

Divine Wisdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Prov. 8:1–21, Matt. 16:26, Prov. 8:22–31, Gen. 1:31, Prov. 8:32–36, 9:1–18.*

Memory Text: “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (*Proverbs 8:22, NKJV*).

At this stage in Proverbs, wisdom reappears (see *Prov. 1:20, 21*), and it's clear from the texts for this week that wisdom is truth—the Truth as it exists in God, the Source and Foundation of all truth.

This accent on the “absolute” character of truth contrasts with some contemporary thinking, especially in the West, in which truth is seen as relative, contingent, cultural, with one person's truth being different from someone else's.

But this concept is not biblical. My truth should be the same as yours, simply because “truth” is universal. It does not belong to anyone in particular but to all humanity, whether or not all humanity recognizes it.

Interestingly enough, Pilate's famous question to Jesus, “What is truth?” (*John 18:38*), came in response to Jesus' statement, “‘Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’ ” (*vs. 37, NKJV*). Truth, absolute truth, exists, and it even speaks to us; what matters for us is whether or not we will listen to, and obey, what it is saying.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.

Wisdom Cries Out

Read Proverbs 8:1–21. According to these verses, what is the value of wisdom?

Wisdom is so important that it must reach everyone. God created all human life, and Christ died for each one of us. So wisdom, the knowledge of God, and the salvation He offers, is for every human being.

Look at the words used to describe wisdom’s vocal presence: “cry out,” “lift up her voice,” “call,” “voice,” “speak,” “opening . . . lips,” “mouth,” “lips,” “words.” However one understands these metaphors, what is clear is that wisdom is to be communicated; it is to be heard by all who will listen. After all, as we saw last week, what wisdom says is a matter of life and death.

Eight times wisdom talks about the truthfulness of her words. The description of wisdom here, interestingly enough, parallels the portrayal of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:4. This parallel, of course, should not be surprising, because God, as the Creator of all things (*see John 1:1–3*), is the Foundation of all truth.

Read Proverbs 8:10, 11. What do these verses say about wisdom?

So many people have lived, and still live, in ignorance, in folly, and in darkness. Many live with no hope at all or with false hopes. What makes this sad state of affairs even sadder is that wisdom and truth are so wonderful, filled with hope and promise for a better life now and the surety of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth, all thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus. All the wealth in the world means nothing (*see Eccles. 2:11–13*) in contrast to the knowledge of God.

Read Matthew 16:26 and ask yourself how well your life reflects the crucial truth of these words.

Wisdom and Creation

Read Proverbs 8:22–31. How is wisdom related to Creation?

In these texts, wisdom is mysteriously related to the Lord as the Creator. This poem shares many common words with the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, and even reflects its literary structure, organized around the three basic elements of heaven, water, and earth. The intention of this parallel is to emphasize the primacy of wisdom: if God Himself used wisdom to create, if wisdom is the oldest tool, older than the universe itself and fundamental to its existence, we should all the more use wisdom in everything we do in life.

There is also a strong emphasis on the divine origin of wisdom. The first word of the poem is the LORD, *Yahweh*, who is said to have “begotten” (second word) wisdom. The Hebrew word *qanah*, translated as “possessed” by the *NKJV*, has the connotation of “begetting” rather than “creating” (see *Deut. 32:6, Gen. 4:1*). The next word is the technical word that is associated with the Genesis Creation, *reshit* (“beginning”), which is found in the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

Yet, the word *beginning* in Proverbs 8:22 is used somewhat differently from the way it is used in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:1, the word is related to the Creation itself, while in Proverbs 8:22, the word is related to God Himself, to His way (*derek*), which means His nature. Thus, wisdom is part of the very nature of God Himself.

Wisdom, therefore, is situated in time even before the creation of the universe. The existence of wisdom, at that time when only God was present, traces the antiquity of wisdom “from everlasting.”

