

“Hear, My Son and Dwell Secure!”: A Rhetorical Analysis of Proverbs 1:8-33

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ABSTRACT

While Wisdom’s speech in Proverbs 1:20-33 may or may not have been composed as an independent poem, its function within the structure of the prologue complements the initial discourse (Proverbs 1:8-19). Wisdom picks up and furthers three main themes of the father’s instructions, specifically the notion of the divine authority of wisdom, the nature and urgency of character development, and the reality of the deed-consequence nexus. Taken together, both discourses share the same rhetorical purpose; they are designed to persuade the listening youth of the need to establish character at an early age by heeding the wisdom and instruction of his parents.

Keywords: Proverbs, rhetorical analysis, Wisdom.



Introduction

There is increasing scholarly consensus regarding the structure of Proverbs 1-9. As these chapters are often called, the prologue is generally believed to consist of a series of ten discourses interspersed with (approximately) five interludes.¹ Proverbs 1:8-33 is comprised of the first discourse (1:8-19) and the first interlude (1:20-33), both of which are clearly distinct units.² The former is a father's instruction to his son, and the latter is personified Wisdom's indictment of the foolish and the simple.

Though there is general agreement on the divisions of the prologue, there is still considerable debate about its textual history, especially regarding the date, purpose, and origin of the interludes.³ These issues largely revolve around the question of authorship. Specifically, scholars wish to determine the historical and authorial relationship between the discourses and the interludes. Were they written by the same person or group of people? Were the interludes composed with reference to the discourses? Or, were they composed independently and interpolated at a later date?⁴

Regardless of the textual history of the individual units, the interludes appear to be deliberately placed within the discourses.⁵ The interludes, almost all of which feature Lady Wisdom, bear certain thematic, stylistic, and rhetorical connections to the surrounding discourses and exhibit a notable progression among themselves.⁶ Regarding this relationship between the discourses and the interludes, Michael Fox rightly notes that, "[e]ven if the Wisdom interludes were composed and inserted by different authors..., they cohere as a group, probably because they all respond to ideas and motifs found in the lectures and in one another."⁷ The message of the two units that make up Proverbs 1:8-33 is fairly straightforward. Both, in their own way, present the inevitable consequences of two ways of life, the certain destruction of the wicked and the foolish, and conversely, the certain blessings of the righteous and the wise. But do they relate to each other, and if so, how?

James Loader has noted that Wisdom's poem amplifies the father's instruction in two ways: the warning of the parental instruction is escalated to a threat, and the "specificity of

1 For an excellent survey of the current state on Proverbs 1-9 research, see Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, trans. Stephen Germany (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 44-47. Though commentators offer different designations for the discourses and interludes – Michael Fox, for instance, calls the former "lectures" – there is general agreement regarding the boundaries of the discourses and the interludes. According to Fox there are ten discourses: Prov 1: 8-19; 2: 1-22; 3: 1-12; 3: 21-35; 4: 1-9; 4: 10-19; 4: 20-27; 5: 1-23; 6: 20-35; 7: 1-27; these are interspersed with five interludes are 1: 20-33; 3: 13-20; 6: 1-19; 8: 1-36; 9: 1-6, 11, 13-18. Fox also notes that these divisions almost all agree with the Masoretic *pisqa'ot*, the earliest preserved unit divisions. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 45, 47, 324. Bruce Waltke identifies only two interludes in the prologue (Prov 1: 20-33; 8: 1-36). However, his designations for the other units as "appendix" (6: 1-19) and "epilogue" (9: 1-18) are more semantic preferences than structural disagreements. Waltke does, however, agree with Fox that Prov 1: 1-19 is the first lecture, and 1: 20-33 is the first interlude. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 11.

2 Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 73, 87.

3 Opinions regarding the date of the collections range from the monarchic period (C. Kayatz) to the Hellenistic period (A. Wolters). For a summary of major opinions, see Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 48.

4 For a survey of approaches to these questions, see Bálint Károly Zabán, *The Pillar Functions of the Speeches of Wisdom: Proverbs 1:20-33, 8:1-36, and 9:1-6 in the Structural Framework of Proverbs 1-9* (BZAW 429; Berlin/Boston, MA: W. de Gruyter, 2012), 8-18.

5 Fox believes that there is no clear progression to the discourses and that they could be rearranged without disturbing the overall message of the prologue. However, he does acknowledge a thematic relationship between the interludes, especially Lady Wisdom's speeches, and the surrounding discourses. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 324. For an extensive treatment of the thematic development of Wisdom's speeches, see Zabán, *The Pillar Functions of the Speeches of Wisdom*.

6 William Brown suggests that there is a logical progression of Wisdom's speeches throughout the prologue. The progression from reproof (1: 20-33) to feasting (9: 1-6) mirrors the youth's progression through his life-journey, characterized by competing voices of authority. William Brown, *Character in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 30-41. Similarly, Zabán argues for the theme of house-building and house-filling in *Proverbs 1-9, The Pillar Functions of the Speeches of Wisdom*, 19-51.

