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Wisdom: God's Helper in Creation

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When Christians think about the biblical account of creation, they usually turn to the two stories found in Genesis chapters one through three.

The first story relates how God methodically created the world step-by-step, much the way a modern construction company builds a house.

The second story tells how God created humans and then describes their subsequent disobedience and punishment. There is a third biblical creation story, however that is often overlooked. This story appears in Proverbs chapter eight and differs significantly from the two in Genesis.

In Genesis, God first creates heaven and earth. In Proverbs, God begins by creating a helper, "The Lord created me ... [as] the first of his acts of long ago" (Prov. 8:22). This helper is Lady Wisdom, a female personification of knowledge and moral behavior. She serves as God's assistant in all his acts of creation. Proverbs does not merely relate Wisdom's acts, but presents Wisdom as speaking in the first person, as only a living, intelligent creature can.

Once God created Wisdom, he then went on to create the universe.

Proverbs gives a list of things that God formed after He made Wisdom: the deep, the sky, springs, mountains and hills, earth, soil and fields. Many of these hark back to Genesis one, indicating Wisdom preceded all the elements that God created in that story. Proverbs makes clear that nothing was created without Wisdom, not even heaven. "When He established the heavens, I was there (Prov. 8:27)."

Wisdom goes on to relate how she assisted God in His creation. "I was beside Him like a master worker (Prov. 8:30)." God did not labor alone, but had Wisdom working alongside Him. The reference to being a master worker indicates that Wisdom was

a knowledgeable and skilled assistant, who lent her expertise to the formation of the cosmos.

In Genesis One, God pauses regularly to approve His work. He looks at it at the end of each day and sees that it is good. In Proverbs Eight, Wisdom thinks His work is worthy of enjoyment. "I was daily delighting ...rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Who is Lady Wisdom? The standard Christian response is that she is Jesus. This link is made by identifying Wisdom with the Word (i.e., Logos) found in the first few verses of the Gospel of John, which read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things came into being through him." There are clear parallels here between Wisdom and the Word in that they are both with God and that the texts indicate that both were involved in creation. There is the small problem that one is female and the other male, but theologians have worked out a variety of responses to resolve that issue.

The main problem with identifying Lady Wisdom with Jesus is that if Jesus is God as John says, then He was not created. Since Proverbs clearly states that Wisdom is the first creation, she can be neither Jesus nor the Word. The earliest approved doctrinal statement of this appears in the Nicene Creed. It clearly indicates that Jesus is not a creation; Jesus is "begotten, not made." Indeed, Christian salvation can happen only if Jesus is a divine and not a created being. If Jesus was merely a created human (or angel), then he could not pass on his triumph over sin and death to the rest of humanity.

So in the end, Lady Wisdom cannot be identified with Jesus. She not only stands as an independent being, the first of God's creations, but assisted God during the process of creation. Any "biblical account" of creation must include her role; otherwise it becomes not a biblical account, but merely Genesis' story of creation.