

IS THERE A PLACE FOR JOB'S WISDOM IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY?

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The famous poem on wisdom in Job 28 asks a crucial question: "Where can wisdom be found, where is the place of understanding?" (28:12). Although this question was quite appropriate in Job's situation of suffering and confusion, it should not be necessary to ask "this question any longer. OT theologians know where wisdom can be found. Wisdom is from God and it is found in his revelation, particularly in biblical wisdom literature. But this response may be nothing more than a cliché, for few biblical theologians have given wisdom ideas equal status with salvation history in their theological understanding of the OT wisdom theology is often simply ignored or purposely excluded; thus, the place of wisdom in OT theology is still a live debate.

This problem would be easier to face if wisdom literature was not included in the canon of Scripture or if it was condemned as knowledge that contradicted divine insight. Since this is not the case, why does wisdom literature appear to be a stranger in many OT theologies? In order to address this problem, several key questions need to be raised: 1) Why do some theologians exclude wisdom literature from OT theology? 2) What solutions have been offered to give wisdom literature a firm position within OT theology? 3) What are the central themes in the wisdom theology of the book of Job? and, 4) What are some distinctive and common elements between wisdom theology and salvation history?

I. WHY DO SOME SCHOLARS EXCLUDE WISDOM FROM OT THEOLOGY?

Although few would argue that wisdom literature is unbiblical, its true status is in question because so many biblical theologies fail to give it an authoritative place within their overall understanding of biblical revelation.¹ In some cases there is

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¹ L Koehler, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957) has only three references to wisdom in the scripture index and no discussion of the theology of wisdom.

no rationale to explain this omission-wisdom is simply omitted. By making only a few references to the wisdom books, OT theologians shove to the side the concepts of wisdom literature and do not treat them as Integral parts of the biblical worldview. This repeated omission of one section of the canon is symptomatic of a fundamental problem, a weakness in the modern understanding of the nature and breadth of Israel's theology.²

C. Westermann faces the issue head on and reveals why wisdom is not a part of his theology. He excludes wisdom literature because "wisdom has no place within the basic framework of an OT theology, since it originally and in reality does not have as its object an occurrence between God and man; in its earlier stages wisdom is overwhelmingly secular."³ Westermann's exclusion of wisdom literature is based on his "historical" definition of biblical theology and his "secular" description of wisdom. Biblical theology is a "history of God and man whose nucleus is the experience of saving";⁴ thus "an OT theology must be based on events rather than concepts."⁵ Since wisdom literature does not describe God's great acts of election, covenant giving, or redemption from Egypt, it does not fit Westermann's definition of biblical theology. G. E. Wright, following von Rad's emphasis on salvation history, concludes that "Biblical theology is the confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God in a particular history."⁶ Because of this definition, Wright admits that "in any attempt to outline a discussion of Biblical faith, it is the wisdom literature which offers the chief difficulty, because it does not fit into type of faith exhibited in the historical and prophetic literature."⁷ Is it legitimate to call one "type of faith" normative and exclude the other? Are these two expressions of beliefs exclusive of one another and contradictory? Are these modern evaluative statements representative of the broad perspective of biblical faith? Can a narrow limitation of beliefs to only one stream of tradition be justified?

Although the salvation history movement has properly focused attention on God's unique acts of grace toward Israel, it has overstressed Israel's unique view of history and unnecessarily

² C. H. H. Scobie ("The Place of Wisdom in Biblical Theology," *BTB* 14 [1984] 43) calculates the small amount of space given to wisdom in recent OT theologies.

³ C. Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 11. In another study (*Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978] 37-39), Westermann puts wisdom under God's blessings in Gen 1:26-27."

⁴ Westermann, *Theology*, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ C. E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (SBT 8; London: SCM, 1952) 13, 38, 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

limited revelation to God's salvific acts on behalf of his covenant people. B. Albrechtson has shown that the ancient Near Eastern religions also described their gods as acting in history. This was not a cultural or theological distinctive which was uniquely Israelite.⁸ J. Barr rejected the view that God only reveals himself through historical acts.⁹ The a priori inclusion of only certain approved theological concepts or literary genres and the exclusion of wisdom theology is unwarranted and prejudicial.¹⁰ It would be more appropriate to derive OT theology from all sources of divine revelation.

Although wisdom literature has been a part of the canonical text for centuries, von Rad classified the wisdom writings as "Israel's Response" rather than God's revelation.¹¹ Other factors which raise questions about the revelatory quality of wisdom are the absence of the prophetic "thus says the Lord," the emphasis on learning from the observation of nature, the derivation of principles from the experience of older wise men, and the discovery of somewhat similar wisdom texts in Egypt and Mesopotamia. These factors caused some to conclude that wisdom literature was anthropocentric, secular, universalistic, and rationalistic, not divine revelation that was Israelite in theology. H. Gese observes that "it is well known that wisdom literature constitutes an alien body in the world of the Old Testament."¹² Those who hold this view frequently believe that references to the "fear of God" in wisdom texts are later additions by post-exilic scribes who were attempting to make wisdom more Yahwistic in flavor.¹³

The ramifications of ignoring wisdom literature or denying its revelatory character have devastating implications for the authority and character of canonical writings and on any attempt to integrate the diverse theological material within the OT. Preuss's recommendation that one "must refuse to give Old Testament

⁸ B. Albrechtson, *History and the Gods* (ConBOT 1; Lund: Gleerup, 1967).