7 Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 328.

socio-economic crime is expanded to the broader principle that underlies such behavior."⁸ This article aims to advance this thesis that there is deliberate artistic and thematic placement of the interludes within the discourses of Proverbs 1-9 and that the interludes derive much of their rhetorical force when they are read in light of the surrounding discourses.⁹ Specifically, it is argued that Wisdom's speech in Proverbs 1:20-33 complements and, in a sense, completes the parental discourse in 1:8-19 by advancing three themes: 1) the divine origin and authority of Wisdom, 2) the nature of character development, and 3) the doctrine of retribution, also called the deed-consequence nexus. After a brief consideration of the aims of the rhetorical method, I will explore the rhetorical features of each unit, focusing on the connections between the speeches as they relate to these three themes. When read with reference to each other, we discover that Wisdom issues her indictment against the foolish who failed to heed their parents' instruction, and in so doing, seeks to persuade the youth (the implied reader) of the importance and urgency of gaining wisdom and establishing character at an early age.

Research Method Rhetorical Analysis

In his presidential address delivered to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968, James Muilenberg outlined the basic aims and method of what has become known as the rhetorical critical method or rhetorical analysis.¹⁰ For Muilenberg, this method's first and perhaps most crucial feature is the need to "define the limits of scope of the literary unit, to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends."¹¹ Since Muilenberg's programmatic address, rhetorical analysis as a discipline has moved beyond his initial focus on stylistics to, in the words of one theorist, "explore the practical persuasive power of the texts in influencing action."¹² Similarly, George Kennedy defines rhetoric as "that quality of discourse by which a speaker or writer *seeks to accomplish his purpose*."¹³ In this regard, Proverbs 1:8-33 exhibits remarkable rhetorical force as the author/editor promises, warns, illustrates, pleads, threatens, and indicts – all with the goal of cultivating

8 James Alfred Loader, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 89.

9 To be sure, this article is not the first to suggest a connection between the lecture and the interlude. Loader also observes: "The third poem of the book complements the second by virtue of its warning character. In this sense it is dependence on 1: 8-19. In its present position it does this by presenting the general principle of the neglect of wisdom after the specific acts of crime picture in vv. 9-19." *Proverbs 1-9*, (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 87. Similarly, Fox maintains that the interludes are "outgrowths of the ten lectures." *Proverbs 1-9*, 328. Contra R. N. Whybray who believes that the Wisdom speeches are gratuitous additions to the discourses, and he goes so far as to say, "nothing in the instructions could be said to have prepared the reader for Wisdom's own speeches." *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 36.

10 Zában has noted the important distinction between rhetorical analysis and rhetorical criticism, the latter employing categories from the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition, the former adhering to the organization discovered within the biblical texts themselves. "A Survey of Present Research on Proverbs 1-9," *Református Szemle* (2008): 605-633, (621-22, n. 122), <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=808263>. Cf. Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (JSOT Sup 256; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998).

11 James Muilenberg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* ed. Paul R. House (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 49-69.

12 Alison Lo, *Job 28 as Rhetoric: An Analysis of Job 28 in the Context of Job 22-30* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 17.

13 George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3, emphasis mine. Kennedy does, however, leave very little room for the consideration of stylistics in the discipline of rhetorical criticism as he thinks it does violence to the classical conception of rhetoric. Most rhetorical critics are, however, more open to looking at a text's stylistic and persuasive aspects. T. B. Dozeman, "Old Testament Rhetorical Criticism," *ABD* 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 712-15. For a survey of contemporary rhetorical critical approaches, see Vernon K. Roberts, "The Present and Future of Rhetorical Analysis," in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (JSNTSup 146; Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 24-52; and Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (OTS; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

the desire to hear and heed the way of wisdom.

It should be noted, however, that these two emphases of the rhetorical method are not mutually exclusive. Both stylistics and persuasion coexist happily under the umbrella of rhetorical analysis broadly considered. While this article emphasises the persuasive power of Proverbs 1: 8-33, one matter of stylistics should be mentioned as it invites the reader to interpret the two poems as offering a unified and complementary message.

Muilenberg suggested that one of the basic clues for determining the scope of a pericope is the use of an *inclusio*, the bookending of a unit with parallel features, whether they be lexical, semantic, or of a more generally conceptual nature.¹⁴ At the conceptual level, we see the opening and closing of Proverbs 1: 8-33 forming an *inclusio* as both promise blessings and security as the reward for the one who embraces wisdom. At the beginning of his discourse, the father promises his son that his instruction will be a “graceful wreath for your head and necklaces for your neck” (1: 9). And at the conclusion of her indictment, Wisdom promises that “the one who listens to me will dwell securely, and will be at ease, without anxiety from disaster” (1:33).

