

Chapter One

The problem of wisdom literature in Old Testament theology

Wisdom literature has emerged recently from the shadow of salvation history to become a discipline in its own right in OT studies. This emergence has not occurred without its own problems, including the definition of wisdom, the relationship of wisdom literature to the rest of the OT, and the relationship of Israel's wisdom literature to that of the ANE. These problems are important because they have an impact on the understanding of the theology of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

Wisdom literature: an orphan in Old Testament theology

OT scholars have not always known what to do with wisdom literature. Many ignored it in their development of OT theology, or, worse, saw it as an aberrant offshoot of Israel's religion, more like an errant child.¹ Murphy called wisdom literature an orphan.² Wright wrote a biblical theology that emphasized theology as a proclamation of the acts of God. The difficulty with wisdom literature is that its narrow focus does not allow it to include a recital of God's action in history. It also does not fit into the type of faith exhibited in the historical and prophetic literatures.³

Eichrodt wrote *Theology of the Old Testament* (originally published in German in 1933), which centres on the concept of the covenant.⁴

¹ Clements 1995: 269, 271.

² Murphy 1969: 289.

³ Wright 1952: 103–104.

⁴ Eichrodt 1967: 1.36. The covenant is the concept in Israelite thought that 'gave definitive expression to the binding of the people to God and by means of which they established firmly from the start the particularity of their knowledge of him'. For Eichrodt's general approach see Hayes and Prussner 1985: 179–184. They call Eichrodt's work one of the most significant works of its genre published in the twentieth century.

He rejected two common approaches to OT theology. One was the attempt to organize biblical materials according to the outlines of dogmatic theology and the other was the pure historical approach that did not emphasize theology. He wanted to present a comprehensive survey and a systematic ordering of the material as a self-contained entity, exhibiting a constant basic character in spite of ever-changing historical conditions.⁵ He devoted ten pages in the second volume of his OT theology to a discussion of the wisdom of God. For a long time the wisdom of God made no contribution to Israel's religious understanding because it was perceived to have a strong secular flavour.⁶ The gnomic wisdom in Solomonic circles was concerned primarily with skill in practical affairs and rules for success in daily life. The secular nature of wisdom literature was also due to its dependence on Egyptian literature. This connection made it clear that Israelite wisdom literature could not give a central place to the national religion of Yahweh, with the latter's emphasis on the cult, the covenant and messianic hopes.⁷ Wisdom was bound to the outlook of humanity in general and to guidance in practical affairs. This early wisdom remained too dependent on foreign models. Only later in the Persian period did wisdom expand its horizon to examine the purpose and order of the cosmos in Proverbs 1 – 9, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the apocryphal writings of Ecclesiasticus, Baruch and the Wisdom of Solomon.⁸

G. von Rad also wrote a magisterial OT theology (published in 1957). He argued against the organization of OT theology around central topics or systematic theological categories. He believed these approaches imposed an alien structure on the OT. The focus of attention should be Israel's own explicit assertions about Yahweh formulated as creedal confessions.⁹ One way that Israel responded to the saving acts of Yahweh was to write creedal confessions. A more personal response to the saving acts of Yahweh was to offer praise to him, to ask him questions and even to complain to him about her sufferings. The psalms and the wisdom literature are the answer that Israel makes to Yahweh's saving acts. In this response a theological

⁵ Hayes and Prussner 1985: 180.

⁶ Preuss 1987: 114–136. He argues that wisdom is marginal to Israel's faith and that the God of wisdom is not Yahweh (see also Bartholomew 2016: 11).

⁷ Hayes and Prussner 1985: 184.

⁸ Eichrodt 1967: 2.80–83.

