

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 9

### *Invitations of Wisdom and of Folly*

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. <sup>2</sup> She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. <sup>3</sup> She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. <sup>4</sup> “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. <sup>5</sup> “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. <sup>6</sup> Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding. <sup>7</sup> “Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. <sup>8</sup> Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. <sup>9</sup> Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. <sup>10</sup> “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. <sup>11</sup> For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. <sup>12</sup> If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.” <sup>13</sup> The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. <sup>14</sup> She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, <sup>15</sup> calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. <sup>16</sup> “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. <sup>17</sup> “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” <sup>18</sup> But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

Third poem about wisdom. (TLSB)

**9:1–6** Wisdom, again personified as a woman, prepares a house and a feast for all who answer her invitation. (TLSB)

**9:1** WISDOM – *khok-moth'* *wisdom*:—wisdom, every wise [woman]. (QV)

Plural in Hbr, perhaps to amplify wisdom’s honor. (TLSB)

Here wisdom is personified as a woman. She is preparing her house for company. But that is not to say wisdom is a woman. At times we use feminine pronouns to personify what is not necessarily female. We might, for instance, point to a ship and say, “There she is!” (PBC)

*has built her house.* Both wisdom and folly have a house to which mankind is invited (see v. 14; 7:8; 8:34), but wisdom has built her house (see note on 14:1)—for her there is no “sitting” (v. 14). Cf. the virtues of the wife of noble character (31:10–27). (CSB)

*seven pillars.* Indicating a large house. Perhaps “seven” refers to seven major aspects of wisdom. (CSB)

Israelite houses were built with pillars on the ground floor to support the upper room, where the family dwelt. As seven is often a sacred number, the house with seven pillars or foundations may refer to the whole earth. (Pillars or foundations are said to support the earth in Jb 38:6; Ps 104:5.) In Pr 8, Wisdom’s call is universal. Here, her house may be worldwide. Cf 14:1. (TLSB)

Seven is the biblical number symbolizing completeness. Perhaps the use of this number is a way of saying that her house is ready. (PBC)

**9:2** *set her table.* Wisdom prepares for her feast as if by checklist. (TLSB)

See v. 17 and note. The banquet prepared by wisdom contrasts with the “perfumed bed” made ready by the adulteress in 7:17. (CSB)

*mixed her wine.* With spices, to make it tastier (see SS 8:2). (CSB)

**9:3** *her young women.* Wisdom’s servant girls remind one of the servants announcing the wedding feast in Jesus’ parable (Mt 22:2–4). (TLSB)

*she calls from the highest point of the city.* See the description of Folly in v. 14; see also 8:1–3. (CSB)

As in 8:2, the invitation goes out for all to hear. (TLSB)

She does not try to hide her invitation. (PBC)

## **Fools in Proverbs**

God often teaches the way of wisdom by using contrast. As a skilled artist sets his or her subject matter against a contrasting background, so the Lord, through His inspired writers, sets the bright gem of wisdom against the dismal backdrop of foolishness.

When the Bible in general—and Proverbs in particular—speaks of foolishness, the first and most important point to remember is that it describes a moral and *spiritual* condition. We should not confuse foolishness with lack of academic prowess or a low IQ. Some people who are brilliant may, in God’s eyes, be fools. For example, Ps 14:1 and 53:1 state, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” In Proverbs, the fool is one who does not have a proper fear of the Lord. Consequently, such a person is likely to deny God’s Word.

The Hebrew language in which Proverbs was originally written makes a distinction among different kinds of foolishness or fools. Awareness of these differences will help you more fully appreciate the message of Proverbs.

**The simple** Hbr *pethi*, the person who is easily lured or deceived; gullible. Of the various types of fools, this one is the least hardened in his or her foolishness. These naive and inexperienced people drift along aimlessly, until they fall easy prey to temptation (14:15). Such gullibility, of course, is not an excuse for sinning. Gullible people are responsible for their actions and may even end up killing themselves (1:32). In Pr 7, Solomon observes the gullible people and notes one who is drifting along aimlessly, ripe for a prostitute's picking. If they are to escape their ways "and live," the gullible need wisdom (9:4–6). Indeed, wisdom invites them by calling out, "Whoever is gullible, turn in here!"

**The fool** Hbr *kesil*; if the gullible person doesn't learn, he or she may well move to the next level of foolishness and become a regular fool. This Hbr word is used 50 times in Proverbs and is the Book's most common term for fool. In the end, "fools die for lack of sense" (10:21).

