

PROVERBS 1–9

Proverbs 1

1:1–7

As noted in the overview, the book of Proverbs is often associated with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes as part of the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. This type of writing has much in common with the perspective described in the Doctrine and Covenants that tells us “the glory of God is intelligence” and, consequently, that we should “teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36; 88:118). Similarly, the book of Proverbs is based on the premise that wisdom and knowledge go hand in hand with becoming more like God and following His ways. Hence, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). The book of Proverbs teaches that there is benefit not just in righteous living but also in learning and reflecting by study; thus, the book of Proverbs will help us “know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding” (1:2). But this wisdom or knowledge is not just about facts; it is about understanding the true nature of the world that God created. Thus, those that read this book do so “to receive instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity” (1:3). The word *sedeq* (here rendered “justice”) is usually translated as “righteousness,” and the word *mišpat* (here rendered “judgment”) is probably better translated as “justice.” Both terms are about living together with others in a community. Righteousness is not about following a set of rules but rather about having a “right” relationship with others by caring for those in need.¹ Justice is not just about punishing wrongdoers but is about making sure everyone is treated fairly and protected from harm. The premise of this book is that if

¹ Nancy DeClaisse-Walford describes righteousness in the Old Testament as “right relationships on both the cosmic and human level” and tells us that it “is a relational concept rather than a matter of strict obedience to a set of rules and regulations.” Nancy DeClaisse-Walford, “Righteousness in the OT,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, vol. 4 of 5 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 819, 822.

we study its words as part of our relationship with the Lord, we will receive a greater ability to improve our lives and the communities we live in, or in other words, we will have greater wisdom.

1:8–19

In this section a father encourages his son to listen to his parents' instruction (Proverbs 1:8). In Proverbs 1–9, the text bounces back and forth between heavenly forces and their earthly representations. This parental instruction becomes a manifestation of Lady Wisdom. Two important themes of Proverbs 1–9 are the metaphors of life as a journey and our purpose in building and providing for a household. The son is encouraged to stay away from sinners (verse 10). A sinner is not just someone who makes incorrect choices but someone who actively attempts to harm those around them. The son must stay away from those who seek others' downfall (verses 10–12) and wish to use this downfall "to fill our houses with spoil" (verse 13). These sinners are in the business of building their own houses and attempting to provide for themselves, but they are doing so in a way that undermines and destroys those around them. One of the hallmarks of wisdom literature is emphasizing the poetic justice that awaits those who seek to harm others: "So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof" (verse 19). Their desire to use their God-given creative powers to destroy others puts them on a path to ruin. Thus, the son is told, "Walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path" (verse 15).

In this section, we are invited to recognize the importance of considering the path we take to achieve our goals. In Proverbs, the path and the objective are equally important. Based on the negative example of sinners in this passage, we can anticipate what it means to be righteous. Just as sinners race to hurt and destroy, the righteous run to care for and help those around them. Rather than fill their houses with spoil, they provide for their household in a way that benefits those around them.

1:20–33

The scene shifts from a father instructing his son to Lady Wisdom calling to the "simple ones," "the scorn-ers," and the "fools" (verse 22). Because the Hebrew word for *wisdom* is a feminine noun, wisdom is personified as a woman. Throughout Proverbs 1–9, we learn more about Lady Wisdom and her backstory. From the perspective of Proverbs, wisdom is considered the top priority of one's life. Wisdom is referred to as the ideal woman that the young men being addressed in Proverbs should seek. The personification of wisdom and humanity's quest for her is told as a love story. This relationship with wisdom finds concrete expression in two ways: in one's relationship with God and in one's relationship with one's spouse. Wisdom herself was created by Jehovah and grew up before Him; Wisdom becomes an intermediary, or symbol, of our relationship with God. The ideal wife described in Proverbs 31 is the embodiment of Lady Wisdom.

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, connecting our relationship with God and our relationship with our spouse makes a lot of sense. We are told to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” and to “love thy wife with all thy heart” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:5; 42:22). Our love for God is bound up in our love for others, but perhaps especially in our love for our spouse and close family members. Just as a spouse can be the embodiment of our duty to God, our family members can be representations of God’s love and care for us.

