

Wisdom and Covenant: Revisiting Zimmerli

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SUMMARY

The following paper is based on a lecture given to the Old Testament Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship at the Fellowship's recent (2003) Triennial Conference

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der folgende Artikel basiert auf einem Vortrag, der vor der Studiengruppe Altes Testament der Tyndale Fellowship in Nantwich, GB, gehalten wurde.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article reprend le contenu d'une contribution apportée au groupe d'étude de l'Ancien Testament de l'Association Tyndale lors d'un récent colloque qui

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Should you turn to Choon-Leong Seow's staff profile on the Princeton Seminary website you will find a brief précis of his view on the idiosyncratic nature of Wisdom Literature (WL) when compared to the rest of the OT. The website tells us that 'The Old Testament's wisdom literature holds a particular interest for [Seow], *in part because he regards it as distinctive for the complete absence of the main themes found elsewhere in the Old Testament.*'¹ Seow's perspective is certainly not uncommon amongst scholars working in the field of the OT Wisdom Literature. The common suggestion is that OT Wisdom rejects the motifs which are central to the Torah, Prophets and, indeed, other books within the Writings. In particular it is often mooted that the central themes of salvation history, cult and covenant are absent

held in Nantwich, UK. The theme of the conference was 'covenant' and this paper seeks to address the question of whether or not the Old Testament's Wisdom Literature rejects the theme of covenant as some scholars suggest.

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Das Thema der Konferenz war "Bund", und dieser Artikel stellt sich die Frage, ob die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur das Thema Bund ablehnt, wie manche Forscher meinen.

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s'est tenu à Nantwich en Grande Bretagne. Ce colloque était consacré au sujet de l'alliance et cet article traite la question de savoir si la littérature sapientiale de l'Ancien Testament rejette la notion d'alliance, comme le pensent certains spécialistes.

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from the Wisdom Literature.

It is not difficult to find voices which echo Seow's notion of the uniqueness of Wisdom. Roland Murphy comments: 'The most striking characteristic is the absence of elements generally considered to be typically Israelite: the promises to the patriarchs, the Exodus experience, the Sinai covenant, etc. . . . [E]xceptions prove the rule: salvation history is absent from the realm of wisdom.'² In another work Murphy comments on 'the observable fact that WL is strangely silent about God's interventions in Israel's history (Exodus, covenant, cult etc.).'³ Perhaps typically, Crenshaw is even more direct in suggesting that, 'The sages. . . proclaimed a world-view that offered a viable alternative to the Yahwistic one.'⁴ He suggests that the humanistic scepticism of the

WL stands in marked contrast to the (in his terms) ‘Yahwistic’ emphases on direct revelation and divine transcendence found in the rest of the OT.

The problem of the idiosyncratic nature of Wisdom has been further compounded by Old Testament Theology’s search for a unifying theme. In the ‘Introduction’ to Day, Gordon and Williamson’s important collection of essays *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, we read: ‘For too long Wisdom has been a casualty of the long-running quest for a theological centre in the OT which had seen a variety of potential unifying themes proposed and wisdom almost invariably marginalized in the accompanying discussion. Since the wisdom texts paid little attention to cult and even less to covenant it was virtually inevitable that, as long as the quest persisted in this form, wisdom would be on the sidelines.’⁵ Hasel points out that ‘the perennial question [for Old Testament Theologies] is dealing with the totality of writings within the canon of the OT. . . . Virtually all OT theologies have had difficulties in dealing with the wisdom writings.’⁶ He goes on to describe wisdom theology as ‘the stepchild of Old Testament Theology’⁷ and in a similar vein Clements comments that scholars interested in OTT often ‘find Wisdom to be a rather errant child.’⁸

Whilst awareness of the particular challenges posed by the WL is by no means a modern phenomenon, most scholars attribute the origins of the idea that Wisdom somehow rejects the central foci of the OT to one key article.⁹ It has been 40 years since the publication of Walther Zimmerli’s foundational ‘The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of Old Testament Theology’ *SJT* 17 (1964) 146-58.¹⁰ Central to Zimmerli’s argument in this article is the idea that the Wisdom Literature is firmly grounded in the context of creation theology, and as such is different from the rest of the OT – showing no concern for the motifs which are normally prominent in other books of the OT canon, focusing instead on different matters.

As we so often see in the field of Biblical Studies, the frequency of repetition of an idea is not necessarily a fair reflection of the soundness of the original argument. Therefore, it seems appropriate to reassess the arguments presented in ‘Place and Limit’ and consider again the question: Does OT Wisdom actually reject or neglect the idea of covenant? Consideration of this question will be divided into three parts:

1. Re-examination of Zimmerli’s argument

that Wisdom rejects covenant (etc.).