**Stubborn fool** Hbr *'ewil*, occurs 20 times in Proverbs. What can be said about the "generic fool" can also be said about this fool. As the term "stubborn" implies, however, the individual at this level of foolishness is more hardened and persistent. "Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance" (14:9). This category of fool is connected to the word for foolishness and stupidity, or folly. Sadly, it's a trait often found in children: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (22:15). As the child becomes a grown-up, the trait is even more difficult to correct: "Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him" (27:22).

**The godless fool** Hbr *nabal*, appears only three times in Proverbs. This is the word used in the psalms quoted earlier in this article. Those people who say to themselves, "There is no God." Their mind is closed; they have rejected the Lord. This word is used in Pr

30:21–23, which states that one of four things under which the earth trembles is “a fool when he is filled with food.” Once such a person’s physical needs are satisfied, who knows what havoc he or she will bring to others? We find the epitome of this boorish and domineering fool in the man named Nabal (1Sm 25). He was “harsh and badly behaved” (v 3), and one of his own servants said of him, “He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him” (v 17).

### **Scripture and the Fool**

As we look closely at the fool in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, we come face-to-face with sinful human beings and with the “natural man.” In other words, we see ourselves. The believer realizes, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Even the author and compiler of Proverbs, wise King Solomon, became such a fool that he fell into idolatry (1Ki 11:4–11). As long as we are in this world, we will struggle against giving in to our sinful, foolish tendencies.

The remedy for foolishness is for God’s Word to remain our daily companion (Pr 2:1). The foolishness of the world is overcome by the foolishness of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1Co 3:18). It comes down to this: to know Christ and Him crucified is to know God’s wisdom (1Co 1:23–25). His forgiveness destroys our sinful foolishness. Through the Savior, we become truly wise and able to offer that wisdom to others as well. (TLSB)

**9:4** The same invitation is given by Folly in v. 16. (CSB)

*simple.* See 1:4 and note on 8:5. (CSB)

The audience for Wisdom’s invitation is all who lack wisdom but have not yet rejected her. They may not be seeking Wisdom, but she seeks their attention. (TLSB)

*lack judgment.* See v. 16; 7:7. (CSB)

To accept wisdom’s invitation, we must first admit that we need it, that we are among the “simple” and “those who lack judgment.” (PBC)

**9:5** *wine I have mixed.* Wine was often mixed with spices. (TLSB)

As in v. 2, wisdom’s gifts to mankind are described symbolically as a great banquet (see Isa 55:1–2 and note; cf. Jn 6:27, 35). (CSB)

One of life’s more enjoyable experiences is getting together with friends and relatives for a dinner. The Bible reminds us that there is a more important feast than earthly, physical food: “[M]an does not live on bread alone but on every

word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). Wisdom invites us to feast on God’s Word – by going to church, attending Bible classes, reading and sharing the Word at home and with friends. In the Bible to “listen” often means to “do” what we have heard. James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, but do what it says.” All this begins to take place in our lives when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus. (PBC)

**9:6** *Leave your simple ways.* See 1:22. (CSB)

*you will live.* See v. 11; 8:35; see also note on 3:2. (CSB)

Wisdom promises life to all who share her feast, which gives life (8:35). The way of Wisdom leads to abundant life. (TLSB)

**9:7–12** These verses bridge between Wisdom’s banquet (vv 1–6) and Folly’s banquet (vv 13–18). (TLSB)

**9:7** *Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult.* See 1:22 and note; cf. 1:30. (CSB)

Foolish people are not open to correction and may respond to admonition with defensiveness and counterattack. (TLSB)

The mocker rejects God’s wisdom. He belittles it and insults it. He calls it a crutch for the weak, or foolishness, or a waste of time. Jesus used a striking picture to illustrate this: “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6). In ancient Israel, the unclean street dogs were nothing but scavengers. Pigs were unclean animals. Some wicked people simply will not listen to God’s Word. They despise it. Mock it, trample all over it. (PBC)

*incurs abuse.* Cf. 1Pe 4:4. (CSB)

**9:8** *he will hate you.* See 15:12, 32. (CSB)

Don’t even bother trying, says Solomon. Of course, we can’t prejudge anyone to be a mocker. Let’s not excuse ourselves from witnessing to others simply because some will reject it. Sad to say, most people do reject wisdom’s invitation. Returning to Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast, the Lord ended the parable on this note, “For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14) (PBC)