In this section, Lady Wisdom calls from inside the community, on the streets, and at the gates. An individual’s decision to listen to wisdom affects the entire community, and true wisdom is the wisdom to live embedded within a beloved community—or what we refer to as Zion. Ultimately, to listen to wisdom is to invite God into one’s life, and to reject wisdom is to “not choose the fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:28).

Proverbs 2

In this section, the father again teaches his son to seek wisdom. Wisdom is the conduit for the “fear of the Lord” and the “knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:5). Seeking and finding wisdom translates into a relationship with God. The “fear of the Lord” and the “knowledge of God” are used synonymously. Both terms can refer to a relationship with God. The idea of wisdom personified as a woman is also in the background. The son should “incline [his] ear” (verse 2) to wisdom and seek for her “as silver, and . . . as for hid treasures” (verse 4). Wisdom, and by extension our relationship with the Lord, is so important that we should search for it like we search for the earth’s most valuable objects. However, as we learn later on, wisdom “is more precious than rubies” (3:15). Just as Lady Wisdom should be sought with diligence because she is worth more than rubies, so should one’s spouse be sought. The book of Proverbs closes with a poem about a virtuous woman (the earthly counterpart to Lady Wisdom), and we are told that “her price is far above rubies” (31:10).

The book of Proverbs invites us to think about our relationship with God as being bound up in our relationship with other people and to see that the most important relationships in life are family relationships. It is through treasuring these relationships far above rubies, seeking them, and listening that we come to know God and to live a meaningful and joyful life.

Seeking after wisdom, which translates into loving both God and our families, puts our life journey on the right path. Because God “keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of the saints,” our relationship with Him will help us understand “every good path” (2:8, 9).

Understanding the paths of righteousness and judgment, or justice (verse 9), means that we understand what it is to take care of others and do what is right for them. Righteousness in the Old Testament is not

about following a set of rules; rather it is having a right relationship with God and others.² This right relationship is demonstrated through caring for others through love and service. This understanding will keep us from “the way of the evil man . . . who rejoice to do evil” (verses 12–13).

Just as Lady Wisdom puts those who seek her on the path of righteousness, the path of wickedness puts one onto the path of the “strange woman” (verse 16). This woman is a stranger because she has “forsaken the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God” (verse 17). The father warns the youth that “her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life” (verses 18–19). The counterpart of Lady Wisdom is Lady Folly, who is referenced in Proverbs 9:13–18. Just as Lady Wisdom is represented by a virtuous woman, Lady Folly is represented by an adulterous woman. One of the main points of the book of Proverbs is showing young people how to live life, and that takes the form of building a household and providing for it. But that is more than accomplishing a goal of marriage; it is how one accomplishes these tasks that is important—and that is why the path is an important theme. The journey is as important as the destination. The danger of the strange woman is that “her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead” (verse 18). Both metaphors, those of the household and the path, find expression here.

Proverbs 3

3:1–12

Family is one of the major focuses of the book of Proverbs. A parent teaches a child about building and providing for their household. In order to do this, the child must seek the Lord by seeking wisdom. On the ground, this looks like being faithful to one’s spouse and treating others with righteousness. The father calls this advice “my law” (Proverbs 3:1), which makes a connection between heeding one’s earthly father and heeding one’s Heavenly Father. The child is told, “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee” (verse 2), and we might translate this as, “Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake thee.” If we are loyal to our family relationships, we will “find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (verse 4).

In walking the roads of life, we must learn to trust the Lord (verse 5). Life is a journey, one that we only get to walk once, and we must trust the wisdom of the Lord to direct our paths. Additionally, we notice that this advice is given by a parent who has walked further along the road of life and is trying to teach a child the wisdom of those who have gone ahead.

² Nancy DeClaisse-Walford, “Righteousness in the OT,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, vol. 4 of 5 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 819, 822.

Just as listening to a parent’s instruction will provide “length of days, and long life, and peace” (verse 2) so shall the “fear of the Lord” provide “health to the navel and marrow to thy bones” (verse 8).