2. Brief assessment of the reception and application of Zimmerli’s argument in English-language WL studies.

3. To suggest a third way: namely, covenant as background to OT Wisdom.

1. Zimmerli Revisited

‘Place and Limit’, like every academic work, should not be read as if it were without context. No academic work stands alone as a piece of free-thinking, on the contrary we are always – consciously or subconsciously – interacting with the theories and ideas which we encounter. One of the dominant voices of Zimmerli’s day in the field of OTT (and later WL) was that of Gerhard von Rad. It is important to bear in mind that, at the time when Zimmerli penned ‘Place and Limit’, Volume 1 of von Rad’s OTT had been published – with its somewhat inadequate treatment of the Wisdom Books¹¹ – but his *Wisdom in Israel* had yet to appear in print. This is significant, because Zimmerli’s conclusions are actually much more limited than has been the extent of application of his argument by scholars and commentators. He is to a large degree responding specifically to von Rad’s suggestion that ‘salvation history’ is key to any proper understanding of OTT. It is in response to this overstatement of the importance of *Heilsgeschichte* that Zimmerli must be read and understood.

So, whilst it is questionable whether Zimmerli’s article actually presented quite such a *carte blanche* as has been derived from it, there are clearly elements of his argument which have helped to give rise to the notion that Wisdom Theology somehow stands over against Covenant Theology (and other major themes of the OT). Two of Zimmerli’s conclusions, in this otherwise helpful, perceptive and persuasive article, seem to feed into this argument:

- i. *That Wisdom rejects the History of Israel.*
- ii. *That Israelite Wisdom is not substantially different from other ANE forms of Wisdom.*

i. Wisdom rejects Israelite History

Having pointed out the similarities that exist between certain sections of the OT Wisdom Books and other ANE Wisdom writings, Zimmerli comes to the somewhat hurried conclusion: ‘This leads immediately to a first point that we have to establish about the structure of Wisdom: *Wisdom*

has no relation to the history between God and Israel. This is an astonishing fact.¹² The reasoning seems straight-forward: similar (almost identical) material is found in countries and cultures which have no relationship with Yahweh, Yahwism or Israel's salvation history. Therefore, Wisdom is something that goes beyond the confines of Israel and her covenant-based history. Undoubtedly, this would indeed be an astonishing fact were it quite as simple as Zimmerli suggests. However, the question must be asked: 'Does the international nature of Wisdom automatically result in the conclusion that there is no internal relation to the history of Yahweh's relationship with Israel?'

Schultz suggests that there is a link between Wisdom and the history of Israel via the superscriptions and authorial designations found in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: 'It often has been claimed that wisdom literature is ahistorical. However, within the Old Testament canon, wisdom literature has been historicised. By virtue of the superscriptions which associate Proverbs [and] Ecclesiastes. . . with Solomon. . .'.¹³ Given the dubiety which exists concerning the historical accuracy of these superscriptions, many would call into question the extent to which they do actually provide any sort of link between Wisdom and Israel's covenant history. However, these superscriptions should be read not for their actual historical value but for their literary, intertextual purpose. With regard to the historical superscriptions in the Psalms, both Childs and Sheppard suggest that the intent of these superscriptions is to provide the reader with a broad canvas for the assimilation and personal application of this literature.¹⁴ Neither Childs nor Sheppard would suggest that the superscriptions are necessarily historically accurate, yet regardless of this question there is a sense in which they historicize ahistorical literature. Did David pen Ps 18 whilst fleeing from Saul? Possibly, but many would say probably not. Yet Childs suggests that the historical content found in Ps 18's superscription provides a backdrop to aid the reader's understanding and application of the psalm to their own circumstances.¹⁵ The superscription forms an association with a certain set of circumstances found in the DtrH. The reader is meant to 'imagine' him or herself in this type of circumstance and this forms a framework for applying what otherwise would be an ahistorical poem.

The superscriptions which associate Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, in particular, with Solomon serve a similar purpose. They are designed to provide

an interpretative framework by which the reader is meant to understand this gathered material. The reader is being told that the Book of Proverbs with all its diversity of material, for example, is to be understood in terms of classical Hebrew Wisdom of which Solomon is the prime example. Whilst bracketing questions of comparative dating at this point, the Books of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles present Solomon, at a certain stage of his reign, as the archetypal practitioner of Israelite Wisdom and it is this association that is meant to be made in the minds of the readers. The point is not necessarily one of actual authorship, but rather literary association and the connection that is being made via the superscriptions is that these books of Wisdom are linked with the prime example of Israelite Wisdom.¹⁶

However, the literary association with Solomon does not end there. If we assume that the Dtr historical accounts of the Solomonic reign were broadly known by the time of the final editing of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,¹⁷ then it is also reasonable to assume that Solomon would be known not only as the prime example of Wisdom, but that the consequences of his covenant failure would also readily spring to mind as they are so clearly emphasised by the author/editor of 1 Kings.¹⁸ It is always difficult (if not impossible) to establish exactly the actual literary associations that are intended by an author/editor's use of a particular figure or text, but the connection with Solomon would likely be a poignant one for any Israelite reader. In 1 Kings 1-11 we see a presentation of Solomon as successor to the great king David, recipient of wisdom from above, builder of the Temple, sage of international repute and *transgressor of the covenant!* In fact, it seems that the author/editor of 1 Kings 1-11 specifically highlights the fact that Solomon breaks all of the limitations imposed upon the king by the Kingship Law of Deut 17:14-20 (namely re. wives, wealth, weapons).¹⁹ The sad end to Solomon's reign is a salient lesson with regard to the effects of covenant unfaithfulness (1 Kgs 11:11).²⁰ Could this also be implied by Prov/Eccl's historical association with Solomon? A subtle endorsement to practice Wisdom within the bounds of covenant?