So, wisdom does not originate in us but, rather, is revealed *to* us; it is something that we learn, something that is taught to us; it is not what we generate out of ourselves. Surely, to walk in our own light is to walk in darkness. We are told that Jesus is “the true Light which gives light to every man” (*John 1:9, NKJV*). Every man needs it too.

Rejoicing in Creation

In Genesis 1, we see that each step of the Creation concludes with the same refrain: “God saw that it was good” (*see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31*). The last step (*vs. 31*) goes even further: “It was *very* good.” The Hebrew word for “good” contains the idea of enjoyment, and it also implies relationship. At the end of the whole Creation week, God pauses to fully enjoy His creation (*Gen. 2:1–3*). The time of this pause, the Sabbath, is blessed. Likewise, our poem concludes with wisdom’s enjoying the Creation.

Read Proverbs 8:30, 31. Why was wisdom rejoicing?

Wisdom’s rejoicing reflects God’s rejoicing at Creation. This rejoicing not only happens “daily” at each step of Creation but also crowns the work of Creation, when the creation (of life on earth) itself was completed.

In Proverbs 8, we find the reason for wisdom’s rejoicing: “My delight was with the sons of men” (*vs. 31, NKJV*). At the end of the Creation week, on Sabbath, God entered into a relationship with humans. The immediate application of this divine pause and rejoicing, after the work of the week, has implications for the human experience of Sabbath: “Following the pattern of the Creator, he too may look back upon his finished work with joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. In this way man may rejoice not only in God’s creation but also in his responsible rulership, not exploitation, over creation.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, in Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), p. 23.

Read Colossians 1:15–17, 2:3, Revelation 3:14, and John 1:1–14. What do these verses tell us about Jesus’ role in the Creation itself? Why is His role as Creator so important in understanding His role as our Redeemer?

Wisdom's Appeal

The last few verses of this proverb return to the personal—to the practical application of what it means to have wisdom. By contrast, the intellectual knowledge about wisdom's preexistence, about wisdom's presence at Creation, is certainly deep. But in the Bible, truth must always at some point come down to the human level and how we respond to what we have been given in Jesus.

Read Proverbs 8:32–36. What life-and-death message is given here?

The Hebrew word translated as “blessed” (*NKJV*) means “happy” (see *RSV*). In this passage, the word *blessed* is attached to two propositions. The first one describes an action: “Blessed are those who keep my ways” (*vs. 32, NKJV*). The same language is used in Psalm 119:1, 2, in regard to the law: “Blessed are the undefiled . . . who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies” (*NKJV*).

The second one describes an attitude: “Blessed is the man who listens to me” (*vs. 34, NKJV*). In both cases, the requirement implies a continuous effort. It is not enough to have discovered the right way; we have to “keep it.” It is not enough to hear the word of God; we have to “watch daily” and follow what we know. As Jesus put it: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (*Luke 11:28, NKJV*).

“Is this the happiness desirable which is to be found in the path of disobedience and transgression of physical and moral law? Christ's life points out the true source of happiness and how it is to be attained. . . . If they would be happy indeed, they should cheerfully seek to be found at the post of duty, doing the work which devolves upon them with fidelity, conforming their hearts and lives to the perfect pattern.”
—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 162.

Happiness can be an elusive thing; the more we strive for it, the harder it seems for us to attain it. Why should faithfulness to God, as opposed to the pursuit of happiness, be our first priority? Besides, which is more likely to produce happiness (and why): seeking it, or seeking first the kingdom of God?

Either/Or

Following wisdom's appeal, the inspired author of Proverbs 9 urges his audience to make a choice now between two lifestyles: wisdom or folly. The first and last six verses (*vss. 1–6, 13–18*) are symmetrical and bring out the contrast between the opposite camps.

Compare Proverbs 9:1–6 and Proverbs 9:13–18. What is the difference between wisdom and folly?

