

Found It

Proverbs 8:17-21

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I. Wisdom is Found v. 17

a. Wisdom –

- i. Wisdom is a capacity of the mind; in the OT it involves both knowledge and the ability to direct the mind toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfillment. Wisdom is thus a special capacity, necessary for full human living, but one which can be acquired through education and the application of the mind.
- ii. Although the term “wisdom” is used primarily in the OT with reference to human beings, all wisdom is ultimately rooted and grounded in God. Wisdom forms a central part of the nature of God. In wisdom God created the universe (Prv 3:19) and mankind (Ps 104:24). Those matters which are not understood by human beings or any other living creature are fully comprehended within the wisdom of God (Jb 28:12–23
- iii. The starting point for an understanding of OT wisdom literature is Proverbs. Its wisdom concerns morality, the knowledge of how to live properly. It has a theological foundation, though much of its wisdom is secular in form. The starting point, as for all wisdom, is the reverence of God. But for the most part, the concern of the book is to convey the fundamentals of morality, the virtues of integrity, discipline, justice, common sense, and the like, and to show by way of contrast the failure in life that awaits the fool.
- iv. Biblical wisdom is both religious and practical. Stemming from the fear of the Lord (Jb. 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Pr. 1:7; 9:10), it branches out to touch all of life, as the extended commentary on wisdom in Proverbs indicates. Wisdom takes insights gleaned from the knowledge of God’s ways and applies them in

the daily walk. This combination of insight and obedience (and all insight must issue in obedience)

- b. Love - to breathe heavily, to be excited
 - i. "Love" "It is known that the definition of love is the convergence and uniting of minds, that is, their concurrence in a single opinion."
 - ii. require that we do more than simply obey the teachings or learn wisdom for utilitarian advantage alone. They insist on an emotional commitment, a desire for learning.
 - iii. Without love, knowledge is inert. Hence we are required to love wisdom (4:6; 7:4; 29:3; cf. 8:34)
 - iv. To love wisdom means to crave knowledge and draw deep satisfaction from attaining it. But in what sense does wisdom feel a corresponding emotion
 - 1. The wise are typified by love of wisdom and hate of deceit, fools by their perverse loves and hatreds. Fools hate wisdom (1:29). They despise its chastisement (1:30) and instruction (5:12). The callow soul "loves" his callowness (1:22). The cynic delights in his own cynicism (1:22). Those who hate wisdom love death (8:36). A lazy man is not merely weary but loves sleep (20:13). A contentious man is not just irascible but "loves" transgression (17:19).
- c. Seek – James 1:5
 - i. Diligently Seek
 - 1. Diligent - to **be on the look out for**, search for
 - a. This love propels one to seek the unknown and allows learning to impress itself on character.
 - 2. Wisdom will be found by those who seek it earnestly. A less-than-wholehearted aspiration to wisdom will not bring one to it. Nor is wisdom accessible to the cynic, the *leş*, who may want to possess learning but will not obey
 - a. Seek Wisdom - Wisdom is to be sought in its totality, in speech and writing, in this book and in the entirety of literature
 - ii. Will Find

1. only those who earnestly desire Wisdom can come into intimate relations with her. The first clause states the attitude of mind, the second the consequent effort—the two are mutually complementary

II. Found in Wisdom vs. 18-19

a. With Wisdom

- i. Riches
- ii. Honor - essence and power in a broader sense, reserved only for God
- iii. Enduring Wealth
 1. **Wealth- time-honored, venerable**, or splendid
 2. *wealth and riches are in his house, and his good fortune lasts for ever* (that is, is continued in his descendants).
 3. Not all wealth brings honor, but the wealth possessed (and granted) by wisdom does.
- iv. Righteousness
 1. Wisdom's benefits are all attained honestly. In vv 15, 18, and 20, the author takes care not to exalt power and wealth apart from moral values.
 2. Wisdom bestows her wealth only in honest ways, meaning that the wise themselves take honorable paths to prosperity.
- v. Fruit
 1. Better than pure Gold
 2. Yield better than choices silver
 - a. The riches that come to the possessor of wisdom are genuine, not artificial substitutes purchased with silver or gold. Being honored in a community is a product of one's walk (conduct) rather than one's wealth by itself. "Prosperity" is literally "righteousness" (cf. v. 20). Godly living is the major benefit from having wisdom.
 - b. The comparison affirms not that Wisdom's reward is different in character from gold (namely, moral

and spiritual), but that it is more splendid and desirable than the most precious metals.