This seems to be at least possible. The commentators all draw out the significance of Solomon as exemplar of wisdom: Van Leeuwen comments, 'Whatever the origins of the book's sayings and sections, the whole now claims the heritage of Solomon, David's son, to whom God gave

wisdom and the covenant promises (2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 3; 10; Psalm 132). The title communicates that this book is endowed with the same “spirit of wisdom” that animated Solomon. . .’.²¹ Fox doubts that Solomon wrote many, if any, of the *לִי שְׁלֹמֹה* but suggests with regard to the superscription that: ‘Most important for our purposes, Solomon was remembered as the greatest of sages and as the author par excellence of wisdom. . . Solomon was famed as an author of wisdom. The tradition of his wisdom was not an invention of the redactors of Proverbs; there would be no point in assigning a Wisdom text to a man not known for wisdom.’²² Similarly, with regard to Ecclesiastes, Seow comments that the intent of the fictional, royal-biographical form and of the superscription’s indirect association with Solomon leads him to the conclusion that, ‘It is probably the intent of the author to evoke memory of Solomon, the wise king par excellence and the best example of one who has it all.’²³ The point is that the superscriptions – regardless of their stage of inclusion into the text, regardless of how they have been interpreted through the ages, regardless of their original purpose – now serve a literary purpose. That literary purpose is to associate the wisdom of these Wisdom books with Israel’s history via the figure of Solomon. As the commentators universally acknowledge, Solomon is the paradigm of Wisdom practice in Israel. However, if the source of this appreciation of Solomon is the Dtr account found in 1 Kings 1-11,²⁴ it would be difficult to see how the reader could possibly remember the figure of Solomon as the ‘great practitioner of Wisdom’ without also remembering the consequences of his covenant disobedience. Solomon could well be seen as both positive and negative example – wisdom exemplar and the one whose rejection of covenant responsibilities lead to the division of the kingdom. It seems likely that, just as for contemporary readers of 1 Kings 1-11, the original readers of the WL would remember Solomon as an example, by all means, but also as a salutary warning of the effects of rejecting the covenant. Therefore this literary Solomonic association serves as a spur for the reader to practice Wisdom within the bounds of covenant.

It may be pointed out that this association of Wisdom with Covenant via Solomon is not very direct. I would be inclined to agree, and this is my point: the WL is different from the rest of the OT Scriptures, but it does not reject the OT’s typical foci entirely – rather these provide a backdrop or

canvas which is essential to a proper understanding and interpretation of the more peculiar emphases of the WL.

ii. Israelite reception of Wisdom

Another area of Zimmerli’s work that perhaps needs to be revisited is his understanding of Israel’s reception of ancient Near Eastern Wisdom. As we have just seen, Zimmerli seems to draw conclusions from the international nature of Wisdom that are, arguably, more far-reaching than is necessarily justified. In a similar vein, he seems to overly minimise the significance of uniquely Israelite expressions of these common Wisdom traditions.

Clearly much of OT Wisdom either borrows from or interacts with the Wisdom traditions of Egypt, Babylon and possibly Canaan.²⁵ Yet OT Wisdom is not *identical* to other ANE forms of Wisdom, there does appear to have been an attempt to mould common Wisdom ideas into a more distinctively ‘Israelite’, Yahwistic version of the same. It could be argued that Zimmerli brushes past these attempts to put a distinctively Israelite spin on Wisdom concepts too easily:

We see in the preamble of Ptahhotep as in that of Heti and Amenemope, that Wisdom – though it knows the religious world of order, in which it lives – has very practical aims. ‘The teaching of life, the testimony for prosperity, all precepts for intercourse with elders, the rules for courtiers, to know how to return an answer to him who said it, and to direct a report to one who has sent him, in order to direct him to the ways of life, to make him prosper upon earth.’ *The Israelite translator of this preamble of Amenemope adds to his model the remark: ‘That thy trust may be in Yahweh.’ But in adding this statement he does not change the whole teaching of Wisdom into an instruction of trust in God, as for example the paraenetic part of Deuteronomy does. This addition does not alter the primary character of Wisdom as an attitude of prudence. Wisdom is per definitionem tahbūloth, ‘the art of steering’, knowledge of how to do in life, and thus it has a fundamental alignment to man and his preparing to master human life.*²⁶

Furthermore, Zimmerli comments that, ‘wisdom has its own structure which is *not altered even when wisdom is integrated in Israelite thinking.*’²⁷

Again, if we are to accept Zimmerli’s suggestion at face value this would indeed be surprising

and would differentiate Wisdom from the rest of the OT. Adoption of ANE practices is discernible in the historical accounts of the life of Israel, yet this process is normally seen as one of adaptation rather than simple adoption.²⁸ If there is, indeed, no differentiation between Israelite Wisdom and other ANE brands of Wisdom then this would, to a certain degree at least, set it apart from the rest of the OT literature.

