

THE STRUCTURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROV 9:7–12

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The following paper raises the question of why Prov 9:7–12 is located in its present position. Is it accidental or purposeful? If it is purposeful, then what is the reason for its presence in Proverbs 9? What are the various perspectives of scholars regarding the nature of 9:7–12?

The primary perspective of critical commentaries in this century is that 9:7–12 is intrusive within the context of Proverbs 9. The reason for its intrusiveness varies from commentator to commentator. C. H. Toy argues that 9:7–12 was originally a part of 10:1–22:16 and therefore has been inserted as a result of scribal error.¹ Other scholars such as H. Ringgren argue that 9:7–12 is intrusive because it inserts a pessimistic tone into the text that is radically different from the optimism of 9:1–6.² Perhaps the most comprehensive list of reasons for seeing 9:7–12 as intrusive is found in B. Gemser's work. His argument for intrusiveness derives from a difference in meter, text-critical matters (for example, the critical apparatus of *BHS* indicates the absence of vv. 9–10 in one Hebrew manuscript and vv. 10–12 in another), a lack of continuation of thought from 9:6 to 9:7, and issues already mentioned such as the pessimism of 9:7–12 and its similarity with the sentence literature of 10:1–22:16.³ These perspectives on the intrusive nature of 9:7–12 often lead scholars to the assumption that the original text of Proverbs 9 did not contain 9:7–12⁴ or that the text is nothing more than proverbial debris that often collected at the end of various instructions in Proverbs 1–9.⁵

Though the weight of scholarship seems to tip the scales in favor of the intrusive nature of 9:7–12, there are those who argue for the text's integrity and integrative nature within its context. F. Delitzsch maintains that 9:7–12 simply continues Wisdom's discourse from 9:1–6.⁶ This same approach is taken by D. A. Hubbard, partly on the assumption that יְיָ יְיָ in 9:11 indicates that Wisdom is still the one speaking. Therefore Hubbard argues for the continuation of the speaker from 9:1–6 but with a change of audience

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¹ C. H. Toy, *Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899) 183.

² H. Ringgren, *Sprüche* (ATD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980) 43.

³ B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1963) 51.

⁴ W. McKane, *Proverbs* (OTL; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 359.

⁵ R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) 48.

⁶ F. Delitzsch, "Proverbs," *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 1.200.

and subject.⁷ D. A. Garrett argues for the integrity of 9:7–12 on the basis of the passage's similarities to Wisdom's appeals in 1:20–33 and 8:1–36. The similarities include thematic parallels related to mocking (1:22; 9:7–8), retribution (1:23–32; 8:36; 9:12) and the promise of life (1:33; 3:35; 9:6).⁸

Finally, R. B. Y. Scott and J. Goldingay have argued that parts of 9:7–12 are integrative to the overall context of Proverbs 9. Scott argues that Proverbs 1–9 originally concluded with 9:1–6, 10–12. He suggests that vv. 10–12 follow easily upon v. 6, whereas vv. 7–9 were added subsequently because of the language of v. 12. Finally vv. 13–18 were added by a later hand in order to provide a contrast to Lady Wisdom in Prov 9:1–6.⁹ Goldingay's approach to 9:7–12 is a modification of Scott's position. Goldingay argues that the original ending of Proverbs 1–9 was 9:1–6, 11. This is based upon the motive clause found in 9:11, which provides the reason for obeying the imperatives of 9:1–6. Eventually 9:10 was connected to 9:6 and functioned as a theological reinterpretation of Wisdom. Afterward 9:12 was added as a further motive clause that substantiated the morality of 9:1–6, 10–11. Finally 9:7–9 and vv. 13–18 were included to expand upon the ןצז of 9:12.¹⁰ Though Goldingay's approach is similar to Scott's, the one major difference is that the bifid structure of Prov 9:1–6 and 9:13–18 is not seen as the interpretative key for understanding the text. Rather, one must distinguish the various layers of redaction in the text and observe how each part relates to the whole.¹¹

I. THE STRUCTURE OF PROV 9:7–12

This section of the paper will seek to demonstrate that Prov 9:7–12 was not haphazardly placed in its current position, nor is it intrusive in its present context. Rather, by looking closely at its structure I will demonstrate that 9:7–12 is a rhetorically complete unit of thought bound tightly to its present context.