⁹ J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 65-82.

¹⁰ See the criticisms of salvation history in J. T. Clemons, "Critics and Criticism of Salvation History," *Religion in Life* 41 (1972) 89-100; and D. G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies* (Naperville: Allenson, 1974) 34-59. For the position that salvation history is not more Yahwistic than wisdom, see R. E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 123.

¹¹ G. von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; London: Oliver and Boyd, (1962) 1.430ff.

¹² H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit* (Tübingen: Mohr [Poeschl], 1958) 2.

¹³ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972] .9, 61-64) refutes the idea that the fear of the Lord sayings were added at a later time because God was always understood as having an important part in all behavioral consequences. This is not a late enlightened idea, as he had maintained earlier in his theology.

wisdom a place"¹⁴ in OT theology needs to be corrected, and so must the trend to ignore wisdom literature. To alleviate this problem, several authors have suggested possible ways of giving wisdom a significant place within OT theology.

II. HOW DO SOME SCHOLARS INCLUDE WISDOM IDEAS WITHIN OT THEOLOGY?

Wisdom theology has been included in OT theology by: 1) connecting the "fear of the Lord" concept in wisdom writings to its usage in cultic, legal, and prophetic texts; 2) drawing on the similarities between the instructions within wisdom literature and the laws in the Pentateuch; and 3) making wisdom theology a part of creation theology.¹⁵ Each of these approaches offers suggestive correlation which must be evaluated carefully.

No one doubts that the "fear of the Lord" is a key idea within wisdom literature. D. Kidner calls it the motto of Proverbs, while B. Gemser says it is the "keyword of Israel's wisdom, *re'sit* in its twofold sense of basic principle as well as the best fruit of Wisdom."¹⁶ The choice of this concept is based on the use of "the fear of the Lord" at strategic locations at the beginning and end of ; Proverbs (1:7; 31:30), the frequency of the root אָרַם in Proverbs (22 times in verbal and noun clauses), and the fundamental connection between the fear of the Lord and wisdom. Although this root IS less frequent in Job (16 times) and Ecclesiastes (9. times), .several times it . is placed at the climax of a section (Job 28.28. Eccl. 12.13).

J. Becker's study of the fear of the Lord defined three primary semantic meanings for the phrase: 1) in a moral context it describes a human relationship to God that results in upright behavior; 2) in a cultic context this relationship to God produces acceptable worship and honoring of God; and 3) in a legal context a God-fearer obeys God's instructions.¹⁷ In each case fear includes a reverence and unconditional submission to the sovereign majesty of God. With the fear of God comes a deep faith commitment to the power, holiness, and wisdom of God. These points of continuity are present in the

¹⁴ H. O. Preuss, "Erwagungen zum theologischen Ort alttestamentlicher Weisheitliteratur," *EvT* 30 (1970) 393-417.

¹⁵ Some have attempted other methods, but these are the three main approaches. E.g., L. E. Toombs ("O. T. Theology and the Wisdom Literature," *JBR* 23 [1955] 193-96) sees wisdom and law as mighty acts of God in response to human needs, but this has not gained wide support. .

¹⁶ D. Kidner, *Proverbs* (TOTC; London: Tyndale, 1964) 59; B. Gemser, "The Spiritual Structure of Biblical Aphoristic Wisdom," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; LBS; New York: KTAV, 1976) 219.

¹⁷ J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965) 210, 261. See also the evaluation of Becker in H. Blocher, "The Fear . of the Lord as the 'Principle' of Wisdom," *TynBul* 28 (1977) 7-15.

usages of the phrase "fear of the Lord," but this common thread does not remove the distinctive meanings of this phrase in its different contexts.

Although the theme of fearing God is found in Genesis (22:12), frequently in Deuteronomy (4:10; 10:12), and in prophetic texts (Jer 2:19; 5:22; 10:7), the wisdom idea of fearing God is not brought into the theology of the OT simply by showing that the phrase is found throughout Scripture. B. Waltke rejects W. Kaiser's "proposal to relate wisdom to the rest of the OT by the concept of 'the fear of God/Lord' . . . because he [Kaiser] relates this theme to 'promise' which he seems to define in terms of Israel's organic covenantal history. Wisdom writers do not mention Israel's covenantal or national promises. . . ." ¹⁸ If the fear of the Lord in wisdom literature was related to Israel's promise or covenant then a valid integration might be possible. A second problem with using the "fear of the Lord" to integrate the wisdom literature into biblical theology is . . . that the phrase is too narrow. It focuses on the ultimate source of wisdom (its beginning point) and the proper response of people who wish to attain wisdom. But this phrase does not delineate the principles or internal structure of wisdom thinking. Job knew the importance of fearing God, but that did not seem to help him understand very much about God's wise way of dealing with him. As M. L. Barre indicates: "The basic premise on which wisdom operates is that the world is an orderly universe. Each person must master the art of how to integrate his or her life into the pre-established order of the world. Whoever does this is 'wise'; whoever does not is 'foolish'." ¹⁹ Fearing God is the key to beginning this process, but one must move on from submission and humility before the all wise God to learning about his wise governing of his created world.