*rebuke a wise man and he will love you.* See 10:8; 17:10. (CSB)

Those who are wise are open to correction and reproof. They know the value of wisdom, even when it hurts. (TLSB)

He gladly receives the invitation. And he is open to the correction of God's Word. May we, by God's grace, never become proud and "above" rebuke! Rather, may we always be open to correction and instruction, especially in spiritual truths. (PBC)

**9:9** *he will be wiser still.* See 18:15; 21:11. (CSB)

Wisdom is not simply attained all at once. Eager for growth, wise people are teachable. The more they learn, the wiser they are. (TLSB)

Solomon places the "wise man" and the "righteous man" in parallel lines. The two are synonymous. Biblical wisdom is not mere head knowledge. It has to do with being righteous. And our righteousness comes through Jesus Christ. (PBC)

**9:10–12** Wisdom's final words summarize the heart of the message in chs. 1–9. (CSB)

**9:10** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* See 1:7 and note. (CSB)

Irenaeus of Lyons: "The sense of sin leads to repentance, and God bestows His compassion upon those who are penitent" (*ANF* 1:457). (TLSB)

Again we have the key refrain of Proverbs. The book keeps coming back to this because it is central. (PBC)

WISDOM – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

*knowledge of the Holy One.* See note on 2:5. "Holy One" occurs elsewhere in Proverbs only in 30:3. (CSB)

Used for God in Pr only here and in 30:3. (TLSB)

UNDERSTANDING – Is the word WISDOM – *binah* – The emphasis in this word is on understanding and the ability to distinguish. – This word is related to the concept of "between" and refers to the ability to make distinctions. Young King Solomon prayed for this type of wisdom early in his reign. (1 Kings 3:9) – Life constantly calls on us to distinguish between what is good and bad, or between what is a wise choice and what is an even better choice. How we make such choices does much to determine in the course of our life. When we face important decisions in life, how do we distinguish between the options? Do we merely act on impulse? Do we follow the advice of friends? Do we read books to gain insight? All these are important factors in life's choices. But it is even more important that we consult God's Word (including the scriptural advice of wise Christian friends, counselors and pastors) and that we ask God's guidance in prayer. (PBC)

**9:11** *years will be added to your life.* See note on 3:2; see also 3:16; 10:27; 14:27; 19:23. (CSB)

As in 3:1–2, those who live by Wisdom will be blessed with a long life. (TLSB)

Following biblical wisdom means living a healthier life-style which in a way prolongs our life. But it's really God who decides. The ultimate prolonging of life is the eternal life that is ours through Christ. (PBC)

**9:12** IF YOU ARE WISE – This verse has been called “perhaps the strongest expression of individualism in the Bible.” While we are influenced by others and in turn influence them, each person stands alone before God. Finally we live and die as individuals. (PBC)

God gives wisdom, and the wise are blessed. Those who reject Wisdom’s invitation have no one to blame but themselves for the sad plight of their lives. The wise receive grace’s gift, deliverance from the way of death. Those on their way with Folly will get what they deserve and bear it all alone. (TLSB)

*your wisdom will reward you.* Some of wisdom’s rewards are given in 3:16–18; 4:22; 8:35; 14:14. WISDOM – *khaw-kam'* – A primitive root, to *be wise* (in mind, word or act):— exceeding, teach wisdom, be (make self, shew self) wise, deal (never so) wisely, make wiser. (CSB)

*mocker.* See v. 7; see note on 1:22. (CSB)

*will suffer.* See 1:26 and note; 19:29. (CSB)

**9:1–12** The gracious invitation of Wisdom extends to all who live apart from the life she longs to bring. Jesus Christ calls the world to His banquet (Jn 6:32–59). Those who respond in faith will live forever in the company of Christ and His banqueting guests. Those who foolishly reject Him are dead in their sins. • Lord Jesus, save me from the folly of rejecting You. Make me wise to the truth of Your love. Help me to know You and love You so deeply that in Your life-giving presence I will grow more like You. For Your name’s sake. Amen. (TLSB)

**9:13** *The woman Folly is loud.* “Loud” links the personified “Folly” with the adulteress, the wayward wife of 2:16 and 7:11. (CSB)

Lit, “the woman of foolishness.” This feminine form appears only here; someone who is the embodiment of simple-minded gullibility, the opposite of wisdom. (TLSB)

Folly tries to imitate wisdom. As wisdom called from the city heights, so does folly. In our day we might argue that folly has seized the most prominent places

for calling out. Think of how folly controls TV, the movies, and much of the publishing world. (PBC)

*undisciplined and without knowledge.* She lacks good judgment, prudence and the fear of the Lord (see 1:3–4, 22, 29; 5:6).

