



## Proverbs - Chapter Nine

### **II Proverbs 1:8-9:18 - A Father's Invitation to Wisdom (continues/concludes)**

#### Summary of Chapter Nine

The commendation of wisdom is continued, under the figure of a liberal host, and its provisions under that of a festival; compare it to Luke 14:16-24. The character of those who are invited is followed by a contrasted description of the rejecters of good counsel; and with the invitations of wisdom are contrasted the allurements of the wicked woman.

#### **II.m Proverbs 9:1-18 - Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly**

The final poem of the first major section of the book contains contrasting personifications of wisdom (vv.1-12) and of folly (vv.13-18). Each consists of a description of the women (Wisdom in vv.1-3; and Folly in vv.13-15), a call to the simple (Wisdom in v.4; Folly in v.16), an invitation to eat (Wisdom in v.5; Folly in v.17), and a statement about where each invitation will lead (Wisdom in vv.11-12; Folly in v.18). The purpose of the similarity is to highlight the differences, which present Lady Wisdom as clearly desirable in all respects.

The description of Lady Wisdom is given more space (12 out of 18 verses), contains a summary of her teaching (vv.6-10), and has her narrating the consequences of her way (vv.11-12). The description of Lady Folly, by contrast, while emphasising the emptiness of her character (v.13), lacks any of her crooked instruction (i.e. nothing follows the address and appeal in vv.16-17), and has her end narrated about her rather than by her (v.18). In the flow of the book, this concluding chapter acts as a bookend with the introduction (Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10) to unify the entire section in its call to recognise, internalise, and walk in the way of wisdom.

The description of Wisdom's house, which she built with seven hewn pillars, and her preparations, i.e. she slaughtered her animals, mixed her wine, set her table, and sent out her young women, is a picture of the prudence, strength, riches, and honour that she described as hers; refer to Proverbs 8:12-21. In contrast, the description of Folly is a picture of one who lacks sense for she knows nothing, she also lacks strength and honour for she sits at the door, offering only stolen water and bread.

### II.m.i Proverbs 9:1-6 - Wisdom's Feast

Wisdom is described in terms of her hospitality. She has built a house, set out her fare and invites everyone to call on her, especially those lacking in wisdom.

- 1 Wisdom has built her house,  
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,  
she has also set her table.

### Proverbs 9:1-2

Wisdom has built her house. Chapter 8 described wisdom as a woman with blessings and benefits for those who listened and obeyed. Now Solomon pictured wisdom as a woman of generous hospitality who invites all, i.e. <<**You that are simple, turn in here!**>> (v.4a). Some commentators have likened Wisdom's house to a temple; this is unnecessary, since the overall image is of a noble lady inviting people to a great feast. Clearly, Wisdom does not compete with the Lord's own temple (v.10)!

Adam Clarke described the general understanding of this figure from the early church fathers and medieval theologians: "The house built by wisdom is the holy humanity of Jesus Christ; the seven pillars are the seven sacraments, or the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, or the whole of the apostles, preachers, and ministers of the Church; the slain beasts are the sacrifice of Christ's body upon the cross; and the bread and mingled wine are the bread and wine in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper!" Of this, Clarke also wrote: "men have produced strange creatures of their own brain, by way of explanation."

**Jesus said:** <<*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it*>> (Matthew 16:18), with the apostles following up on the theme of such a house: <<*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom*>>

*you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God>> (Ephesians 2:19-22), and: <<Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ>> (1 Peter 2:4-5).*

She has hewn her seven pillars. The seven pillars have also provoked many guesses by commentators throughout the ages. It is simplest, however, to take them as indicating that the house is of good size, and to consider that seven is often symbolic of completion or perfection.

She has slaughtered her animals. Culturally, the slaughtering of animals was the duty of a man or even a priest, but Wisdom is no ordinary lady! Her offerings transcend all human traditions.

She has mixed her wine. This could be a blend of wines but seems more likely to refer to watering it down to make it less bitter and more palatable. Clarke explained, "Among the ancient Jews, Greeks, and Romans, wine was rarely drank without being mingled with water; and among ancient writers we find several ordinances for this. Some direct three parts of water to one of wine; some five parts; and Pliny mentions some wines that required twenty waters: but the most common proportions appear to have been three parts of water to two of wine."

