

Lady-Wisdom: The Personification Of God's Wisdom As A Woman

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"Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud..." Proverbs 8:1-3

In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, God's infinite wisdom is personified as a woman. The association of divine wisdom with the feminine is not accidental. Social relationships in Israel reflected spiritual relationships between Israel and Yahweh. As a result of this basic analogy between the earthly realm and the heavenly realm, one can look to the feminine images of Hebrew scriptures to better understand personified wisdom. The Law and the Prophets provided the writer(s) of Proverbs with many feminine images (including home-maker, counselor and wise woman, and lover) that influenced their use of female imagery for divine wisdom. By better understanding the images of women portrayed in the Old Testament, one can gain insight into the nature of God's wisdom.

Proverbs was written to teach young male students how to function in society and find meaning and order in the world. The proverbs are truths, inspired by and rooted in the Hebrew faith, that provide practical guidance for right living. In light of the fact that these proverbs were written for a male audience, it is ironic that, as a whole, Proverbs is united by recurrent female imagery and the personification of God's wisdom as a woman.¹ Chapters 1-9 and 31, which form the introduction and conclusion to the book of Proverbs, are especially pregnant with feminine imagery.

Personification is a literary device which is used to personalize an impersonal concept.² A personification is capable of expressing a whole spectrum of meanings. The woman in Proverbs personifies God's creative counsel and purpose, as well as God's presence and active involvement in the world. She personifies the gift of wisdom given to humanity by God for guidance, enabling us to obey God's commands and respond to God's calling. She also personifies the order and meaning which God...

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