

Proverbs 9 - The Ultimate Choice, Wisdom or Folly?

I. Chapter Overview

A. The chapter is made up of basically three sections

1. (v.1-6) Woman Wisdom's Invitation
2. (v.7-12) Woman Wisdom's Final Words
 - a. At first glance this section seems out of place
 - b. v.11 suggests that these are Woman Wisdom's words rather than the sage
 - 1) Therefore, this is still a part of Woman Wisdom's exhortation
 - 2) This makes verse 12 the final words she speaks in the book of Proverbs
 - c. Since these are the last words of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs, there needs to be careful consideration of their significance in everything that has been taught up to this point.
3. (v.13-18) The Woman of Folly's Invitation

B. The chapter serves as both a conclusion and transition

1. It concludes Proverbs 1-9
 - a. After all the instructions of Proverbs 1-9, it comes down to 2 choices, choose wisdom or choose folly
 - b. Wisdom personifies all the instructions concerning the fear of the Lord, righteousness, and uprightness
 - c. Folly personifies all the instructions concerning arrogance, wickedness, crookedness, and foolishness
2. In a sense it transitions to the collections of proverbs that follow
 - a. The collections that follow are the tools and nourishment that woman wisdom offers
 - b. It is significant that the book of Proverbs concludes with the virtuous woman, a fitting conclusion to a book that has Woman Wisdom dominating the beginning, and the virtuous woman dominating the end

C. Features

1. This chapter is a high point in the book of Proverbs
2. The pupil is no longer "simple" or "unlearned," since he has now had the benefit of the teaching that has preceded this chapter.

II. (v.1-6) Woman Wisdom's Invitation

A. Translation

1. Wisdom¹ built her house,
she has hewn out her seven pillars.
2. She has slaughtered her slaughter,
she has mixed her wine,
she has also arranged her table.
3. She has sent her damsels,²
she calls from the highest of heights of the city
4. Who is simple/naïve? Turn aside here!
And she says to him lacking of heart,
5. Come! Eat of my bread,
and drink of my wine I have mixed
6. Forsake simpleness/naïveness and live,
and go straight on in the way of understanding

B. The teacher's description of Woman Wisdom

1. She is a builder
 - a. She has built her house - Knowing the type of architect she is in 8:22-31 reveals the type of builder she is
 - b. Seven pillars
 - 1) This communicates grandeur
 - a) Seven pillars in a house makes one think of a temple, palace or noble's house
 - b) Commoners did not build their houses with pillars
 - 2) This communicates stability
 - 3) This is reminiscent of Prov. 8:30
 - a) By wisdom, God built the world
 - b) 1 Sam 2:8 - God set the world on the pillars
 - c) The world is solid and stable
 - c. Similar instructions using similar metaphors
 - 1) Matt 7:21-27 - Jesus uses similar analogy
 - a) Jesus teaches wise words to live by
 - b) In conclusion he gives a contrast of one who listens and one who doesn't
 - 2) 1 Cor 3:10-15 - Paul uses a similar analogy
 - a) It takes more than just a good foundation for a house to stand
 - b) Good building materials, which in context refer to

¹ Wisdom here is in plural form. For more on the significance of the plural form for the figure of wisdom, see the notes on 1:20-33.

² נַעֲרָה *nē'ārāh* - Young female, damsel, little girl

that which is focused on God rather than man

3) Col 2:6-8

- a) We need to be built up in our faith in Christ
- b) Contrast between worldly philosophy and Christ

2. She is a hostess

- a. The purpose of her house is to invite guests
- b. She has "arranged her table" - A feast
 - 1) She has meat
 - 2) She has mixed wine
- c. She invites the simple and naïve to come to her house
- d. She sends out her maidens to extend invitations
 - 1) Stands in contrast to pagan temple prostitutes
 - 2) Who do they represent?
 - a) Wisdom teachers in a young man's life?
 - b) A good wife?
 - c) Good friends and influences?
 - d) All of the above?

C. The nature of Wisdom's Feast

- 1. Call to the naïve, inexperienced, and gullible
- 2. Her "food" offers life and understanding
- 3. There is a sense of well-being, wholeness, and stability in her feast
- 4. There is also a sense of joy, this is a sumptuous banquet

II. (v.7-12) - Woman Wisdom's Final Words

A. Translation:

- 7. The admonisher of a scorner³ fetches for himself dishonor and a reprove of the wicked, a blemish.⁴
- 8. Do not reprove a scorner lest he hate you,
Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.
- 9. Give to a wise man, and he will be wise still,
Make known to the righteous man, and he will increase learning
- 10. The beginning of wisdom (is) the fear of Yahweh,
and the knowledge of holy ones (is) understanding
- 11. For in me, your days will become many,
and they will add to you years of life.
- 12. If you are wise, you are wise to you
and if you scorn, by yourself you will bear (it).

B. This section almost seems out of place

³ לִיץ *liš* - To scorn, scoff, mock.