III. Where Wisdom is Found vs. 20-21

- a. Walk in the way of righteousness
 - i. The form of the Hebrew verb **walk** conveys the idea of walking steadily or continuously
 - 1. *walk*: means to go about habitually, referring here to a mode of behavior.
 - ii. Righteousness conveys to us the idea of obedience to religious law, or moral and religious purity; but these qualities, though they belong to Wisdom, are not here in question; the writer, as the connection shows, has in mind simply the justice which assures to every man his due
- b. Midst of the paths of Justice
 - i. Wisdom sums up her promises of reward in the declaration that she deals equitably and justly with her friends. *Equity* and *justice* are synonyms. The former term represents the Heb. word rendered by *prosperity* in v. 18; here it is a quality of action (= right decision), there it is the result of this action. The statement of v. 20 is simply *I deal justly*. *Friends*, lit. *those who love me*, as in v. 17; *wealth* = *possession, property* (RV *substance*).
 - ii. The term here translated by *prosperity* (צדקה) is usually rendered by *justice* or *righteousness*. It signifies primarily that which is *right, true*, as quality of a fact or of the soul (the English *justice* has the same double sense). In its most general meaning, *in accordance with propriety* or *with the facts in the case*, it occurs in 1 Sam. 26:23, where Yahweh is said to give every man his *due*, and in Joel 2:23, where Yahweh gives rain in *just measure*. It thus comes to mean the *just measure of fortune* which is meted out to a man, for example, by God, and then, by a natural transition, the good decision in his favor, the *good fortune* awarded him—sometimes a legal decision by a judge (and the judge may be God)
- c. Endow

- i. Who love with Wealth
 - 1. *Since I am just, my friends will be properly rewarded*
 - 2. to give as an inheritance” means to transfer ownership permanently, so that it may be passed on in inheritance
- ii. Fill their Treasuries
 - 1. Material substance is replenishable (keeping one’s **treasuries full**) because of the skill a wise person has to maintain it

Word Studies

Love- to breathe heavily, to be excited¹

Diligently - to **be on the look out for**, search for²

Riches – Wealth

Honor - essence and power in a broader sense, reserved only for God³

Wealth - time-honored, venerable, or splendid⁴

Righteousness - loyalty to the community, in conduct, **honesty**⁵

Wisdom –

Wisdom, Wisdom Literature. Wisdom is a capacity of the mind; in the OT it involves both knowledge and the ability to direct the mind toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfillment. Wisdom is thus a special capacity, necessary for full human living, but one which can be acquired through education and the application of the mind.

The wisdom literature in the OT is that literature which has this special concept of wisdom as its central theme. It comprises principally the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and may also be found in portions of the psalms and prophets. The wisdom literature contains both the moral substance of true wisdom (Prv) and also the intellectual explorations of wise men seeking to understand the fundamental problems of human existence (Jb, Eccl).

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 17.

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1465.

³ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 458.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 905.

⁵ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1006.

The Wisdom of God. Although the term “wisdom” is used primarily in the OT with reference to human beings, all wisdom is ultimately rooted and grounded in God. Wisdom forms a central part of the nature of God. In wisdom God created the universe (Prv 3:19) and mankind (Ps 104:24). Those matters which are not understood by human beings or any other living creature are fully comprehended within the wisdom of God (Jb 28:12–23).

Thus wisdom, in its positive connotations, is something inherent in God, reflected in creation, and a part of the reason for human existence. Wisdom in creation is reflected in the form and order which emerged out of primeval chaos; the world may hold meaning for mankind only because it reflects in its structure the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God in the creation of mankind means that human life may also be marked by form and order, and that meaning in life may be found in the created world which contains the marks of wisdom. The wisdom of God is thus creative, purposeful, and good; it is not merely the intellectual activity of God. The potential for human wisdom is rooted in the creation of mankind. Created by divine wisdom, human beings have within them the God-given capacity for wisdom. Thus it is impossible to understand human wisdom without first grasping its necessary antecedent, divine wisdom.

The Wisdom of Man. The word wisdom, with reference to human beings, is used in a variety of different ways in the OT. The word is often used as virtually synonymous with the term “knowledge,” but in its general and secular uses it commonly indicates applied knowledge, skill, or even cunning. Wisdom could be defined as either “superior mental capacity” or “superior skill.” Thus wisdom is used to describe both the cunning of King Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–6) and the craftsmanship or skill of the workman Bezalel (Ex 35:33). But it was also used to describe mental capacities and skills which had a moral component, the capacity to understand and to do the good. Thus, when Moses delegated some of his authority to newly appointed judges, he chose “wise, understanding, and experienced men” (Dt 1:13). It is from this latter sense that there emerged the central concept of wisdom and the wise man in ancient Israel. Human wisdom, in this special

The Wisdom Literature. Wisdom literature forms an important part of the OT. It falls within the third division of the Hebrew canon, the Writings, and comprises basically three books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (or Qoheleth), and Job. There are also wisdom psalms (e.g., Pss 1; 32; 34; 37) and wisdom-type passages in the prophets

(such as the parables of Is: e.g., Is 5:1–7). In the Greek OT (and the English Apocrypha), two additional books of wisdom are found. There is Ecclesiasticus, a 2nd-century BC work of Joshua ben Sira, which has certain similarities to the Book of Proverbs, and the Wisdom of Solomon, an anonymous work more philosophical (or Greek) in style, representing the flowering of Jewish wisdom in the Hellenistic period.

