In his “Introduction to the Old Testament” published in 1783, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn argued that the first collection of the book of Proverbs, chapters 1–9, should be separated as “a discrete scripture” from the rest of the book.1 Eichhorn based his argument on certain literary evidence. In terms of style as well as in regard to the concept of wisdom, the collection in Proverbs 1–9 differs from the other parts of the book. While Proverbs 10–22 and 25–29 contain “aphorisms in couplet form,” Proverbs 1–9 and 30–31 present, as is often stated, “discourses of various characters.”2

It is a scholarly consensus that different concepts of Wisdom can be found in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1–9 represents a theological wisdom, while Proverbs 10–22 and 25–29 contain wisdom which focuses more on everyday life, and in the final chapters of the book (Proverbs 30–31) the focus shifts more to a reflection about wisdom itself.3 These final chapters contain the same argumentative style as the first collection. Here, the “proverbial collections,” as they are often called, are primarily single sentences and short sayings.4 Furthermore, recent research has shown that...
the final chapters and the first collection of Proverbs were connected by specific key words and topics. Against this backdrop, one passage from these final chapters is remarkable.

Surely I am more a beast than a human being
I do not have the understanding (בינה) of a human being,
I have not learned wisdom (חכמה),
nor have knowledge of the holy one (ידע קדשים).

According to Prov 30:2–3, a human being is not able to understand wisdom, and wisdom cannot lead to further knowledge. This is expressed by a number of typical wisdom terms such as בינה, חכמה, or דעת. These terms are frequently mentioned in the instructions of Proverbs 1–9 and were not used to emphasize the limitations of wisdom but its benefits. In Proverbs 2, for example, they are part of an argument, which entrusted men to receive the qualities of wisdom by following the parental instruction:

(1) My son, if you accept my words, and my commands you store up with you
(2) by making your ear attend to wisdom (חכמה), directing your heart to understanding (בינה),
(5) then you will understand the fear of YHWH and the knowledge of God (דעת אלוהים) you will find;
(6) for YHWH gives wisdom (חכמה), from his mouth come knowledge (דעתי) and understanding (בינה).
(10) For wisdom (חכמה) will enter your heart, and knowledge (ידע) will be pleasant to your appetite;

When comparing the words of Agur with Proverbs 2, the Proverbs 30 passage appears to be a negation of everything that is typical for a concept where wisdom can lead to further knowledge and the fear of God. While it is possible in Proverbs 2 to call to בינה and to listen to חכמה, Proverbs 30

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6 See Arndt Meinhold (Die Sprüche [2 vols.; ZBKAT 16/1–2; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991], 497), who points to Job 40:4; 42:3, 6.

7 A helpful overview on the wisdom terminology used in the book of Proverbs can be found in Fox, *Proverbs*, 28–43.