

The Worldview of the Wisdom Books

The Wisdom books provide us with a great deal of profitable information to help us live wisely and piously in the midst of our age of uncertainty. Here is a brief attempt to construct a worldview oriented to the perspective of these books.

a. Foundation for Thought.

Throughout these three books (but especially in Proverbs) there is to be seen a clear antithesis between God-centered (Theistic) thinking, and man-centered (Anti-theistic) thinking. To “fear the Lord” (Prov. 1:7; Job 28:28) is said to be the beginning of knowledge, and to despise it is to eschew wisdom and instruction. Moreover, to know God in His holiness is to find understanding (Prov. 9:10). These things - the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of the holy - must be in place before the ear is truly open to wisdom (Prov. 1:2-5). To proceed without such understanding (Eccles. 12:13) is to expend one’s life in vanity and emptiness (Eccles. 2:11, 22-24; 6:7-8). Therefore, the starting point of a biblical world and life view is the fear of God (Eccles. 7:18). Without that, it is impossible to comprehend the world truly (Prov. 28:5).

b. Creation and Providence.

The first thing one must know after the fear of God are the works of God in Creation and Providence. Man is not some cosmic accident and he is not sustained by impersonal

naturalistic forces. He exists in this world because he and the world were made for each other. The heavens and earth were made by God (Job 9:8; 26:13; 38:7) and so also was man (Job 33:4-6; Eccles. 12:1; 7:29). Indeed, part of the lesson Job learned was about the remarkable fitness of creatures to their environment (Job 39:1-8, 27-30).

In addition to the doctrine of Creation, we are also told about God's sustaining Providence and His continual Governance over what He has made. It is the Lord who preserves men (Job 34:14), sometimes to the bewilderment of some (Eccles. 6:8-12; 7:15; Job. 12:6). But God keeps His own counsel (Job 40:2, 8; 33:13). It is for us to trust in Him (Job 13:15; Prov. 3:5-6; 16:3, 20; Eccles. 12:13), and not to question His ways (Eccles. 8:4; Prov. 3:7).

We are told that there is a time for everything (Eccles. 3:1ff), and that we cannot know what is to happen in the future (Eccles. 8:6-7). We must see that things belong to God (Job 41:11), and that He preserves and governs this world with infinite wisdom (Prov. 8:14ff; Eccles. 11:5).

c. The Plight of Man.

To begin to make sense of our world it is imperative to take the Fall seriously. Man is born to trouble (Job 5:7). He has departed from the right way (Prov. 2:13, 15; 4:14-15, 19; Eccles. 7:29). In fact, there is a way which *seems* right to him, but its end is death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

The problem with man is his proud rebellion against his Maker (Prov. 1:29-30). He is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12:15; 16:2), trusting to himself (Prov. 28:26), while making a mock at sin (Prov. 14:9). All men are sinners (Eccles. 7:20; 8:11; Job 15:16). They are froward (perverse in their reasoning-Prov. 21:8; 3:32; 6:12), and foolish (Prov. 10:23; 5:14b; 18:6-7; 27:22). This means they cannot interpret God's world wisely. In other words, the view of life of a sinner is at odds with God's purpose for us. All this means that, try as he might, fallen man cannot find meaning without God (Prov. 17:24; Eccles. 1:14; 2:1-11).

d. Judgment.

There is no doubt that men are guilty (Job 4:17; 9:28; Eccles. 9:3). A man's sins find him out (Job. 4:8; 13:26; Prov. 11:5-6, 27:22:8). This means the prospect of judgment lies before every man (Eccles. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14; Prov. 24:12; 20:26). There is no point in railing against God. He is completely just (Job 37:23; 8:3). This knowledge ought to provoke men to depart from evil (Prov. 16:6), for the righteous shall be approved (Job 17:9; Prov. 4:18; 11:31). The voice of wisdom beckons us to forsake our foolishness and live (Prov. 9:6). God is a Redeemer as well as a Judge (Job 19:25; 13:16). It is wise, then, to be reconciled with Him (Job 22:21).

To summarize, we have shown that a proper perspective on the world must include several facets not associated with the thinking of the person without God, beginning with the fear of God Himself. Next we have to see the world as created and sustained by God.

A true understanding of ourselves must take into account the fall and rebellion of man and the noetic effects of sin which renders the natural man's autonomous reasoning foolish. Nevertheless, men sense the coming judgment of God on them (Job 15:21; 18:14). We ought to acknowledge all these things and attempt to live our lives in reference to them (Prov. 4:23).

e. How Shall We Then Live?

In the eighth chapter of Ecclesiastes, we find a great passage upon which to begin to build a practical world and life view. We shall briefly describe some of its elements. If we allow the "king" in these verses (see vv. 2-4) to be the Lord, we are reminded against foolishly dismissing ourselves from His presence, and if we do, not to remain "in an evil thing", for God will do what He wills (v. 3). Besides, to "go out of His sight" is to leave the place of power (v. 4). It follows that to "keep the commandment" is to ensure peace (vv. 2, 5), and to know God's time and judgment when it comes (v. 6). And if it tarries and we are tempted to be glum (v. 8), we can rouse ourselves, trusting to God's providence (v. 7).

In addition to the above, one ought to give heed to the voice of wisdom elsewhere in these books. Proverbs, for example, prescribes many measures for staying out of the snares of the wicked (Prov. 1:10; 4:14-15; 23-27; 6:20-35; 8:33-36; 11:2-4, etc.). We find the same in Job (5:3; 8:20; 23:12). We should understand that filling our lives with

worldly joys cannot shut up the deep undertow of sorrow and discontent which such a lifestyle produces (Prov. 24:13).