The starting point for an understanding of OT wisdom literature is Proverbs. Its wisdom concerns morality, the knowledge of how to live properly. It has a theological foundation, though much of its wisdom is secular in form. The starting point, as for all wisdom, is the reverence of God. But for the most part, the concern of the book is to convey the fundamentals of morality, the virtues of integrity, discipline, justice, common sense, and the like, and to show by way of contrast the failure in life that awaits the fool. The book has a strongly didactic nature. Nowadays it can be read as a piece of literature, though its wisdom was designed to be learned, memorized even, by the young persons who received their education at the feet of the wise men. For those who learned its truth, for whom the short poetic sayings became a part of the subconscious mind, the wisdom of the proverbs served as a moral and spiritual guide throughout life. There was a way to live successfully, a way governed by morality, and success lay in the fact that the morally good life was the life lived according to the wisdom of the Creator of all life. Thus the wise men of the proverbs functioned as guides, in both their teaching and their writing; they provided no new philosophical theories, no advanced intellectual speculation, but communicated that most valuable of all human kinds of knowledge—how to live. Wisdom is “more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prv 3:15–17).

Yet there were two directions from which the relatively straightforward wisdom of proverbs was vulnerable. One was the attack of thoroughgoing skepticism; the other was the attack of such an awful experience of human life that the wisdom of proverbs seemed undermined to its very core. The attack from the perspective of skepticism is dealt with in Ecclesiastes; that from the direction of experience is examined in Job. Both these books have a more theoretical perspective than that of Proverbs; they teach, but in a simple didactic fashion and are both invaluable companions to the Book of Proverbs.

Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Wisdom, Wisdom Literature,”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2150.

Wisdom in the fullest sense belongs to God alone (Jb. 12:13ff.; Is. 31:2; Dn. 2:20–23). His wisdom is not only completeness of knowledge pervading every realm of life (Jb. 10:4; 26:6; Pr. 5:21; 15:3) but also ‘consists in his irresistible fulfilment of what he has in his mind’ (J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 1–2, p. 198). The universe (Pr. 3:19f.; 8:22–31; Je. 10:12) and man (Jb. 10:8ff.; Ps. 104:24; Pr. 14:31; 22:2) are products of his creative wisdom. Natural (Is. 28:23–29) and historical (Is. 31:2) processes are governed by his wisdom, which includes an infallible discrimination between good and evil and is the basis for the just rewards and punishments which are the lot of the righteous and the wicked (Pss. 1; 37; 73; Pr. 10:3; 11:4; 12:2, etc.). Such wisdom is inscrutable (Jb. 28:12–21): God in his grace must reveal it if man is going to grasp it at all (Jb. 28:23, 28). Even wisdom derived from natural abilities or distilled from experience is a gracious gift, because God’s creative activity makes such wisdom possible.

Biblical wisdom is both religious and practical. Stemming from the fear of the Lord (Jb. 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Pr. 1:7; 9:10), it branches out to touch all of life, as the extended commentary on wisdom in Proverbs indicates. Wisdom takes insights gleaned from the knowledge of God’s ways and applies them in the daily walk. This combination of insight and obedience (and all insight must issue in obedience) relates wisdom to the prophetic emphasis on the knowledge (*i.e.* the cordial love and obedience) of God (*e.g.* Ho. 2:20; 4:1, 6; 6:6; Je. 4:22; 9:3, 6; and especially Pr. 9:10).

D. A. Hubbard, [“Wisdom,”](#) ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1244.

Commentary Study

17–21 The second “I” passage is framed by the word “love,” vv 17, 21. **17** See *Note 17.a*⁶. The reciprocal nature of the love between Wisdom and her lovers is proclaimed by Wisdom herself. C. Kayatz (*Studien*, 101–2) has pointed out that the formula of reciprocity is never found in the O⁷T in the mouth of the Lord. It is found several times in Egyptian sources (a god loves those who love him), and thus it may ultimately be a formula going back to an Egyptian model. Be that as it may, it is never found in the mouth of the Egyptian goddess, Ma’at, who is usually co-related with Israelite Wisdom. M. Fox has pointed out (“World Order and Ma’at: A Crooked Parallel,” *JANESCU*⁸ 23 [1995] 44–47) that the “I-style” is found also in Mesopotamia, but he looks to the Hellenistic Isis aretologies as a more likely connection with Prov 8. But that suggests a later date than one would otherwise suspect for chap. 8. Perhaps the formula was more common than we realize. As it stands, v 17 is another sign of the erotic language (e.g., 4:5; 7:4) used in the pursuit of Woman Wisdom. Elsewhere, however, it is a question of humans loving Wisdom. Now the emphasis is upon Wisdom’s affection for those who love her. Another important aspect is the seeking and finding theme (v 17b) which also appears in Cant 3:1–4; 5:6. The key word is “find”—finding a wife, Prov 18:22; 31:10, and also finding wisdom, 3:13; 8:35. Perhaps ironically, “find” is also on the lips of the seductive woman in 7:15b. While any specific vocabulary range has limits, there is a deliberate echoing of key terms throughout these chapters. **18–21** Wisdom describes the gifts that this love bestows, such as justice and riches. Then she immediately boasts that her gifts are more precious than any gold or silver (v 19). This is an echo of 3:14, and like 8:10 it is another “better” saying, but there is no reason to excise it. **20** The very frequent metaphor of the way/path turns up again. In contrast to 1:15; 2:13–15; 4:14–15 which describe paths of the evil, the figure changes slightly; here Wisdom herself, and not the youth, is traveling the path of justice. The association of צדקה and משפט in this verse is particularly important since these are attributes central to the understanding of the Lord (cf. Isa 5:16; Jer 9:23–24). **21** It is not surprising that

⁶17.a. It is important to read the Qere “love me,” instead of the Ketib “love her.” See also the *Comment*.