However, in addition to an *inclusio* at the conceptual level, there is also an *inclusio* at the lexical level with the repetition of the verb עָמַשׁ. The father’s opening words begin, עָמַשׁ יְבִיבָהּ רִסוּם יְבִיבָהּ (“hear, my son, your father’s instruction,” 1: 8). Wisdom closes her indictment with the promise וְיָשָׁב יְלֵךְ עִמָּי (“and the one who listens to me will dwell securely,” 1: 33). Here we observe a lexical *inclusio* accompanying the conceptual *inclusio* not too dissimilar from the opening of the book of Psalms. Many have noted that the בְּרֵכָה יְרֵשָׁהּ which opens Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man who walks not according to the counsel of the wicked” (Ps. 1:1) is repeated at the close of Psalm 2: “Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (2:12). Though the *inclusio* says little about their composition, its presence in the final form of the text invites the reader to consider how the psalms complement each other and together produce a unified and coherent meaning.¹⁵

A similar phenomenon may be observed in Prov 1:8-33. Between the opening and closing promises of honor, security, and blessing, the instruction (1:8-19) and the indictment (1:20-33) focus almost exclusively on destroying the wicked, the scoffers, the foolish, and the simple.¹⁶ However, by opening and closing these two poems with the promise of prosperity for those who heed wisdom, as well as with the repetition of the root, עָמַשׁ, the author/editor invites the reader to understand the two poems as offering coherent, complementary message with a unified rhetorical function.

Discussion

Divine Origin and Authority of Wisdom

The function of the parental discourse in Proverbs 1: 8-19 is twofold. First, and perhaps

¹⁴ Muilenberg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 58.

¹⁵ Patrick Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann (JSOT Sup159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 83-92; Bruce Waltke and James Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 160-61.

¹⁶ The one exception might be verse 23. However, my interpretation below suggests that the thrust of this verse is negative, not positive.

most basically, the parental discourse presents the ordinary way by which wisdom is obtained. A young man or woman finds wisdom and the benefits accompanying her in the family's natural setting. The familial context for learning wisdom is paradigmatic throughout the prologue as each of the ten discourses opens with the words אָבִי ("My son ...").

Some have suggested that the context here is a classroom rather than a family, and the father and son are metaphors for teacher and student, respectively.¹⁷ This, however, seems to be an unnatural reading of the text, especially in light of the mention of the mother's teaching in verse 8.¹⁸ Rather, directly following the magisterial preface to the book (1: 1-7), the parental discourse presents the ordinary way in which the preceding virtues (righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, wisdom, and understanding) are cultivated. That is, they are passed on from the parents to children in the home context.¹⁹ More specifically, some have read the instructions in Proverbs 1: 8-19 and throughout the prologue as a father's words to his son at a specific point when the son is about to cross the threshold into manhood.²⁰

Unabated Proverbs are designed to instill wisdom, knowledge, and righteousness in the simple and the young (1:2-6). The preface states that these virtues can only be achieved in the proper relationship with the Lord, namely "the fear of the Lord" (1:7).²¹ The immediate transition in verse 8 to the words of a father to his son suggests the natural context in which the fear of the Lord is obtained. It is primarily within the context of the covenant family that godly fear and the godly character that it produces is formed. In this regard, Meredith Kline writes, "The appearance of Yahweh's covenantal words in the wisdom form of parental instruction reminds us that the covenantal and family models offer complementary understandings of God's relationship to man. The Lord of the covenant is also the Father of his people."²² Consequently, in the opening scene of parents instructing their children, the reader is confronted with the ordinary context and mechanism for communicating wisdom from one generation to the next.

In the first discourse, the father employs an array of rhetorical and literary devices designed to instill wisdom in his son in a persuasive and winsome manner. The father's words to his son open with an appeal to that which should be the governing motivation for a son's action, namely the honoring of his parents (1:8-9). This walking in the way of his parents' instruction will make him honorable and beautiful before men. This honor will

17 Leo Perdue, *Proverbs* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 77; Crawford H. Toy, *Proverbs* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1899), 14; Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, vol 1, trans. M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 59. Cf. Loader's somewhat more nuanced articulation of a 'metaphorical father-son' interpretation, *Proverbs 1-9*, 70.

18 See Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, 186; R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 37; Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 15. Fox also agrees that the father-to-son setting is "maintained in Proverbs, at least as a fiction, consistently in chapters 1-9." He does acknowledge that the origins and setting of Wisdom Literature is a separate issue from the existence of schools or their possible use in the royal court. *Proverbs 1-9*, 8-9.

19 To be sure, the quest for the social context of the Proverbs persists unabated. See Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (BZAW 422; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011). However, even if the book of Proverbs in its final form functioned in other social and instructional contexts, the familial context of its *at least* fictive (if not actual) setting has import for its theology and is critical for the argument above.

20 E.g., Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9," *Semeia* (1990): 111-44.

21 Brown argues that there is a relational and communal aspect to the entire list of virtues in Prov 1: 1-7, which culminates in the most basic of the virtues, "the fear of the Lord." He also sees a connection with Deuteronomy where the "fear of God receives much attention... as a posture of humble obedience the [sic] begins with the heart, the seat of understanding and the will (e.g. Deut 10:12)," *Character in Crisis*, 28 n. 24.