⁹ Hayes and Prussner 1985: 233–234.

doctrine of humanity becomes clear. The way Israel saw herself before God is worth the highest attention theologically.¹⁰

The difficult nature of wisdom literature

Scholars had trouble fitting wisdom literature into the rest of the OT because this literature was different from other parts of the OT.¹¹ Wisdom literature has little emphasis on key concepts that dominate the rest of the OT. Scholars were so immersed in the study of salvation history and God's acts in history that they did not know how to approach literature that did not have that emphasis. Wisdom literature does not emphasize the covenant or the other major traditions of the OT, such as the revelation of God at Mount Sinai or the concept of Israel as God's special people. Instead, the emphasis is on observation rather than revelation and on the individual rather than the nation. The sages did not understand history as the arena in which God worked to accomplish his plans for his covenant people. They were more concerned with the individual than the nation, so that redemptive historical events did not play a role in their thoughts.¹² A distinction between wisdom and Yahwism developed so that they were understood as two totally different approaches to God. Some even argued that wisdom was not a genuine expression of Israelite faith. Wisdom literature was seen as an alien body in the OT and the attempt of Israel to shape herself in the image of her neighbours.¹³

Two factors were working against wisdom literature. It not only stressed different things than the rest of the OT but also looked very much like the wisdom literature of the ANE. These two factors led many to draw the conclusion that Israel's wisdom literature was secular and patterned after the literature of the ANE. There are similarities between Israel's wisdom literature and the wisdom literature of the ANE, particularly Egyptian wisdom literature. Similarities in content are evident because they share many of the same themes. Both speak of riches that fly away (Prov. 23:5; *ANET*, 422).¹⁴ Both speak of the importance of justice and not oppressing the poor or

¹⁰ Von Rad 1962: 1.355–356.

¹¹ For a perceptive analysis of the development of wisdom around several turns (historical, literary, postmodern and theological) see Bartholomew 2016: 3–36.

¹² Crenshaw 1974: 23–55.

¹³ Murphy 1975: 117. Murphy gives examples of those who see wisdom as an alien body, but argues that wisdom and Yahwism go together.

¹⁴ These examples are found in Kidner 1985: 126.

the widow (Prov. 15:25; 31:9; *ANET*, 415). Both speak of treating the enemy kindly by giving him food to eat (Prov. 25:21; *ANET*, 422). Both speak of disciplining a child with a rod (Prov. 23:13–14) or a beating (Ahikar 2.22).¹⁵ Similarities were also seen between the Egyptian work *The Instruction of Amenemope* and Proverbs 22:17 – 24:22 (see chapter 4). The book of Job has been compared to Mesopotamian works that deal with similar themes, such as *A Man and His God*, *The Babylonian Theodicy* and *I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom* (also called *The Babylonian Job*). Although there are significant differences between Job and these works, the similarities caused scholars to view the wisdom literature of Israel as different from the rest of the OT and an attempt to shape Israel in the image of other nations.

A new foundation for wisdom literature: creation

In the older works of OT theology the place of both creation and wisdom was determined by the role of the historical traditions of election, covenant and redemption. Von Rad's statement 'The Yahwistic faith of the Old Testament is a faith based on the notion of election and therefore primarily concerned with redemption' shows the problem of fitting the doctrine of creation into OT history. How can creation be related to the problem of redemption that dominates the whole OT?¹⁶ He argued that certain statements in Deutero-Isaiah show that the doctrine of creation had been incorporated into salvation history and put into the service of redemption. Creation was brought into direct contact with redemption in Isaiah 43:1 and 44:24, showing that the doctrine of creation does not belong in a separate category from the redemption at the Red Sea. These two distinct acts are part of the same act of the universal redemptive purpose of God. The doctrine of creation, however, still does not stand on its own but is swallowed up in the doctrine of redemption.¹⁷

Both creation and wisdom were understood to stand outside the mainstream of the historical traditions. Only later in Israel's history were these ideas brought into harmony with the historical traditions of Israel when the faith of Israel was confronted with new ideas, and

¹⁵ Kidner 1985: 131.

¹⁶ Von Rad 1968: 131.