However, Zimmerli's suggestion that ANE Wisdom remains unaltered even when integrated into Israelite thinking does not fair too well under closer scrutiny. This is most obviously the case with regard to the Book of Proverbs. In dealing with Prov 22:19, the verse which Zimmerli passes over as insignificant despite its distinctly Yahwistic tone, van Leeuwen comments, 'Verse 19a reminds readers that wisdom is based on trust of Yahweh (see 1:7) and that the book's purpose is to foster such trust, even in mundane aspects of life.'²⁹ What is more, Clifford points out that this exhortation to trust in the Lord is *central* to the prologue of this section of Proverbs which seems to draw upon *The Instruction of Amenemope*.³⁰ So not only is this reminder to trust in the Covenant God of Israel added to a known ANE wisdom tradition, it is added at the centre of the introduction to this material, providing a hermeneutical guide to an *Israelite* understanding of it.

Obviously, it is not difficult to trace covenantal overtones in the Book of Proverbs with its continued refrain that, 'The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov 1:7). Van Leeuwen again:

With very few exceptions, Proverbs refers to God as "the LORD" (Yahweh), the God who made covenant with Israel and led the people throughout history (cf. Gen 20:11; Eccl 12:13). Proverbs never uses אלהי "god") and uses אלהים (*‘ēlōhīm*, the most common word for "god" or "gods") only three times: 2:5, parallel to "fear of the LORD"; 3:4; 25:2. The editors of Proverbs are very consistent in avoiding the suggestion that the God of the sages is any other than Israel's covenant God, Yahweh (see Exod 3:15; 33:18-20; 34:6-7; John 1:14-18). Proverbs has profound similarities to ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Perhaps the consistent use of "Yahweh" was meant to forestall the idea that the God of Proverbs was not Israel's covenant God.³¹

Perhaps this distinctively Israelite tone is less apparent in the words of Qoheleth. The divine

name does not appear at all in Ecclesiastes and is replaced by אלהים, so does this indicate a movement away from Yahwism, or rejection of covenant ideas in later Israelite wisdom? Possibly, but such a conclusion probably goes too far. Quite simply we do not know why the author/editors of Ecclesiastes used *‘ēlōhīm* instead of Yahweh, just as we do not know why a section of the Psalter is dominated by *‘ēlōhīm* rather than the Tetragrammaton.³² The significant factor is that most readers would associate the 'fear of God' in Ecclesiastes with the 'fear of Yahweh' from Proverbs as referring to the same thing. Seow comments, 'Ecclesiastes shows continuity with the sapiential mainstream. Thus Qohelet emphasizes the fear of God, a concept that is prominent in Proverbs, although there it is the "fear of YHWH" rather than "fear of God." This fear of God motif. . . emphasizes the place of humanity in relation to God. . . In this emphasis on the fear of God, Qohelet stands with others in the wisdom tradition.'³³ Equally, the much criticised postscript to Ecclesiastes, places Qoheleth's rigorous speculations within the framework of covenant belief.³⁴ Regardless of the originality of this statement, Fox comments:

Man's duty to fear and obey God and God's ultimate judgment on man are, for Qohelet too, bedrock truths that experience can collide with but not dislodge. We may wander around bruised and bewildered. We may see the meaning of life crumble if we stare at it too carefully. But we can still do what we are supposed to do. And we know what this is, even if we are ignorant of its consequences. That is no small thing.³⁵

Further, Whybray comments: 'This God, whom [Qoheleth] calls (ha-)Elohim but who is in fact identical with the Yahweh of the Old Testament, is the sole creator of the world and holds the fate of every human being in his hands.'³⁶ It seems likely that the ancient reader of the phrase 'fear of God' would associate that specifically with the 'fear of Yahweh', Israel's covenant God.

So, in one sense Zimmerli is correct, Wisdom is about the 'art of steering' one's way through life – it is based around the observation of life well-lived, it does not *focus* on law or cult or covenant – and as such it shares a common interest with sapiential thought throughout the ANE. However, it goes too far to suggest that Israel's reception of these Wisdom motifs is unaffected by her theology and world-view. The additions to and adaptations of known Near Eastern sapiential

maxims when adopted into Israelite Wisdom seem to suggest a mindset and attitude which is still very much grounded in the fear of the Lord – that is, in covenant relationship with Yahweh.

2. Reception & Application of Zimmerli's Argument

Obviously, a comprehensive survey of how 'Place and Limit' has affected even the English-language secondary literature is beyond the scope of a paper such as this, but one can observe tendencies towards the expansion of Zimmerli's ideas which have driven a larger wedge between Wisdom and the concept of covenant. In particular the context of Zimmerli's work must be borne in mind – he is responding, first and foremost, to an excessive emphasis upon salvation-history apparent at the time of the article's publication. Primarily, Walther Zimmerli is suggesting that *Heilsgeschichte* is an inadequate context for the understanding and interpretation of the Wisdom books of the OT. They are not part of a developing story of salvation and, indeed, their primary point of reference is to be found not in the redemptive-history of Israel but in the OT's creation theology. Goldingay provides helpful context for a proper understanding of Zimmerli's article: 'The difficulties inherent in the salvation-history approach became apparent in the 1960s. Its importance had been overstated; it could not provide the comprehensive framework for understanding the Bible that had been attributed to it.'³⁷ Zimmerli wrote a corrective to this approach.