1. *Paronomasia*. When one begins to examine the structure of Proverbs 9 it is apparent that a contrast is being drawn between Lady Wisdom (vv. 1–6) and Lady Folly (vv. 13–18).¹² The continuity and discontinuity between the two sections of text are readily apparent. Continuity is seen in the similarities between both sections in terms of location (vv. 3, 14), invitation (vv. 4, 16) and meal (vv. 5, 17). On the other hand, there is discontinuity in the result that awaits one's choice of either lady, which is life or death (vv. 6, 18). As one examines Proverbs 9, however, a parallel text between the two sections is apparent. It is the text that extends the invitation

⁷ D. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (Dallas: Word, 1989) 131.

⁸ D. A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993) 114–115.

⁹ R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1965) 76.

¹⁰ J. Goldingay, "Proverbs V and IX," *RB* 84 (1977) 91–93.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 93.

¹² R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 140.

to those who pass by. The only significant difference between the parallel texts of v. 4 and v. 16 is the addition of the ו in v. 16:¹³

v. 4: מִי־פָתַי יָסֵר הַנְּהַי חָסֵר־לֵב אֲמַרָה לוֹ
v. 16: מִי־פָתַי יָסֵר הַנְּהַי וְחָסֵר־לֵב וְאֲמַרָה לוֹ

The repetition of this text in two sections of Proverbs 9 suggests the importance of this invitation within the chapter. But more significant is the paronomasia¹⁴ exhibited between 9:4, 16 and 9:7 that connects 9:7–12 to each block of text that precedes and follows it.

The first example of this phenomenon occurs with the repetition of the consonants of יָסֵר (vv. 4, 16) and יָסֵר (v. 7). The verb יָסֵר is from סָר, which means “to turn aside.” But יָסֵר is from יָסַר, which means “to teach.” This discovery alone is enough to suggest the intentional integration of 9:7–12 into its immediate context. There are additional examples, however, that lock these verses together.

The second example of paronomasia is found between לֵב (vv. 4, 16) and לֵךְ (v. 7). Their similarity is based not only upon a shared consonant but also upon a similar vowel pattern or assonantal paronomasia.¹⁵

The final example is not impressive enough to be mentioned by itself, but since it occurs in the same line as the other examples of paronomasia it becomes more significant. לוֹ is found in all of the verses (vv. 4, 7, 16). Therefore on the basis of the above examples it seems obvious to me that the editor intentionally integrated 9:7–12 into its present context by tying together, through paronomasia, v. 7 with the repeated invitations of 9:4, 16. This certainly agrees with the assessment of Watson that wordplay assists in composition and also links a poem or its parts together.¹⁶

2. *Chiasm.* Scholarship has maintained that 9:7–12 is not a single literary unit. This conclusion has been reached in various ways. First, Scott and Goldingay emphasize a process of redactional accretions to Proverbs 9. Both scholars argue that parts of 9:7–12 were not original to the context. A redactor added vv. 7–9 at a later time to expand upon the original theme of v. 12, which is the לֵךְ.¹⁷ Therefore one should not assume literary unity in this text. B. Lang offers a second approach to explain the structure of 9:7–12. His argument is that 9:1–6 was originally followed by vv. 11–18 and then vv. 7–10. An early copyist of the book, however, had a master copy in poor shape because of the papyrus material and failed to understand that vv. 7–10 represent the conclusion of Proverbs 1–9. So he reinserted it after

¹³ D. C. Snell, *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993) 35. It is interesting to note that according to Snell there are only six instances of repetition in Proverbs where verses are repeated verbatim or close to verbatim with only spelling variations.

¹⁴ W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 242; L. A. Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988) 29.

¹⁵ Watson, *Classical* 243.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 245.

