

WISDOM, THE “AMEN” OF TORAH

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Torah, prophecy, and wisdom cannot be chronologically laid end to end. Rather, their history as theological paradigms overlaps. Perhaps the best model for their relationship is that of an equilateral triangle. The vertex represents Torah, and the two flanking angles represent prophecy and wisdom. In this model, Torah is the basic paradigm, while prophecy and wisdom are paradigms in support of Torah. The present consensus of OT scholarship is that prophecy ought to be read in the light of Torah, rather than Torah in light of prophecy, the latter view characterizing the consensus of a former generation.¹

The rabbinic view of prophecy was that the prophets were preachers of Torah. While that may be an overstatement, it is nonetheless true as a core principle of the relationship between Torah and prophecy. In other words, prophecy may be viewed as an affirmation of Torah, especially an affirmation of the fundamental moral principles of Torah. That understanding of prophecy is based in large part upon the reflections of the book of Deuteronomy on prophecy (e.g. Deut 5:23–29; 18:15–19).²

Our concern in this paper, however, is the third paradigm, wisdom. More and more OT scholarship is recognizing that the theological paradigm of wisdom is an affirmation of the Torah in a similar way as prophecy. It is, indeed, the “amen” of Torah. Now, obviously one can say “amen” with gusto at one point and with less gusto at another, indicating degrees of affirmation. While I will not try to measure the decibels of wisdom’s “amen,” I will nonetheless try to draw out the affirmation of Torah that comes from this “amen corner” of the biblical canon.

First, let me issue a word of explanation. The usual way to study the divisions of the OT canon is to follow the threefold division of the Jewish canon: Torah, Prophets, and Writings. Generally speaking, this is the way OT theologians approach their task. But the Writings compose such a diverse collection, with no univocal way of speaking, that some other way of looking at this canonical corpus of books is needed. Quite obviously, the compilers of the Writings sought inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. My proposal is

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¹ Ronald E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978) 125.

² See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 120.

that in doing OT theology, we should think more practically of three theological paradigms rather than three canonical divisions, the paradigms of Torah, prophecy, and wisdom. By “paradigm,” I simply mean a way of viewing God and his relationship to the created order. While ritual was key in the Torah paradigm, it was the means to an end, the end being best expressed by the covenant formula that is developed in the Pentateuch, “I will be your God, you shall be my people, and I will dwell in your midst.” The Torah, then, aims to develop the reality of this formula: God, people, and divine presence. Consciously or unconsciously, this became the lens through which Torah, prophecy, and wisdom measured Israel’s religious experience. This formula was woven into the fabric of prophecy, and, perhaps less obviously, but nonetheless quite authentically, also woven into the fabric of wisdom. While I will not develop this thesis in this paper, I present it as a way of understanding the Torah paradigm.

To simplify, prophecy, we might say, was an explication of Torah, while wisdom was a response to Torah, the “amen” of Torah, viewed through this paradigmatic lens. I want to break down this general thesis, that wisdom was a response to Torah, into bite-size portions so we can hear the “amens” of wisdom resounding from its various components.

I. WISDOM’S “AMEN” OF THE CREATOR GOD

Perhaps wisdom’s loudest “amen” is her affirmation of the Creator God. No other theological concept is more characteristic of wisdom than this.³ It is no coincidence that the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 put an indelible stamp on the OT canon, leaving no doubt that God should be viewed as the Creator of the world. Gerhard von Rad’s proposal that creation was a late-comer to OT theology has had its day and is thankfully passing into the geniza of historical criticism. Aside from the dating of creation’s entrance into biblical theology, the opening statement of the OT canon is the story of creation, thus making creation “the horizon of Israel’s faith.”⁴ Why wisdom chose creation as the platform of its theology rather than redemption, as is the case of Torah and prophecy, is a question that teases our speculative instincts. Mine suggest that the theological spokespersons of the OT were keenly aware that creation was the platform of the religions of the ancient Near East, and they could not permit those religions to abscond with the doctrine of creation and leave Israel with a truncated theology. Redemption, as central as it was in their thinking, was a privilege of none other than the Creator, a theme that Isaiah sounds, and one with which John prefaces his Gospel: only the Creator could redeem.⁵ Redemption presupposed ownership,

³ Genesis 1–2; Psalms 8, 19, 104; Prov 3:19–20; 8:22–31; Job 38:4–38; and Isa 40:21–26 and 45:8–13 are major expressions of creation faith.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 162. See also Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 137.