The way in which Zimmerli's paper was picked up and advanced is interesting, his focus upon the link between Wisdom and Creation and his rejection of the role of salvation-history in the Wisdom Literature, led to a kind of academic tabula rasa with regard to the OT setting of Wisdom. Not only was salvation-history to be rejected, but also cult and Temple, law and covenant, the Patriarchs, divine revelation and so on. The expansion of Zimmerli's idea was marked and rapid. This has led to much time being spent regaining ground. Leo Perdue's dissertation demonstrated that WL is indeed interested in the cult.³⁸ Hubbard and Schultz both address in different ways the question of Wisdom and covenant,³⁹ whereas Goldingay seeks to moderate any total rejection of salvation-history by suggesting a degree of complementarity between *Heilsgeschichte* and Wisdom.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this strong differentiation between Wisdom and other OT

themes is the question of method. Fundamentally, the separation conclusions are based on arguments from silence: 'Wisdom does not speak about X therefore it cannot be interested in X.' Or sometimes the statement is made even more boldly: 'Wisdom rejects X because it does not speak to it.' However, such argument seems unnecessarily reductionist and also to lack awareness of the subtleties of literary and social influence. The fact that a particular text does not speak to a topic does not mean that it is not interested in that topic, far less that it rejects that topic, per se. Goldsworthy responds to this trend by commenting:

It is, I believe, more satisfactory to refuse to segregate the wise men, and to see *a plurality of perspectives dictated by a variety of concerns*. What began with early folk wisdom in the home and market place would have developed within the overall perspective of *the revealed faith of Israel*. The interaction between the various perspectives is found rather by looking for the emphases of the various books, both wisdom and non-wisdom, and by *trying to understand the relationships between these different literary expressions*.⁴¹

As Fox also points out with regard to the much debated scepticism of Qoheleth⁴² – we go too far if we suggest that the WL deliberately distances itself from the central themes of the OT, it is simply the case that, generally speaking, these great themes are not the central foci of Wisdom. The Books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes deal primarily with different issues, but any attempt to understand Wisdom entirely apart from these themes leads to a skewed image of the ultimate message of Wisdom. This is true of the theme of covenant, which leads to a third and final point.

3. Covenant as Background to OT Wisdom

Depending on the scholar involved (generally speaking) an emphasis is often placed either upon the overall 'unity' or the overall 'diversity' of the OT canon. Some seek to stress the commonality of material shared between a wide variety of canonical books of the OT, others underline the individuality of each particular voice within the OT. However, I cannot help but feel that a degree of subtlety in our understanding of intertextual relationships is often lost in the debate between unity and diversity. Our thoughts are shaped in

ways of which we are often unaware, resulting in the discernible influence of motifs which (if asked) we would deny were present.⁴³

There can be no doubt that the OT WL is not about covenant. Just as it is not about the cult or Temple or Exodus or the Patriarchs. However, it would be wrong to simply state, therefore, that Wisdom should be understood entirely apart from the Torah and Prophets. It would be wrong simply to posit a degree of diversity which separates Wisdom off from the themes of the rest of the OT, as a competing world-view. Such a conclusion is one step too far and the tendency to separate actually does a disservice to the intricacy of intertextual relationships that exists within the OT canon. This can be illustrated using our theme of covenant.

By all means covenant is not the central focus of attention within the WL. The word ברית appears three times in Job, once in Proverbs and not at all in Ecclesiastes. Compare this with 26 occurrences in Deuteronomy or 60 in the DtrH and those who would advocate a strong degree of separation appear to have good grounds to justify their argument. However, literary interaction is often much more subtle than the simple repetition of a word or words.⁴⁴ Covenant may not be the focus of attention in the WL, but the concept of covenant subtly influences the didactic thrust of the Wisdom books and if we are unaware of this interaction then we skew the message of these books.

The Book of Job is a case in point. As Zimmerli observes there is a clear link with creation theology, particularly in the Yahweh speeches towards the end of the book. Nowhere in the Book of Job does covenant become a particular focus of debate, yet the theme still bears a strong influence on the proper understanding of the theology of the book. What is Job's problem? (Many a student has asked this question with some feeling!) His problem is that he believes in a Covenant God who has bound himself to relationship in a particular way. From Job's perspective he sees a lack of 'order', a lack of 'design' or 'plan'. Job believes that Yahweh will relate to him in a particular way and, when that relationship breaks down, Job makes his accusation which is (effectively) an accusation of covenant unfaithfulness against God.⁴⁵ Does this make covenant an express theme of the Book of Job? No, yet at the same time understanding covenant relationship is essential if one is to understand the theology of Job. The theme is not blatant, but it is there nonetheless and its subtlety does not undermine its importance. If Job had no under-

standing of covenant relationship with his Creator would he have made his complaint? Or, at the very least, would he have made it in the same way? If he believed in a fickle or capricious god (as some other ANE cultures did) would the questions of Job be formulated in the same way?⁴⁶ Job's problem is rooted in the fact that he has an expectation of a particular type of interaction with his Creator – interaction, it appears, bound by covenant – and it is in the fact that those expectations are not met that his crisis arises.