¹⁷ Scott, *Proverbs* 75–76; Goldingay, “Proverbs” 92–93.

v. 6, which accounts for the present arrangement of the text.¹⁸ A third view is proposed by Whybray, who dismisses the above position because of a lack of textual and versional evidence that would substantiate a transposition of 9:7–12 from the end of the text to its present location. Instead he offers the view that v. 10 was originally misplaced or omitted in a previous copy of the text and then reinserted in its present location. Compounding the problem, the next editor then composed v. 11 to give the illusion that vv. 10–11 are a continuation of Lady Wisdom’s speech in 9:1–6.¹⁹ Finally the remaining verses of 9:7–12 are an “example of the kind of debris—here concerned with various types of wisdom—which tended to collect at the end of some of the instructions.”²⁰

It is certainly true that 9:7–12 is composed of various types of proverbs. One finds a mixture of sentence (vv. 7, 10) and admonition proverbs (vv. 8–9, 11–12). This mixture of types has led Whybray to the conclusion “that vv. 7–12 do not constitute a single literary unit . . . their contents are miscellaneous.”²¹ Though I am not oblivious to the variety of proverbial types and the change of person within the text, it is also important to gain a picture of the overall structure of the pericope. When one focuses upon the anatomy of 9:7–12, a chiasmic structure becomes evident.²²

The outer elements of the chiasm are formed by the repetition of the key words לִי/לְךָ in vv. 7–8 and לְכִם/לִי in v. 12. These four words provide the central characters contrasted in the text. In addition, they are structured chiasmatically within 9:7–12: לִי (v. 7)/ לְכִם (v. 8)// לְכִם/לִי (v. 12a)/ לְכִם/לִי (v. 12b).

The second element of the chiasm is formed by the repetition of the verb root רָץ in vv. 9 and 11. In v. 9 the wise man will add (יָסַף) insight (לְדַעַת) to his life by listening to instruction. In v. 11, which is parallel to v. 9 in the chiasmic structure, one finds the root רָץ once again. This time Lady Wisdom reminds the hearers that it is through her that one adds years to life.

Finally, the center of the chiasmic structure is v. 10: “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Therefore the overall structure has the following configuration:

- A. לִי/לְךָ (vv. 7–8)
- B. לְךָ יוֹסֵף (v. 9)
- C. $\text{תְּחִלַּת חִכְמָה יְרֵאת יְהוָה וְדַעַת קְדוֹשִׁים בִּינָה}$ (v. 10)
- B’. $\text{וְיוֹסֵפוּ לָךְ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים}$ (v. 11)
- A’. לְכִם/לִי (v. 12)

¹⁸ B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986) 88–89.

¹⁹ Whybray, *Composition* 46–48.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 48.

²¹ *Ibid.* 45–46.

²² Though I noticed the chiasmic structure independently, one should note that A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche, Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1–15* (Zürich: Theologischer, 1991) 155–156, also points out the same construction. Meinhold argues that one of the functions of 9:7–12 is to introduce the reader to the next collection in Proverbs 10–15. But Whybray disputes this suggestion in light of the headings (*Composition* 57).

Once the structure is determined to be chiasmic, the question must be asked: What is the significance of the chiasmic structure? (1) I suggest that the chiasm calls into question the previous theories of other scholars about the supposed accretions to the text or theories of misplaced elements that were inserted in different locations. It seems that the editor of Proverbs 9 composed a text that was a complete unit of thought. (2) One should keep in mind the words of Watson: “Chiasmus can *link* the components of a strophe.”²³ It certainly seems that the editor of this text has chosen a chiasmic structure to unify the diverse proverbial elements of 9:7–12 into a single whole. But I would also argue, in light of previous connections between 9:7–12 and its context, that the editor intended this section, and 9:10 in particular, to be a hinge between the two proximal parts of Proverbs 9 (vv. 1–6, 13–18). Later in the paper the theological significance of 9:7–12 as a hinge in Proverbs 9 will be explored.²⁴

Before leaving this section concerning the chiasmic structure of 9:7–12 we should note a lesser example of chiasm in the text, which I would argue is intentional in design and connective in function. The last word in 9:12 is the verb נָשַׁן, while the first word of 9:13 is נִשְׂאָה. The consonants in the two words are arranged chiasmically. The construction does not seem accidental but intentional.²⁵ It seems that the editor wanted to tie 9:7–12 to its context with this device. It is appropriate that 9:12 ends with the warning that a mocker will bear the results of his behavior, with the editor then connecting the warning by way of a chiasm to the introduction of Lady Folly, who if followed brings tragic results to a man’s life (9:18).