⁵ Isaiah is the OT source of this combination of creation and redemption: Isa 43:1; 44:21–22, 24.

so the doctrine of creation was the necessary complement to the doctrine of redemption. One wonders how the two doctrines could have stood apart. The Ten Commandments give witness to their complementarity by associating the LORD's Sabbath rest with both creation (Exod 20:11) and redemption (Deut 5:15). To restrict Israel's faith to redemption would have been to neglect God's claim on the world and would have been a restriction on redemption itself, for, in the final analysis, God's redeeming acts flow out of his creating acts.

1. *Wisdom's "amen" of the God of creation: Prov 3:18–20.* In this text God creates by wisdom (בְּחָכְמָה) and understanding (בְּהַבִּינָה) as compared to God's word in Genesis 1. After having introduced humanity, *Adam*, to wisdom in 3:13 (“Happy is the man [אָדָם] who finds wisdom”),⁶ in verse 18 wisdom stands as the “tree of life,” waiting for the inhabitants of her garden to take hold of her, no cherubim with flaming sword preventing entry. She stands ready to pronounce her blessing, in wisdom's own language (מְאֹשֶׁר), on those who “hold her fast” (RSV). The merism of 3:19, “earth and heavens,” reflects the same terms in Gen 1:1 and 2:4. The LORD with his triune creative instrument (wisdom, understanding, and knowledge) founded the universe:

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke forth,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

The separation of the primeval waters of Gen 1:9–10 is probably in view here. While the verbs of creating (יָסַד and כִּבְּנָן) do not belong to the Genesis narrative, they are verbs of creating in other OT texts.⁷ The language of creation has expanded beyond בָּרָא and of הִשֵּׁעַ of Genesis 1 and 2.

2. *Wisdom's "amen" of the God of creation: Prov 8:22–31.* The gist of this account is to establish the priority of wisdom over creation. The several temporal terms affirm this.⁸ Moreover, the description includes water, mountains, and soil, with the division of the waters in verse 24. In verses 27–29, we have the creation of the heavens (Gen 1:1), with mention of the face of the deep (Gen 1:2) and fixing the bounds of the sea (Gen 1:9).

Wisdom's identity as אֶמּוֹן in verse 30 has been much discussed. The two common ways of rendering it are “master worker” and “little child.” The playful mood of wisdom, playing with “human beings” (“sons of man”), would suggest that the picture of a child is intended, joyfully romping around with

⁶ Cf. Gen 2:16–17; 3:3 (the word “touch” is נָגַע in Genesis and הִמַּךְ in Proverbs, but the idea is the same).

⁷ Dell, *Book of Proverbs* 141. יָסַד occurs in Isa 24:18; 48:13; 51:13; Amos 9:6; Zech 12:1; and Prov 8:29. כִּבְּנָן occurs in Job 28:25, 27; Ps 93:1; 119:90; Prov 24:3 (building a house); and 8:27.

⁸ The temporal terms are: רֵאשִׁית (v. 22: compare to בְּרֵאשִׁית of Gen 1:1), first (קִדְמָה), ages ago (מֵעוֹלָם), at the first (מֵרֵאשִׁית), when there was no (בְּאֵינִי), before (בְּטַרְדָּם), לפני, בְּטַרְדָּם), when (ב- preposition plus infinitive construct, five times in vv. 27–29).

human creatures. It is a bold metaphor,⁹ but it reads from the creation narrative quite clearly the joy of God in his creation that is expressed in Gen 1:31 (“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”).¹⁰ Thus Proverbs 3 and 8 say their loud “amens” to the Creator God of the Torah.