⁴ מוֹם *mûm* - blemish or defect. When used figuratively, it speaks of a moral blemish, or the shame of repulsiveness

1. It appears to be a random serious of proverbs
 2. Many scholars and commentators treat this section without regard to the context
 3. The question should be - How does this section function in the context?
- C. v.11 seems to indicate that these are still the words of woman wisdom, though it could also be the words of the teacher, but this is doubtful
- D. v. 7-9 - Contrasts
1. The contrast is between the wise man and the scorner/scoffer/mocker
 - a. This is a crossroads.
 - 1) The student is no longer naïve
 - 2) He will now either be a wise man, or a scoffer
 - b. Characteristics of the Scoffer
 - 1) He has heard the teaching of wisdom and righteousness
 - 2) He rejects wisdom
 - c. Characteristics of the wise man
 - 1) He has heard the teaching of wisdom and righteousness
 - 2) He accepts it and becomes wiser
 2. The issue then, is not merely whether to choose Wisdom or Folly
 - a. The issue is that kind of person will you be?
 - b. You can be wise and increase in learning
 - c. You can be a scoffer who will come to ruin
 3. This almost seems to be directed at would-be teachers
 - a. Don't try to teach wisdom to a scoffer
 - 1) It will result in dishonor for yourself
 - 2) The scoffer will hate you
 - b. Characteristics of a scoffer
 - 1) Prov 3:34 - Yahweh scoffs at the scoffers
 - 2) Prov 13:1 - Does not listen to his father
 - 3) Prov 14:6 - Cannot find wisdom even if he looks for it
 - 4) Prov 15:12 - Does not love one who reproved him
 - 5) Prov 19:29 - Judgment and punishment is for scoffers
 - 6) Prov 20:1 - Calls wine a scoffer
 - 7) Prov 19:25; 21:11⁵ - His punishment serves as a lesson for the naïve to become wise
 - 8) Prov 21:24 - He is arrogant
 - 9) Prov 22:10 - He causes strife and needs to be driven out
 - 10) Prov 24:9 - He is an abomination
 - b. In other words, choose your pupils wisely
 - 1) The wise teacher needs to recognize that some students cannot be taught
 - 2) Matt 7:6 - Jesus gave a similar instruction

⁵ Many Bibles translate the conjunction, ׀ w^e as disjunctive, "but." This could also be conjunctive, "and" which seems to fit better with the context. It is important to note that the naïve and the scoffer are not the same person.

- E. v.10 - Woman Wisdom rounds out chapters 1-9
 - 1. Prov 1:7 - The fear of the Yahweh, the beginning of knowledge
 - 2. Prov 9:10 - The beginning of wisdom, the fear of Yahweh
 - 3. The knowledge of holy ones is understanding
 - a. Curiously, the adjective "holy ones" is plural
 - b. This could also be translated, "holy things"
- F. v.11 - Benefits of accepting Wisdom's Invitation
 - 1. You will live many days
 - 2. You will have years of "life"⁶
- G. v.12 - Take responsibility!
 - 1. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself - You will enjoy wisdom
 - 2. You alone will bear the punishment for your stupidity

III. (v.13-18) - The Woman of Folly's Invitation

A. Translation

- 13. The woman of stupidities is a noisemaker⁷ of naïveness⁸
and does not know what
- 14. And she sits in the entry of her house,
upon the seat of the heights of the city.
- 15. To call to those who pass by the way,
to those who make straight⁹ their paths.
- 16. Who is simple/naïve? Turn aside here!
And she says to him lacking of heart,
- 17. Waters stolen will be sweet.¹⁰
And the bread of secrecies¹¹ is delightful¹²
- 18. And he does not know that departed spirits¹³ are there
In the depths of Sheol are her summoned ones.

B. The teacher's description of the Woman of Folly

⁶ For more on the significance of "life," see notes at Proverbs 3:1-10.

⁷ הָמָה *hāmāh* - murmur, growl, roar, be boisterous. The idea is of making noise.

⁸ פְּתִיּוֹת *pēṭiyyōt* - simplicity (noun). Same root as the adjective, פֶּתִי *peṭi* - simple, open-minded, gullible.
A more loose translation of this phrase would be - "A stupid woman is loud and naïve."

⁹ יָשָׁר *yāšar* - To go straight, or figuratively meaning to be agreeable. However, in this verse it is in the piel form, which is intensive and means, "to make straight." הַמְיָשָׁרִים (piel ptc plu art.)

¹⁰ מָתוֹק *mātoq* - become or be sweet, pleasant

¹¹ סֵתֶר *sēter* - (noun) covering, hiding-place, secrecy

¹² נָעִם *na'ēm* - to be pleasant, delightful, lovely. The name, "Naomi" in the book of Ruth is derived from the same root.

¹³ רְפָאִים *rēpā'im* could be rendered, "Shades, ghosts, name of the dead in Sheol, departed spirits."