Similarly with Ecclesiastes, would Qoheleth have experienced quite such a profound existential crisis if he did not have an expectation of justice and meaning in the ordering of daily reality? Why does Qoheleth expect to find meaning and order 'under the sun'? Because he has been led to this expectation by the history of Israel's dealings with Yahweh. As Fox points out, Qoheleth believes in צדק and משפט and it is the lack of these that leads to his crisis of perspectives.⁴⁷ These are concepts strongly linked with the OT's presentation of covenant – on the part of each party to the covenant – and it is, again, this lack of expected relationship between Creator and his creation that leads to Qoheleth's view that everything is הבל.

Does this mean that Job and Qoheleth are effectively 'the same' as the rest of the OT? No, of course not. Both are unique books and as such inevitably have their own message, style and emphases. For me the question is how we should respond to this diversity of voice. Does 'different' mean separate? Does 'different' mean somehow 'competing' or 'incompatible'? Perhaps, but not necessarily. Job and Ecclesiastes are very different from the other books of the OT, some would say they are substantially different even from Proverbs, but they still synthesise themes which are apparent throughout the OT. These intertextual relationships are subtle, but they are present. We cannot simply say that, 'X deals with covenant and Y does not' because there is a wide variety of levels upon which texts interact with one another.⁴⁸

The Book of Proverbs' connection with the covenant themes so apparent in the remainder of the OT canon is, arguably, more obvious than with regard to Job and Ecclesiastes. Proverbs' covenant motifs have been pointed out via the Book of Psalms,⁴⁹ and also by way of the sapiential themes apparent in the Prophets.⁵⁰ However, Proverbs' strongest covenant association is found in its thematic link with the Book of Deuteronomy. The proverbial motto (Prov 1:7) endorsing readers

to ‘fear Yahweh’ seems to echo strongly Deuteronomy’s presentation of the covenant response expected of Israel as the people prepared to enter the land. Van Leeuwen comments:

The great phrase “the fear of the LORD” grounds human knowledge and wisdom (cf. 9:10) in humble service of Yahweh. This phrase frames the first section of the book (1:7; 9:10), as well as the whole book (1:7; 31:31). The book of Proverbs is meant to teach humans wisdom. But the fear of the Lord relativizes human wisdom, because the mysterious freedom of God can subvert human plans and purposes (16:1, 9; 19:21; 21:30-31; 27:1). Without the God of Israel, the best human wisdom becomes folly, because God alone holds the world and all outcomes in God’s hands (2 Sam 16:15-17:23; 1 Cor 1:18-31, with its OT quotations). *Although this phrase has its origin in the experience of God’s numinous majesty (as at Sinai, Deut 4:9-10), it eventually has come to express the total claim of God upon humans and the total life-response of humans to God. In the covenant context of Deuteronomy we find:*

So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only 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, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. (Deut 10:12-13).⁵¹

Therefore, we can perhaps argue for a more direct link between Proverbs and the covenant theology of the rest of the OT. However, even here, as van Leeuwen points out, we can observe a certain transition in the understanding of the concept of the ‘fear of the Lord.’ He argues that originally it was based in the people’s physical response when confronted by the awesome majesty of Yahweh at Mount Horeb (Ex 20:18-21), but the way it is used in Proverbs (and in Deuteronomy) reflects an attitude more than this immediate physical response – an attitude of whole-life-and-being devotion to Yahweh. So, yes, it can be argued that there is a strong covenant connection apparent in the Book of Proverbs via its reflection of the ideas of Deuteronomy, but even here we see that ideas are developing, being altered and shaped slightly differently in different canonical books.

Conclusion: Awareness of Literary Complexity in Assessing the Presence of Themes

In recent years discussions within the field of OT studies have been dominated by the canonical approach, a method which has been an *incredibly positive dynamic* in our field. However, it has, perhaps inevitably, resulted in certain questions being asked and others ignored. There has been something of a trend to focus on macro structures within the OT canon – for example, discussion often focuses on the DtrH (Jos-Kings), or the Book of the Twelve (Hos-Mal). Questions are asked about whether the canonical books which make up these broader collections speak with the same voice or whether they address the same themes differently. Our discussion of unity and diversity within the OT is often shaped in the same way: ‘Is Judges pro-monarchic? Is Samuel anti-monarchic?’ ‘Do the books of the DtrH speak with the same voice?’. In phrasing the questions in this way, I feel that we have lost a degree of awareness of the subtlety of literary interaction that occurs on an intertextual level. Our focus on macro-structures has resulted in a lesser focus on the OT as literature and the subtle interaction of themes.