3. *Wisdom’s “amen” of the God of creation: Job 38:4–41.* At this point we must address the issue of date. If Job precedes the Torah, as some believe, how could he say “amen” to the Torah before it existed, unless, of course, it was eternal, as the rabbis insisted? If he is post-Torah, then there is no problem. My answer to this question is that it is possible to hear a proleptic affirmation of Torah in Job much like the prefiguration of the exodus in the story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt in Genesis 12. The difference, of course, is that it is quite possible that Genesis 12 was written after the exodus and thus could more easily have been incorporated into its outline. Nevertheless, an underlying prophetic plan of history and theology is at work in the OT literature, and Job could have seen Torah in the offing, just as he did other biblical doctrines, such as the incarnation (Job 10) and the resurrection (Job 19). Call it “prophecy” or “theological insights,” it is still appropriate, in my opinion, to think of Job in a Torah-affirming mode.

That being said, let us look at the so-called “God speeches.” Their authority and power derive in part from the fact that we hear the voice of YHWH out of the whirlwind, the One who initiated this whole scenario in the prologue. The reader knows this by dramatic irony, even though in the dialogue Job suspects that God has initiated this state of affairs, and in the last cycle Job expresses the confidence that:

He knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall
come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)

This same LORD who has impeccable confidence in His servant Job speaks with final vindication of his servant in the God speeches. It is vindication in the sense that the LORD is silent about the sins with which Job’s friends have charged him. Rather YHWH challenges Job to a journey through the created world. These two speeches, intended to be a dialogue between YHWH and Job, are reminiscent of the brief dialogue the LORD God has with Adam in the Genesis narrative (Gen 1:29–30; 3:9–19). It reminds one of the cross-examination in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:9–19), but with a different purpose, that being to bring Job to wonderment in the great creation the LORD has made. Thus the deity leads Job on a tour of wonderment through the created world, drawing attention to YHWH’s own power and providence, and to Job’s uninformed and impotent status in comparison. The spotlight is turned on the Creator through the creation, lauding his power to create and to sustain.

⁹ Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 53.

¹⁰ Note also the joy present at the birth of the first human child in Gen 4:1.

In contrast to wisdom in Proverbs 8, Job was not present when God created the world. Is this in response to Proverbs 8 and wisdom’s presence before the LORD called creation into being? Since the date of Job’s composition is uncertain, we cannot answer this question. We can, however, say that canonically speaking, we may observe that Job did not play the role of wisdom at creation. At times he seems to have assumed that he had the wisdom advantage, that is, that he knew much more about the universe and God’s governance of it than he in reality knew. The LORD’s rebuke of him, then, was tantamount to saying, “You are not wisdom. You were not present at creation.” Job may be playing more off the creation tradition of Proverbs 8 than directly off the Genesis narrative.

That said, we should acknowledge that the LORD of the prologue acknowledges Job’s superior standing in the world of human beings when he asks the rhetorical question of the 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?” (Job 1:8; 2:3). Added to that is God’s affirmation of this pronouncement in the dialogue. In the famous hymn on wisdom of chapter 28, Job declares that only God knows the way to wisdom (Job 28:23). And in a context where Job describes God’s creating activities, when he was examining “everything under the heavens,” when he gave the wind its weight and meted out the waters by measure, when he gave the wind and lightning their travel instructions, he at the same time looked for wisdom and found it, and said to man:

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding. (Job 28:28)

This is the only time God’s voice is heard in the dialogue, and when he speaks, it is, like the prologue, an affirmation of his servant Job as a man of wisdom, rising above the shrill voices of the friends, to say that the wise man is Job. But he was a man *of* wisdom, not wisdom itself, something Job seemed to forget at times, and he finally repented in dust and ashes for his arrogance:

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand
things too wonderful for me,
which I did not know.
...
I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:3b, 5–6)

The poem of creation in Job 38 has more in common with Proverbs 8 than it does with Genesis 1 and 2.¹¹ Both poems assume a high level of poetic license, and, unlike Genesis, use the analogy of birth. In Job 38:8, the sea breaks forth from the womb (מִרְחֵם) and is wrapped in the swaddling band

¹¹ Note the reference to “foundations” (Prov 8:29) and the infinitive construct of the verb in Job 38:4; the word “shaped” (מְצַבֵּעַ) in Prov 8:25 and Job 38:6.