¹⁷ Ibid. 136, 138.

interest in the traditions of salvation history had grown weak.¹⁸ In this way creation faith became part of the central faith of salvation history.¹⁹

G. von Rad also addressed wisdom in a later book, *Wisdom in Israel*, where he explored how the experiential knowledge in wisdom came to expression and what made up the fundamentals of its understanding of the world. He wanted to examine wisdom on its own terms. The discovery of the wisdom literature from the ANE showed that the post-exilic dating of the wisdom material was mistaken because wisdom was an earlier phenomenon common to the ANE. It also raised the question of the relationship of wisdom to Yahwistic faith that was seen as more exclusive. A work was needed that started with the wisdom texts themselves to understand the thinking and values of the wise men.²⁰

Wisdom is concerned with the order in creation to help human beings acquire knowledge of their environment to achieve mastery over life. The creation order communicates truth that Israel seeks to express. In wisdom a wise man was in search of himself and took things into his own hands without appeal to a specific, divine commission. This approach is different from the approach of the theologians of history, who present Israel's historical experience. The initiative in the former lay with human beings and in the latter with Yahweh. These two groups use a different language and set of concepts. The thinking of the wise men was not stimulated by divine activity in history but by human existence. Salvation was not brought about by Yahweh's activity in history or by any kind of human agency (Moses or David), but by specific factors inherent in creation itself. In this way wisdom was a phenomenon that stood on its own and was in theological tension with traditional Yahwism.²¹ This is a distinctive Israelite concept, for the idea of a testimony emanating from creation is attested only in Israel.²²

Other scholars began to argue for an independent basis and structure for creation. Zimmerli argued that wisdom had no relationship to the history between God and Israel but operated

¹⁸ Von Rad 1962: 1.449–452. Von Rad notes that internal conditions, such as freeing herself from the archaic forms of faith, were conditions that led to new ideas. Part of these new ideas in wisdom literature included the cosmic wisdom of Prov. 8.

¹⁹ Reventlow 1985: 139–140.

²⁰ Von Rad 1972: 6–10.

²¹ Ibid. 289–291, 307, 314.

²² Reventlow 1985: 177.

within its own theological framework of creation. Wisdom seeks to order life and to build the rules of life based on observation of the world. It recommends the blessing that human beings can obtain by following the rules of its teaching and warns against the harm that comes to the one who disregards them.²³ In developing the theological framework for wisdom Zimmerli highlighted the dichotomies between wisdom and OT theology. Proverbs speaks about people, never the people as the elect of Yahweh. The king is never identified as the anointed king of Israel or the son of David. God is also never identified as the God of Israel or as God of the Fathers. Although wisdom may borrow from other parts of the OT, such as inhabiting the land (Prov. 2:22–23), there is not a clear reference to the history of Israel. There is also a difference between the authority of the law and the authority of wisdom. The admonition of the wise man remains in the framework of counselling. Counsel allows a certain amount of liberty for people: they can either follow or not follow the advice. It has the authority of insight, but that is different from the authority of the Lord in the law. And yet God authorizes human beings to go out into the world to investigate it, to draw conclusions concerning behaviour that leads to blessing, and behaviour that leads to negative consequences.²⁴

Schmid sought to end the silence concerning creation theology and to address the perception that creation theology is secondary to Christian theology by giving it a central theological significance as the broad horizon of biblical theology. He acknowledges that creation takes second place because it is viewed as late in Israel's history. If one looks at how creation is handled in the ANE, several things become apparent. Creation did not just deal with the origin of the world but with the concept of order. This order manifests itself in a political order over against chaos and in a legal order manifested in justice. The connection between the cosmic, political and social orders that find their unity in creation is manifested in wisdom, as in the Egyptian concept of Ma'at, in the integral concept of the role of the king, and in the connection between act and consequence. Schmid found this approach in the pre-exilic prophets, where they criticize the people based on the order found in interpersonal relationships that is also connected in creation faith to law and wisdom. The concept of righteousness in the exilic and post-exilic prophets was not understood narrowly as a legal matter but as a

²³ Zimmerli 1964: 146–158.