A second way of giving wisdom literature an integral part in the theology of the OT is to emphasize the connection between law and wisdom. This point is explicitly made in Deut 4:5-6:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances. . . . Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who. . . will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

D. Kidner claims that the "relation of Proverbs to Deuteronomy is similarly straightforward by Scripture's own account of itself. . . . The harmony between these two parts of Scripture is expressed most

¹⁸ B. K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology," *BSac* 136 (1979) 303. Scobie ("Wisdom," 43-44) feels that the slender thread which Kaiser finds is not successful in integrating promise and wisdom.

¹⁹ M. L. Barre, "Fear of God' and the World View of Wisdom," *BTB* 11 (1981) 41.

clearly in Deuteronomy 6:24 (see also 1:13, 15; 16:19; 32:6, 29). . . . Here is the union of right and good, of obligation and satisfaction. Centered upon God's will, wisdom unites with law."²⁰ This connection is strengthened by reference to the *הוֹרָה* ("law") (1:8; 3:1; 13:14; 28:4, 7) and the *מִצְוֹת* ("commandments") (2:1; 3:1; 4:4; 6:23) in Proverbs. G. von Rad believes that the motive clause in Deut 16:19--"for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise men and subverts the cause of the innocent"--can be classified as a wisdom saying.²¹ E. Gerstenberger finds many similarities between apodictic laws in the Pentateuch and prohibitions in Proverbs and hypothesizes that they both developed out of a common source.²² M. Weinfeld sees a wisdom influence in Deuteronomy because both: are written by scribes, use an admonishing style characteristic of the father/son relationship, rely heavily on the motive clause to persuade, are infiltrated with a strong sense of rewards or retribution for behavior, claim that obedience to their instructions will lead to life, require that one must fear God, contain common themes (i.e., both are against moving landmarks [Deut 19:14 and Prov 22:28]; both reject the use of false weights [Deut 25:13-16 and Prov 11:1]), and use overlapping vocabulary.²³ The total association of torah and wisdom was most clearly made in the non-canonical Wisdom of Ben Sirach around 180 BC: "If you delight in wisdom, then keep his [God's] commandments" (Sir 1:26; see also 17:11; 24:23; Deut 33:4 and Bar 3:37-4:1) For Ben Sirach, torah is wisdom. This same connection is made in haggadic passages in the Mishnah.²⁴

This attempt to associate wisdom literature with law goes much deeper than the mere association of one key phrase. Nevertheless, Weinfeld's suggestion that Deuteronomy was written or revised by scribes from the wisdom school seems unlikely in light of the non-covenantal nature of wisdom and the total immersion of Deuteronomy in covenantal thinking. Although it

²⁰ D. Kidner, "Wisdom Literature of the O. T.," in *Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco: Word, 1970) 118. A. von Rohr Sauer ("Wisdom and Law in Old Testament Wisdom Literature," *CTM* 43 [1972] 600-9) believes wisdom and law were quite different in pre-exilic times but that the two became one in the post-exilic period.

²¹ G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (SBT 9; London: SCM, 1953) 80.

²² E. Gerstenberger, "Covenant and Commandments," *JBL* 84 (1965) 38-51.

²³ See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1972) and the summary in D. F. Morgan, *Wisdom in the Old Testament Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 94-106. D. A. Hubbard ("The Wisdom Movement and Israel's Faith," *TynBul* 17 [1966] 11-13) also sees a strong connection between wisdom and law. For a critique of Weinfeld's views see c. Brekelman, "Wisdom Influence in Deuteronomy," in *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (ed. M. Gilbert; Paris: Leuven, 1979) 28-38.

²⁴ von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 240-62; and B. T. Shepherd, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct* (BZAW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 60-62, 81, 97. For the Mishnaic treatment of law and wisdom see E. J. Schabel, "Law and Wisdom in the Mishnaic System," *BTB* 17 (1964) 104-10.

would seem to be inappropriate to classify Deuteronomy as a wisdom text and minimize its distinctive contribution to OT theology, at least wisdom theology seems less foreign to the rest of the OT when it is compared with the theology of Deuteronomy. What is needed to complete the connection between these related theological streams of tradition is a broad overarching conceptual framework that will include both wisdom and other ideas as legitimate yet distinctive parts within a single whole.