- <sup>3</sup> She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls  
from the highest places in the town,  
<sup>4</sup> 'You that are simple, turn in here!'  
To those without sense she says,  
<sup>5</sup> 'Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
<sup>6</sup> Lay aside immaturity, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.'

### Proverbs 9:3-6

She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town. Some of the earlier commentators likened this to the sending out of those who would spread the Gospel in the way that Jesus sent out his first disciples: <<And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation'>> (Mark 16:15), <<After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go>> (Luke 10:1), and: <<He replied, 'It is not for you to

*know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’>> (Acts 1:7-8).*

You that are simple, turn in here! This a confirmation of the earlier invitation: <<*O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it*>> (Proverbs 8:5). Wisdom calls the uneducated and inexperienced to her feast so that they may become wise. Folly calls them to come and not only remain simple but also to be further formed in the way of foolishness.

Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Several older commentators saw an allegorical reference to communion, the Lord’s Table, in the mention of bread and wine. This is an example of taking the figures from Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature and over allegorising them. It is likely more in keeping with the words of the prophet: <<*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear*>> (Isaiah 25:6).

Jesus provides a parable that shows the wisdom and the folly of either accepting such an offer or declining it: <<*Then Jesus said to him, ‘Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, “Come; for everything is ready now.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.” Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies.” Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.” Then the master said to the slave, “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled*>> (Luke 14:16-23).

Lay aside immaturity, and live. Wisdom makes the invitation, but the simple must respond: <<*My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you*>> (Proverbs 3:1-2). They must be willing to go in the way of understanding, i.e. walk in the way of insight. Immaturity here is also translated as foolishness.

## II.m.ii Proverbs 9:7-12 - General Maxims

Those who try to teach unbelievers the ways of the Lord will face abuse but those who are already wise will accept the teaching and benefit from it. For it is the fear of the Lord that brings insight and wisdom, and those that do so will profit during their lifetime.

- 7     Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;  
       whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.
- 8     A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you;  
       the wise, when rebuked, will love you.
- 9     Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still;  
       teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.

### Proverbs 9:7-9

These verses present three statements about what happens if one corrects a scoffer or the wicked plus three contrasting statements about reproving a wise person. The point is twofold: if a person desires to be wise, they must examine how their heart responds to wise reproof or correction (v.12); and in order to be wise with others, they must have the prudence to observe other people's actions. It is clear that the wise or righteous person does not rest content with their attainment, nor are they presented as morally perfect. They become wiser still, and will gain in learning, through correction.

Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse; whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt. Having given the generous invitation, wisdom explained the folly and fruitlessness of trying to impose wisdom on the unwilling: <<*Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, who will only despise the wisdom of your words*>> (Proverbs 23:9), and: <<*Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you*>> (Matthew 7:6). The wicked man and the scoffer will not receive wisdom and will often hate the one who tries to help: <<*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you*>> (John 15:18-19), and: <<*Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you*>> (1 John 3:13).

Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning. In contrast, the wise and just person will benefit from wisdom's invitation. This is something of the sense of Jesus' words: <<*For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be*

*taken away*>> (Matthew 13:12). Clarke observed, “Literally give to the wise, and he will be wise. Whatever you give to such, they reap profit from it. They are like the bee, they extract honey from every flower.”

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

### Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord. Together with: <<*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction*>> (Proverbs 1:7), this verse stands as the grounding and thematic statement for all of the appeals to wisdom throughout the first major section of the book. This is a real fear, but in the sense of awe and reverence. It honours God as he really is – holy, just, and the creator of all. It is not a covering or servile fear, but it is a kind of fear nevertheless. Although Proverbs is a book that focuses on practical life, it is founded on this important principle: wisdom begins with a right relationship with God.

The beginning of wisdom. Wisdom has a starting place, and it is in the recognition and honour of God. This means those who do not recognise or honour God fall short of true wisdom in some way or another.

On ‘the knowledge of the Holy One is insight’ Derek Kidner remarked, “The plural can express excellence or comprehensiveness, like the plural word for Deity: *Elohim*.”

<sup>11</sup> For by me your days will be multiplied,  
and years will be added to your life.

<sup>12</sup> If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;  
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

### Proverbs 9:11-12

For by me your days will be multiplied. Wisdom brings her benefits to those who receive her. Finding wisdom’s beginning through the fear of the Lord will always be rewarded: <<*You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!’*>> (Deuteronomy 4:6).