²⁴ Ibid. 152–153.

universal world order in a comprehensive salvation. These views are also found in the Deuteronomistic and Primeval Histories. In other words, history is understood as the implementation of the order of creation. God's creation of the world order and his sustaining of it provide the framework for history.²⁵

The influence of wisdom in the Old Testament

As wisdom became more prominent as an independent discipline, scholars began to find wisdom ideas and themes in many places of the OT. Crenshaw comments that von Rad's study of the influence of wisdom on the Joseph narrative led to similar claims of wisdom's influence upon Esther and the 'succession narrative' (2 Sam. 9 – 2 Kgs 2). In addition, discoveries of new wisdom texts from Mesopotamia, Ugarit and Egypt spurred the trend to unprecedented heights.²⁶ In fact, wisdom became so prominent in OT studies that a book devoted to wisdom in ancient Israel finds wisdom influence in OT narrative traditions, in Solomonic historiography, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and the psalms.²⁷ Crenshaw warned that the excitement of this new direction in scholarship led to 'exaggerated claims supported by dubious arguments and assumptions' so that a study of methodology to determine wisdom influence was needed.²⁸ If wisdom's influence is everywhere, then wisdom's influence is nowhere, because the definition of wisdom is too broad.

Crenshaw argues that wisdom speech does not mean wisdom influence. Wisdom can be defined as 'the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator' that moves on three levels. Nature wisdom tries to master things for human survival and well-being by studying natural phenomena as they relate to people and nature. Juridical and practical wisdom examine human relationships in an ordered society, and theological wisdom deals with issues of theodicy. Wisdom influence can be proved only by a stylistic or ideological peculiarity found primarily in wisdom. Just the use of wisdom terms, topics or common words such as 'hear, know, keep, law, teach, etc.' does not mean wisdom influence.²⁹ The history of

²⁵ Schmid 1984: 102–108.

²⁶ Crenshaw 1995: 312. He lists wisdom's influence on Gen. 1 – 11, 37, 39 – 50; Exod. 34; Deuteronomy; 2 Sam. 9 – 20; 2 Kgs 1 – 2; Amos, Habakkuk, Isaiah and Jonah.

²⁷ Day et al. 1995.

²⁸ Crenshaw 1995: 313.

²⁹ Ibid. 313–316.

wisdom is also important when it is possible to determine its structural development, geographic spread and ideological formulation.³⁰

Crenshaw concludes that the Joseph story, the succession narrative and the book of Esther are lacking in the characteristics that would prove wisdom influence. Some of the problems he sees are the use of common topics that are in wisdom but not peculiar to wisdom and the use of numerous non-wisdom themes.³¹ His conclusions concerning wisdom influence are beneficial, but he sees wisdom as an entity separated from other streams of the OT that has its own peculiar ideological emphases.³²

The definition of wisdom

The definition of wisdom is important in trying to determine its influence on other parts of the OT and in trying to define wisdom literature. Crenshaw notes that no single definition is sufficient because of the variety of phenomena covered by the Hebrew word.³³ There are three things generally associated with wisdom: the use of wisdom forms, the occurrence of certain themes or subject matter, and an emphasis on creation. The use of wisdom forms includes the use of the word ‘blessed’, various forms of proverbs (antithetical proverbs, better-than sayings), acrostics, numerical sayings, parables, riddles and fables.³⁴ The use of certain themes is also associated with wisdom. These themes include divine retribution (the deed–consequence relationship),³⁵ theodicy, marriage, raising children, creation order, human experience, and the two ways.³⁶ The development of creation as the basis of wisdom gave wisdom an independent status over

³⁰ Crenshaw (*ibid.* 317) calls the change in wisdom in apocryphal works the ‘most striking observation’.

³¹ *Ibid.* 318–325.