22 Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 67.

later serve as a foil for that which the sinful men have to offer, namely material gain that is wrongfully acquired and can only lead to destruction (1:19). The promise of the father is not necessarily material wealth (though it may include this), but rather favor among men and by implication, favor before God.²³

The image of adorning oneself with virtues is repeated throughout the book of Proverbs. In 3:3, for example, the author writes concerning steadfastness and faithfulness, “bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.” Regarding parental instruction, 6:21 reads, “Bind them on you heart always; tie them around your neck.” Although some scholars wish to identify these adornments with certain cultic or superstitious practices of other ancient Near Eastern religions, a better connection can be drawn with Yahweh’s covenantal instructions to his people. The image of adorning oneself with the teaching of another is an allusion to Deuteronomy 6:6-9.²⁴

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The connection between the father’s instruction and the law of God is perhaps most obvious in the use of the imperative עֲמֹץ in conjunction with the mention of Torah: “And do not forsake the *instruction* of your mother” (דְּמָא תִּרְוֹת).²⁵

By presenting the benefits of obedience in a way that alludes to Yahweh’s familiar covenant promises to his people, the father anticipates what will become explicit in Wisdom’s speech, namely that family wisdom is bestowed with divine authority. Like the law in Deuteronomy, wisdom is presented as authoritative and binding. The father is not passing on mere personal advice or communal customs. His instructions are rooted in the very nature of reality as it has been ordered by God and as it is sustained by God through the operation of rewards and punishment for obedience and disobedience, respectively.²⁶

Though an author’s purposes in personification are varied, the personification of Wisdom in the final form of this text functions, in part, to present a contrast with the wicked gang who is enticing the young man to a life of crime.²⁷ In this way, Wisdom’s discourse receives much of its rhetorical power. One of the literary devices employed to tie the two

23 Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 84.

24 “Thus, v. 9 alternates between two levels: a surface level that has to do with a sign of honor and a deeper level that alludes to the Deuteronomistic tradition.” Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 78.

25 “Generally, the poetry of this writer has its hidden roots in the older writings. Who does not hear, to mention only one thing, in i.7-ix. An echo of the old עָמַץ (hear), Deut vi. 4-9, cf. xi. 18-21? The whole poetry of this writer savours the book of Deuteronomy.” Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, 1.34-35. Since Moshe Weinfeld’s monumental study, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), the relationship between law and wisdom has been highly controverted, and space does not permit even a cursory survey of the relevant literature. For a survey of the state of the field, see Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of ‘Torah’ in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 163; Leiden: Brill, 2013). However, even if this author’s conviction of the priority of Deuteronomy is not shared, the above argument remains valid from a canonical and intertextual perspective.

26 Contra e.g., Fox who argues: “Even if Proverbs and Deuteronomy use similar terms and motifs in speaking of wisdom instruction and Yahweh’s Torah, that does not mean that these come from the same source, only that terms of honor learned from the one book are used in the other.” *Proverbs 1-9*, 79. Cf. Roger N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (BZAW 135; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 121 n 191; James Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 73.

27 For a survey of the functions of literary personification, see Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985), 214-22.

units together is the contrast between the entreaties of the gang and Lady Wisdom, both with regard to their setting and substance. In the first section, the wicked gang 'entices' (1:10; הִתְנַחֵם) the young man to collaborate in their wickedness. The image is one of lies, deceit, secrecy, and seduction.²⁸ The setting of their plea is the dark and secretive places of the world as they entice the youth to "lie in wait for blood" while they "lurk in hiding" (1:11).

In contrast to the wicked gang quietly seducing the young man, Wisdom is personified as crying out "in the street," "in the market," at the "head of noisy streets," and "at the city gates" (1:20-21). Fox comments on her setting: "Wisdom is not secretive, confining herself to a coterie of initiates. Quite the contrary, she roams about the busiest parts of the city, demanding attention."²⁹ In contrast to the gang, Wisdom is not hidden or far off. Nor is she the reward for the elite who devote themselves to scholarship and learning. Her message is for everybody. She takes her place in the public spaces of everyday life. She proclaims her message loudly and clearly. She is honest, upfront and has nothing to hide.

Personified Wisdom shows up at least two other times in the book of Proverbs (8:1-36; and 9:1-6, 11-12.) But while in her later appearances she is alluring and enticing as she conveys her beauty and benefits, her first appearance in 1:20 is much more imprecatory in character. Wisdom is portrayed as taking what many have rightly identified as a prophetic stance at the gate of the city as she issues God's curse against those who despise her.³⁰ It is this prophetic posture that discloses Wisdom's divine authority. In Proverbs 1:20-33, Wisdom issues her reproof to the foolish and the simple. This indictment against those who spurn her call recalls that of the prophets issuing God's covenant lawsuit. For example, Jeremiah prophesies, "'because you have done all these things,' declares the Lord, 'and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer'" (Jer. 7:13).³¹

Also, like Israel's prophets, Wisdom offers hope that those who would listen to her and heed her call will be saved (Prov. 1:33).³² Just as the parents depict their instruction in a manner that alludes to Yahweh's covenant promises in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Wisdom depicts her indictment in terms reminiscent of Israel's prophets. Together they forcefully communicate that Wisdom, wherever she is found, comes with divine authority and is attended with the promise of divine rewards and sanctions. Brown comments on the rhetorical effect of Wisdom's speech relative to the father's instruction: "The position of wisdom's rebuke immediately following the father's warning has the effect of extending

28 BDB glosses this word, "persuade," "entice," "deceive," "seduce," 834.

29 Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 96.

30 Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 161 n. 21. On the portrayal of Wisdom as a prophetess, see the discussion of Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 93f; Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, 89-90. On the specific, intertextual connection between Proverbs 1:20-33 and Jeremiah, see Scott Harris, *Proverbs 1-9: A Study of Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (SBLDS 150; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 67-109.