1. Wisdom is efficient and is involved in Creation: seven verbs are used to describe her actions there (*vss. 1–3*). The seven pillars she has hewn (*vs. 1*) allude to the seven days of Creation. Folly, in contrast, sits and does nothing, just pretending to be someone when in fact “she is simple, and knows nothing” (*vs. 13, NKJV*).

2. Although wisdom and folly call the same audience (*note the identical vss. 4 and 16*), what they provide is essentially different. Wisdom invites her guests to eat the bread and drink the drink that she has prepared (*vs. 5*). Folly offers nothing to eat or drink; she simply boasts about stolen provisions (*vs. 17*).

3. Wisdom calls us to forsake foolishness and, therefore, to live. Folly is more tolerant; she does not demand that we forsake anything, but the result is death. Those who follow wisdom will be advancing; they will “go in the way of understanding” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). Those who follow folly will be static, and they will “not know” (*vs. 18, NKJV*).

Read Proverbs 9:7–9. How do the wise man and the wicked man respond to the instruction of wisdom? What makes the wise man wiser than the wicked man?

The key to wisdom is humility. The wise man is the man who is teachable and responds to instruction with an open mind. Wisdom comes only to the one who, like a child, feels the need to grow. This is why, in the most explicit manner, Jesus taught that “‘unless you . . . become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (*Matt. 18:3, NKJV*).

Further Study: “The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate—a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. ‘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.’ John 1:1, 2. Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. . . . And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: ‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.’ Proverbs 8:22–30.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is belief in the Genesis Creation account the foundation of biblical wisdom? Why is the idea of evolution contrary to the Bible in every way?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that true wisdom is something that we cannot generate of ourselves but that must be revealed to us. What are some examples of important truths that we would never know other than their being revealed by divine inspiration? For instance, how could we know about Christ’s death on the cross and what it offers were it not revealed? What about the seventh-day Sabbath or the Second Coming?
- 3 How does God’s work, as revealed in Genesis 1, testify to the fact that good cannot be mixed with evil? What implications does your answer have for the idea that one could, for instance, incorporate an evolutionary worldview into the Genesis Creation story?
- 4 How does God’s enjoyment of the creation help us to understand how we can have a deeper and richer Sabbath experience?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 8:22–31*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Grasp the reality of Christ in Proverbs 8 as Divine Wisdom, Cocreator with the Father, and pre-Fall Mediator.

Feel: Appreciate the warmth, intimacy, joy, and condescension of the Godhead in Their work of Creation.

Do: Accept the biblical picture of the preincarnate Christ as Cocreator with the Father and as pre-Fall Mediator, and internalize this demonstration of the character of God.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Reality of the Preincarnate Christ in Proverbs 8

Proverbs 8 affirms that Jesus is the Divine Wisdom, Cocreator with the Father, and Mediator between an infinite God and finite creatures. Where else in Scripture is Christ’s pre-Fall mediation implied (*see John 1:1–3*)? Why was such “mediation” necessary even before sin?

II. Feel: The Preincarnate Christ as Mediator

Proverbs 8 describes Christ coming down at the time of Creation to identify with His creatures (*vss. 30, 31*). How does this demonstrate the Immanuel (“God with us”) principle from the very beginning? In what ways does this portrait of Christ impact your feelings about the amazing character of the Godhead?

III. Do: Divine Wisdom and God’s Character

Proverbs 8 depicts the vibrant and even playful joy and fellowship among the Members of the Godhead at Creation. Imagine the Father and Son joyously, even playfully, interacting during Creation week. How does this picture transform your view of God’s character?

► **Summary:** Proverbs 8 reveals a loving Godhead in intimate and joyous fellowship at Creation, and Christ, the Divine Wisdom, condescending to mediate (build a bridge) between the infinite Godhead and finite creatures.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 8:22–31*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Wisdom, in Proverbs 8, goes beyond mere poetic personification and actually refers to a divine Being—the preincarnate Christ, who was Cocreator with the Father and served as Mediator between the infinite Godhead and finite creatures even before sin.