(תוללתו) of thick darkness. Proverb 8 applies the imagery, not to creation itself, but to wisdom: “The LORD created¹² me at the beginning of his work” (Prov 8:22); and “before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth” (Prov 8:25). The concluding imagery of the *amon* (אמן) as a little child playing among the fresh products of creation fits the birth imagery that is applied to wisdom in the poem.

While Proverbs 8 has more verbal affinities with Genesis, Job 38 has both verbal and metaphorical affinities with Proverbs 8. But they both describe creation in poetic language and draw upon Israel’s creation traditions, thus pronouncing their “amen” of the Creator God of the Torah.

4. *Wisdom’s “amen” of the God of creation: Ecclesiastes.* The case of Ecclesiastes is quite different, since the book never engages in creation language like that of Proverbs and Job. Nevertheless, Qoheleth does speak about the world of nature, or the world system that is fixed and changeless. This worldview is best presented in the well-loved poem of Ecclesiastes 3. The universal system is designed so that everything has its place, and there is little that one can do to change it. In fact, God has made humanity so that they want to reach beyond themselves; but even this desire is frustrated by the lack of knowledge in which this search ends. Qoheleth’s view of creation is not its origins, but it is more about the universal system that turns in endless cycles of time and human experience. And his “amen” of the God who stands behind this system is one of resigned acceptance, devoid of enthusiasm.

Qoheleth is, however, aware that God is *Creator*, for he issues the summons to “remember also your Creator in the days of your youth” (Eccl 12:1).¹³ He was conscious of both the Creator and the creation, even though he was not confident that this knowledge improved one’s ability to figure God out: “He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God had done from the beginning to the end” (Eccl 3:11). Nature turns in ceaseless cycles, but the earth remains, and this universal system does not allow anything novel to break into it (Eccl 1:4–11). Except for the reminder of creation in 3:11 and the summons to remember the creator in 12:1, the “amen” we hear from Ecclesiastes is as much as we can expect from the Preacher. It is too muted to be a resounding affirmation, although it is a “still small voice” not to be ignored.

II. WISDOM’S “AMEN” TO THE MONOTHEISTIC GOD OF TORAH

There is not a hint of Israel’s polytheistic world in the wisdom books, unless one is inclined to believe that Lady Wisdom in Proverbs is a deity of

¹² The verb יָבַן in verse 22 may have the sense of “fathering” or “forming” (Dell, *Book of Proverbs* 142); the verb הוֹלֵלְתִי in verse 25 also suggests birth imagery.

¹³ Michael V. Fox identifies the *yod* in the noun בְּרִיאָה as a fuller form of the *seghol* rather than the *yod* of the plural (“your creators”), and gives forms in Deut 23:15; Isa 5:12; 30:23; and 42:5 as other examples (*A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 321, n. 47).

some sort, like Maat or Isis, which, in my opinion, is a far reach. The monotheism of Torah is the theological basis of wisdom.

In the prologue, God speeches, and epilogue of Job, the deity is known by the covenant name YHWH (LORD). It is of some consequence that in the dialogue the terms for God are *El*, *Eloah*, and *Elohim*, the generic terms. However, in those sections where God speaks directly (except 28:28) the deity is referred to with the *tetragrammaton*. In fact, for Job, the God speeches were a “burning bush” moment when the LORD revealed himself to Job and identified his concern for his servant and his world.

The God of Proverbs is the God of Moses, known by the covenant name YHWH (LORD), who created the world and all humanity.¹⁴ The covenant name appears eighty-seven times in the book, with only five occurrences of the generic name for God.¹⁵ This clearly classifies the theology of Proverbs as center-stage covenant theology, thus connecting it directly to Mosaic faith. Bruce Waltke, moreover, lists five connecting links to the God of Moses: (1) God as Creator of the world (Deut 10:14/Prov 1:7; 3:19–20); (2) God as Creator of all humanity (Deut 4:32/Prov 14:31; 29:13); (3) God as avenger of wrong (Deut 32:35, 40–41/Prov 5:21–22); (4) God as comforter of his people with full knowledge of their ways (Deut 23:14[15]/Prov 5:21); and (5) God as sovereign and director of history (Deut 4:19; 29:4[3], 26[25]/Prov 16:1–9, 33; 19:21; 20:24).¹⁶