³² Sneed 2015: 53–54. He argues against the approach to wisdom represented by Crenshaw.

³³ Crenshaw 1981: 16–17.

³⁴ See chapter 2 for definitions of words associated with wisdom.

³⁵ Retribution can be defined as the conviction that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer in proportion to their respective righteousness and wickedness (Walton 2008: 647). Righteous deeds should lead to blessing, and wicked deeds should lead to negative consequences. A better phrase to describe this might be ‘character–consequence’ because it is the attitudes and resulting lifestyles that are in focus (Boström 2016: 139). This work will use the phrase ‘deed–consequence’ to highlight the mechanical view of this relationship that can develop, as in the book of Job.

³⁶ Perdue 1994b: 34–48. He lists many of these themes in discussing approaches to wisdom theology. Crenshaw (1981: 18) speaks of a particular world view and common topics, such as the dangers of adultery, the perils of the tongue, undeserved suffering, etc.

against the emphasis on history, covenant and law. Wisdom emphasizes interaction with creation based on observation, reflection and drawing conclusions (Prov. 24:30–34), a different approach from receiving revelation from God.

The different emphasis in wisdom literature over against salvation history has led some to characterize it as humanistic,³⁷ where its foundation and goals are distinct from Yahwism. Crenshaw's definition of wisdom as 'the reasoned search for specific ways to assure well-being and the implementation of those discoveries in daily existence' is good as far as it goes. The problem is that he characterizes the distinctive wisdom ethic as people trying to secure their well-being apart from the need or expectation of divine assistance.³⁸ This view goes against clear statements in Proverbs (1:7; 3:5–7) and does not account for the fact that when Job struggles with his suffering, he seeks to hear from God. Crenshaw highlights that 'wisdom addresses natural, human, and theological dimensions of reality, and it constitutes an attitude toward life, a living tradition, and a literary corpus'.³⁹

More recently, Kynes argues that wisdom as a category is 'plagued by definitional deficiency, amorphous social location, and haemorrhaging influence, among other maladies'.⁴⁰ It is a modern scholarly construct created in the mid-nineteenth century. Wisdom as a genre category and as a movement with its own social location and world view distinct from the rest of the OT should be abandoned. An emphasis on experience does not need to be set against revelation, and creation does not need to be separated from history. A better approach would be to explore connections between texts normally associated with wisdom and other biblical texts (intertextuality) to see what these books have in common.⁴¹ He is willing to use the title 'wisdom literature' for Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job, in agreement with Weeks, who states 'so long as this is taken simply as a description of subject-matter, and not of form or origin'.⁴² A comparison of these

³⁷ The more wisdom, with its own method and foundation, is viewed as separate from the rest of the OT the more it will be understood as secular humanistic or secular. This includes a view like that of Preuss (1972: 117–145), who argued at one point that the God of wisdom is more like the god of the ANE than the God of the rest of the OT. Wisdom is focused on human effort for salvation. But even Crenshaw (1990: 216) affirms that the sages believed in their own ability to cope in the face of adversity.

³⁸ Crenshaw 1981: 24.

³⁹ Ibid. 24–25.

⁴⁰ Kynes 2015: 11.

⁴¹ Ibid. 32.

⁴² Weeks 1999: 27.

three wisdom books demonstrates certain similarities that help in the interpretation of each other, but these three books should also be compared with other texts that will bring to light common ideas and themes.⁴³