Just for Teachers: In the early centuries of Christian history, Proverbs 8:22–31 was one of the most popular Old Testament passages utilized by the church fathers as referring to Christ, and this interpretation prevailed throughout the Christian era until modern times. Although many scholars since the nineteenth century have seen in Proverbs 8 only a poetic personification of wisdom, there is strong biblical evidence for affirming that this passage speaks directly of the preincarnate Son of God. This interpretation has profound significance for understanding the relationships among the members of the Godhead and for seeing the amazing character of the Creator in coming down to be close to His creatures in creation.

Opening Activity: Ask your class to stretch their minds by trying to imagine the prevailing mood of the Father and Son in Their work of creating the universe and, in particular, this world and its inhabitants. Was it somber or joyous—perhaps even playful? What kind of special role did the preincarnate Christ take on in this creation?

Consider This: According to John 1:1–3, Christ in the beginning was called “the Word.” A word goes between one’s mouth and another’s ear so that communication can take place. This week we will discover that from the beginning of Creation, the Son of God was such a Word—mediating or facilitating communication between the Godhead and created beings.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Throughout Proverbs 1–7, wisdom is merely personified; but in Proverbs 8, the language shifts to describe Wisdom in a way that could apply only to the Second Person of the Godhead, the preincarnate Christ. (See Richard M. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological*

Society 17, no. 1 [Spring 2006]: 33–54, available at www.atsjats.org.)

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus as Divine Wisdom (Review Proverbs 8:12–21, 32–36 with your class.)

The references to Wisdom in Proverbs 8 denote the second member of the Godhead at the time of Creation. This is clear, first, because Wisdom is described with the very prerogatives that are, elsewhere in Scripture, reserved for Yahweh alone: (1) Giver of life and death (*vss. 35, 36; compare 14:27*); (2) Source of legitimate government (*vss. 15, 16; compare, for example, Num. 11:16, 17*); (3) the One who is to be sought after, found, and called (*vs. 17; compare Deut. 4:29*); (4) the One who loves and is to be loved (*vs. 17; compare, for example, Neh. 13:26*); (5) the Giver of wealth (*vss. 18–21; compare 1 Chron. 29:12*); and (6) the Source of divine revelation (*vss. 6–10, 19, 32, 34; compare 29:18; 30:3–5*).

In Proverbs 8:12, the expression often translated “I, wisdom . . .” is better translated as “I am Wisdom,” in precise grammatical parallel with the common rhetorical form of divine self-reference regularly reserved elsewhere in Scripture for God: “I am Yahweh your God” (*see, for example, Ezek. 12:25, 35:12, Zech. 10:6, Mal. 3:6*). Wisdom in Proverbs 8 thus speaks and acts as a distinct, self-aware divine Being (the preincarnate Son of God). This usage of an attribute (wisdom) to refer to a distinct divine Person is technically known as *hypostasis*.

Ellen G. White clearly understood the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 as referring to the preincarnate Son of God. See especially *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900: “Through Solomon Christ declared . . . [Prov. 8:22–30 quoted]. In speaking of His preexistence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.”

Consider This: How does understanding Christ as “Divine Wisdom” broaden your perspective of God’s character and work?

II. The Divine Wisdom (Jesus) as Cocreator With the Father (Review Proverbs 8:22–31 and Colossians 1:15, 16 with your class.)

The Hebrew word *’amon* in Proverbs 8:30 is best translated as “Mastercraftsman,” thus providing further evidence that the Divine Wisdom is Christ, Cocreator with the Father. Wisdom’s building of a house with seven pillars (*Prov. 9:1*) is probably an allusion to the seven days of Creation week and possibly the temple, as well.

