WISDOM AND THE BUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE:

בְּרוּנֵלָה הַמַּעֲקֵדָה מְדִינָתָהּ ᴵ in Exod 25–40

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A long-standing question in both OT Theology and OT criticism can effectively be summarized, “What should we do with wisdom?” This question is essentially two-fold. On the one hand, it involves the matter of the theological relationship of the wisdom literature to the rest of the OT, with several scholars arguing that the OT wisdom corpus lacks any explicit concern for concepts that are basic to redemptive history, including the concepts of covenant, priesthood and Messiah. On the other hand, the question involves the matter of the perceived

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presence of wisdom and its related themes in other books of the OT. While some are concerned with determining, in non-wisdom texts, the influence of a so-called “wisdom tradition,” that is, the distinctive thought of a social group whose members produced the wisdom literature, others simply explore how wisdom vocabulary and themes figure into the final form of OT texts outside the wisdom literature. Wilson labels the latter sort of exploration a search for “wisdom literary influence,” contending that any biblical author, writing within any setting, may work “wisdom elements” into a given genre.

Deuteronomy and the Wisdom Literature, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 225 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 166–8, 183.


The purpose of this essay is to explore the “wisdom literary influence” of הַכְּסִיָּה ("skill"; “wisdom”) and בֵּיתָם ("skillfull"; “wise”) in Exod 25–40,\(^7\) with special attention given to how these terms contribute to one’s understanding of the tabernacle, as well as Israel’s worship within it. The paper will first summarize how הַכְּסִיָּה and בֵּיתָם fit into the discourse of Exod 25–40. Second, using cognitive linguistics, it will explore how the semantics of these terms can enhance one’s understanding of the terms within the passage. Finally, it will assess potential contributions of Exod 25–40 for an OT theology of wisdom.

*The Place of הַכְּסִיָּה and בֵּיתָם within the Discourse of Exod 25–40*

An appropriate point of departure in examining the meaning and significance of הַכְּסִיָּה and בֵּיתָם in Exod 25–40 is determining how the author has woven the terms into this passage’s textual fabric. The terms appear a total of 16 times in the passage, occurring in the following verses: 28:3; 31:3, 6; 35:10, 25, 26, 31, 35; 36:1, 2, 4, 8.\(^8\) Unfortunately, space will not permit a full-scale discourse analysis of this passage here. However, the passage roughly divides into the sections reflected in the following chart:

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<td>Introduction.</td>
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\(^8\)Some verses have multiple occurrences.
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<th>Verse Range</th>
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<td>28:1–43</td>
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<td>31:1–11</td>
<td>Description of how God will equip the artisans.</td>
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<td>31:12–18</td>
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As one would expect, the introduction (25:1–9) provides information essential for understanding the discourse that follows. There, God commands Moses to assemble the needed
supplies and highlights the tabernacle’s chief purpose, to be a “sanctuary” (יִרָאָה)—a holy space
where God is worshiped and where he will reside among the Israelites (25:8).

Additionally, in this introductory speech, God commands Moses to construct the tabernacle
according to the “plan” (יִסְצַב) he has shown him (25:9). Thus, the introduction references
three facets that converge in the ensuing discourse: (1) the creation of a sanctuary with holy
objects of worship, (2) the presence of God in this sanctuary and (3) a plan or design to which
the builders must conform their work.

The tabernacle’s purpose as the place of God’s presence pervades the discourse. The account of the Golden Calf itself attests to this purpose; upon Israel’s worship of the calf,
God’s covenant with his people is broken, he threatens to withdraw his presence from his people
altogether (33:3; cf. 29:45–46) and, not coincidentally, the plan to build the tabernacle is
suspended. When God restores the covenant at the interceding of Moses, the building of the
tabernacle commences and the passage culminates in God’s filling the tabernacle with his
presence (40:34–38).

Accordingly, the terms used to describe the tabernacle reflect God’s presence there. As noted above, the tabernacle is identified as a “sanctuary” (יִרָאָה), that is, a holy space,
built and set apart specially for God (25:8). That this is the first way the tabernacle is identified

9 יִרָאָה, "HALOT, 625–6.

10 See the thorough discussion by Dozeman, who suggests that יִסְצַב refers to a
“blueprint” of the tabernacle (Commentary on Exodus, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary [Grand
Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, 1st ed., The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish
Publication Society, 1991), 159.
in Exod 25–40 sets the tone for how the structure should be understood. Fundamentally, the tabernacle reflects God’s holiness and thus his separateness from his people.11 Yet, at the same time, the term נְדָקִים (‘tabernacle’ or ‘abode’) reflects God’s nearness to the people, portraying the structure as a place of God’s residence with them.12 Additionally, the tent itself is often referred to as לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם (“the tent of meeting”),13 alluding to the tabernacle’s purpose as a setting where Israel encounters and responds to God’s presence.14 Accordingly, God refers to the tabernacle as the place “where I will meet with you” (רָאָס לָךְ לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם) (29:42; 30:6,


