse” in 2 Sam. 4:4; Ruth 4:16, which tends to negate speculating it is an unattested epicene noun.
- M. Fox achieves a similar meaning by analyzing the form as a *Qal* infinitive absolute meaning “being raised”/“growing up” and functioning as an adverbial complement to the main verb. His interpretation requires neither textual emendation nor a feminine form, and it has the support of Ibn Janah and Moshe Kimchi. But it is grammatically questionable.
- The *Qal* infinitive is active, meaning “raising,” because the *Qal* participle of I *’mn* is active, as is the probable infinitive construct in Esth. 2:20. The notion of “being raised up/growing up with” presumably requires the passive *Niphal* stem.
- Whatever the text or form, Wisdom’s claim that while she was a little child she rejoiced delightfully in the Lord’s creative work does not make her claim to grave authority very credible.

4. Hoffman and Plöger independently interpret it as a *Qal* infinitive absolute of I *’mn* “to be firm, faithful,” the root understood by Symmachus, Theodotion, and the Targum....

- Fox’s objection that the productive stem of I *’mn* is *Niphal* is not defensible. The *Qal* of I *’mn* is attested in *’āmēn* (originally “trustworthy”)—its nominal forms are *’ōmēn* “trustworthiness,” *’omnâ* “truth,” and *’emet* “trustworthiness.” Moreover, the *Niphal* infinitive absolute of I *’mn* is unattested, and some lexemes occur unexpectedly in isolated forms in otherwise nonproductive stems (e.g., *dōbēr*, *Qal* active participle of *dbr*, which root is the otherwise always *Piel*).
- Moreover, the *Qal* infinitive absolute is commonly used with the *Niphal* stem, suggesting that it may serve here as its surrogate.
- This interpretation best satisfies the parallels according to the MT accents:

And I was	beside him	<b><i>faithfully, constantly</i></b>
And I was	delighting	daily
	celebrating before him	at all times.

Although all three interpretations are possible and have historical support, the last interpretation best suits the broader context of vv. 22–31 and the immediate context of v. 30. Scott, though only thinking of the adjective “faithful” and not entertaining the option of an infinitive absolute form, rightly comments: “This meaning of the word is entirely suitable in the context generally, and particularly in verse 30 where it corresponds to the adverbs ‘daily’ [sic!] (*yôm yôm*) and ‘always’ (*ʾbkl ʾt*).”

Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 417–420.

## Michael Fox

**8:30:** *And I was near him, growing up [waʾehyeh ʾešlo ʾamon]*: This verse has provided one of the great puzzles of the Hebrew Bible because of its theological implications... The most important explanations of *ʾamon* may be grouped into three categories: (1) artisan, (2) constant(ly), and (3) ward/nursling. According to a variant of the last, which I favor (3c), Wisdom is declaring that while God was busy creating the world, she was near him, growing up in his care and giving him delight...

### 1. Artisan and related concepts

- 1a. **Emending** *ʾāmôn* to *ʾommān* “artisan” (or construing the word in this way without emendation). Syr and Vul, and perhaps LXX (see Textual Notes), understand the word thus, as does Wis (7:21; 8:6), which speaks of wisdom as the *technitis* “artificer” of the world.

*ʾāmôn* is frequently taken as a loanword from Akkadian *ummānu* via Aramaic. The Akkadian word basically means artisan, but the term may be used more broadly. Greenfield identifies *ʾāmôn* with the *ummānē* (pl.), the postdiluvian sages, and the latter with the *apkallū*, the divine antediluvian sages who brought the arts to the world (1985: 17–20). The title *ummānu* covers a broad spectrum of occupations, including scribe, scholar, master craftsman, officer (p. 17). Cazelles (1995: 45–55) notes that one Aḥuaqari is called an *ummānu* in a tablet from the Seleucid period. Pointing to Wisdom’s role as royal counselor in 8:15–16, Cazelles says that Wisdom is to be understood as a steward or high-ranking scribe in 8:30, and as an artisan only in 9:1.

Lady Wisdom is, however, shown in none of these roles during creation, and only in that setting is she called *ʾāmôn*. (It would be different if Wisdom said she was an *ʾāmôn* with kings and princes.) Moreover, the parallels in v 30bc emphasize that Wisdom was *playing* constantly. Even in Prov 3:19, according to which God created the world “by” (or “in”) wisdom, wisdom is an instrument, not an agent. She was certainly not bringing the civilized arts to humanity during the time when she was “with” God, namely at creation!

Furthermore, MT’s *ʾāmôn* is not compatible phonologically or orthographically with *ummānu*. The attested Hebrew cognate (possibly a loanword) is *ʾommān*. The analogy with *ummānu* requires an emendation, but the only justification for the emendation is the analogy, which is not a close one.