Proverbs 30:4 reinforces this interpretation, alluding to this Cocreator with Yahweh as “God’s Son.” That Proverbs 8:22–31 refers specifically to

the preincarnate Son of God, the Creator, is further supported by the allusions to Proverbs 8 in the New Testament and the application of these allusions to Christ in His work of Creation (*see especially John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:1–4*).

Consider This: According to Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit was also involved in Creation. How do you imagine the Three Persons of the Godhead carrying out Their “cocreative” operations during Their work of Creation? How does this picture enhance our concept of the Godhead as essentially relational (an intimate fellowship of divine Beings) from eternity?

III. Wisdom (Jesus) as Mediator Between God and His Creatures (*Review Proverbs 8:22–25, 30, 31 with your class.*)

Proverbs 8:22–25 uses the language of birth with reference to Wisdom (“brought forth/born”), but this does not indicate that Christ was literally born and does not imply that there was a time before which Christ did not exist. Rather, allusions to birth, when coupled with the Hebrew word *nasak* for “installed” (*vs. 23*), are technical Old Testament language for installation of a person into a new office. Note the precise parallel in Psalm 2:6, 7, where the Messianic king is clearly not literally born but rather installed into a royal office, using language of birth combined with the Hebrew word *nasak* meaning “installed.” Psalm 2 points forward to the time when Christ would be installed as King after His incarnation, while Proverbs 8 points backward to the preincarnate Christ’s installation into a new office at the beginning of Creation (*vss. 22, 23*).

What office? Proverbs 8:30, 31 indicate that Christ’s new office was that of a mediator, not in the sense of an intercessor for sin but in the sense of a communication link between Creator and creation. Wisdom is at the same time “rejoicing always before Him [Yahweh]” and “rejoicing in His [Yahweh’s] inhabited world.” Thus, Wisdom takes the role of Mediator (in the sense of “go-between”) between God and created beings, facilitating communication between the infinite God and finite creatures.

Consider This: What is the difference between Christ’s mediatorial work for sinners after the Fall and His office as Mediator between infinity and finitude from the beginning of Creation?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In the “counsel of peace” (*Zech. 6:13*) among the coequal members of the Godhead before the creation of the universe, it appears that the Person we call the Father represents the transcendent majesty and glory

of the Trinity, while the one we call the Son would “empty” Himself, coming close to His inhabited universe, mediating between infinity and finitude, thus demonstrating from the dawn of Creation the Immanuel principle, God with us!

Thought Questions:

- ① What evidence from the Old Testament hints at the possibility that Christ took the form (not the nature) of an angel to interface with His creation? (See the passages depicting the divine “Angel [or Messenger] of the Lord”: *Genesis 16:13; 18, 19; 22:24; 48:16; Exodus 23:20, 21; 32, 33; and Judges 13:3, 13, 17, 18, 22, etc.*)
- ② How does Christ’s stooping to be close to His creatures, even before sin, reveal that God is not aloof, distant, cold, and forbidding but rather intimate, personal, warm, and affirming?

Application Questions:

- ① How does understanding the Immanuel principle regarding the work of the Son in Creation affect your personal relationship with God and perhaps alter your perspective on the nature and character of God?
- ② Why was it important to the Godhead for one of Their members (Jesus) to be a Mediator (go-between), bridging the gulf between an infinite God and finite creatures?
- ③ What, if anything, would have changed had They decided that the One we call the Father should have become the Mediator between infinity and finitude? Discuss.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Hebrew word for “rejoice” in Proverbs 8:30, 31 literally means “laugh, sport, play.” This passage seems to picture the Father and Son joyously laughing, sporting, even playing during Creation. Does this indicate that God can identify with us even in our play and sport?

Activity: Think about and share with the class possible times during the Creation week when the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might have playfully laughed as They created unique animals and plants (the long-necked giraffe, the striped zebra, the kangaroo, etc.). Then share how you imagine God enjoying fellowshiping with us in our innocent play, as well as in our work and worship.