⁷OT Old Testament

⁸*JANESCU Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*

those who love Wisdom will prosper; she provides more than precious riches (v 19). To this verse the Septuagint adds an extra statement that serves as a remarkable introduction to the next section: “If I tell you about daily happenings, I will now remind you of what happened in ages past” (“from eternity,” literally; cf. A. Barucq, 92, who remarks that it may indicate the end of a strophe). A certain intensification in Wisdom’s speech can be detected. From the present, which manifests Wisdom’s generosity, she now turns to the past, which will highlight her origins from God before creation.⁹

17. Synonymous, ternary-binary. On the rendering *seek*, instead of *seek diligently* (or, *early*), see note on 1:28.—The reciprocity expressed in first cl. is not real (like that of ψ 18:25, 26(26, 27)), but only formal, the sense being that, by a natural law of mind, only those who earnestly desire Wisdom can come into intimate relations with her. The first clause states the attitude of mind, the second the consequent effort—the two are mutually complementary. It is assumed

⁹ Rowland E. Murphy, [Proverbs](#), vol. 22, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 51.

that men may naturally desire wisdom, and that search for it is always successful. The sage recognizes to the full the moral responsibility and potency of man; the highest gift of life is within every man's grasp. His thought is an expanded and refined form of the old-Hebrew idea (Ez. 18:4). Similar stress is laid in the Fourth Gospel on the power of the human desire and will (Jno. 5:40 *ye do not wish to come to me*) and on the attitude of mind here expressed by the word *love* (Jno. 3:19 *men loved the darkness rather than the light*). Cf. note on v. 9.—**18.** Synonymous, ternary. The connection shows that the reference is to earthly honor and wealth (as in v. 21; 3:10 *al.*). *Honor* is good repute in the eyes of men. *Lordly* = *splendid*, or, in general, *great*, Grk. *abundant*, Lat. Vulg. *superb*, RV¹⁰. *durable*, margin *ancient* (that is, *inherited from ancestors*); the word appears to mean *advanced*, *eminent*, and some such superlative adjective is suggested by the connection, but the sense *inherited* (Stade) is not appropriate.—The term here translated by *prosperity* (צדקה) is usually rendered by *justice* or *righteousness*. It signifies primarily that which is *right*, *true*, as quality of a fact or of the soul (the English *justice* has the same double sense). In its most general meaning, *in accordance with propriety* or *with the facts in the case*, it occurs in 1 Sam. 26:23, where Yahweh is said to give every man his *due*, and in Joel 2:23, where Yahweh gives rain in *just measure*. It thus comes to mean the *just measure of fortune* which is meted out to a man, for example, by God, and then, by a natural transition, the good decision in his favor, the *good fortune* awarded him—sometimes a legal decision by a judge (and the judge may be God). It expresses Yahweh's interpositions on behalf of Israel (Ju. 5:11), that is, his (just) decisions in their favor, and the good fortune which his protection insures: *every tongue that enters into a legal contest with thee thou shalt get the better of* [= procure a sentence of condemnation on¹¹]*—this is the lot of the servants of Yahweh, and their fortune awarded by me, says Yahweh* (Isa. 54:17). This signification comes out clearly in ψ 112, which is a description of the happiness of the man who fears Yahweh; his happiness is based on earthly prosperity, and it is said of him, among other things (v. 3): *wealth and riches are in his house, and his good fortune lasts for ever* (that is, is continued in his descendants). So the word must be taken in 21:21b, if it be retained in the text (it is lacking in the Grk.), and this sense is required by the connection of our verse; the sage ascribes to Wisdom the bestowal of well-being which the psalmist ascribes to Yahweh.—**19.** Synonymous, ternary. *Fruit* and

¹⁰RV. Eng. Revised Version.

¹¹] Omission of Heb. word or words.

*produce*¹²(= *product, crop, revenue*¹³) are synonymous agricultural expressions of blessing and prosperity. As in the preceding verse, the blessing is external. The comparison affirms not that Wisdom's reward is different in character from gold (namely, moral and spiritual), but that it is more splendid and desirable than the most precious metals.—In first cl. the Heb. has two terms, generally rendered by *gold* and *fine gold*; their precise meanings are uncertain, but their combination may be represented by *finest gold*. Cf. note on v. 10.—**20, 21.**

Both couplets are synonymous; v. 20 is ternary, v. 21 ternary-binary. Wisdom sums up her promises of reward in the declaration that she deals equitably and justly with her friends. *Equity* and *justice* are synonyms. The former term represents the Heb. word rendered by *prosperity* in v. 18; here it is a quality of action (= right decision), there it is the result of this action. The statement of v. 20 is simply *I deal justly*. *Friends*, lit. *those who love me*, as in v. 17; *wealth* =

¹²(Insertion for clearness.