A third suggestion makes wisdom theology a part of creation theology. W. Zimmerli has proposed this solution because of the universal character of wisdom. It refers to people in general, not Israelites specifically. Wisdom teaches all people how to master the realities within human life. To live properly one must understand that people were created by God, that God supplies an order that gives meaning to nature, and that God granted people responsibility to rule and enjoy the world. Wise admonitions counsel people, so that they will know what is good and what to do to receive God's reward.²⁵ The great speeches of God at the end of I the book of Job (33-41) and the hymn in praise of wisdom in Proverbs 8 demonstrate that creation was accomplished through God's great wisdom and that creation played an important part in wisdom thinking: Von Rad suggests that wisdom is "the meaning' planted by God in creation," while H.-J. Hermission claims that "creation is the basis not only of regularity, but of the meaningful and satisfactory order of events in the world."²⁶ Although creation may provide a basis for some wisdom ideas, it does not spell out what one is to do to be wise. L. Bostrom concludes that creation was a secondary motif in Proverbs and not "the theology of OT wisdom."²⁷ W. H. Schmidt decides that "wisdom thought cannot without qualification be assigned to a 'theology of creation' unless the concept is so enlarged that it embraces the whole of man's experience of reality."²⁸ God's creation demonstrates his wisdom in beginning and ordering the physical world, but this is quite different from his wise and just regulation of a rebellious world of sinful people.

²⁵ W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limits of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964) 146-58. W. J. Dumbrell (The Faith of Israel [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 215-16) places wisdom within the horizon of creation theology.

²⁶ Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 148; H.-J. Hermission, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (ed. J. G. Gammie, et al.; Missoula: Scholars, 1978) 46.

²⁷ L. Bostrom, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksellinternational, 1990) 83, 87.

²⁸ W. H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 83.

A variation of Zimmerli's approach to creation theology is H. H. Schmid's emphasis on wisdom's attempt to establish cosmic and social order in the world.²⁹ He sees creation theology as the framework for wisdom, for in creation, order was established by God. Creation provides the setting within which historical events take place and also the basis for the just order for human behavior.³⁰ J. L. Crenshaw supports Schmid's emphasis on creation and conceives of it as the basis, the defense, or the undergirding of divine justice, which is the central theme of wisdom.³¹ This approach makes creation a support for order and justice in human affairs.

The value of each of these three proposals may be compared by noting the emphasis they receive in wisdom and non-wisdom texts. The fear of the Lord is one of several responses a person can have to God in the Pentateuch and in wisdom texts (love, service, obedience, worship, wise behavior, ethical action, and enjoyment of life are other responses), but is the response of fearing God broad enough to cover all of these or more central than obedience or service? Fearing God is the starting point, but it does not adequately encompass the variety of responses that God desires of people after that initial step.

The second suggestion draws on the similarities between the laws and admonitions in Deuteronomy and wisdom, but certainly" God's covenant is broader and more central than the laws, and the divine desire for righteousness and wisdom is broader and more central to wisdom than the style or content of individual proverbial admonitions. Although similarities of form, topic, and hortatory style may exist, these external comparisons do not get at the heart of what wisdom and Deuteronomy are all about.

Making creation the center of wisdom thinking is also an inadequate means of integrating wisdom into biblical theology. Although creation is the basis for and starting point of salvation history, salvation history is not primarily about creation. Likewise creation may be the basis of wisdom's order, but wisdom thinking is not primarily about creation. The basis for wisdom, the response of

²⁹ H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (BZAW 101; Berlin: I. Topelmann, 1966).

³⁰ R. Murphy ("Wisdom-Thesis and Hypothesis," in *Israelite Wisdom*, 35-36) argues against too rigid of an emphasis on the orderly connection between cause and consequence.

³¹ J. L. Crenshaw, "In Search of Divine Presence," *RevExp* 74 (1977) 362-65 and his "Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom: Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 26-35. B. S. Childs (*Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 211) believes wisdom "sought to interpret and supplement a fuller understanding of the divine ordering of the world and human experience."

the wise person, and the content of wisdom may be discussed with great gain if they are all included and put in their proper place.

Finally, it is necessary to refer to the outstanding contributions of S. Terrien. He sees the divine presence rather than covenant as the homogeneous element in Israel's religion.³² The divine presence is associated with worship at the temple, God's giving the law, the final events of history, and wisdom at the creation of the world. Terrien's analysis demonstrates that the presence of God is a common element in many literary pieces, although he focuses more on the aesthetic and experiential side of wisdom and does not adequately deal with the structure of wisdom theology.

Although none of these suggestions is entirely satisfactory, they do point to a possible approach to the problem of the place of wisdom in OT theology: finding a broad theme that is distinctively developed in wisdom and non-wisdom texts but constructively tied to the central theological teachings of both.