3. *Inclusio*. The next structural pattern that suggests the integrity of Prov 9:7–12 is *inclusio*, “the repetition of the same phrase or sentence at the beginning and end of a stanza or poem. In effect, the poem is framed between the repeated phrases.”²⁶ *Inclusio* is used in 9:7–12 as well as in Proverbs 9 as a whole.

The first example of an *inclusio*, which affirms the integrity of 9:7–12, is the repetition of the terms מְלַץ/חָכֵם (vv. 7–8) and חָכֵם/לֵיץ (v. 12). Since these terms are part of the chiasm described previously, they undergird the rhetorical unity of 9:7–12. Furthermore, the use of terms such as “mocker” and “wise man” also tie 9:7–12 to the overall emphasis of Proverbs 9, which is the choice between wisdom and folly. The connection is made by describing the two types of individuals who would most likely listen to the appeals of Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly.²⁷

²³ Watson, *Classical* 205.

²⁴ W. G. E. Watson, “Chiasmic Patterns in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (ed. J. Welch; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981) 147.

²⁵ One should consider, however, the textual note in *BHS* that suggests that the similarity between the two words is because of dittography. This textual decision is not necessary if one weighs carefully the use of chiasm as a poetic device.

²⁶ Watson, *Classical* 282–283.

²⁷ Hubbard, *Proverbs* 129.

The next example of *inclusio* derives from the semantic field of folly. Of the various terms used in wisdom literature to describe the fool,²⁸ the editor of Proverbs 9 uses five: פְּתִי, חֲסֵר-לֵב, לֵץ, רָשָׁע and כְּסִיל. Of these five terms חֲסֵר-לֵב and רָשָׁע are used as synonyms of פְּתִי and לֵץ (vv. 4, 7). This leaves in sequence פְּתִי (v. 4), לֵץ (v. 7) and כְּסִיל (v. 13). This same trio of terms appears in 1:22, where Lady Wisdom speaks for the first time. Therefore I contend that the similar sequencing of the three terms in both 1:22 and chap. 9 may indicate an intentional *inclusio* on the part of the editor of Proverbs 1–9. If so, then the editor is warning the reader at the beginning and end of the collection to avoid the example and end of folly. If that is the case, then the contiguous use of פְּתִי, לֵץ and כְּסִיל affirms the integrity of 9:7–12 and its connection to all of Proverbs 9.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PROV 9:7–12

The final section of this paper will attempt to demonstrate the literary and theological significance of Proverbs 9 and, in particular, 9:7–12.

1. *Theological summary.* When one approaches Proverbs 9 it is important to understand this chapter as a theological summary, a conclusion that sets before the young man a set of options—namely, wisdom and folly. This use of theological summation is evident throughout Proverbs 1–9. Whybray points to such texts as 1:19; 2:21–22; 3:35; 4:18–19; 5:21–23 as conclusions that speak of the two alternatives placed before the young man.²⁹ Furthermore even in those places where a brief theological summary is not found there is the juxtaposition of images of Folly and Wisdom, as in Proverbs 7 and 8. In Proverbs 7 one finds a detailed account of an encounter between a young man and an adulteress, whereas in Proverbs 8 one is introduced to Lady Wisdom.³⁰ The similarity of content between the two women reminds the reader that one must seek wisdom in order to choose properly between the two options. According to C. V. Camp the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 provides the “antidote to that perversion of language embodied in the seductive speech of the strange woman. Wisdom speaks the truth.”³¹

²⁸ T. Donald, “The Semantic Field of ‘Folly’ in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes,” *VT* 13 (1963) 285–292.

²⁹ Whybray, *Composition* 13.