¹³) Insertion for clearness.

possession, property (RV¹⁴. substance). The initial particle in v. 21 expresses purpose (*in order that I may*), and this is here equivalent to result (*so that I do*). Wisdom's justice is guarantee that she will properly reward those who devote themselves to her; the two verses may be thus paraphrased: *Since I am just, my friends will be properly rewarded*. The rendering *righteousness* (instead of *equity*) in v. 20 is misleading; it conveys to us the idea of obedience to religious law, or moral and religious purity; but these qualities, though they belong to Wisdom, are not here in question; the writer, as the connection shows, has in mind simply the justice which assures to every man his due.—At the end of v. 21 Grk. adds, as introduction or transition to the following section, the words: *If I declare to you the things of daily occurrence, I will remember to recount the things of old*—that is, I now pass from our present life to the history of the primeval time—an explanatory note by a scribe, not a part of the original text.

12. שְׂכַנְתִּי, an improbable expression; κατασκήνωσα; ¹⁵ ברית create (cf. Pin¹⁶k); read הִסְכַּנְתִּי *understand*, or קִנִּיתִי, which is graphically not hard, if the ש of שְׂכַנְתִּי may be miswriting of preceding ה (in חכמה). Before מְזֻמּוֹת insert אִמְצֵא ¹⁷ .ו.; ¹⁸ ἔπτεκαλεσάμην, for ἔπτεκατησάμην (Jäg¹⁹.).—**13.** ²⁰ שְׁנֵאת רַע; on ²¹ cf. Pink²².: on an apparently personal interpretation of רַע ²³(= *bad man*²⁴) in Talm. see H. Deutsch, *Spr. Sal.*, p. 68.—**14.** In ^b we must either take אֲנִי as preposed subject, and insert ו before גְּבוּרָה, or, what is simpler, following ²⁵, change אֲנִי to כֹּל ²⁶ .**16**—**17.** לִי. אֶרְךָ; ²⁷ τύραννοι κρατοῦσι γῆς; read יִשְׁפֹּטוּ א'.—For אֲרִין ²⁸ and many Heb. MSS. and printed Edd. give צִדְקָה (see De' Rossi), which seems to be scribal

¹⁴RV. Eng. Revised Version.

¹⁵Ⲅ eshiṭa; Ⲅ^{Lee} ed. of Lee, etc.

Ⲅ Alexandrian Version of OT.

Ⲅ Masoretic text.

¹⁶Pink H. Pinkuss.

¹⁷Ⲅ Masoretic text.

¹⁸Ⲅ Alexandrian Version of OT.

¹⁹Jäg. J. G. Jaeger.

²⁰Ⲅ Masoretic text.

²¹Ⲅ eshiṭa; Ⲅ^{Lee} ed. of Lee, etc.

²²Pink. H. Pinkuss.

²³(Insertion for clearness.

²⁴) Insertion for clearness.

²⁵Ⲅ Alexandrian Version of OT.

²⁶Ⲅ Masoretic text.

²⁷Ⲅ Alexandrian Version of OT.

²⁸Ⲅ eshiṭa; Ⲅ^{Lee} ed. of Lee, etc.

repetition from end of preceding verse; after טפּש we expect ב before קצדק, as in ψ 96:13; 98:9.—On ²⁹ see Pink³⁰.’s note.—**17**. Read Qeri אהבי (so ³¹); Bi³². אני אהב יה בְּאִי / *I love him who loves Yah*, an improbable reading.—**18**. ³³ עֵתֶק; ³⁴ πολλῶν, perhaps for παλαιῶν (Grabe, cited by Lag³⁵.); ³⁶ ומזליא *and riches*; ³⁷ = ³⁸; Ἄ μετ’ εἰρήνης; ³⁹Σ (and ⁴⁰Θ) παλαιός; ⁴¹ *superbae*.—**20**. At the end ⁴² adds ἀναστρέφομαι, to correspond with the vb. of first cl., but against the rhythm.—**21**. ⁴³ שׁי; ⁴⁴ ὕπαρξιν; ⁴⁵ אַתּא שׁניא *many years*; ⁴⁶ סברא *hope*; ⁴⁷ *ut ditem*. On the form cf. Ew⁴⁸., § 146 *d*, Stade, § 370 *b*, and on the meaning BDB⁴⁹. On the couplet added in ⁵⁰ (the style of which differs from that of the context) see notes of Jäger, Lag⁵¹., Baumgartner.⁵²

²⁹ ע eshita; ע^{Lee} ed. of Lee, etc.

³⁰Pink. H. Pinkuss.

³¹ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

³²Bi. G. Bickell.

³³ מ Masoretic text.

³⁴ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

³⁵Lag. P. de Lagarde.

³⁶ ת Targum.

³⁷ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

³⁸ מ Masoretic text.

³⁹Σ Symmachus.

⁴⁰Θ Theodotion.

⁴¹ י Jerome’s Version of OT.

⁴² א Alexandrian Version of OT.

⁴³ מ Masoretic text.

⁴⁴ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

⁴⁵ ת Targum.

⁴⁶ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

⁴⁷ י Jerome’s Version of OT.

⁴⁸Ew. H. Ewald.

⁴⁹BDB. Heb. and Eng. Lex. of OT., ed. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs.

⁵⁰ א Alexandrian Version of OT.

⁵¹Lag. P. de Lagarde.

⁵² Crawford Howell Toy, [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 168–171.