Goldingay has described this as ‘complementarity’⁵² and others speak of ‘referentiality’ in the inter-relationship of texts. The fact is that in the comparison of any two or more ‘books’ of the OT we will find differences and similarities even when they are discussing the same theme. So we should not be surprised when two canonical books from the DtrH differ in their discussion of the theme of kingship – they may be *similar*, but it would be unusual were they *the same*. Yet, at the other end of the spectrum, given the significance of divine revelation in the life of Ancient Israel, it would be unlikely that a canonical book ignore the major themes of that revelation entirely. Covenant is not an obvious or dominant theme in the WL, but it is present as significant background to the matters which are the focus of discussion in these texts.

So my polite reminder is that we should bear in mind the many levels upon which literary interaction occurs and that we should not be too quick to suggest that any canonical book rejects a major biblical theme entirely. Graeme Goldsworthy’s thoughts regarding our central question of how wisdom and covenant relate are helpful:

The broad study of wisdom seems to show two

things. First, the wisdom writers were Israelites through and through, and they acknowledged the prophetically revealed word of God. *They did not reject the covenant but rather operated within this framework of the fear of the Lord.* Secondly, despite this orthodox Israelite mind-set, the wisdom writers found that their subject matter and method of approach did not involve them in the specific concerns of the covenant and the saving acts of God. Rather they looked at man in the world at large.⁵³

Lack of explicit discussion of a given theme does not mean that that theme is 'not there'. We should constantly remind ourselves of the subtleties of literary interaction that take place within the OT canon.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.ptsem.edu/meet/Faculty01/seow.htm> (emphasis added).
- 2 R. E. Murphy, "Wisdom in the OT," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. IV, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 297.
- 3 R. E. Murphy, "Wisdom—Theses and Hypotheses," in J. G. Gammie, W. A. Brueggemann, W. L. Humphreys and J. L. Ward (eds.), *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1978, 36.
- 4 J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Louisville: WJKP, 1998, 184.
- 5 'Introduction' in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995, 1.
- 6 G. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, fourth ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, 45.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 8 R. E. Clements, "Wisdom and Old Testament Theology," in J. Day, R. P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995, 271.
- 9 Varying degrees of segregation are apparent in the secondary literature. Some suggest a more marked and conscious separation of Wisdom from covenant (etc.), others are more circumspect in the conclusions drawn from the lack of obvious connection with the prominent themes of the OT.
- 10 First published as "Ort und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der alttestamentlichen Theologie," *Gottes Offenbarung. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament*, TBü 19; München: Kaiser, 1963.
- 11 Some scholars suggest that *Wisdom in Israel* was actually written in response to criticism of von Rad's poor use of the WL in his *OTT Vol. 1* (e.g. C. H. H. Scobie, "The Place of Wisdom in Biblical Theology," *BTB* 14 [1984] 44; R. L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *Tyn Bull* 48/2 [1997] 273). Von Rad does not comment on this matter, but it is certainly a possibility. See also Clements, "Wisdom and OTT", 269.
- 12 W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964) 147, italics mine.
- 13 Schultz, "Unity or Diversity," 300.
- 14 B. S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16/2 (Autumn 1971) 137–49; G. T. Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46/2 (April 1992) 143–55.
- 15 Childs, "Psalm Titles," 148–9.
- 16 Obviously, the Book of Job bears no such superscription. Zimmerli's article focuses primarily on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, hence this response follows suit. Also, there are more obvious covenant connections to be found in the theology of Job (see below).
- 17 This seems to be a fairly reasonable assumption as it is at least possible that Proverbs reached its final form in the Hellenistic period (R. Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections* [New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume 5]; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997, 21) and that Qoheleth interacts with the Greek philosophy of the Epicureans (C. G. Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory* [Analecta Biblica 139]; Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1998, 216.) Such dating would make it likely that the books of the DtrH were known to the readers of the Wisdom Literature.
- 18 J. G. McConville, "King and Messiah in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 271–2; G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, 177; Jung Ju Kang, 'The Persuasive Portrayal of Solomon in 1 Kings 1–11 and the Josianic Redaction Theory,' forthcoming from Peter Lang.
- 19 For this reason, some commentators see the Kingship Law as a later construct which responded to the excesses of Solomon's reign (see G. N. Knoppers, "The Deuteronomist and the Deuteronomic Law of the King: A Reexamination of a Relationship," *ZAW* 108/3 [1996] 331 for details). Whoever, Wright correctly points out that, 'Although it is difficult to read these verses without thinking of Solomon and the later kings, and although the literary account of Solomon has clearly been written with these verses as a