³⁰ Whybray states: “There are many verbal as well as topical links between the two passages. Both Wisdom and the adulteress stand in the public places of the town (8.1–3; 7.12) and call to the simple (8.5; 7.7), and their persuasive words are quoted (8.4–10, 32–36; 7.14–20). Both offer ‘love’ (8.17; 7.18); both mention the house as a rendezvous (8.34; 7.8, 27); while Wisdom speaks of her ‘ways’ as righteous and just (8.20), the teacher warns the pupil against straying into the woman’s ‘ways.’ Finally, Wisdom offers ‘life’ (8.35a), while the adulteress’s house ‘goes down to the chamber of death’ (7.27)” (*ibid.* 43). G. A. Yee points out parallels as well (“I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh”: The Foreign Woman [ʿiššā zārā] in Proverbs 1–9,” *JSOT* 43 [1989] 54–55, 63).

³¹ C. V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985) 118; cf. J. N. Aletti, “Seduction et Parole en Proverbes I–IX,” *VT* 27 (1977) 140–144.

In similar fashion, Proverbs 9 echoes the same contrast as Proverbs 7 and 8. Two women and their appeals are juxtaposed at the end of the entire collection in Proverbs 9. Lady Wisdom has already made various appearances within Proverbs 1–9 (1:20–33; 3:13–20; 8:1–36). But Proverbs 9 introduces the personification of folly for the first time. This raises the issue of the relationship between Lady Folly and the various other seductive women throughout Proverbs 1–9. While opinions vary as to the identification of the “strange woman” in Proverbs, I agree with G. A. Yee who argues that the “strange woman” of Proverbs is a literary personification described with various attributes.³² Therefore even though Lady Folly appears only once in Proverbs 1–9 one could argue that various reflections of her character are seen in every instance where the “strange woman” appears in the collection (2:1, 9, 16–19; 5:1–8, 21; 6:20–25, 32; 7:1–17; 9:13–18). When Lady Folly is fleshed out in various roles within Proverbs 1–9, “the strange woman . . . becomes a metaphorical vehicle for the disruptive and chaotic forces that threaten the shalom of individual and society.”³³ This interpretation of Lady Folly’s identity leads to the conclusion that within Proverbs 9 there is a juxtaposition of theological options, a juxtaposition that summarizes wisdom and folly in Proverbs 1–9. Furthermore the contrast between life and death within Proverbs 9 (vv. 6, 18) also provides a theological summary for the first collection in the book.³⁴

In a similar fashion 9:7–12 reflects a theological summation that moves away from the illustrative to the indicative and yet at the same time undergirds each half of Proverbs 9. Proverbs 9:7–12 chiasmatically arranges two options toward life: the approach of the wise, and the approach of the mocker. It is my belief that each type of individual mentioned in 9:7–12 corresponds with the two women in Proverbs 9.³⁵ The lover of Folly is the mocker, and the lover of Wisdom is the wise man. The mocker insults and abuses the one who attempts to correct. In similar fashion Lady Folly parodies the exact words of Lady Wisdom and twists their meaning (9:4–5, 16–17). By imitating Wisdom’s words, Folly both eviscerates their seriousness and changes their focus.³⁶ Lady Folly and the mocker have much in common. The connection

³² Yee, “Foreign” 54; Camp, *Wisdom* 116. Other views regarding the immoral woman in Proverbs 1–9 include G. Boström’s perspective that the woman is a foreigner, who is also a devotee of the fertility cult of Ishtar/Astarte (*Proverbiastudien. Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr. 1–9* [Lund: Gleerup, 1935] 108). L. G. Perdue argues that the immoral woman combines elements of fertility religion and the fertility goddess (*Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994] 99). Certainly context may often help identify more specifically the role played by the immoral woman. For example, Prov 5:20 suggests that the woman is an adulteress. But when one comes to Proverbs 7 there are so many variations of description that it seems best to see a stereotype rather than attempting to discover one primary understanding of the immoral woman.

³³ Camp, *Wisdom* 120.

³⁴ R. E. Murphy, “The Kerygma of the Book of Proverbs,” *Int* 20 (1966) 9–11; R. C. Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9,” *Semeia* 50 (1990) 114.

³⁵ Meinhold, *Sprüche* 156.

³⁶ Lang, *Wisdom* 106; Yee, “Foreign” 65.

of the mocker with Folly is further reflected in the chiasm of consonants at the end of v. 12 and the beginning of v. 13. The suffering (סִוְרָה) of the mocker and the woman (תִּפְזָה) of folly are connected rhetorically. Folly brings suffering and eventual death.