Kynes and Sneed have raised legitimate concerns about the ‘traditional’ approach to wisdom represented by Crenshaw, and advocate a unified relationship between wisdom and the rest of the OT. Longman appreciates their concerns and concludes that Kynes’s advocacy of intertextuality as the key for studying wisdom books achieves much the same results as his genre-based approach.⁴⁴ Bartholomew also sees intertextuality as a way to move the discussion forward concerning the relationship between Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, the relationship between these wisdom books and the rest of the OT, the relationship between OT wisdom and the NT, and the reception history of OT wisdom.⁴⁵ These approaches have led to a more nuanced discussion of wisdom and its relationship to the rest of the OT. Just because Judges 9 uses a fable does not mean it is wisdom literature. Just because a text deals with marriage does not mean it is wisdom literature (Mal. 2:10–16). Just because a text describes the investigation and organization of God’s creation does not mean it is wisdom literature (Gen. 2:19–20). It is appropriate, however, to explore these common themes that are found in the wisdom books and other books of the OT.⁴⁶ Although there is room for discussion whether some parts of the OT should be characterized as wisdom literature,⁴⁷ it should be clear that Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes are the main wisdom books.

⁴³ Kynes 2015: 31. Kynes has a forthcoming work (see the bibliography) that continues this argument. Longman (2017: 276–282) agrees with many of Kynes’s concerns but believes that his criticisms are effective against a wooden (and outdated) view of genre. Longman argues the case for wisdom literature as a genre category based on a fluid understanding of genre (there are multiple levels of abstraction in texts).

⁴⁴ Longman 2017: 282.

⁴⁵ Bartholomew 2016: 23–24.

⁴⁶ For recent treatments of wisdom in other parts of the OT along these lines see Firth and Wilson 2016. Chapters in this book not only cover Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, but also include the analysis of wisdom themes in Ruth, OT narrative and Psalms, as well as chapters on the themes of retribution and biblical theology. Longman 2017 also has chapters that cover Deuteronomy, Psalms, Song of Songs and Prophecy as well as a chapter on Joseph and Daniel and a chapter on Adam and Solomon.

⁴⁷ There is debate about whether the Song of Solomon and certain psalms should be classified as wisdom. For recent discussions that see wisdom themes in the Song see Clarke 2016: 100–112 and Longman 2017: 75–77. For analysis of wisdom in the psalms see Stocks 2016: 194–201 and Longman 2017: 66–69.

The development of wisdom in biblical theology

There is a general consensus in critical scholarship that a development in wisdom literature took place over several centuries. The impetus for the wisdom movement does not necessarily come from Solomon, as presented in 1 Kings 4, but from the loss of the monarchy in the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. The era of wisdom's fullest literary development occurs in the post-exilic period. Israel transitioned from a nation state to a scattered people among many nations. This change led to an international outlook that was more universal.⁴⁸ The corporate perspective on life that allowed the individual emphasis reflected in wisdom literature to develop was lost. Proverbs combined older wisdom before the exile (Prov. 10:1 – 22:21) with later wisdom after the exile, and then wisdom literature as late as the Hellenistic period was added (Prov. 1 – 9). The book of Job comes from the Persian period because it no longer treats disease as the concern of cultic purity and holiness. Ecclesiastes comes from the late third century as it reveals the influence of Greek philosophy on Jewish life.⁴⁹ The progress of wisdom is explained in a number of ways. Some speak of a crisis of wisdom, where wisdom became hardened and not open to new observations. A mechanical view of the deed–consequence relationship developed. Job and Ecclesiastes are a response to this crisis.⁵⁰ Others stress that the changing times in which Israel lived in the Persian period produced a crisis of social stress that older ways of thinking were not able to combat. The response in Proverbs was an emphasis on the family to preserve the community's ideals. Ecclesiastes is a salvage operation for coping with the crisis of changes in socio-economics, politics and epistemology (a distinctly sapiential focus).⁵¹ Crenshaw speaks of a process of theologization that took place over time in three stages that culminated in the identification of wisdom with Torah in Sirach.⁵² Wisdom developed as a response to the changing social conditions in Israel after the exile.

A major reason that the post-exilic period is viewed as the impetus for the development of wisdom literature is that the account of Solomon in 1 Kings 4 is considered to be unreliable legend and

⁴⁸ Clements 1992: 22, 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 33–34.

⁵⁰ Schmid 1966: 162–164.