31 In addition to the prophetic nature of her discourse, Camp has suggested that the prophetess Huldah in 1 Kings 22:15 might be a historical prototype for the depiction of Wisdom in Proverbs 1:20-33. She says, "If however, Wisdom's 'counsel' and 'reproof' in 1:25, 30 may connote the written wisdom tradition in Prov 10-31... then Huldah's function as authenticator of a book may be profitably compared to this presentation of Wisdom." *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 142.

32 Waltke cites C. B. Kayatz's extensive treatment of the prophetic motifs in Wisdom's speech in Prov 1:20-33 (*Studien Zu Proverbien 1-9*). These include her use of: "how long" (יִתְנַחֵם) in v 22, "turn back" (וּבוֹשֶׁת) in v 23, her scolding accusation of not listening, introduced with "but since" (עַי) in vv 24-25; sentences of coming destruction introduced by "then" (אָז) in v 28 and "because" (תַּחַת) in v 29, sentences of sinners calling in vain in v 28, and condemnation for faithlessness in v 32. Waltke notes, "None of these motifs is [sic] at home in wisdom literature." *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, 84, n. 61.

the parental discourse into the realm of the community. Rather than mitigating the father's authoritative stance, Wisdom heightens the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student."³³

Urgency of Character Development

The opening discourse presents the parents' stern warning against the pursuit of unjust gain. To achieve this, the fathers employ the particular illustration of the pursuit of such gain. This second section of the father's discourse warns the son against joining a gang. Fox notes that this extreme example of viciousness is uncommon in ancient Near Eastern (including Israelite) wisdom literature.³⁴ However, its purpose seems clear. The father wants to clearly distinguish the two ways of life, making them as distinct as possible. He allows for no grey areas. He may also be seeking to shock his son (and the readers?), to evoke from them disgust and repulsion towards the senseless violence described here.

Speaking in the first person, the gang is, in a sense, given their own voice. In verses 11-14, they invite the youth not simply to join them in a one-time criminal operation but rather to "throw in [his] lot" with them (וּנְבוֹתָבָ לִיפֶת דְּלָרוֹג, 1: 14). The language here is comprehensive in scope. The invitation is for the youth to lead a life of crime. This life is cast as obtaining a share of illicit gain by casting lots.

Fox notes that the temptation of the gang is two-fold: wealth and camaraderie.³⁵ For a young man, wealth and camaraderie, along with illicit sex (another major theme in the book of Proverbs), perhaps make up the chief temptations with which he will be confronted. However, the gang seeks not only material wealth (1:13) but also the exercise of sheer power. They compare themselves to the pit of Sheol itself: "like Sheol, let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit" (1:12). William McKane has argued that the image of Sheol swallowing her victims whole is a metaphor derived from Canaanite mythology where "Mot (Death) is the god with the gaping throat and the insatiable appetite, and it is through his gullet that the living pass into the underworld of the dead."³⁶ If McKane's connection is correct, the criminals are ascribing to themselves semi-divine qualities as they exercise power over life and death. Furthermore, their violence is presented as arbitrary, violence for the sake of violence. Surely, they could have robbed their victims without having to kill them (1:11). They are claiming for themselves power, authority, and privileges that belong exclusively to God. Their delusional claims anticipate the appearance of Lady Wisdom, who comes as the truly semi-divine figure properly exercising divine authority.

By letting the criminals speak for themselves in 1:11-14, the author is rhetorically creating a tone of plausibility, essentially giving the criminals their own voice and yet, at the same time, undermining their self-aggrandizing claims. In fact, letting the criminals

33 Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 32.

34 "Lecture I thus takes a new angle, one perhaps intended to cause surprise, even discomfort. Is life really *that* dangerous?" Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 93.

35 Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 93.

36 William McKane, *Proverbs* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 269.

"speak for themselves" suggests that the father is speaking as one who has experienced the temptation of such criminals. He knows how they think and speak, he's observed their actions, and he knows how their life ends. However, the father caricatures the criminals when he puts words in their mouths that they would almost certainly not say, especially when they are trying to gain a new recruit. For example, it is not likely that they would admit that those who they are waiting to kill are innocent (1: 11). However, such caricaturing does not negate the realism of the father's depiction. The father cleverly achieves two aims. He communicates the nature of the temptation realistically, and at the same time, he undermines their temptation by exposing it for the senseless violence that it really is.

Having painted a vivid picture of the life that the wicked lead, the father then admonishes his son to seek a different path, namely, the path of life. He says, "My son, do not walk in the way with them, hold back your foot from their paths" (1: 15). The words "walk" (הלך) and "path" (דרך) together envision an entire way of life. Like the criminal gang, the father is setting forth a way of life. The father is seeking to inculcate a certain character or pattern of behavior in his son, namely wisdom, righteousness, justice, equity, knowledge, prudence, and discretion (1: 2-6) that will govern not only his decision regarding invitations to violence but any and all temptations to folly. Character development is at the heart of parental instruction. For the sages, righteous or wicked actions express one's character. Therefore, the father says that instead of being the kind of person who walks along the path of the wicked, his son should cultivate the character that leads him to walk according to his father's instruction.