In contrast to the mocker and Lady Folly stand the wise man and Lady Wisdom. The wise man listens to the voice of Lady Wisdom, and the result is both an addition of learning and years of life, just as Wisdom promised (8:35–36; 9:6). This is substantiated by the relationship of vv. 9 and 11, which forms a part of the overall chiasmic structure of 9:7–12. On both sides of the chiasm life and learning are connected with the wise, not the mocker.

Therefore Proverbs 9 stands as a theological summation woven together with implicit and explicit expressions of wisdom and folly as well as life and death. Whether an individual is going to be a mocker or a wise man is dependent upon whom the individual will fall in love with: Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly.

2. *Theological navigation.* Another significant feature of Prov 9:7–12 is its ability to help a young man decide in favor of Lady Wisdom and against Lady Folly. This decision is not always easy to make because of the similarity of the speeches by the two women. Both women are found in the same location, the highest point of the city (9:3, 14). Both women make the same appeal in their speeches (9:4, 16). Both women offer meals to their guests (9:5, 17). The similarity between the two women at the point of appeal reflects the ambiguity of life. It is the use of wisdom that allows the young man to choose correctly.³⁷

The young man, however, is not alone in his decision-making. Certainly the nonambiguous elements of Proverbs 9 suggest which woman is to be avoided and which is to be loved. The very fact that the editor describes one woman as “Wisdom” and the other as “Folly” is a warning in itself. Furthermore there is a difference in the type of meal provided. Wisdom will provide “meat” and “wine” (9:2), whereas Folly provides only “water” and “bread.”³⁸ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Wisdom’s invitation is to life (9:6), but Folly’s invitation, though not stated, leads to death (9:18).³⁹ Therefore, while there is a certain ambiguity because of the superficial similarities between the two women, the literary presentation dispels that ambiguity.

The ability to navigate a course that avoids Lady Folly but embraces Lady Wisdom is a primary purpose of wisdom. W. Zimmerli describes the purpose as the “art of steering.”⁴⁰ This rhetorical expression of wisdom’s purpose derives from Prov 1:5, where the term תְּהַבִּילֹת is used to describe “the ability to steer one’s course successfully through life.”⁴¹ The ship of

³⁷ Yee, “Foreign” 64; Van Leeuwen, “Liminality” 112.

³⁸ I am well aware that “stolen water” and “food eaten in secret” have sexual overtones; see Whybray, *Proverbs* 148–149.

³⁹ Camp, *Wisdom* 117; Aletti, “Seduction” 135.

⁴⁰ W. Zimmerli, “The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of Old Testament Theology,” *SJT* 17 (1964) 149.

⁴¹ Whybray, *Proverbs* 34; McKane, *Proverbs* 266.

wisdom, however, is not sailed under one's own flag but under the "fear of Yahweh" (1:7; 9:10).⁴²

When one examines those places where the "fear of Yahweh" is found in Proverbs 1–9, one discovers that the ability to turn away from evil (3:7; 8:13) and the rejection of pride and arrogance (1:7, 28–29; 3:7; 8:13) are results of living life in the fear of Yahweh. These twin results are certainly found in Proverbs 9. If the issue set before the young men in Proverbs is whether to choose Wisdom or Folly, then the "fear of Yahweh" will help them make the proper choice (3:17; 8:13). I therefore surmise that the emphasis on the "fear of Yahweh" is at the center of the chiasm in 9:7–12 and also in the center of Proverbs 9, for the decision between Wisdom and Folly ultimately rests on whether one fears Yahweh. That decision controls and subdues the ambiguity between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly and decides the course of one's life.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed one of the assured results of wisdom studies and has found it lacking. Proverbs 9:7–12 is not intrusive in its context but integrative both in terms of its structure and content. I suggest that 9:7–12 forms a hinge on which Proverbs 9 turns. Paradoxically, one must choose wisdom and the fear of Yahweh in order to choose against Lady Folly. Therefore a choice must be made (1:7; 9:10) that allows one to navigate the waters of seduction in a dangerous world.

⁴² Zimmerli, "Place" 158.