Ecclesiastes, in contrast, uses only the name *Elohim* for God, never the covenant name. This is not surprising in view of Qoheleth’s theology, which puts God at a distance from his world. One could interpret this, taking the use of *Elohim* in Genesis 1 as one’s cue, as a code name for the transcendent God, but most likely, it implies the hidden God, the God who keeps his distance from humanity: “God is in heaven, and you upon earth” (Eccl 5:2). God is sovereign,¹⁷ but his providence has only a shade of goodness. His “gift” to mankind is the joy of eating and drinking and doing one’s work (Eccl 2:24; 5:18; 8:15). Nevertheless, there is no other God besides him, and there we have to leave the matter.

III. WISDOM’S EARMARK PHRASE “THE FEAR OF THE LORD/GOD”

The phrase “the fear of the LORD/God” is shared by wisdom and Torah, as well as the verbal form “fear the LORD/God.” The question is which theological paradigm has priority on the term, Torah or wisdom. Generally it is assumed that the phrase is endemic to wisdom. Yet I am inclined to think that this phrase has dual citizenship, and while it is the typical phrase

¹⁴ Prov 1:7; 3:19–20; 14:31; 29:13.

¹⁵ The name “God” (*Elohim*) occurs only five times: three times as a divine name for Israel’s God (2:5; 3:4; 25:2); two times as one’s personal God (3:4; 30:9); one time in its singular form (30:5). See Bruce K. Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 65.

¹⁷ Eccl 3:9–18; 7:13–14; 8:16–9:1; 11:5. See Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 35.

describing wisdom's creed, it is broadly distributed in the OT literature and is shared at the foundation level of OT theology.

First, the semantic range of the phrase "fear of the Lord" extends all the way from "dread" to worship. There are, of course, nuances in between. Deuteronomy associates the fear of the LORD with the giving of the law on Horeb. When Israel heard God's words, they learned to fear him:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask 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, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" (Deut 10:12-13)¹⁸

Here both awe and obedience are the ingredients of the fear of the LORD.¹⁹

1. *The fear of the LORD/God: Proverbs.* Whenever the phrase occurs in wisdom literature, it implies the covenant faith. This is a foregone conclusion in the book of Proverbs. In the first place, this book positions itself in the covenant faith by its use of God's covenant name, YHWH, as we have already observed. Second, the book of Proverbs uses Torah language to describe and commend its own teachings. In fact, wisdom as represented by Proverbs is a religious expression which extracted the moral essence of Torah and set it to the front of theological consciousness. The sage's "instruction" is called "Torah" (Prov 3:1; 4:2; 7:2), as is also the teaching of parents (Prov 1:8; 6:20). Four occurrences of the term, however, may bear a legal nuance: 28:4, 7, 9, and 18. In the last of these texts (29:18) the word "vision" (תִּזְוֶה) parallels "Torah," "Where there is no תִּזְוֶה the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps *Torah*."

However that may be, Proverbs is conscious of *Torah language* and the *institutions of Torah*. For example, Proverbs uses the language of Torah-keeping to demand that the patrons of Wisdom keep her teachings. The language of "binding," typical of Deuteronomy (Deut 6:8; 11:18), commands loyalty and faithfulness, "Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck" (3:3). This same language of "binding" is used to command the keeping of the father's *mitzvah* and the mother's *Torah* (Prov 6:21), and in Prov 7:3 it commands the keeping of the teacher's instruction.

Further, the language of the *Shema'* (Deut 6:9; 11:20) is in view in both Prov 3:3 and 7:3 when the teacher instructs the patrons of wisdom to "write them on the tablet of your heart." The word "heart" is substituted for the Deuteronomic phrase "doorposts of your house and on your gates." The heart has become the door and gate of wisdom, and her patrons are to write her words there. They serve both as a mark of identification and a protective device. It may not be an overstatement to say that one who keeps wisdom's

¹⁸ Cf. Deut 4:10, 30.