⁵¹ Brown 2014: 39–40, 139–142.

⁵² Crenshaw 1976: 24–25.

folklore.⁵³ Assumptions concerning the dating of books make a difference in how one perceives the development of wisdom and how it relates to OT theology. In discussing what texts should be used to establish creation theology, Hermission argues that Genesis 1 is not the place to start because it is a late, mature product of Israelite creation theology.⁵⁴ The critical reconstruction of Israel's history that Wellhausen popularized is still common even if source criticism and the way he presented Israel's history are not followed. Scripture clearly presents a flowering of wisdom under Solomon; and if one accepts that account, then a different view of the development of wisdom is possible.⁵⁵ Without denying the differences between salvation history and wisdom literature, there are many reasons to see areas of similarity and common concern that lead to a more unified approach to creation, wisdom and salvation history. First, wisdom must already have been in existence before the reign of Solomon for there to have been an emergence of wisdom during his reign.⁵⁶ The fact that Solomon as king was not only wise but that he was to enforce the law of God makes connections between Proverbs and Deuteronomy understandable (Prov. 6:20–22 and Deut. 6:7–9).⁵⁷

Second, the early chapters of Genesis contain key elements from both creation and salvation history. Genesis 1 begins with creation as a world of order as God transforms the earth from being uninhabitable for life (formless and void) to a place habitable for plants, animals and people. God establishes the order of evening and morning and

⁵³ Crenshaw 1981: 42–54. Not all scholars follow Crenshaw. Clements (1992) argues that wisdom had a close association with the monarchy. Brueggemann (1972) attempts to reclaim wisdom ethics by focusing on David's role 'as a man of faith in a world come of age', showing that people are able to choose wisely and decide responsibly.

⁵⁴ Hermission 1978: 47.

⁵⁵ Schultz 1997: 277–278. He argues against a historical development or crisis in wisdom and sees the relationship between Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes as an inner dialogue, not a contradiction. The 'crisis' view arose partly because differences between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were no longer explained in terms of Solomon's biography. There is a basic unity between these three wisdom books in that neither Job nor Ecclesiastes rejects the traditional wisdom of Proverbs. I agree with this assessment except that the first-person autobiography of Qohelet does conflict with Proverbs, but the epilogue agrees with Proverbs. The debate is an inner dialogue that can take place in a person who has experienced the blessings of God (Proverbs) but has also experienced suffering so that there is a wrestling with the issues of life (Job and Ecclesiastes).

⁵⁶ Crenshaw 1981: 57. He recognizes that most canonical proverbs, except Prov. 1–9, existed before the rise of the monarchical state, but views the account in 1 Kgs 4 as legend and fable.

⁵⁷ Hubbard 1966: 12–13. He discusses the establishment of the monarchy and the rise of the wisdom movement with the implication that links between the wisdom movement and Israel's covenant faith are not as late as many argue.

the creation of vegetables and animals according to their kind. Human beings are given the highest place in creation in order to rule over God's creation, under his authority, and to care for creation. In Genesis 2 Adam is placed in the garden to work it. He has to learn how to care for the plants in the garden. He also names the animals in the garden, an activity of exercising dominion in organizing and cataloguing things in God's creation. Adam is also given a law to obey (Gen. 2:16) and, some would argue, a covenant to keep.⁵⁸ The serpent in Genesis 3 is called 'crafty' (*'ārûm*), a term that is common in Proverbs where the positive meaning of 'prudent' dominates (Prov. 12:6, 23; 14:8, 15). Occurrences outside Proverbs generally convey the negative meaning of getting what you want in a deceptive, dishonest way (Job 5:12; 15:5; Exod. 21:14).⁵⁹ The disobedience of Adam and Eve to God's command disrupts relationships and brings the disorder of the curse of sin into God's creation (Gen. 3:16–19). God's response to deliver human beings from the curse of sin (Gen. 3:15) is the beginning of salvation history, which has the goal to restore order in creation. The rest of the OT tells this story and points to the fulfilment of God's purposes in Jesus Christ. The God of creation is the God of salvation history. Genesis 1 – 3 contains all the elements of order, disorder, covenant, law and the beginnings of salvation history.⁶⁰ These facts do not prove that Genesis 1 – 3 is wisdom literature, but it is important that these ideas are closely associated with each other in this foundational text.⁶¹