Not only must the child build a household but they must also provide for that household. The father encourages his son to “honour the Lord with thy substance. . . . So shall thy barns be filled with plenty” (verses 9–10). Because our relationship with the Lord is bound up in our relationships with others, honoring the Lord with our substance is not just offering sacrifice but also taking care of the poor. Alma taught his people that “they should impart of their substance . . . to every needy, naked soul” (Mosiah 18:28). Such a lifestyle seems paradoxical—how could we have our barns filled if we offer our substance to God and to others? By doing so, we put greater value on our relationships with others. Our focus moves away from having our barns filled and moves toward those whom we have filled the barns for. Filling our barns and providing for our household becomes no longer the end goal but a means to an end. The only way that our lives can be full is by using our substance to care for others. The follower of Christ knows that we are blessed for our loving sacrifices, but we also know that suffering for those we love is what brings joy in life. Thus, Jesus taught that blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sad, and the hated (Luke 6:20–22). Those who suffer and choose to sacrifice for others are blessed.

Another important theme in the book of Proverbs is that we should not fear adversity but see it as a teaching opportunity. Thus, we should “despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction” (verse 12). Just as family relationships are essential to living a meaningful life, situating ourselves as God’s children and as members of His household means that we submit to His correction as a son submits to a father (verse 12). Not every adversity comes because we have done something wrong, and God is not the author of every difficulty in our lives. But if we allow God into our lives, He can turn every trial into a learning opportunity. God never passes up an opportunity to teach and strengthen us.

3:13–20

In this section, the quest to find wisdom in order to build and provide for a household finds its model in the Lord’s creative efforts. Raymond Van Leeuwen demonstrated this point by linking Proverbs 3:19–20 with Proverbs 24:3–4.³ These two passages are foundational to understanding the place of wisdom in God’s creation as well as the place of wisdom in humanity’s own creative efforts. Proverbs 3:19–20 tells us that

The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth;
by understanding hath established the heavens.
By his knowledge the depths are broken up,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

³ My discussion of wisdom’s role in building and providing for households is heavily indebted to Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Cosmos, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 67–90.

There is much in these two verses that helps us to enter the worldview of the Old Testament. Jehovah founded the earth and established it by means of wisdom. God is described as a divine architect that uses wisdom in building both heaven and earth. Because wisdom is not just knowledge but also the ability to apply it, it is often used to describe creative endeavors such as artisanship and design. When the Israelites were commanded to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, Bezaleel was chosen to do this because God “filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:3). Later for the temple, Solomon “sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre” because “he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass” (1 Kings 7:13, 14). Each of these craftsmen participated in divine wisdom in their creative endeavors. Because architectural terms are used to describe the construction of heaven and earth, the cosmos is implied to be God’s divine house. God not only built His home with wisdom but also provided it with water so life can thrive: “By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew” (Proverbs 3:20). This image of God as a divine architect who builds a house and then provides for it is connected to Proverbs 24:3–4, which reads:

Through wisdom is an house builded;
And by understanding it is established
And by knowledge shall the chambered be filled
with all precious and pleasant riches.

God modeled our efforts to build a household and provide for it through wisdom. In fact, this passage implies that those who follow God in building and taking care of households with wisdom will find themselves becoming more like God. For those that find it, wisdom is “a tree of life” (Proverbs 3:18). The story of Adam and Eve depicts a tradeoff between enduring life and having knowledge (Genesis 2–3). Because Adam and Eve chose to become like God in their knowledge, they were denied access to the tree of life. However, Proverbs 3:18 implies that true knowledge, or wisdom, will lead to life. We cannot find the tree of life by going backwards to the garden; we will only find it by moving forward and using the knowledge we have to find wisdom. The beginning of wisdom is having a relationship with God (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10); therefore, living life inside of a relationship with God will lead us forward to the tree of life. The Book of Mormon takes a similar stance as it presents this life as a time to prepare to meet God and teaches that inviting Jesus Christ into our lives will allow the tree of life to grow within us (see Alma 12; 32–34).