If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. Solomon explained how wisdom and folly directly affect the individual. Sometimes people seek wisdom more for others than themselves; Solomon’s words are a reminder that wisdom is for self and the fool will bear it alone. Perhaps there is something like this also implied: “Do not

seek wisdom to please others. That is not a right or sufficient motivation. You are the one who will most benefit from the wisdom you seek after, so let the motivation come from you and not from another.” Kidner commented, “This is perhaps the strongest expression of individualism in the Bible. Such statements (Ezekiel Chapter 18; Galatians 6:4-5) are not meant to deny that people benefit or suffer from each other’s characters (Proverbs 10:1), but to emphasise that the ultimate gainer or loser is the man himself.”

The contrast of this verse (wise or scoff) picks up that of vv.7-9 and further emphasises the responsibility of the individual to respond to Wisdom’s call and to recognise her benefits.

### II.m.iii Proverbs 9:13-18 - Folly’s Invitation and Promise

The first major section of Proverbs closes with a description of where the foolish way will end: although the one who heeds Folly’s call does not know it, her way ends in death. This refers to anyone who turns aside from Wisdom and follows the woman Folly. The force of the contrast with the end of the way of wisdom throughout this section makes the point clear that this refers not simply to physical death but to the spiritual reality bound up with where that path is headed.

- 13 The foolish woman is loud;  
she is ignorant and knows nothing.
- 14 She sits at the door of her house,  
on a seat at the high places of the town,
- 15 calling to those who pass by,  
who are going straight on their way,
- 16a ‘You who are simple, turn in here!’

#### Proverbs 9:13-16a

The foolish woman is loud. Using symbolic figures, Solomon now presented the foolish way that rejects wisdom. Wisdom is like a gracious woman offering generous hospitality (vv.1-12). Folly is like a clamorous, unpleasant woman - one who is ignorant and knows nothing - looking for friends that she can draw away from the truth, from a righteous path: <<*She does not keep straight to the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it*>> (Proverbs 5:6).

She sits at the door of her house. Foolishness can be found in the home, but also in the high places of the town. Wisdom works hard to make a wonderful meal and offer impressive hospitality; folly sits at the door and makes her call to those who pass by in either place, not caring who she draws in to her ways: <<*at the head of*

*every street you built your lofty place and prostituted your beauty, offering yourself to every passer-by, and multiplying your whoring>> (Ezekiel 16:25).*

You who are simple, turn in here! Folly imitates the call wisdom makes to the simple (v.4). She works to keep those she already has, the simple and those who lack understanding. Folly has her own training program to bring her victims further along their path. Clarke observed, “Wisdom says, ‘Let the simple turn in to me.’ No, says Folly, ‘Let the simple turn in to me.’ If he turns in to Wisdom, his folly shall be taken away and he shall become wise; if he turns in to Folly, his darkness will be thickened, and his folly will remain.”

- <sup>16b</sup> And to those without sense she says,  
<sup>17</sup> ‘Stolen water is sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’  
<sup>18</sup> But they do not know that the dead are there,  
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

### Proverbs 9:16b-18

Stolen water is sweet. This is the message of folly, explaining how good it is to be bad. Things gained through transgression are sweeter and more pleasant than what may be rightfully obtained. Kidner remarked, “If Proverbs 9:10 is the motto of the wise, here is that of the sophisticated.” And Clarke added, “I suppose this to be a proverbial mode of expression, importing that illicit pleasures are sweeter than those which are legal. The meaning is easy to be discerned; and the conduct of multitudes shows that they are ruled by this adage. On it are built all the adulterous intercourses in the land.”

Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. This alludes to the ways of sin and is in stark contrast to the feast of righteousness offered by Wisdom.

But they do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. There is some truth in the idea that transgression can make something feel better. There is some genuine allure in the excitement, independence, camaraderie, and pleasure in breaking God’s command and wisdom’s counsel. Sin has its pleasures for a season: <<*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin>> (Hebrews 11:25). Yet folly’s path has an end: the dead are there, her guests are in the depths of Sheol. Accepting folly’s invitation is to accept ultimate death and permanent misery for a few hours or days of what is sweet and pleasant. What they eat on earth will be digested in hell.*