

AN INTRODUCTION TO WISDOM LITERATURE

Christ Church Manchester / School of Theology / 16 March 2024

WHAT IS WISDOM?

- Learning, instruction, knowledge, insight — but also riddles and a lifelong struggle (Prov 1.1-7) as well as practical skills (Exod 35.31; 2 Sam 2.22).
- A group of books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) — but “wisdom” appears also in the Pentateuch (Gen 1-3; 37-50; Deut 31-33), the historical books (1 Kgs 4-6), the prophets (Isa 11; Jer 8-9), and the Psalms (Pss 1, 19; 32; 37; 49; 119).
- A gift accessible to all (Prov 2.1-6; 8.1-5) — but also hidden and obscure (Prov 30.1-3; Job 28).
- The fear of the LORD (Prov 1.7; 9.10; 31.30; Job 28.28; Eccl 5.7; 12.13) — but also common-sense.

TRADITION & COSMOS

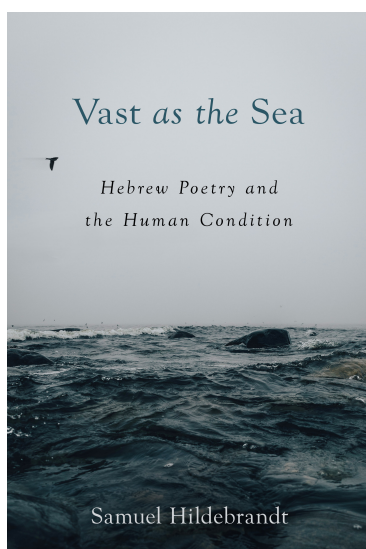
- Wisdom literature is consistently addressed to youth (Prov 1.8; 2.11; Eccl 11.9; Job 32). Wisdom is a community product and a conversation (Job and his friends; Hezekiah’s wise men of Prov 25).
- At the same time, wisdom is presented as something that belongs to God only, that must be revealed, that is counterintuitive to human thought (Prov 30.5; Job 28.23-28).
 - “The LORD founded the earth by wisdom” (Prov 3.19).

OPEN EYES IN A WISE WORLD

- What do these passages tell us about God’s wise world and how do they teach us to be wise?
 - Prov 30.18-20, 21-23 / Job 38.39-41 & 39.26-30 / Eccl 1.3-9

OLD TESTAMENT WISDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

- Jesus, our wisdom from God (1 Cor 1.30)
- Jesus, our wisdom teacher (Matt 6.25-34)



FURTHER READING

Samuel Hildebrandt, *Vast as the Sea: Hebrew Poetry and the Human Condition*. Fortress Press, 2023 [£17.50].

Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction*, 2011.

William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*, 1996.