¹⁹ M. V. VanPelt and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "אר," in *NIDOTTE* 2:530.

teachings also keeps the Torah.²⁰ The thrust of Proverbs, then, is in the direction of an endorsement of Torah theology. In fact, the book is more than an endorsement, it is a digest of practical instructions on how to be God's people, broken down into the ethical bites of wisdom theology, and applied microcosmically to the individual. In other words, Proverbs presents the moral urgency of wisdom in the language of Torah-keeping and thus highlights both the authority and the urgency of the moral life, which is the bottom line of Torah theology.

Further, the precepts of Torah are part of the religious legacy of the book of Proverbs. Just as the prophets condemned a manipulative sacrificial system devoid of repentance and moral conduct, so wisdom also pleads the case of morality, stripped of its ritual pretense: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov 15:8).

"To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice" (21:3).²¹ These admonitions, like the prophetic admonitions of Hos 6:6 and Mic 6:8, were a counterstatement to the manipulative mode of worship practiced in Israel, stimulated by a spirit that sought to impress God with the abundance of well-performed services and rituals. Whether or not Proverbs was an instrument of Hezekiah's reform, especially with the new edition that included chapters 25–29, its enunciation of the moral essence of Torah in a popular and accessible form highlighted both the authority of Torah and the urgency of the moral life.

Now let us go back to our earmark phrase "the fear of the LORD." The banner text is, of course, Prov 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."²² The long prologue of the book, Proverbs 1–9, concludes with the same affirmation in 9:10. The book as a whole makes a similar assertion about the "good woman" in 31:31: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."

In Proverbs the fear of the LORD is "a standard of moral conduct known and accepted by men in general," says R. N. Whybray.²³ It is equivalent to the dual concept of the "love of the LORD" and the "fear of the LORD"

²⁰ Another example of Torah language draws upon the language of Lev 25:18 where Israel was admonished to keep the LORD's statutes and ordinances "so you will dwell in the land securely." Proverbs 1:33 uses the same terms, minus the element of land, to describe the security of that person who listens to Wisdom: "but he who listens to me will dwell secure/and will be at ease, without dread of evil" (the same term appears in Deut 33:12). Another set of terms including the word "land" occurs to represent the security that keeping wisdom's teachings will bring (Prov 2:21–22; 10:30).

²¹ Cf. Hos 6:6: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings"; Mic 6:8: "and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

²² The phrase occurs in Prov 1:29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13 in the first section of the book and elsewhere in 10:27; 14:2, 26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 28:14; 29:25; 32:30.

²³ R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (SBT 45; London: SCM, 1965), quoted by Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15* 96.

which are used synonymously in Deuteronomy (Deut 5:29; 6:2, 5). Thus Proverbs pronounces a hearty “amen” to Torah and the ethical life that Torah prescribed.

2. *The fear of the LORD/God: Ecclesiastes.* With Ecclesiastes we breathe different air. Even though Qoheleth circumscribes himself within Israel’s monarchical tradition as “son of David” (Eccl 1:1), he never refers to the God of history and his marvelous acts of redemption. At the same time, however, Qoheleth does not reject Israel’s religious practice out of hand. The concept of fearing God is good evidence of that. The nominal phrase does not occur, but the verbal form is found several times.²⁴ There is, he admits, value in sacrifice and prayer (Eccl 5:1–7). Even in his moments of deep skepticism, he sees that fearing God is still the essential duty of individuals, and after his precaution that religious acts can be overdone, he advises: “For when dreams increase, empty words grow many; but do you fear God” (Eccl 5:7).

As he tried to penetrate to the heart of the world’s meaning, he saw its fixed order as a built-in admonition that human beings should fear God:

I know that whatever God does endures for ever;
 nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it;
 God has made it so, in order that men should fear
 before him (Eccl 3:14).