⁵³FOURTH STROPHE (8:17–21)

8:17–21 Following the theme of v. 17, this strophe emphasizes the material benefits of Wisdom. She has riches and wealth (v. 18) and bestows her treasures on those who love her (v. 21). These claims should be taken in a literal rather than a metaphorical sense; through wise behavior one can attain material prosperity. At the same time, not all her benefits are material in nature. She also possesses “righteousness”¹⁶⁵⁴² (vv. 18, 20), a quality that is far better than gold or silver.

The point of the strophe is that Wisdom offers the way to prosperity, but it is a way completely devoid of any cynical manipulation of the world. It is based on principles that are woven into the fabric of creation (vv. 22–31), and thus those who follow her avoid self-destructive patterns. Refraining from both self-indulgence and schemes for quick money gradually but surely leads to a life that is healthy in every way.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴¹⁶² צדקה in v. 18 as in v. 20 means “righteousness” rather than “prosperity.” Cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, 350.

⁵⁵ Duane A. Garrett, [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs](#), vol. 14, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 108.

Wisdom, available to all, is acquired only by those who **love** her (cf. v. 21; 4:6) and **seek** her (cf. 2:1–4). Those who are wise receive **riches and honor** (cf. 3:16), **enduring wealth** (cf. 8:21; 14:24; 15:6; 22:4), **and prosperity**. “Enduring” is literally “surpassing” or “eminent.” The riches that come to the possessor of wisdom are genuine, not artificial substitutes purchased with silver or gold. Being honored in a community is a product of one’s walk (conduct) rather than one’s wealth by itself. “Prosperity” is literally “righteousness” (cf. v. 20). Godly living is the major benefit from having wisdom.

8:19–21. The word **yield** (v. 19) is a term used in the marketplace; the verb focuses attention on wisdom’s ability to produce benefits far superior to what **fine gold** (*ḥārûṣ*; cf. v. 10) and **silver** provide. Wisdom goes with **righteousness** and **justice** (cf. v. 8). The form of the Hebrew verb **walk** conveys the idea of walking steadily or continuously. (On the distinction between righteousness and justice see comments on Amos 5:7.)

As in many places in Proverbs, **way** (s) and **paths** are used synonymously (see comments on Prov. 2:13). As stated in 8:18, those who love (cf. v. 17) and acquire wisdom gain wealth (cf. 3:16; 14:24; 15:6; 22:4). Like many statements in Proverbs, this one is a generalization to which exceptions should be noted. Material substance is replenishable (keeping one’s **treasuries full**) because of the skill a wise person has to maintain it.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Sid S. Buzzell, “[Proverbs.](#)” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 922.

8:17–21. Wisdom’s Material Benefits

8:17. *I love ...*: Like Prov 2 as a whole, this verse offers encouragement to the neophyte. Radaq paraphrases: “Let no one say, I strove but did not find.” Hame’iri elaborates: “The intent of the statement is that man should not slack off from study, fearing lest he not succeed because of the weight of the burden in the task of study, which requires much time and lengthy preparations.” He who goes toward wisdom may be confident that learning will become progressively easier, for his mentality will conform itself to wisdom and come to absorb it more easily. “Love” is the emotion that embodies this process because, as Hame’iri observes: “It is known that the definition of love is the convergence and uniting of minds, that is, their concurrence in a single opinion.”

I love those who love me: The love that binds wisdom to her adherents is a notable theme in Proverbs, particularly in Part I (elsewhere only in 12:1 and 29:3, but implicit in several verses). This theme is given great prominence in Ben Sira but is scarcely attested in foreign Wisdom literature.

’ēhāb “I love” is first sg⁵⁷, with elision of the radical *’aleph* and contraction of the first two vowels (GK⁵⁸C §68f). Radaq says that the *aleph* was dropped for ease of pronunciation. And indeed, the line, nicely rhythmic and alliterative as it stands, would sound like stuttering in the expected grammatical form, *’āni ’ōḥābay ’e ’ēhāb*.

Reciprocal Love in Proverbs

⁵⁷sg. singular

⁵⁸GKC Gesenius, Kautsch, and Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 1910

The authors of Proverbs, especially but not exclusively in Part I, require that we do more than simply obey the teachings or learn wisdom for utilitarian advantage alone. They insist on an emotional commitment, a desire for learning. This love propels one to seek the unknown and allows learning to impress itself on character. Without love, knowledge is inert. Hence we are required to love wisdom (4:6; 7:4; 29:3; cf. 8:34).

For Proverbs, love and hate are not two emotions among many. They are the polar mind-sets that define the basic shape of a person's character. The wise are typified by love of wisdom and hate of deceit, fools by their perverse loves and hatreds. Fools hate wisdom (1:29). They despise its chastisement (1:30) and instruction (5:12). The callow soul "loves" his callowness (1:22). The cynic delights in his own cynicism (1:22). Those who hate wisdom love death (8:36). A lazy man is not merely weary but loves sleep (20:13). A contentious man is not just irascible but "loves" transgression (17:19). To be wise is not only to know wisdom, but to love it and seek it (see the comment on 8:30c–31a), and this love is met by wisdom's own, the attraction of like for like (8:21).