1. She is stupid
 2. She is a noisemaker
 - a. The Hebrew word carries the idea of making noise
 - b. She draws attention to herself through noise?
 - People drawn to see what the commotion is about?
 3. She knows nothing
- C. She offers an identical sounding invitation to the naïve and the simple
1. Wisdom and Folly offer the same invitation
 2. The pupil has to choose whose he will accept
- D. What she offers
1. Stolen Water
 2. Secret Bread
- E. The end result of those who accept her invitation
1. Sheol - Meaning the grave or the abode of the dead
 2. Rephaim - Similar to Sheol, the place of ghosts
 3. Rather than just saying "death" these words give a more ghastly, morbid image of what happens to her victims.

IV. Contrasts between Wisdom and Folly

Woman Wisdom	Woman of Folly
Built her house with Seven Pillars	<i>(Implication: She builds nothing, she is staying in a shack)</i>
<i>(Implication: When she speaks it has substance)</i>	She is a noisemaker
She is Wise	She is stupid
Offers a feast of meat, mixed wine, and bread	Offers stolen water and secret bread. Seems meager in comparison to Wisdom's Feast
Calls to the simple and naïve	Calls to the simple and naïve
Her guests gain long life	Her guests wind up in Sheol
She exhorts her guests to go straight on in the way of understanding	She entices those who are making straight paths for their feet

V. Who are Woman Wisdom and the Woman of Folly?

- A. The Woman of Folly - A personification of stupidity and wickedness
1. She offers stolen waters & secret bread
 - a. 1:10-13; 4:14-19 - Wicked companions who rob others
 - b. 2:16; 5:3ff; 7:6ff - Immoral woman and adulteresses

- c. 3:5-7 - Arrogance
- d. 3:27-28 - Withholding a debt owed
- e. 3:29-32 - Evil plans
- f. 6:9-11 - Becoming indebted and laziness
- g. 6:12-19 - Arrogance, lying, violence, spreading strife
- h. She is anything that lures you away from God's will

2. The result of what she offers

- a. 1:18 - Entrapment
- b. 1:17; 4:19 - Blindness and stupidity
- c. 5:12ff - Regret
- d. 6:11 - Poverty
- b. 6:27-28 - Pain
- c. 3:35; 6:33 - Disgrace
- d. 6:34 - Enemies
- e. 5:23 - Death

B. Woman Wisdom - A personification of godliness

1. She offers a feast in a well built house. Who is she?

- a. 1:7; 9:10; 3:7 - She is the Fear of the Lord
- b. 2:6 - She is the instruction of Yahweh
- c. 1:8; 4:1, 10ff - She is the instruction of the Parents
- d. 5:18ff - She is the wife of your youth
- e. 3:27ff - She is righteous ethics and kindness
- f. In short, she is righteousness, wisdom, and anything that keeps you on the right path

2. The Result of what she offers

- a. 2:8- Preservation
- b. 2:10ff - Deliverance
 - 1) 2:12 - From the way of evil
 - 2) 2:13-15 - From wickedness
 - 3) 2:16ff; 5:1ff; 6:20ff - From immoral women
 - 4) 6:1ff - From perpetual indebtedness
- c. 3:8 - Healing and refreshment - health
- d. 3:9 - Prosperity
- e. 3:14ff - Better profit than material wealth
- f. 3:16; 4:10 - Long life and honor
- g. 3:17 - Peace
- h. 3:24ff - Security
- i. 4:8 - Honor
- j. 5:18ff - Joy and happiness
- k. 8:35 - Favor from Yahweh

VI. Final reflection

- A. The bottom line: What kind of person will I choose to be?
 - 1. 9:12 puts the responsibility on our shoulders
 - 2. In Matt 7:13-14 Jesus offers a similar choice
 - Instead of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly, the choice is between two paths
- B. The real power is not in good or bad influences, but in the power to discern and choose
 - 1. The sage does not try to shield his pupil from evil
 - 2. The sage calls to attention the nature of righteousness and wickedness
 - 3. The sage attempts to instill discernment into the pupil
 - 4. The real power is in education in order to discern and choose the right path

Discussion Questions for Proverbs 9

1. How do are Wisdom and Folly alike? How are they different?
2. What do you find significant about Wisdom's final instructions in this chapter?
3. Evaluate the following statement: Ignorance is Bliss
4. In what ways is it dangerous to be naïve?
5. What is the difference between the simple/naïve and the scoffer?
6. In your own words, describe the difference between the scoffer and the wise person?
7. Who is Woman Wisdom in your Life? How does she manifest herself? What does she say to you? How does she attempt to entice you? Does it work?
8. Who is the Woman of Folly in your life? In what ways does she manifest herself? In what ways does she try to entice you? Is she successful at it?
9. What can you do to resist the enticements of the Woman of Folly in your life?
10. What can you do to get Wisdom and not Folly?