Despite how one views the layers of thought that characterize Qoheleth’s view of God and the world, one must still explain in a satisfactory way²⁵ the presence of 12:13: “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.” We may hear two voices in the book, but they are from the lips of the same person. My view is that this is the final expression of a religious skeptic who also had his moments of faith, and now he has come to the end of his theological meanderings, and offers his bottom-line confession. This book, I suggest, is the work of a man who had moved through the maze of skepticism and emerged into the freedom of faith, even though it was not a freedom that made him gleeful, but one that gave him, nevertheless, theological equilibrium. Coming to this state of equilibrium did not happen all at once, but it did happen. And when it did, all elements of doubt and despair were not totally eliminated from his thinking. He was a man *on the road* to faith, perhaps even a man who had been immersed in faith and then victimized by skepticism, only emerging after a long struggle into a more enlightened faith, a faith that saw the way of Torah as the viable way to meaning. But Torah faith was more than a fall-back. It was a faith to which he returned when his experimental designs (“all has been heard”) had taken him in circles of just more despair. In a less distinct way than Job, we can see Qoheleth’s journey (especially chapters 1–3). His redeeming vision was nothing like the theophany of Job 38–42, but the much more conventional vision of divine glory in the commandments. Franz Delitzsch called this “the kernel and the star

²⁴ Eccl 5:6; 7:18; 8:12, 13; 12:13.

²⁵ In my opinion, the view that orthodoxy is a poultice applied to Qoheleth’s skepticism is not satisfactory.

of the whole book.”²⁶ Even though Ecclesiastes as a whole does not fit comfortably within Torah theology—it is too skeptical and daring for that—it is much more an expansion of the idea of God and an exploration of human life in the gray dusk of the mystery. But thankfully, that too has a place in Torah theology, and thankfully we can hear Qoheleth’s muted but distinct “amen.”

3. *The fear of the LORD/God: Job.* The book of Job is concerned with God and his relationship to the world, illustrated by his relationship to Job. Job’s character is presented and attested by God in the prologue as “one who feared God” (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). The deity even confirms his moral aptness in the poem on wisdom (Job 28:28). Somewhere in the midst of his journey, Job had a flash of divine insight and got a glimpse of the vision that awaited him at the end of the journey. He confidently anticipated the glorious vision to come—after death, he thought—but a vision that would come more quickly than he anticipated:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then from my flesh I shall see God,
who I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold,
and not another (Job 19:25–27).

When Job finally and arduously arrived on that plateau and saw the sunrise of divine glory—not *after* his death but *before*, to his surprise—the experience was like the drastic difference between hearing and seeing:

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee. (Job 42:5)

The book of Job presents a vision of the Creator God, awesome and majestic, yet Job declares in one of his better moments of faith that the creation was just the “outskirts of his ways” and “the whisper of his voice” while the “thunder of his power” was past human comprehension:

By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he smote Rahab.
By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways;
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power
who can understand? (Job 26:12–14)

While Job is concerned with the classical issues of justice and righteousness, these are not framed in classical language such as Torah and covenant. Sinai and Moses never come into view, except perhaps by allusion. In the above passage, for example, Job may allude to the Sinai event (see

²⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes* (trans. M. G. Easton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1970) 438.

Exod 20:18–19), or if Job precedes that event in time, he may sketch its outline prophetically. This book is a test case for the fear of God, and the test is phrased by the Satan himself: “Does Job fear God for naught?” (Job 1:9). Eliphaz threw that in Job’s face: “Is not your fear [of God]²⁷ your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?” (Job 4:6). Job turned that stone around and around and looked at every facet, wondering whether it was worthy of an aptitude for life, sometimes concluding “yes” (Job 23:10) and sometimes “no” (Job 9:22).

The phrase “fear of the LORD” does not even occur in the God speeches, but we have no better illustration of the fear of God in its purest form than in Job’s response to the LORD’s two speeches:

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5–6)

Job’s “amen” is pronounced to the description of the Creator God who governs the world and takes note of his servant and even the smallest detail of nature (Job 38:26). Robert S. Fyall has looked at Job 9:9 and 38:31–33, where God is the Creator of the stars, and noted that Job distinguished himself from his three friends in his understanding of the supernatural work of God in creation and his awareness of the awe and majesty of the Creator.²⁸ Taken together, these observations sustain the idea that the book is the one OT book that is a “theology” in the more restrictive sense of the word, a “study” of God and the divine/human relationship. Job’s “amen” was wrenched from his soul when his acute suffering was put in the light of YHWH’s sovereign work in creation, which spread against the backdrop of Job’s pain and personal loss. Even though the Creator never mentions the pain and loss, his appearance elicits an “amen” that resounds antiphonally across the expanse of the Torah-wisdom spectrum. Hans-Jürgen Hermisson remarks that YHWH’s appearance was only a supplementary part of Job’s answer to his question, and that was the theophany itself, a motif that is alien to wisdom,²⁹ and, we should observe, shared with Torah.