3:21–35

This section refers to the father’s admonition to his son to remember his commandments (Proverbs 3:1–3). If the son keeps his father’s instruction, it will protect him and provide him with safety. He will not stumble on the path of life (verse 23), and when he lies down to sleep at home he will not fear (verse 24). The

father then offers advice to his son, encouraging him to care for those in his community (verses 27–32). His son should not “envy the oppressor and choose none of his ways” (verse 31). Even though it might seem tempting to use others to enrich ourselves, we should remember that our obligation is to care for them and to not hurt them. Rather than oppress or harm others, those who have a relationship with the Lord demonstrate righteousness by caring for others. To hurt others is the definition of wickedness, and to care for others is the definition of righteousness; thus “the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just” (verse 33). The Hebrew word *ṣaddîqîm* that the King James Version translates as “just” can also be translated as “righteous.” Those who walk the path of righteousness will find the blessing of the Lord upon their households.

Proverbs 4

The father encourages his son to prioritize his relationship with Lady Wisdom. Because wisdom is personified as a woman, the son is encouraged to maintain a loving relationship with her. He must “forsake her not,” “love her,” “exalt her,” and “embrace her” (Proverbs 4:6, 8). The more he invests in his relationship with Wisdom, the more she will reciprocate—“she shall preserve thee,” “she shall keep thee,” and “she shall promote thee” and “bring thee to honour” (verses 6, 8). Thus, “wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (verse 7). The father encourages his son to see his relationship with Wisdom as the most important aspect of his life. This relationship, however, is not a relationship to a disembodied ideal but rather a relationship with God and one’s family.

A relationship with Wisdom helps one on the journey of life. The son is encouraged to “enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men” (verse 14). Those on this path have built their lives around harming others, thus they cannot sleep unless “they have done some mischief” or “they cause some to fall” (verse 16). On this path, they eat and drink wickedness (verse 17). Just as the righteous are not just those who follow the rules but also those who build relationships and care for others, the wicked are not just those who are disobedient. The wicked are those who tear down relationships and work to harm rather than help others. Those who walk this path in their life walk in darkness and “know not at what they stumble” (verse 19). On the other hand, “the path of the just,” or the path of the righteous, is one that is bright, and those who walk it can see things as they are. The inability of the wicked to have a relationship with Lady Wisdom affects their ability to have healthy and sustaining relationships with others.

In the last verses of the chapter (verses 20–27), commentators have noted the many parts of the body that are singled out (ear, eyes, heart, mouth, lips, eyelids, feet, and hands). The father cautions the son to be diligent and deliberate in walking the path of life. On the one hand, we can see this as pointing out the many ways we can go wrong. We hear an echo of King Benjamin’s caution: “I cannot tell you all the things

whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish” (Mosiah 4:29–30). On the other hand, we can read this as a reminder of the power of our bodies and the God-given power of agency to do good. We can think of Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28: “Men [and women] should be anxiously engaged in a good cause and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.”

Proverbs 5

In this chapter, the father instructs his son to stay away from “a strange woman” and instead to be faithful to “the wife of thy youth” (Proverbs 5:3, 18). The ways of wisdom/folly and life/death are now more concrete for the young man: his wife and another’s wife. The father warns that the strange woman might seem enticing (verse 3), but “her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell” (verse 5). To follow the path of the strange woman causes one to leave “the path of life” (verse 6) and puts one’s household in danger. The father warns, “Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house. . . . Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger” (verse 10). The final lament in Proverbs 5:14 is better translated as, “I was almost completely ruined in the midst of the congregation and assembly.” The book of Proverbs is emphatic that our actions always take place within a community and, because of this, ultimately affect others, including God. Thus, what may have seemed secret and private will always affect a community.

Because the strange woman leads to the path of death, the young man is told to remain faithful to “the wife of thy youth” (verse 19). The father uses the analogy of water, something that is life-giving and vitally important for the well-being of a household. The young man is told to drink water from his own cisterns (verse 15). Verse 16 is better read as a question: “Should thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets?” Thus, “let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” (verse 18). Not only are “the ways of man before the eyes of the Lord” (verse 21) but our own actions also come with natural consequences; thus, “his own iniquities shall take the wicked himself and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins” (verse 22).