To love wisdom means to crave knowledge and draw deep satisfaction from attaining it. But in what sense does wisdom feel a corresponding emotion—a desire to be *taken*, as it were? Proverbs does not provide the answer, but its insistence (reiterated more explicitly by Ben Sira) on wisdom's amenability to being learned supports the following reflection. To the neophyte, knowledge in any area appears massive, fragmented, and unmanageable. As one progresses in learning, the vastness of knowledge is even more evident, but lines of organization begin to appear, and interconnections emerge that facilitate memory and comprehension. Eventually, one assimilates these structures so that they seem natural, almost self-evident, and what once seemed a great obstacle to knowledge (Hebrew verb forms, for instance) now seems to offer the line of least resistance. In other words, a learner may have the sensation that the field of knowledge is cooperating in clarifying itself, at least in the territory one has already traversed. While such an abstract formulation would have been foreign to the sages, they are expressing a similar experience of learning in terms of the reciprocal love of wisdom and the wise.

Behind the concept of the mutual love of wisdom and humanity may lie the theme of reciprocal divine-human love. While the theme of mutual divine-human love is biblical (especially prominent in Deuteronomy), the formula of reciprocal love is not. There are, however, strong Egyptian parallels. Kayatz (1966: 98–102) quotes the formulas on heart scarabs, such as "Khonsu loves him who loves him";

“Isis loves the one who loves her.” Kayatz believes that the qualities of loving and being loved are particularly characteristic of Ma‘at, the goddess of justice and truth (see pp. 335f.). This reciprocity formula, however, is used of a variety of deities.

and those who seek me find me: It is not even enough to be receptive to wisdom; one must actively pursue it (2:4; 15:14; 18:15). Wisdom will be found by those who seek it earnestly. A less-than-wholehearted aspiration to wisdom will not bring one to it. Nor is wisdom accessible to the cynic, the *leṣ*, who may want to possess learning but will not obey its dicta (Prov 14:6), to the dolt who thinks he can buy it (17:16), or to the fool who belatedly grasps for it in desperation (1:28); cf. Sir 15:7–8.

Seeking and Studying

What does it mean in practice to seek wisdom? First of all, one must give attention to the words of one’s teacher and of other sages. For Ben Sira, seeking wisdom means studying both wise sayings and the sacred books of Israel, above all the Law (see esp. Sir 6:32–37; 14:20–15:10). It is less clear what it means for Proverbs, though textual study is certainly within the purview of the Prologue. Does seeking wisdom include book learning, as in the first chapter of Daniel?

The Egyptian sages encouraged the study of all the scribal literature, especially the Wisdom instructions. Anii says: “Penetrate the writings, put them in your heart. Then all that you say will be effective” (20:4–5; cf. AE⁵⁹L 2.140). Pap⁶⁰. Beatty IV praises the ancient scribes at length (vso⁶¹. 2.5–4.6 [AE⁶²L 2.176–77]) and exhorts the reader: “Be a scribe! Put it in your heart. Then it will be thus with your name” (vso⁶³. 2.13; cf. AE⁶⁴L 2.177), meaning that the reader too will gain renown. The author is urging the study of the ancient books; this study is preparatory to the understanding of ethical wisdom: “(Only) when you are learned in the books will you penetrate the instruction” (4:6, 9). Duachety promises to teach his son love of book learning, and he praises the scribal office for which it is a prerequisite: “Nothing surpasses book learning [lit. “books”]; it is like being on the

⁵⁹AEL *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Lichtheim 1973–80

⁶⁰Pap. papyrus

⁶¹vso. verso

⁶²AEL *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Lichtheim 1973–80

⁶³vso. verso

⁶⁴AEL *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Lichtheim 1973–80

water” (that is, “sailing” successfully through life) (Ilc; cf. AE⁶⁵L 1.185). Amennakhte counsels: “Be a scribe, frequent the House of Life [the library and scriptorium joined to large temples], for that means becoming like a book-box” (I⁶⁶. 12). (To “be a scribe” could be translated “become literate.”)

Like the Egyptian sages and Ben Sira, the authors of Proverbs, especially of Part I, may well be including the study of ancient books (minimally, the book of Proverbs itself) when they urge the reader to seek wisdom. Proverbs, however, does not isolate the components of wisdom. Wisdom is to be sought in its totality, in speech and writing, in this book and in the entirety of literature.

8:18. *Wealth and honor are with me:* The pair is a hendiadys meaning “honorable wealth.” Wisdom holds both wealth (‘ošer) and honor (*kabod*) in her right hand (Prov 3:16), symbolizing their association. Note too how the extra gift of “wealth and honor” that Solomon receives in 1 Kgs 3:13 corresponds to “wealth” alone in v 11. The construct pairs ‘ošer *k^ebod-* (lit. “the wealth of the honor [of his kingdom]”; Esth 1:4) and *k^ebod* ‘ošro (lit. “the honor of his wealth”; Esth 5:11) show that the concepts are sometimes interchangeable, since riches usually bring prestige. However, *kabod* is not an exact equivalent of ‘ošer, for a person can have one without the other, and the two stand in opposition in Prov 11:16. *Kabod* refers to wealth and not honor in, e.g., Ps 49:17–18 and Isa 66:11–12. Not all wealth brings honor, but the wealth possessed (and granted) by wisdom does.