IV. COMPLETION OF THE CIRCLE

A clear hint that the circle is closing may be found in the brief words of Augur in Prov 30:2–6.³⁰ While it too is a creation text, I have saved it until now in order show the launch trajectory of wisdom’s movement toward an identification, not merely *with* Torah, but *as* Torah. This may be the capstone of wisdom’s affirmation of Torah in Proverbs, a capstone of content

²⁷ “Of God” is implied.

²⁸ Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 57–62.

²⁹ Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, “Observation on the Creation Theology in Wisdom,” in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 131.

³⁰ Here I footnote my student, Christopher Ansberry, who read this paper and drew my attention to the significance of Augur’s words.

and of placement. It is a creation text, dealing with how one receives knowledge of the Holy One (lit. "holy things/ones"). The creation language belongs to the tradition of Job 38, Proverbs 8, and Ps 104:1–4, in the sense that it is highly poetic but is like the Genesis narrative in its use of the primeval terms of creation: the heavens, the waters, and the earth (Prov 30:4). The proud rhetorical question challenges the silent auditor, just as YHWH challenged Job in chapter 38:

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?
 Who has gathered the wind in his fists?
 Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?
 Who has established the ends of the earth?
 What is his name, and what is his son's name?
 Surely you know. (Prov 30:4)

When no answer was forthcoming, Augur himself offered his own insight: "Every word of God proves true: he is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Prov 30:5). And then, in words reminiscent of Moses' language in Deut 4:2,³¹ he cautions against augmenting the words of God: "Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Prov 30:5–6). This statement sums up the general thrust of wisdom, especially as represented in Proverbs, insisting on the inadequacy of human knowledge, and the complete sufficiency of divine revelation as it is given in God's words.³²

The Torah paradigm as it is represented in wisdom comes full circle, not in the Jewish canon of Scripture, but in the post-exilic book of Ben Sira. Gerald T. Sheppard³³ proposes that in the exilic and post-exilic era wisdom became a hermeneutical construct by which to interpret Torah. He sees this outcome as the result of a process, the evidence of which I have dealt with in this paper in its literary form, but not in its developmental stages. In this study I have tried to present evidence that wisdom identified *with* Torah. In Ben Sira the circle is completed when wisdom is identified *as* Torah. In the same vein as Proverbs 8, wisdom came into being at creation "from the mouth of the Most High" (Sir 24:3, 9), and cut her path through Israel's history, ministering in the tabernacle, and finding a "resting place" in Jerusalem (Sir 24:10, 11). The circle closes in Sir. 24:23 when wisdom becomes synonymous with Torah: "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us."

Perhaps the most genuine testimony to wisdom's devotion to Torah is her becoming a synonym of Torah.³⁴ While this result was not part of her

³¹ "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you?" (Deut 4:2).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

³⁴ See John H. Sailhamer, *An Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 247–49; Michael Victory Houston, "The Identification of Torah as Wisdom: A Traditio-Critical Analysis of Deuteronomy 4:1–8 and 30:11–20" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1987); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

journey in the biblical canon, the journey gives evidence that she is moving in that direction. At this stage of development, wisdom's response to Torah is "amen and amen."

V. CONCLUSION

We have looked at the Torah elements and ideas in wisdom under the rubrics of creation, monotheism, and the fear of God. All along her journey in the OT canon, her varying decibels of affirmation set the trajectory in the direction of Ben Sira's identification of wisdom *as* Torah. Thus wisdom has helped to chart the course that leads to the Torah-centered Judaism of the post-exilic era.