III. WHAT ARE SOME CENTRAL THEMES IN THE WISDOM THEOLOGY OF JOB?

Although most theologies begin with the great concepts of salvation history and try to squeeze wisdom in somewhere, there is no reason why one could not begin with a wisdom text.³³ Both streams of tradition are a legitimate part of the canon and both are a normative and necessary part of Israel's theology. An analysis of the wisdom theology of Job may reveal a theological framework that is uniquely expressed in terms of wisdom, but equally relevant to the history of God's deeds for his covenant people. This procedure is not meant to reject the importance of salvation history or to claim wisdom's superiority,³⁴ but to give both traditions value in OT theology. If wisdom and salvation history do not stand together, all that has been created is a deceptive illusion based on human imagination.

The book of Job can be divided into several sections based on the different speakers that provide wisdom instruction. Although the theology of each speaker is somewhat unique and at times contradictory, there are common understandings of reality that

³² S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 3, 35.

³³ R. Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism," in *No Famine in the Land* (ed. J. Flanagan and A. Robinson; Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 118-20. He argues that it is improper to integrate wisdom into a "Hebrew theology" which has been formulated without the input of wisdom, for such an approach assumes that wisdom has a subordinate position.

³⁴ W. Brueggemann (In Man We Trust [Richmond: John Knox, 1972]) seems to assert the superiority of wisdom, but J. Goldingay ("The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom Perspective' within the Context of Biblical Theology," *EvQ* 51 [1979] 198-201) appropriately argues against this.

serve as underpinnings for wisdom thinking. If these common threads are parallel to the essential underpinnings of salvation history, then a broader perspective on OT theology can be developed.

A. THE THREE FRIENDS

Although the three friends who come to comfort Job do not give identical advice, they all come from a similar wisdom perspective.³⁵ They differ in their emphases and in their sympathy toward Job, but the three friends are essentially in theological agreement. Their theology is found in: 1) their words of praise about God; 2) their arguments about the fate of the wicked and the righteous; and 3) their personal exhortations or accusations of Job. Words of praise about God form the foundation for the friends' theology (5:9-16; 11:7-11; 22:12-14; 25:2-3).³⁶ God's greatness is extolled because he controls the great forces of nature that produce rain. He establishes social justice for the helpless and frustrates the plans of the wicked (5:9-16).³⁷ God's wisdom has no limits, and people have no way to discover the extent of his wisdom (11:7-11). Although God is in heaven, he knows what people do (22:12-14). Indeed, God is awesome and all powerful, having dominion over everything (25:2-3). The theology within these hymns seems fairly clear: God has all power and wisdom, he controls everything that happens.

These theological beliefs are basic to the friends' statements about God's punishment of the wicked (4:7-11; 5:2-7; 8:8-19; 15:17-35; 18:5-21; 20:4-29) and his care for the righteous (4:6-7; 5:17-27; 8:5-7, 20-21; 11:13-19; 22:21-30). Although fools or wicked persons may flourish for a while, soon God will see their oppression and destroy them. Although the righteous or innocent may suffer pain for a while, they will quickly seek God's help and be restored to

³⁵ M. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) lxx. Pope argues that there is no real movement in the arguments of the friends; they just grow more vehement in their attacks on Job. Others do find more progression of thought. See W. A. Irwin, II "An Examination of the Progress of Thought in the Dialogue of Job," *JR* 13 (1933) 150-64; J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 56; and J. E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 39. N. C. Habel (*The Book of Job* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985] 30-31) sees movement in Eliphaz' speeches.

³⁶ For a summary of the praise of God in the speeches of the friends see C. Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 75-79.

³⁷ Habel (*Job*, 133-34) sees 5:9-14 as a hymnic doxology which celebrates El as the "wonderworker, champion of social justice, rainmaker, and master mind controlling all wisdom and strategies on earth

happiness.³⁸ This theological position assumes that God knows and controls everything—therefore he can rule the earth in justice.

The third group of passages includes personal exhortations to Job and several accusations of iniquity. Westermann has noted that the exhortations are found mainly in the first cycle of speeches.³⁹ They apply the theological assumptions about God and his justice to Job's specific situation. They encourage Job to endure in hope (4:5-16), to seek God's help, to confess his sins (5:8; 8:5-6; 11:13-14; 22:21-22), to accept God's discipline (5:17), and to rely on the wisdom of the wise men (8:8-10).

The personal accusations usually begin with a rejection of Job's words (8:1-2; 11:1-4; 15:1-16; 18:1-4; 20:1-4) and particularly the claim that he received a secret message from God in a night vision (4:12-21; 6:10; 7:14; 15:8, 11-16).⁴⁰ In the midst of these attacks, the friends accuse Job of sin (15:5-6; 22:5-11). These personal responses to Job are consistent with the principle that God blesses the righteous and curses the wicked. The friends do not base their thinking on Israel's covenant but adopt a theological understanding of God's relationship to mankind that is similar to covenant thinking. This suggests that both systems of thinking may be based on a broader conception of God's sovereign and just rule of the earth.