Third, the account of Solomon in 1 Kings makes allusions to Adam in the garden so that Solomon functions as a second Adam.⁶² Solomon is acclaimed king at Gihon (1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45), a water source on the slope below Jerusalem that bears the same name as one of the primeval rivers of Genesis 2:13. Solomon is urged to become a 'man' (*'îš*) and 'keep' (*šāmar*) the charge of Yahweh (1 Kgs 2:2–3) just as the first one to be called a 'man' is charged with keeping the garden (Gen. 2:15). Solomon exercises dominion over God's creation by his

⁵⁸ Frame 2013: 62–66.

⁵⁹ Luc 1997: 539–540.

⁶⁰ See also Schultz 1997: 303–305. He argues that Gen. 1 – 3 is foundational for wisdom literature.

⁶¹ This approach is very similar to Kynes's emphasis of pursuing common themes in wisdom and other parts of the OT. Bartholomew (Bartholomew 2016: 25–26) also sees a connection between the ordering of creation in Gen. 1 – 2 and wisdom. Wisdom and law share an underlying assumption of a 'carved' creation order.

⁶² Many of the connections between Solomon and Adam come from Davies 2011: 39–57; see also Longman 2017: 94–108.

understanding of animals and plants (1 Kgs 4:33), just as Adam did in the garden (Gen. 2:19–20). What is different for Solomon is that God gave Solomon great wisdom in order to administer justice in the kingdom (1 Kgs 3:9, 28). Also, the prospect of life is held out to Solomon, conditional on his obedience to the divine command (1 Kgs 9:1–9) just as it was to Adam (Gen. 2:16–17). Solomon's kingdom was only a partial restoration of dominion lost at the fall because it failed to restore order in God's creation. He was only a precursor of the coming king, the Second Adam, who would destroy the power of the curse of sin and restore creation by freeing it from corruption (Rom. 8:19–23). The powers of the age to come have broken into history in the kingdom of Christ, but the fullness of deliverance and restoration awaits his second coming. Until then, wisdom literature helps God's people successfully navigate the pitfalls of life.

The plan of the book

The following chapters focus on Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, with three chapters given to each book. Some attention is given to introductory questions, but the focus is on the message and theology of each book. Proverbs sets forth, over against the way of folly, the way of wisdom that is founded in God's creation order and in the fear of Yahweh. God as Creator has set an order in the world that cannot be fully understood apart from special revelation and is an expression of his justice. Proverbs recognizes that people cannot fully comprehend God's ways in the world because of the freedom of God and the finiteness and fallen nature of people. Job wrestles with the disorder of suffering and its relationship to piety. The friends of Job operate with a mechanical view of divine retribution, so that if Job is suffering he must have sinned. This is a distortion of the view of Proverbs but it causes Job to wrestle with God's justice and how he should respond to suffering even though he is innocent. The mystery and sovereignty of God is emphasized in God's response to Job, showing that people understand little about God's ways in the world concerning individual suffering and that the proper response is to fear Yahweh. Qohelet wrestles with the disorder in the world concerning the breakdown of the deed–consequence relationship as he examines labour, wisdom and God's justice in a world that does not make sense. The epilogue of the book clearly points to the solution of the proper response: fear God and keep his commandments. Finally,

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the relationship of Christ to wisdom is explored in terms of his teaching ministry and his person and work. He is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3).⁶³

⁶³ Several English translations are used throughout this book; but if the English translation is not identified, then it is the ESV, except for the chapters on Ecclesiastes, where I use my own translation of the text.