We can read this passage as a general plea for faithfulness to family in building and providing for one’s household. The search for wisdom finds concrete realization in one’s continued faithfulness to important family relationships. However, we do have to be cautious that the images of the strange woman as a

seducing temptress do not add to a general assumption that women should be treated as dangerous and that any interaction with them is hazardous.

Proverbs 6

The first section of chapter 6 (verses 1–5) deals with the issue of being surety for a friend’s debt. Doing so makes one liable and responsible for a friend’s financial choices. Perhaps a modern analogy would be cosigning on a credit card or line of credit that your friend would use. The father tells his son to get out of such an arrangement immediately, just “as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler” (verse 5). The line “Go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend” (verse 3) is better translated as it is in the New English Translation of the Bible: “Go, humble yourself, and appeal firmly to your neighbor.”

In verses 6–11, the youth is told to go to an ant and “consider her ways, and be wise” (verse 6). Even the ant knows that one must work hard in summer and in harvest to survive. The one who sleeps or prefers less strenuous and more relaxing activities will find that their lack will attack them like “an armed man” (verse 11). Certainly, this is a lesson against laziness, but the broader principle is that doing hard things provides benefits in the long term.

Verses 16–19 talk of seven things that “are an abomination unto” the Lord. Each of the abominations are about one’s relationship with others. “A proud look” (verse 17) is always directed at someone, and a “lying tongue” deceives someone. Shedding innocent blood is obviously a terrible act of violence against another. Having thoughts (related to our heart) and actions (related to our feet) that are directed at “wicked imaginations” and “mischief” only lead to harming others. Bearing false witness (a graver crime than lying) and sowing discord tear at the fabric of communities. The book of Proverbs is about living in a community, and when we have a relationship with God and live according to wisdom, we are always doing our best to care for those around us. The foolish and the wicked seek to use or harm others for their own advantage.

The child is told to “keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (verse 20). One’s relationship and commitment to this instruction will make all the difference: “When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee” (verse 22). Thinking similarly about God’s instructions in the scriptures is useful. Not only can these commandments lead us and keep us but they can also “talk with thee” (verse 22). Spending time reading and rereading the scriptures diligently and prayerfully allows God to speak to us through the words of the scriptures. Those who have taken time to ask questions as they study the scriptures have found that they truly do talk back.

The last section (verses 24–35) takes up a familiar caution against the strange woman (verse 24; see also 2:16–19; 5:3–14).

Proverbs 7

The father tells his son to cherish and value his instruction and his “law as the apple of thine eye” (verse 2). This phrase is probably better translated as the “pupil of your eye.” We instinctively protect our eyes, and our commitment to wise instruction should be just as instinctive. The father further implores the son to “bind them upon thy fingers” and “write them upon the [tablet] of thine heart” (verse 4). We should make wise instruction not only become a part of our own body but also structure our thoughts. In the Old Testament, the heart is often equivalent to what we consider today to be the mind. Jeremiah saw a day when God would make a new covenant and the Lord “will put [His] law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be [God’s] people” (Jeremiah 31:33). The effect of His law becoming a part of His people allows the relationship between God and the people to finally work. The previous relationship, or covenant, Israel “brake, although [the Lord] was an husband unto them” (Jeremiah 31:32). Following the Lord’s law is about having a relationship with Him, and this relationship is often compared to a marriage relationship between Israel and the Lord. It is a marriage because God relies on Israel just as Israel relies on God. It is only together that God can bring about His plans to save His children. In the same vein, the son is encouraged to marry Lady Wisdom: “Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman” (verse 4). The term “sister” can be used to refer to a spouse.⁴ This relationship with Wisdom will serve to “keep thee from the strange woman” (verse 5).

The father then gives an account of witnessing a young man succumb to the “strange woman” (verses 6–23). The father encourages his son to think about where his actions lead, for “her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (verse 27). The importance of this young man’s being able to build a house and a household that will endure is constantly emphasized in Proverbs 1–9. The way that this house is built and provided for makes all the difference.