- 1b. **Uniting, organizing**—emending to *ʾômēn*, which supposedly means “binding [all] together,” “uniting”; thus R. B. Y. Scott (1960 and AB commentary), for which he appeals to LXX, Vul, and Syr. But this too goes contrary to context and syntax and assumes an unattested meaning for the verb *ʾmn*.

1c. **Instrument.** R. Hoshaya states simply: *ʿmwn ʿwmn*, “*ʿamôn* means artisan” (Gen. Rab. 1.2). However, he goes on to describe wisdom not as the artisan but as the “instrument” or “tool” (*kly ʿwmntw*) of God:

The Torah is saying (in Prov 8:30): “I was the instrument (*kly ʿwmntw*) of God.” In this world, it is the custom that when a mortal king builds a palace he does not build it from his own knowledge alone but uses the knowledge of a craftsman. And the craftsman does not build it from his own knowledge alone, but has scrolls and tablets so that he may know how to make the rooms and how to make the doors. So too did God look in the Torah and create the world. (Gen. Rab. 1.2)

In this Midrash, God is both the king and (more relevantly) the architect. The Torah (Wisdom) is like a blueprint, a static repository of information.

Saʿadia similarly explains that wisdom was the means whereby all things were initiated and put into operation.

2. **Constant(ly), faithful(ly)**, or the like, deriving the word from *ʿ-ṁ-n* “be faithful,” etc.

2a. **Symmachus** and Theodotion translate *estērigmenē* “set firm.”

2b. **Parsing** *āmôn* as an inf. abs. used adverbially and translating *beständig* “constantly” (hesitantly proposed by Plöger). Ehrlich: *vertrauten Freund* (“trusted friend”) or *beständiger Gast* (“constant guest”). Targum: *mhynt* “trusted one.”

This explanation runs up against the fact that the root *ʿ-ṁ-n* “be firm” is not productive in the G-stem (it appears only in the frozen form, *ʿāmēn* “Amen!”). Moreover, the N-stem would be expected in the proposed sense.

3. **Nurturing or raising** (a child), deriving the word from *ʿ-ṁ-n* “to nurture,” “serve as ward (to a child),” etc.

3a. **Pedagogue.** This gloss (using the Greek word) is suggested by R Hoshaya (early third century) as one valid interpretation among several (Gen. Rab. 1.1). He cites Num 11:12, “as an *ʿōmēn* carries an infant.” The *pedaigogos* was not a schoolmaster but a household slave who took children to school and was responsible for their upbringing. Gal 3:24 offers a permutation of this reading: *ho nomos paidagōgos hēmōn gegonen eis christon*, “The Law was our pedagogue till Christ came.”

“Pedagogue” could be justified morphologically by parsing *āmôn* as a rare (or Aramaizing) *nomen agentis* of the *qātōl* pattern. But the picture of Wisdom either carrying or instructing (whom?) during creation has no place in Prov 8.

3b. **Ward, one who is raised/nurtured**, or the like, vocalizing (or understanding) *ʿmwn* as *ʿāmûn*, a passive ptcp. Thus Aq *tithēnoumenē* “nursed,” “nursling” (fem.). If so, *ʿmwnn* must be taken as an unattested epicene noun, “ward,” “nursling,” because if it were functioning as an adjective, the pass. ptcp. would be in the fem. The masc. pl. adj. *ʿēmûnim* appears in Lam 4:5.

3c. **Growing up with**, parsing *ʾāmôn* as an inf. abs. serving as an adverbial complement. Hence: “I was with him growing up” (“*ʾāmôn*-ing,” as it were). This, I believe, is the solution to the puzzle. It requires no emendations and accords with the morphology of the Hebrew word.

This explanation combines insights of Ibn Janaḥ (*Sefer Hariqmah* 323.16) and Ramaḳ. Ibn Janaḥ identifies *ʾāmôn* as a (G) inf. abs. serving as an adverbial complement. For the sense, he cites Esth 2:7, “And he [Mordecai] was raising (*ʾômēn*) Hadassah.” The syntax is correct, but the example (which others adduce in favor of explanation 3b) is problematic. It shows that the G-stem of this verb is transitive, and in the case of Prov 8:30 this would imply that Wisdom was doing the child rearing, which is impossible. Ramaḳ offers a better example, Esth 2:20b, “just as it was *bʿomnāh ʾittô* when she was growing up with him.” This verse shows that the G-stem of *ʾ-m-n*, at least in the inf., can be intransitive and refer to the child’s role as well as the guardian’s. (The G inf. is, in any case, indifferent as to voice.) It also shows that the verb in this sense can govern a preposition meaning “with,” for *ʾēšel* “with”/“next to” is a near synonym of *ʾēt* as a preposition of proximity (cf. the interchange of these prepositions in 1 Kgs 20:36). On the inf. abs. as adverbial complement, see IBHS §35.3.2; some examples are Gen 30:32; Exod 30:36; Num 6:5, 23; Jer 22:19. The last also displays the passive use of the G and H infinitives.