Lady Wisdom advances this theme of the urgency of character development. This theme manifests in the two rhetorical questions with which she begins her indictment (1:22). These questions express Wisdom's exasperation with the foolish who continue to reject her generous offer and delight in their hopeless conditions. The simple continue to revel in their simplicity (1: 22), and the foolish continue to despise that which would make them no longer fools, namely knowledge (1: 23). Wisdom's exasperation evokes a sense of absurdity in the reader. A world in which such foolishness runs rampant through the streets and is present in places of justice and business is clearly a world out of joint. This chaotic (and absurd) situation recalls that of the gang who lie in wait for their own blood in the first discourse. The decisions of the foolish, like the violent and the wicked earlier, are out of accord with the created order and are portrayed as inherently absurd and senseless. Yet, because they lack wisdom, they are unable to perceive it.

In both the father's discourse and Wisdom's interlude, we see the character portrayed as a reality established in one's youth, which becomes solidified over time to the point where it becomes all but impossible to change. For this reason, as the setting changes from the home to the workplace, the rhetoric changes from parental warning, admonishing and persuading to prophetic threatening, condemning, and sentencing. The characters of the simple, the scoffers, and the foolish have become so hardened that there is little or no hope for them to turn from their certain destruction. In contrast to the measured

discourse of the father, Wisdom's words manifest exasperation and frustration. Also, as Carol Newsom remarks, Wisdom's opening words, "How long will you..." (1:22) posit "a past relationship between [Wisdom] and the reader."³⁷ This is not the first time the unwise have heard Wisdom's voice. Presumably, they've heard Wisdom's voice from their youth through the instruction of their parents. In this, we see a connection between Wisdom's and father's authority.³⁸

However, concluding that Wisdom's speech presents a deterministic theology that precludes repentance and change would be a mistake. The very point of this text is the repentance, not of the fool in the text, but of the reader of the text. About this rhetorical feature, Brown writes, "Wisdom's approach is clearly strategic: The force of her rhetoric lies in her ability to ascribe a guilty conscience to her listeners, thereby provoking a crisis of decision. This is clearly the rhetoric of rebuke at its sharpest."³⁹ The fool does not know that he or she is a fool, nor are scoffers aware of their scoffing. They will not respond to Wisdom because they are not looking outside themselves for reproof and instruction from a higher authority. For this reason, Wisdom's indictment can be compared to that of the prophets where they take their stand and issue a message calling for repentance that they know for certain will not come (e.g., Ezek 3:7).⁴⁰ There are even similar occasions when Yahweh, like Wisdom, promises that he will not respond when he is sought (e.g., Jer 11:11; Mic 3:4; Isa 1:5; Hos 5:6). Fox notes that in this respect, Wisdom transcends the behavior of a prophet, and speaks as a divine figure.⁴¹

Many translations of verse 23 suggest that Wisdom is, in fact, offering an opportunity to turn and repent, especially through the image of her pouring out her spirit. The NIV, NEB, and ESV render the verse as a conditional clause, "If you turn ... then I will..." Though not explicitly conditional, the NRSV also portrays Wisdom as offering hope and deliverance when she says, "... I will pour out my thoughts to you..." Presumably, she is still willing to offer instruction to those who would listen.⁴² The difficulty with this interpretation is that it interrupts Wisdom's vicious indictment against those who have refused to heed her reproof.⁴³ Perhaps more significant, however, is the fact that the conditional rendering requires that the presentative particle הַיְהִי־כֵן be interpreted as introducing the apodosis of a conditional clause. This phenomenon is rare, if not unattested, in the Hebrew Bible. Richard Clifford's solution to this problem is to omit verse 22bc altogether, moving straight from the condemnation of the foolish in verse 22a to verse 23, which he

37 Carol Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 146.

38 Though Newsom sees the authority exercised in both speeches as a negative thing, she recognizes the unifying nature of the hierarchical speeches of the father and Wisdom as opposed to the egalitarian temptation of the criminal classes. "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 145-46.

39 Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 32.

40 Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 93.

41 Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 333. However, Fox wants to restrict the designation of a prophet to Wisdom's discourse and not her *persona*. This seems to be an unnecessary distinction because Wisdom derives much of her *persona* from the form of her discourse, which, as Kayatz has demonstrated (see n. 31 above), has many distinctively prophetic characteristics.

42 The KJV, NKJV, and the NASB also imply a conditional offer with Wisdom uttering the imperative, "turn."

43 Roland Murphy, "Wisdom's Song: Proverbs 1:20-33," *CBQ* 48 (1986), 458.

renders, "...will you turn away at my reproof?"⁴⁴

Roland Murphy argues that such an emendation is unnecessary. According to Murphy, the spirit that will be poured out is not a spirit of peace and blessing as it is in Isa 44:3. Rather, he argues that Wisdom's spirit is a spirit of judgment and condemnation as in Isaiah 4: 4, "the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning."⁴⁵ The fact that Wisdom has already been rejected is made clear in verse 24ff. The sense of verse 23, therefore, is that the simple, the scoffers, and the fools *have turned away from, not towards* Wisdom. Such an interpretation is well expressed in Murphy's translation of 1: 22-23: "How long, simple ones, will you love being simple, and the arrogant delight in their arrogance, and the fools hate knowledge, turning away at my reproof? Now I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make known my words to you."⁴⁶

Furthermore, Murphy helpfully points out that the notion of turning away in verse 23 is again, "taken up in a kind of *inclusio* in *mēšûbat pētāyîm* of v 32, where the turning away is precisely attributed to the 'simple' ones as in verses 22-23."⁴⁷ In other words, there is no hope being entertained for the simple, the scoffers, and the fools. However, as the young man on the threshold of manhood (that is, the implied reader) is made privy to Wisdom's indictment against those whose character has become hardened in folly, simplicity, and scoffing, as he witnesses the certain destruction of such people, he is (hopefully) impressed with the importance of heeding familial wisdom in his youth.