- background, it is not necessary to assume that this law of kingship must be a *post factum* reflection of Solomon,' (C. J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* [NIBC; Peabody, MA/Carlisle: Hendrickson Publishers/Paternoster Press, 1996] 221).
- 20 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant." (NRSV)
- 21 Van Leeuwen, *NIB Proverbs*, 32.
- 22 M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible Commentary); New York: Doubleday, 2000, 55-6.
- 23 C.-L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible Commentary); New York: Doubleday, 1997, 37.
- 24 Some (e.g. R.B.Y. Scott) suggest that elements of the Solomonic account in 1 Kings are late (post-Deuteronomic), but Fox points out the even if this is the case, the likelihood is that the Kings account predates 'the title of Proverbs and may have inspired it' (Fox, *ABC Proverbs 1-9*, 56). Whatever sources may have predated the Kings account, the fact of its canonicity indicates that it came to be seen as the primary historical text dealing with Solomon.
- 25 J. Day, 'Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel,' (in Day, Gordon, Williamson eds., *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 55-70. See also the first three chapters of this volume for further discussion of the ANE setting of Wisdom.
- 26 Zimmerli, "Place and Limit." 148-9 (italics mine).
- 27 'Place and Limits,' p 147 (italics added).
- 28 A prime example of this process of adaptation is kingship. This is a late feature in Israelite history, one which the former prophets present as being a concept of foreign origin, yet the Israelite variety—at least in theory—is radically different from ANE models of kingship (limited power, king not divine, bound by same covenant rules as rest of the people etc.).
- 29 Van Leeuwen, *NIB Proverbs*, 204.
- 30 Prov 22:17-23:11 is seen as a section which mirrors the Egyptian wisdom text *The Instruction of Amenemope*. Prov 22:17-21 is the prologue to this section, and Clifford points out that the divine name, Yahweh, is the 18th of 36 words in this prologue (See R. J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, OTL; Louisville: WJKP, 1999, 206.)
- 31 Van Leeuwen, *NIB Proverbs*, 33.
- 32 The Elohist Psalter spans Pss 42-83, and once again scholars find it difficult to explain this phenomenon. Some (e.g. Seybold) see this as evidence of a period of redaction where the divine name was systematically replaced. Others (e.g. McCann) think that this is unlikely (why retain 44 instances of Yahweh, and why stop at Ps 83) and suggest that the use of 'ĕlōhīm is original to these psalms and that they have been grouped together because of this similarity of content. Basically, we have no access to the reasons why 'ĕlōhīm is used rather than Yahweh—the reasons could be theological, literary, social, festal and so on.
- 33 Seow, *ABC Ecclesiastes*, 69 (emphasis added).
- 34 'The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.' (Eccl 12:13-14, NRSV)
- 35 M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 144-5 (emphasis mine).
- 36 R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 27 (emphasis mine).
- 37 J. Goldingay, "The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology," *EQ* 51 (1979) 195.
- 38 *Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literature of Israel and the Ancient Near East*, SBLDS 30; Missoula, Scholars Press, 1977.
- 39 D. A. Hubbard, "The Wisdom Movement and Israel's Covenant Faith," *Tyndale Bulletin* 17 (1966) 3-33; Schultz, "Unity or Diversity."
- 40 Goldingay, "Salvation History and Wisdom."
- 41 G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel's Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995, 119 (emphasis mine).
- 42 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 361.
- 43 On author Ian Rankin's website he comments with regard to a recently published academic work which examines his novels: 'Gill Plain, a lecturer at St Andrews University, has published her 90-page critical work investigating the background, characters and themes of *Black and Blue*. The book only costs a fiver, and I must admit I found it engrossing. Gill certainly spotted stuff even I didn't know was in there,' (http://www.ianrankin.net/pages/books/forthcoming_titles.htm).
- 44 See N. F. Lohfink, "Was there a Deuteronomistic Movement?" in L. S. Schering and S. L. McKenzie (eds.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism*, JSOTSup 268;; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 36-66, who argues that repetition of individual words is not sufficient to prove theological association, but that the confluence of multiple words and ideas together may indicate a particular theological backdrop to a text.
- 45 For example, 'Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?' (13:24). Job also speaks about a time 'when the friendship of God was upon my tent; when the Almighty was still with me' (29:4-5) and his accusation is that this covenant

- relationship has been lost. See, e.g., J. E. Hartley, *NICOT Job*, 227.
- 46 An interesting factor in this discussion is that Job and his friends are presented not as Israelites, but as foreigners, yet Job's expectation in terms of his relationship with God seems to be distinctively 'Israelite'.
- 47 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 51ff.
- 48 See, for example, M. Worton and J. Still (eds.), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, or from the perspective of biblical literature, E. van Wolde, "Intertextuality".
- 49 Hubbard, "Wisdom Movement," 13.
- 50 E. Gerstenberger, 'The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets', *JBL* 81 (1962) 249-263; Hubbard, "Wisdom Movement," 8; G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. James D. Martin; London: SCM

Literature, Leicester: IVP, 1985, 61; Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom*, 125; J. C. McCann, "Wisdom's Dilemma: The Book of Job, the Final Form of the Book of Psalms, and the Entire Bible," in Michael. L Barre (ed.), *Wisdom, You are my Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, CBQMS 29;; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997, 18–30. The same sort of connection is made from the Deuteronomic perspective, as can be seen in M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, 244ff and his "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Enquiry," in D. L. Christensen (ed.), *The Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993, 21–35; D. T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994,