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*Proverbs and Creation*  
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If someone were to ask us what the Bible says about creation, most of us would give one of two answers. We might talk about Genesis, and mention how God created the world in seven days, beginning with nothing and gradually making the Earth, its creatures and plants, and finally humans. Or, we might refer to the story of Adam and Eve, where this newly created couple is placed in bliss into the Garden of Eden, where they sin by eating the forbidden fruit. But there is a third biblical description of creation that few of us remember; a story where God begins by creating a woman and then, with her help, goes on to make the rest of the cosmos.

What is this story and where is it found? This picture of creation comes from the book of Proverbs. Most of the book contains pithy sayings, short but meaningful, such as: "If a man returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house." Or, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses." Most of Proverbs' 30 chapters consist of such sayings. Some are organized by subject, but most seem to be just randomly placed one next to another. Despite the wisdom and thoughtfulness of individual proverbs, as a whole, the book is not exciting reading.

The main point of Proverbs is that people should become wise, they should pursue wisdom through study and they should act and behave wisely at all times. In the first nine chapters, this goal and its alternative of foolishness is personified by two women, Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly. Dame Folly acts like a prostitute to entice young men to her, while Lady Wisdom is presented as a pure and chaste wife to stand by one's side and support one on his journey through life.

But suddenly in Proverbs Chapter 8, this opposition is dropped, and the story line opposing Wisdom and Folly is forgotten. Instead Wisdom turns to the reader and speaks in first person. She

begins by speaking of the importance and desirability of wisdom. "I, Wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion . . . I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just."

But then Lady Wisdom changes the subject to her place in creation: "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the Earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth. According to this passage, Wisdom was God's first creation. If we were to fit this into the creation story of Genesis, this act would go prior to the opening verse; it goes before "The Beginning."

But Lady Wisdom is not just any created thing, she was God's helper at creation. It is not just that "When he established the Heavens, I was there." Instead, she was God's assistant, "when he established the foundations of the deep . . . when he marked out the foundations of the Earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman." And then, as if this was not enough, Wisdom helps God enjoy the results of his work. "I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men."

Christians and Jews have understood Lady Wisdom in many different ways over the centuries. Their interpretations have ranged from literal to mystical, from analogies to symbols. But it seems to me that the most important message here is to understand creation through wisdom, rather than through fear and folly.