Deed-Consequence Nexus

Having presented the life of the wicked from their own point of view, the father concludes by revealing their certain destiny. The destiny of the wicked is to serve as the motivation for the youth to decide in favor of his parent's wisdom. There is, in fact, a great deal of irony as the father contrasts what the gang has said will be their lot (specifically wealth, power, and camaraderie) with what really lies in store for them.⁴⁸ The fact is, the blood they are running to shed will be their own (1:18). While they huddle together, excitedly lying in wait for their treasure, they are, in fact, awaiting their own destruction. With this ironic climax, the father wonderfully captures the heart of the deed-consequence

44 Clifford, *Proverbs*, 40. Clifford does, however, have syntactical ground for the connection between 22a and 23.

45 Murphy, "Wisdom's Song: Proverbs 1:20-33," 458. Cf. Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 94-95. The LXX likewise interprets Wisdom's words more as a threat than as an invitation to repent:

ἰδοὺ προήσσομαι ὑμῖν ἐμῆς πνοῆς ῥῆσιν,
διδάξω δὲ ὑμᾶς τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον.

Behold, I will bring forth to you the utterance of my breath,
And I will teach you my word.

46 Murphy, *Proverbs*, xxxii. Cf. JPS, "You are indifferent to my rebuke; I will now speak my mind to you, And let you know my thoughts."

47 Murphy, "Wisdom's Song: Proverbs 1:20-33," 459-60. Contra Waltke who interprets the "simple ones" as being the object of Wisdom's plea for repentance, the other two, fools and scoffers, being beyond the scope of redemption. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, 203-4.

48 The exact meaning of verse 17 is uncertain. Fox lists six different views and, in the end, adopts a double reading. He first compares the bird with the youth being addressed. If such a simple creature has the wherewithal to avoid such an obvious trap, certainly the youth should have even more so. Secondly, however, the fact that a simple bird would avoid such a trap shows the lack of wisdom of the gang who traps themselves. Therefore, this proverb serves double duty in its comparing both the youth and the gang to the bird. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 89. Interestingly, Richard Clifford excises verse 16 as a later interpolation for the purpose of explaining the nebulous verse 17. However, this suggestion may be safely disregarded as verse 18, not verse 16, seems to be carrying the load of interpreting verse 17. Verse 18 demonstrates the foolishness and calamity of the wicked gang. Richard Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 37.

nexus, a theme that occurs throughout the proverbs. The deed-consequence nexus also called the doctrine of retribution, refers to the relationship between one's actions and the inevitable consequences which flow from them. McKane puts it like this:

The action itself is pregnant with consequences for good or evil. Hence the relationship between the actions of the fools and the bad end which overtakes them is inward and necessary, not superimposed as the consequence of a forensic verdict and penalty. This comes close to saying that such necessary connections between act and consequence belong to the structure of reality.⁴⁹

The father's concluding summary in verse 19 reiterates the dreadful irony of the criminal's behavior and serves as a bridge to Wisdom's indictment that immediately follows. The father's words in Proverbs 1:19 broaden the horizon of his instruction, that such destruction is the consequence not only for the criminal classes but also for all who live a life seeking unjust gain. This is, in fact, a feature of the proverbial literature generally – where a specific example serves as an invitation to consider the broader applicability and implication of the truth contained in it.⁵⁰ This broadened horizon anticipates the change of focus from vicious criminals in the parental discourse, to the everyday fool, scoffer, and simpleton who are the objects of Wisdom's derision.⁵¹ Like the criminals who receive just retribution for their actions, so too will the fools, the scoffers, and the simple reap the consequences for their disregard for instruction. Furthermore, Prov 1:19 anticipates the personification of Wisdom in the personification of unjust gain as it is said to "take away the lives of its owners."

Finally, Wisdom advances the theme of the deed-consequence nexus. Wisdom affirms that individuals are responsible for their actions and that good and bad actions will bear their respective outcomes. Like the father in the first discourse, who makes it clear through explicit statements as well as clever use of irony that the cause of the demise of the wicked is their own devices, Wisdom affirms that the foolish are responsible for their own destruction. She says, "thus they will eat the fruit of their own way, and have their fill of their own counsels. For the simple kill themselves, and the ease of fools destroys them" (1:31-32). Judgment, disaster and death are inevitable realities for the fools, scoffers, and the intractably simple. Although she will be present, Wisdom is not the one who will execute judgment. Her past and present work is depicted as solely beneficent (1:24). However, when disaster strikes, Wisdom will be present, perhaps as a witness testifying to the way of life so foolishly ignored. Destruction will certainly come, and its terror is portrayed like the overwhelming power of a storm or gale (1:27). This destruction is portrayed as the inevitable fruit of rejecting Wisdom's call.