B. THE JOB SPEECHES

Job's speeches can be divided into three basic parts: 1) hymnic descriptions of God; 2) disputations concerning justice; and 3) personal lamentations about his situation.⁴¹

Job's hymnic descriptions of God (9:5-13; 12:13-25; 26:5-14) refer to God's great and marvelous power in creating (26:7-10) but also to his angry power to upset, rebuke, or set limits on what he has created (26:10-15).⁴² This great God is also elusive and people are not able to question or control him (9:11-12). Job rejects the wisdom of the wise men (12:12); instead he believes that all wisdom and power belong to God (12:13-25). Through his wisdom and might God controls the rain, kings, judges, priests, nobles, and nations. Instead

³⁸ D. Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985) 60.

³⁹ Westermann, *Structure*, 19.

⁴⁰ G. V. Smith, "Job 4:12-21: Is it Eliphaz' Vision?" *VT* 40 (1990) 453-63.

⁴¹ Westermann (*Structure*, 25-28, 31-66, 71-75) calls these sections praises of God, disputations, and laments. .

⁴² The author of 26:5-14 is widely questioned. Pope, Terrien, Dhorme, Gordis, and Habel suggest that this is the second half of Bildad's speech, since 25:1-6 is so short. But F. I. Andersen (*Job* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976] 216) keeps it as a part of Job's speeches. Westermann (*Structure*, 77-79) assigns 26:5-14 to Bildad and then transposes it to the end of Bildad's speech in chap. 8. H. H. Rowley ("The Book of Job and its Meaning," in *From Moses to Qumran* [New York: Association Press, 1963] 163-64) surveys various opinions about the speakers in Job 25-28.

of wisdom and prosperity, foolishness and destruction come on them. Job, like the three comforters, believes that God is all powerful and all wise, but his emphasis is on God's judgment, his hiddenness, and the injustices present in human relationships. Job's disputations (chaps. 9-10; 19; 21; 23-24; 26-27; 29; 31) are motivated by his desire to see justice, his desire to correct the false assumptions of his friends (about the way God rules), and his desire to understand God. He recognizes the futility of bringing a lawsuit against God, for God is all wise, all powerful, and cannot be forced into court (9:3-4, 13-20, 32-35; 13:3, 15; 23:1-7). Yet it appears that both the guilty and the wicked are treated the same way and that God does not judge the wicked for their evil (9:22-24; 10:2-3; 12:6; 21:7-26; 24:1-25). Job maintains that justice has failed, that he is not guilty of a sin equivalent to the judgment that he has received (10:6-7; 12:4; 19:7; 23:7, 12; 27:4-6). He was a respected man in society who cared for the poor, opposed the wicked, and avoided falsehood, immorality, and pride in his riches (29; 31). In these speeches Job begins with the same theological base as the three friends: God is all powerful and wise. Unlike the three friends, Job questions God's administration of justice. In light of his own circumstance and rejects his comforters' application of the theory of divine retribution to his situation.

C. THE ELIHU SPEECHES

After a lengthy introduction (32:6-22) Elihu's speeches in Job 32-37 include a rebuttal of Job and a defense of God. First Elihu rejects Job's statement that God is far away and does not speak. God speaks to people through dreams or visions, through pain and suffering, and through a gracious mediator who can bring redemption (33:13-28). Elihu rejects Job's claim that God has been unjust (34:1-9). Elihu also believes that God has all power (34:13) and controls the life of every human being (34:14-15). Job speaks wickedly in ignorance of God's ways (34:33-37). God is righteous, he judges the wicked who refuse to turn from evil, and cares for the righteous (36:1-16). He is the exalted one, his marvels in nature are unsearchable. Since his knowledge is perfect and his power is unlimited, he is just (36:24-37:24). Elihu rejects Job's claims of injustice and constructs a justification for God's rule on the basis of his power.

D. THE SPEECHES OF GOD

The two speeches by God (38:1-42:6) question Job's wisdom about the creation and ordering of the heavens and the earth. God has the power and wisdom to measure and lay the foundations of the

earth (38:2-7), set limits on the sea (38:1-11), arrange the days, planets, clouds, snow, wind, lightning, and inner parts of the earth (38:16-38). God's wisdom also controls the behavior of domestic and wild animals (38:39-39:30). Since Job understands none of these things, can he understand the basis for God's justice?⁴³ Job does not have the wisdom or power to judge the proud or the wicked, and certainly he has no power over God's creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan (40-41). The God speeches do not explain the full details of God's plans on earth, but develop God's means of governing by arguing from the structural, the functional, and the celebrative aspects of God's design of the universe. "The structural motifs emphasize the wise order and depth of the design, the functional motifs focus on the containment of evil and providential care, while the celebrative motifs reach...to the festive and incongruous dimensions of this design."⁴⁴ There is no further doubt in Job's mind concerning the wisdom of God's rule of the world.⁴⁵