SIMPLE *peth-ah-yooth'* – *silliness* (that is, *seducibility*):—simple.

**9:14** *sits.* Cf. wisdom's building her house (v. 1). (CSB)

Unlike Wisdom, busy with banquet preparations, Folly just sits and waits for the next gullible victim. Cf 5:8. (TLSB)

*at the door of her house.* See 5:8; 8:34. (CSB)

*at the highest point of the city.* Cf. the position of wisdom in v. 3; 8:2. (CSB)

*takes a seat on the highest places.* Cf v 3. Here Folly, perhaps mocking Wisdom, calls to those far and near. Note that lazy Folly also sits on the heights. Ironically, she enthrones herself where she does not belong. (TLSB)

**9:15** *calling out.* Cf. the appeal of wisdom in v. 3; 8:1, 4. (CSB)

**9:16** WHO ARE SIMPLE – – *peth-ee'*, *peh'-thee*, *peth-aw-ee'* – *silly* (that is, *seducible*):—foolish. – Translated it has the root meaning “to be open.” It refers to a person of undecided views, who is wide open and susceptible to bad as well as good influences. (PBC)

Her invitation is identical to wisdom's (v. 4; see note on 1:21). – The simple are open to either good or evil. How especially true this is of young people. What kind of exposure are our children getting? (PBC)

Same appeal as v 4, revealing that one must distinguish between the invitations of these two opposing women. (TLSB)

**9:17** *Stolen water ... food eaten in secret.* The “banquet” prepared by “Folly” seems poorer than the wine and meat of wisdom (v. 2). And it was stolen at that! This “meal” refers to stolen pleasures, exemplified by the illicit sex offered by the adulteress (see 7:18 and note; cf. 5:15–16). (CSB)

Folly's banquet of water and bread does not compare with Wisdom's banquet of wine and meat. What's worse, Folly's food and drink are stolen goods, symbolizing the stolen pleasures of adultery. (TLSB)

*sweet.* But see Job 20:12–14. (CSB)

Folly offers lies. Sex with someone else's spouse might seem more exciting than with one's own. The shady business deal may hold out promises of things you've always wanted to have, but have never been able to afford. It's the old deception Satan used with Eve in the Garden of Eden. (PBC)

**9:18** *the dead are there ... her guests are in the depths of the grave.* Similar to 2:18; 5:5; 7:27 (see notes). (CSB)

Wisdom brings life (9:6, 11). Folly brings death. Her banquet is cheap and phony, a stolen parody. Once again, Solomon presents a horrible picture of dead people eating, meant to shock the foolish into seeing folly for what it is—a way to death (2:18–19). Rm 6:23 presents a similar stark contrast between death and life in terms of our justification. (TLSB)

It might be more to our modern taste to end a work – whether a story, sermon, or article – on an “upbeat” note. Yet many individual proverbs and some larger sections of the book end on a down beat, talking about the wicked or foolish. Several OT books (Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Lamentations, Malachi) end with a sharp words of judgment, and a number of Jesus' parables end in strongly negative words (see the last several verses of Matthew 22, the story of the wedding banquet). Only by God's grace can we hope to escape the ensnarements of folly and enter the house that wisdom built. (PBC)

**9:13–18** God's Law warns against the deadly foolishness all around us. Life in the Gospel saves us from a naive gullibility that sets us up for moral and spiritual disaster. The Law is the light that shows us the dirt in the house of our lives. The Gospel is the broom that sweeps it clean. The Gospel moves us from lazy moral laxity to wise discipline. The folly of sin gets a just punishment—death. The wisdom of our God-given faith brings eternal life. • Lord, save me from the folly of going my own way, for in the end folly abandons me in the company of the dead. Give me a discerning mind to know how folly's call would take me from wisdom to a table for the dead. Then, by Your grace and Spirit, bring me to a feast of life, rich with Your presence, lasting forever. Amen. (TLSB)