The rhetorical effect of having Wisdom advance the deed-consequence nexus is that it connects the father's depiction of the way things are with God's work in the creation.

49 McKane, *Proverbs*, 271.

50 "Wisdom sees the universal through the particular and judges the particular for what it is." R. C. Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs* (NIB V; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 35.

51 This thematic development is identified by Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 89.

Wisdom acts as a type of mediatrix between God and man. As such, her affirmation that deeds will reap their respective consequences in all areas of life (not just for the criminal) is a divine word about the nature of reality. Wisdom's work signals both the divine origin of the deed-consequence nexus and a continued divine involvement in the created order.⁵² About this continued divine involvement, Waltke writes, "Many sayings assert the deed-destiny nexus, but they do not presuppose divine inactivity."⁵³ Waltke goes on to note that throughout the book of Proverbs, the sayings resist the charge of being deistic or secular with regard to God's involvement in creation by an intentional use of structural and rhetorical features. Again, Waltke's comments are helpful: "Many sayings represent the character-consequence nexus without appealing to the Lord's involvement, but Proverbs aims to protect itself against interpreting the deed-destiny connection as being fatalistic in several ways... [the most important of which, to my mind is] the sayings combine these so-called "world order sayings" with Yahweh sayings."⁵⁴

In the same way that the sayings in Proverbs 10-31 are preserved from depicting an iron-clad deed-consequence nexus that precludes divine activity through structural and rhetorical features, so too the father's instruction is qualified through the introduction of the divine figure of Woman wisdom. Wisdom universalizes and divinizes the deed-consequence theology of the father.⁵⁵ The consequences of which the father speaks are not blind forces of nature, but the consequence of a divinely ordained and sustained order of reality. Lady Wisdom acts as God's representative on earth – teaching, guiding, instructing, and pleading for everyone to hear and follow her.

Wisdom's indictment is structured by two parallel sections, which present the motive or reason for Wisdom's indictment (1:24-25 and 29-30), and two parallel sections present the inevitable results of the foolish decisions (1:26-28 and 31-32). The important difference between the two motive sections is the transition from the second-person to the third-person plural pronouns. Though Wisdom had been addressing the condemned directly with the pronoun "you," at the end of the first section, there is a shift to the third person: "Then *they* will call to me, but I will not answer, *they* will scour for me, but they will not find me" (1:28).

This stylistic feature affects a sense of distancing the reader from those being indicted and condemned. The author wants the reader to view the condemned as 'other.' In this way, it can be said that while there is no offer of salvation to those foolish persons in the text, the purpose of the text is to elicit a response from the reader, namely one of disassociation with the foolish, the scoffers, and the simple. Herein lies the persuasive force of

52 "[Wisdom] appears to be the link between the practical, down-to-earth realities of daily living and life with God." Roland Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Israel*, ed. by John Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 231.

53 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapter 1-15*, 73.

54 To prove this last claim, he cites the following: 10:2-5; 10:23-27, 12:1-14, 14:1-4, and 15:2-7. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, 74.

55 Commenting on Wisdom's peroration in Prov 1: 32-33, Loader says, "Here [Wisdom] sums up the deed-consequence nexus as well as it can be done. The first stitch provides its negative side and the second the positive side. Both are formulated as general truths: The waywardness and complacency of various shades of fool kill and destroy them. The imperfections used in both verbs show that this is always so. Likewise, whoever listens to Wisdom (חָכָם participle) will always be safe and without fear of disaster. The very formulation of a general truth means that this is the order of things. So Wisdom herself, in her own words, testifies that the deed-consequence nexus is built into the world." *Proverbs 1-9*, 100.

this text. The text's rhetoric persuades the reader to take a critical posture towards those who have rejected Wisdom's call.⁵⁶ The youth is reminded that he (the youth) is not them (the simple, the scoffers, and the foolish), and that his life decisions now (on the threshold of manhood) will affect Wisdom's posture toward him in the future. Will she become the source of security and blessing of life, or will she stand aside as a mocker when disaster and terror strike?

Conclusion

While Wisdom's speech in Prov 1:20-33 may or may not have been composed as an independent poem, it functions within the structure of the final form of the prologue to complement the initial discourse of Prove 1:8-19. Wisdom picks up and furthers the main themes of the father's instructions, specifically the theme of the divine authority of wisdom, the nature and urgency of character development, and the reality of the deed-consequence nexus. Taken together, both discourses share the same rhetorical purpose; they are designed to persuade the listening youth of the need to establish his character at an early age by heeding the wisdom and instruction of his parents.

The youth is provided with two perspectives on the same phenomenon. The first is from perspective of a young man on the threshold of adulthood who will be faced with various temptations which result in death and destruction. The second is from the perspective of those in the adult world who have failed to heed the call of Wisdom in their youth. Wisdom's speech affirms the divine authority of parental instruction, the importance of wise decision-making facing the youth, and the reality of consequences for his decisions. While the fools, the scoffers, and the simple are beyond the influence of Wisdom's voice, her indictment serves as a warning to the youth in the text and to the reader of the text.

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⁵⁶ Loader, *Proverbs 1-9*, 98. Contra Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 146.

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