E. THE PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE

The beginning and final sections of the book (1:1-2:13; 42:7-17) are key theological components which give something of the author's understanding of Job's trial. Here the curtains of heaven are drawn back so that a brief glimpse of God's mysterious ways are revealed. Job is recognized by the narrator and God himself as "blameless, upright, fearing God and turning from evil" (2:3). Job's denial that he was receiving just punishment for some great sin is shown to be correct, and the theology of the friends is proven inadequate to deal with the mysterious heavenly arrangements between God and the Accuser (42:7-8). The narrative prologue reveals that the divine justice of God is not destroyed by the intrusion of the Accuser's destructive work against Job, for at this point justice is placed within the broader wisdom of God's sovereign plan. God maintains his sovereignty over the Accuser by granting him only limited authority for his destructive work. Dhorme concludes, "Yahweh is in sovereign control. He it is who holds in His hands all the threads, and moves the actors."⁴⁶

⁴³ E. F. Sutcliffe, *Providence and Suffering in the Old and New Testaments* (London: Nelson, 1953) 118.

⁴⁴ Habel, *Job*, 532-33.

⁴⁵ Schmidt (*Faith*, 248) believes that "God's answer (ch. 38ff teaches Job about God's government of the world, and makes him aware of the limitations of man.

⁴⁶ Dhorme, *Job*, XXXII.

IV. DISTINCTIVE AND COMMON ELEMENTS IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE OT

Is the wisdom theology of Job foreign to the theology of the rest of the OT? Should wisdom literature be excluded from biblical theology? If it is an integral part of the canonical texts of the OT should be an integral part of its theology. If basic elements Common to wisdom theology and other theological traditions can furnish solid connections within a single framework, wisdom's distinctive contributions can enrich and broaden the perspective of the whole without destroying its unity. Although wisdom literature speaks in a unique voice, the connections demonstrate the continuity between wisdom and non-wisdom texts. Both deal with the theology of God's relationship to humankind and the world, but each type of literature arises from a different contextual setting.

The various theologies represented in Job agree on the fundamental theological principle that God sovereignly rules over individuals, nations, and nature. Job, the friends, Elihu, the God speech, and the prologue witness to God's power and ability to rule. He rules over his creation through his power and his wisdom, over the nations through wars and famines, and over the final events of human history, including death itself. All animals, all people, and all nations are controlled by his almighty rule. His creation of the world and his providential ordering and care for it are evidences of his wisdom and power. His amazing power and control are praised, and his sovereign rule makes him ultimately responsible for bringing suffering or blessing on mankind. Although Clines is correct when he claims that the chief issue of Job is "the problem of the moral order of the world, the principles on which it is governed,"⁴⁷ that problem exists only because there is no doubt in anyone's mind that God sovereignly rules the world.⁴⁸ If he were not sovereignly ruling, the issues of his justice and his mysterious ways would not be raised.

Two subordinate themes explain how God rules in the context of the wisdom theology of Job. One relates to God's just treatment of people and the other deals with God's mysterious freedom and wisdom. On these points there is controversy and partial resolution. The friends defend God's justice by claiming that it brings predictable results for both the wicked and the righteous. Because

⁴⁷ D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word, 1989) xxxvii; cf. also A. van Selms, *Job, A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 14.

⁴⁸ L. Bostrom (*God of the Sages*, 177) concludes that the discussion in Job "never departs from the assumption of God's sovereignty even though the question of whether or not God's activity is limited by ethical considerations is brought into the picture."

Job did not experience God's justice as he expected it, he began to see that God's ways of treating people in the real world were not bound by the simple theological formulas of the friends. On these points the theology of Job probes the deeper issue of the relationship between God's sovereignty and his justice. The limits of deuteronomic theology are expanded by wisdom's search for fuller explanations of seeming inconsistencies than are given in incomplete covenant formulations. But wisdom's own limitations are only too evident as it confronts the power and presence of God in this world.⁴⁹

The prologue, the God speeches, and the epilogue uncover the mysterious and marvelous ways in which God works. In his wisdom he is free to allow sin, suffering, and the Accuser to exist; yet still fulfill his purposes. In the midst of negative circumstances justice exists, but it is mysteriously tempered with divine wisdom and freedom. This perspective is a unique contribution that wisdom theology makes to OT theology, and it is an essential part of a wholistic understanding of God's rule. It forces every person to step out in faith, humbly fearing God, knowing that God has the freedom to use his power and wisdom in ways that go beyond human "understanding."⁵⁰ Joseph must have wondered about these issues (Genesis 37-45) and David struggled with them in some of his laments (Psalm 13), but neither was able to see beyond his traditional understanding. Without an understanding of his mysterious wisdom and freedom, God would be almost a puppet, bound to respond automatically in predetermined ways to all behavior, never free to rule in dimensions beyond human comprehension (cf Job 40:1-5; 42:1-3). The revelations about divine government derived from the theology of Job are distinctive, yet not unrelated to other key theological emphases in texts that focus on the covenant and God's great acts of grace for his chosen people in salvation history.

