



## Cycle 3: Theological Survey

### *A Biblical-Theological Survey of Moses, Prophets and the Writings*

The Writings: Wisdom Literature

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## The Wisdom of God/ Wisdom Literature of the Bible

### Introduction: What is Wisdom? Who are the wise?

The wise ultimately are realists who adjust to the way things *are*. They develop skill in fitting into God's creation. They understand themselves as they truly are, creatures who live in their Creator's world and follow the instructions of their Most Wise and Holy Creator. Three main wisdom books in the Old Covenant: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

### Defining Wisdom

- i. Proverbs: "Blessed" – Wisdom is the "blessed life"
- ii. Themes: divine retribution, theodicy, marriage, raising children, creation order, human experience, death and life, the "two ways" of living, etc.
- iii. Creation: Interaction in real world- need for keen observation, thoughtful reflection, prayerfully drawing conclusions, experiencing life and "listening and learning"

### Goal of Wisdom: *To live the wise and blessed life.*

**King:** *To be wise, to exemplify wisdom. God grants the people a wise king to rule over His creatures wisely and kindly.*

**Covenant:** *To live wisely in reliance upon God's grace. God grants His people grace to love wisdom and grow in understanding/insights.*

**Dwelling:** *To live in relationship with my Creator. God grants His own power and presence for the people to rightly worship, love, serve and fear Him.*

The goal of wisdom is living to the glory of God as one was created to live. The starting point of getting wisdom is the creation; to ask:

***How was I created and designed to live in God's world as a covenant creature in dependence upon my Creator?***

How can I live the “good life” of well-being-shalom-embodied-peace? In three steps **this is the good life of the Kingdom**:

**1. Acquire wisdom and follow Torah**

*"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?" (Deut. 10:12-13)*

**2. Cultivate the fear of the LORD.**

*"The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.<sup>12</sup> My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.<sup>13</sup> The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:11-13).*

**3. Suffer righteously, knowing there is purpose and design in my suffering.**

*"And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"<sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? (Job 1:8-9).*

Glancing at the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, we could sum up their messages thus. The wise learn and then accommodate themselves to such truths as these:

- The more you talk, the less people will listen.
- If your word is no good, people will not trust you, and it is then useless to protest this fact.
- Trying to cure distress with the same thing that caused it only makes matters worse.

- If you refuse to work hard and take pains, you are unlikely to do much of any consequence in the world.
- Boasting of your accomplishments does not make people admire you. Boasting is vain in both senses of the word.
- Envy of fat cats does not make them slimmer and in the end will rot your bones.
- If you scratch certain itches, they just itch more.
- Many valuable things, including happiness and deep sleep, come to us only if we do not try hard for them.
- Wise people know that accepting things that cannot be changed is the secret of contentment, and active goodwill toward others is the secret of sweetness in this life.

Crenshaw wrote: “Wisdom can be defined as the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationship with things, people, and the Creator on three levels”:

- i. Nature Wisdom
- ii. Juridical/Practical Wisdom
- iii. Theological Wisdom

## I. **Wisdom begins with our relationship to God.**

- Proverbs 1:1-7- *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* Wisdom is derived from, or rooted in *the fear of the Lord*. What is this *fear*? A reverence, worship, awe, a response of faith and trust to the God who reveals himself as Creator, Savior, and Judge of all the earth.
- I. Packer: “[Wisdom] comes our way through reverence toward, dependence upon, humility before, worship of, and obedience to the God who presents himself in covenant to his people. He is the object of their faith, hope, love, and enjoyment, and he promises to fulfill for them the role of guide, benefactor, helper, and sustainer as they set themselves to meet his covenant claims upon them.”
- Deut. 6:1-9; 24-25- *Obedience in light of God’s gracious redemption.* (IOW: Grace precedes the commands of God).
- Ecclesiastes 12:9-14- *Ultimate and lasting fulfillment in this life is only found in fearing God, and obeying him in all that we do as his creatures.*
- Psalms 111- *A Psalm of Wisdom.*

### A. **The study of wisdom is a study of life in God’s creation as God’s creatures.**

Wisdom is about understanding all creation as from God- - Remember Solomon who prayed for wisdom in 1 Kings 3:9? He sought wisdom not merely in terms of *redemptive questions*, or in covenantal ideas, but found God’s wisdom revealed in all of creation. He sought to understand all of the things God had created so that he might gain wisdom and knowledge.

## II. **There are two paths in this life.**

### ***The Way of Wisdom- Righteous Path***

Personified by *Lady Wisdom*

Proverbs 9:1-12

### ***The Way of Folly- Wicked Path***

Personified by *Dame Folly*

Proverbs 9:13-18

## **III. Wisdom is from God**

### **A. Wisdom from God is a work of God *in us*.**

- Wisdom is a *communicable attribute* of God, which means that it is a divine character quality that God graciously reproduces in sinful human beings by his generous grace.
- Like other aspects of being conformed to the image of Christ, wisdom is gained by God's work in us. This means to be wise is more than a mere memorization of the Proverbs, although the Proverbs (as well as other wisdom literature) is inspired from God and the *means* by which God, by his grace, through his Spirit makes us wise.
- Also, wisdom is gained throughout life in trusting, an acting on what God says regardless of our circumstances.
- **James 3:13-19:** *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

**B. Wisdom from God is beyond our reason.** It is beyond what might seem reasonable to us (e.g. *living righteously, yet suffering; continuing to trust in God and to be obedient even when we do suffer*).

#### **IV. Wisdom Literature**

Oswald Chambers once wrote concerning the OT Wisdom Literature: “the Psalter teaches you how to pray and praise, Proverbs teaches you how to behave, Job teaches you how to suffer, the Song of Solomon teaches you how to love, and Ecclesiastes teaches you how to enjoy.”

- A. Job- A world well-managed.
- B. Proverbs- A life well-managed.
- C. Ecclesiastes- A life worth living.

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