Proverbs 8

Just as the strange woman took action to tear others down in the shadow of secrecy, Lady Wisdom acts by standing and crying in public to those she might help (Proverbs 8:1–3). Rather than prey upon the simple, she finds the simple in order to instruct and help them.

⁴ See Song of Solomon 4:9–10. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 5 of 12 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 84.

Wisdom tells us, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old” (verse 22). This verse is extremely rich. The word translated as “possessed” (Hebrew root, *qnh*) has two meanings in Hebrew. It can mean both “to acquire” and “to create.” This helps us think about Wisdom in two ways. To think about God’s acquiring wisdom makes us think about wisdom as merely an attribute that Jehovah got “in the beginning of his way.” This beginning occurs “before his works of old” and before He created the earth (verses 22–26). When God begins “his way,” He proceeds to create the world and provide for it (see verses 19–20); in other words, He builds a house and provides for it. In this way, God models what the reader of Proverbs is asked to do—to “acquire wisdom” (4:5) and to build a household and provide for it through wisdom (24:3–4).

The idea of obtaining wisdom like any other attribute stands alongside the metaphorical description of Wisdom as a person. Thinking about wisdom this way, it is one’s relationship of love, deference, and respect with Wisdom that empowers us. Reading Proverbs 8:22 as “the Lord created me in the beginning of his way” helps us see Wisdom metaphorically as an individual rather than just an attribute. She was created before God created the world and is witness to the world’s unfolding. In this way, Lady Wisdom’s knowledge and skill comes from her experiences and the tutelage that she acquired from the Lord. She in turn exhorts humanity to “hear instruction” (verse 33), for “blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors” (verse 34).

The apostle John in John 1 seems to appeal to the image of wisdom in describing Jesus Christ as the Word, or Greek *logos*.⁵ Just as Wisdom was in the beginning with God and was used by God in Creation, so “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3).

It is important to remember that wisdom in the book of Proverbs isn’t just knowing things; it is having the skill of living life in God’s world as He intended. Thus, Wisdom tells us that “all the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them” (Proverbs 8:8) and teaches us that “the fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (verse 13). Righteousness is about having a right relationship by taking care of those in need and choosing to be faithful and loyal to others. This is how the world that God created should work, and this is what it means to be truly alive, or as Wisdom tells us, “Whoso findeth me findeth life” (verse 35). When we live in a world of evil or wickedness, we live in a world where we use and abuse others for our benefit. This kind of behavior is what it means to be physically alive but spiritually dead, and Wisdom tells us, “They that hate me love death” (verse 36). Mormon took a similar perspective when he wrote, “All things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could

⁵ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 98–99.

no good thing come unto them” (Moroni 7:24). God is the source of all goodness and righteousness; whatever is good in the world comes from God and is an extension of His wisdom.

Proverbs 9

Proverbs 1–9 serves as the introduction to the book of Proverbs and is a guide for how to read the rest of the book; Proverbs 9 is the conclusion to this introduction. The scene is set with Lady Wisdom, who “hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars” and “hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table” (Proverbs 9:1–2). An important theme in these introductory chapters has been the obligation for young people to build their own households with wisdom and provide for those households with wisdom. In this scene, Wisdom has built her own house, has provided for it, and invites the “simple” to “turn in hither” and “eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled” (verses 4–5). At the beginning of the section, Proverbs 1:7 tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” and Lady Wisdom finishes this section by telling us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). We can understand this verse as telling us that our relationship with God is the beginning of wisdom; it’s the beginning of learning how to live a good life in the world that He has created.

The final scene in the section, however, goes to Lady Folly, who also “sitteth at the door of her house . . . to call passengers who go right on their ways” (verses 14–15). She too calls to the simple and those who lack understanding (verse 16). Lady Folly calls to the simple because they are her prey, whereas Lady Wisdom calls to them because she wants to help them. The simple “knoweth not that the dead are [in Lady Folly’s house]; and that her guests are in the depths of hell” (verse 18). Wisdom and her followers work to provide for and help others; Lady Folly preys upon others for her own benefit.

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