The Pentateuch, historical books, and prophets describe God's relationship to human beings, and particularly his people. Salvation history is rich with its own distinctive themes of God electing a people, delivering them from Egypt, giving them the torah, entering into a covenant relationship with them, giving them the land, and guiding them through their history. Each of these acts is based on a fundamental theological belief that God sovereignly rules over Israel, the nations, and nature. He rules over his people as the covenant Lord who is with them and keeps his covenant promises, as the lawgiver who provides instructions on

⁴⁹ vonRad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 97-110.

⁵⁰ Several emphasize God's freedom from a mechanistic theology of retribution. See Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 369-71; and Crenshaw, *Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 25.

how to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). He is the Lord of history who delivers them from slavery and defeats other nations and the judge who controls nature to give rain and blessing or drought and curse. He is the great king of the theocracy who rules with power.

Several subordinate themes play a role in God's rule over his people in salvation history. Because God rules over Israel and has revealed principles of conduct which influence future relationships, issues of justice are basic to the relationship between the covenant partners. If Israel is not righteous and does not follow God's covenant stipulations, God in justice will send other nations to destroy the people and send a curse on nature. But if they love God and follow his instructions, God will bless the land where they live and give them peace with other nations (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-28).

In spite of this clear teaching, the relationship between God and Israel goes beyond justice. God's mysterious election of Abram, his love for Israel (Deut 7:1-12), and his deliverance of Israel from Egypt were free acts of grace and mercy. Justice cannot explain the mysterious freedom that moves God to choose one people and not another. His mercy and deeds of salvation are praised, but they are beyond human understanding. These themes are uniquely developed in God's positive dealings with Israel, but they are not foreign to Israel's wisdom theology.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Both wisdom and non-wisdom traditions have a distinctive place in OT theology. They are different, but they do not contradict each other. Both point to the same fundamental relationship between God and the world. God rules over everyone and everything. This agrees with Bostrom's study of the theology of Proverbs and its relationship to other OT teaching. He concludes that "it is probably correct to say that a belief in God's sovereignty more or less characterizes the OT as a whole and that the belief in the Lord as supreme ruler constitutes a basic shared assumption of the biblical authors."⁵¹ Although the theological setting of the book of Proverbs stands in bold contrast to the context of Job, Bostrom's conclusion is supported by the proverbial statements that describe how God created the world through wisdom (3:19-20; 8:22-31) and freely controls the plans and lives of every person according to his purposes (16:1-9, 33; 19:21; 20:24); he is the ultimate source of life and death. He justly rules over those who are wise and

⁵¹ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 179.

righteous as well as those who are foolish and wicked (3:3-12; 5:21-23, 8.34-35, 14.31).

The central themes in Job are also fundamental to Qohelet's theological substructures, for in spite of all his feeling of frustration, ignorance and powerlessness, there is the overriding belief that God has made everything, that no one can change what he has planned, and that God is somehow observant of good and evil (Eccl 3:10-14). Although everything (food, work, satisfaction, wealth, and money) is a gift from God, it is impossible to understand the mystery of God's blessings or his just ways (2:24-26; 4.14, 5.18 6.2, 8.16 17).

This central theme-God rules over Israel, the nations and nature-is superior to Goldingay's dual emphases on creation and redemption because it encompasses and stands behind both.⁵² God's rule is a broader and more adequate unifying theme for four reasons. 1) It does not focus just on the two powerful events of creation and redemption, but on all God's powerful deeds and words. 2) It encompasses not only God's great positive deeds (creation and redemption) but his just judgment of nature and nations and his daily providential control of history and nature as well. 3) It is not focused on a few historical points, but on the many ways his wisdom instructions, laws, and prophetic warning bring about his rule over individuals, nations, and parts of nature. 4) It does not depend on the chronological relationship of creation and redemption, which makes one more prominent at one time and the other at another time, but applies to all times and in many ways.

God's rule in the perspectives of the wisdom writings and the covenant history of Israel conforms to his principles of justice and wisdom. His wisdom is revealed in his covenant instructions, proverbs, visions, and theophanies (Deut 4:5-6; Job 33:13-18; 39-41), through the creation of the world and his continual control of it (Proverbs 8; Deuteronomy 27-28), and through his dealings with the wicked and the righteous. These wise dealings reveal his justice and bring the fulfillment of his plans. But his justice is tempered with mercy and forgiveness, with marvelous miracles of salvation, and with wise decisions that overshadow the covenantal and proverbial concepts of retribution in significant ways. Life with God cannot be neatly systematized, but it is not a blind alley with no light. There is a way that seems right, but it is filled with divine surprises. The fool fails to see the divine ways as God's rule, the wicked reject his rule, but there are many like Job who fear God and strive to know the truth so that they may be free. Job's friends failed to understand the full beauty of God's ways because they limited God's rule to an inadequate conception of his

⁵² Goldingay, "Wisdom Perspective," 201-7.

justice and freedom. Theologies which ignore the wisdom and mysterious freedom of God's sovereign rule remove any need for faith in God and run the danger of being just as inadequate as the narrow ideological reconstructions of Job's friends.

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