enduring riches and righteousness [*hon* ‘ateq uš^edaqah]: As in “wealth and honor” (18a), the second noun defines the quality of the first. Ehrlich paraphrases: “exceedingly great property gained justly” (“überaus grosses, auf rechtlchem Wege erworbenes Vermögen”). Wisdom’s benefits are all attained honestly. In vv 15, 18, and 20, the author takes care not to exalt power and wealth apart from moral values.

enduring riches [*hôn* ‘ātēq]: ‘ātēq (⁶⁷= ‘ātāq) is usually understood to mean “old” (Malbim) or “venerable” (Delitzsch), equivalent to ‘attîq “ancient,” hence “enduring.” Both ‘attîq and ‘ātēq are adjectival forms from ‘-t-q, so the equation is reasonable. The ability to endure, demonstrated by something’s antiquity, is transposed into the future. The word has also been understood as “great.” Nahmias, for example, glosses *rāb w^egādôl*. In Job 21:7, which is thought to support the latter, ‘āt^eqû actually means “grow old,” parallel to “live.” In Isa 23:18,

⁶⁵AEL *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Lichtheim 1973–80

⁶⁶l. line

⁶⁷= equals; i.e., the same as or *virtually* the same as

‘ātîq is predicated of a garment and traditionally translated “stately” or “venerable,” but this is conjecture.

righteousness [š^edāqāh] refers to wealth gained righteously and honestly. Some explain š^edāqāh here as “wealth” or “prosperity,” a cause-for-effect metonymy. Toy: “the *just measure of fortune* which is meted out to man,” hence “the *good fortune* awarded him.” Similarly, “success” (JPS⁶⁸V) and “prosperity” (NRSV). The parallel between šidqātām and naḥālat- “inheritance of” in Isa 54:17b might be thought to support this. There, however, both nouns refer not to material prosperity but to vindication (17a). In Ps 112:3, šidqātô parallels hōn wā ‘ōšer “riches and wealth,” but the second line may be supplementary rather than not synonymous. Note that w^ešidqātô ‘ōmedet lā ‘ad in Ps 111:3 is recapitulated as t^ehillātô ‘ōmedet lā ‘ad, “his *praise* endures forever,” later in the same psalm (v 10). Thus there is no need to ascribe a special sense to š^edāqāh in Prov 8:18.

8:19. *Better my fruit ...*: In the present text, Wisdom takes a precautionary step away from her enthusiastic promise of material blessings to remind us (in an echo of v 10) that wealth is still inferior to the fruits of wisdom, which are intellectual and ethical, not only material. Yet the antithesis between Wisdom’s wealth and fruit is not really appropriate here, since Wisdom has just declared that her fruits include wealth (v 18). Moreover, the relative depreciation of wealth—though certainly consonant with the author’s belief—weakens the promise of affluence in the next verse. This verse is probably a pietistic precaution based on 8:10 and, especially, 3:14, which has the same chiasm reversed.

finest gold: Ḥārûš and pāz are two unidentified types of gold used synonymously. They reinforce each other to form a superlative of value. Kesep nibḥār “choice silver” is the antonym of kesep nim’ās (Jer 6:30), which means silver that is rejected, not to be chosen (Ehrlich).

8:20–21. *I walk in the way of righteousness ...*: Wisdom bestows her wealth only in honest ways, meaning that the wise themselves take honorable paths to prosperity.

walk: The D-stem m^ehallek means to go about habitually, referring here to a mode of behavior.

to grant wealth: The verb l^ehanḥil “to give as an inheritance” means to transfer ownership permanently, so that it may be passed on in inheritance. Compare the

⁶⁸JPSV Jewish Publication Society Version, 1965–82

promise in 13:22a, “The good man bequeaths [*yanḥil*] his wealth to his children.” Lady Wisdom’s promise of prosperity is framed in terms connoting habituality (*m^ehallel*) and permanence (*l^ehanḥil*). Wealth gained improperly, in contrast, will not endure (20:21; 23:4–5; 28:8, 22).

The word for wealth, *yēš*, is a noun meaning possessions only here and in Sir 42:3 (*nḥlh wyš*). The phrase *w’l yš lh* “and upon that which is hers” in Sir 25:21 shows the intermediate step between *yēš* as an existential particle and as a noun meaning possessions. The pairing of *yēš* with *nḥlh* in Sir 42:3 suggests that *yēš* is enduring, stable property, and not just any valuables.

to grant /⁶⁹/ (*to*) *fill* (*l^ehanḥil* /⁷⁰/ *’āmallē*’): Compare the inf⁷¹.-yiqtol parallelism in, e.g., 2:2, 8, and see the comment on 5:2. No special semantic significance is discernible.

Throughout 8:12–21, Wisdom extols the benefits of which she is the means and the facilitator. In doing so, she is boasting of her own prowess and prestige. The endowments so highly cherished by man—cleverness, power, dominion, and wealth—are in her control. She moves in the most esteemed circles, among the rich and the powerful, for whom she is a majestic patron and benefactor. Indeed, as we are about to learn, she is an intimate of God himself. For him, however, she is a darling little girl.

The LX⁷²X adds a verse (8:21a) introducing the next unit; see the Textual Notes.⁷³

⁶⁹// parallel to

⁷⁰// parallel to

⁷¹inf. infinitive

⁷²LXX Septuagint (ed. Rahlfs)

⁷³ Michael V. Fox, [*Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 18A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 275–279.