13 Historical critical scholars often note that לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם appears in Exod 33:7–11, where it describes the tent where Moses meets with God in the aftermath of the Golden Calf sin. This observation, according to some, raises a tradition-historical problem, since, among other things, the tent of meeting described in Exod 25–31 is not constructed until Exod 35–40. Concluding that the tabernacle is fictitious and its depiction is derived from Solomon’s temple (see Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, Scholars Press Reprints and Translations Series [Atlanta, Ga: Scholars, 1994], 38–45), some have argued that the tent of meeting described in Exod 33:7–11 is part of an earlier tradition (E and D; see also Num 11:16, 24, 26ff; 12:4, 10; Deut 31:15), which partially influenced the priestly portrayal of the tabernacle. For a summary of this view, see Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 590–91. However, it seems that these tents of meeting were two distinct tents, with two distinct purposes, the tent in Exod 33:7–11 having an oracular function, and the tabernacle tent of meeting, in Exod 25–31, having an added cultic function. On this latter view, see Richard E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” DOTP, 810–11, 818.

14 The expression occurs 66 times with reference to the tabernacle in Exod 25–40 (see 27:21; 28:43; 29:4, 10, 30–44; 30:16–36; 31:7; 35:21; 38:8, 30; 39:32, 40; 40:2–34). On the significance of the expression, see Ralph E. Hendrix, “Miškān and ’Ōhel Mô’ēd: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extra-Biblical Usage,” AUSS 29 (1991): 213–23; Ralph E. Hendrix, “The Use of Miškān and ’Ōhel Mô’ēd in Exodus 25–40,” AUSS 30 (1992): 3–13. In the first article, Hendrix argues that the terms נְדָקִים and לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם are not interchangeable synonyms, since the former signifies a “dwelling place” and the latter stresses the “encounter” between God and Israel within the tent structure. In the second article, Hendrix shows that, within Exod 25–40, נְדָקִים appears in contexts focusing on the building of the tent structure and לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם appears where the text stresses the cultic function of the structure. Thus, לִבְנַי חֲקָדָם connotes Israel’s encounter with God’s presence and their response of worship to that presence.
Thus, the tabernacle not only highlights God’s holiness, but also his nearness to his people; rather than opposing one another, these two notions complement each other.\textsuperscript{15}

The very shape of the discourse betrays an authorial strategy to present God’s taking up residence in the tabernacle as a covenantal reality. It is no coincidence that, upon seeing the sin with the Golden Calf, Moses smashes the tablets inscribed with the Decalogue, symbolizing the breaking of the covenant, and, subsequently, God withdraws from the people (32:19; 33:1–7).\textsuperscript{16} When God reestablishes the covenant, producing new tablets, he renews his commitment to be present with them (33:14–17; 34:1–28). Moreover, two reminders for Israel to keep the Sabbath bracket the account of Israel’s sin with the Golden Calf, thus concluding the body of instructions for building, as well as introducing the narrative describing the actual act of building (31:12–18; 35:1–3). The upshot of these reminders seems to be that Israel should observe the Sabbath, \textit{even as it builds the tabernacle}; failure to observe it would undermine the very basis for the tabernacle’s existence in the first place—God’s covenant with Israel (see Exod 29:45–46; Lev 26:9–13).\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}See Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 809.


Thus, the passage indicates that the presence of God, and ultimately his covenant with Israel, occasions the construction of the tabernacle. Additionally, the passage reiterates that the Israelites must construct this sanctuary according to God’s plan, or commands (25:9, 40; 34:4; 39:1, 5, 7, 21–31, 43, 40:19–32). It is in direct reference to the artisans’ ability to execute God’s plan for creating the tabernacle that הָרוֹן and/or בְּכֵם appear in the passage. When God summarizes how he will equip the artisans for carrying out their work (31:1–11), he explains that he has equipped these artisans with “wisdom” (תְּכַנְנָה) (31:3, 6). One should note that this summary also stresses the need for the builders to execute God’s instructions—or plan—for building the tabernacle and its accessories, and depicts this need as the basis for God’s gift of wisdom (31:6, 11).

Executing any sort of design or plan requires some degree of understanding. Thus, the passage suggests that this is why God supplies the artisans with wisdom, to equip the people with the requisite understanding for creating the tabernacle. God indicates that he grounds Bezalel’s artistic ability in “wisdom, understanding and knowledge” (תְּכַנְנָה וַחֵי הָרוֹן), which underscores the cognitive dimension of his work (31:3–5; cf. 35:31–33).18

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Moreover, Moses indicates that God gives wisdom in order for the workers “to know how to do all the work of the service of the sanctuary” (36:1) and so that Oholiab will have the capacity to pass this understanding on to others (35:34). Perhaps wisdom’s cognitive import for executing the work according to God’s plan is most evident in 36:2–7, where the wise workers discern that they have more supplies than necessary for completing the construction according to God’s commands, leading them to direct Moses to stop the offering of materials (36:5).

Two reasons, with overlapping concerns, are apparent for the passage’s emphasis on properly executing God’s plan for the tabernacle. First, the holy nature of the tabernacle and its accessories requires that they be produced in a certain way. A connection exists between the holiness of the tabernacle and its accessories and the way they are made, including the materials used, the difficulty in making them, as well as the form that they take.\textsuperscript{19} The prohibition banning unauthorized production of the anointing oil and incense supports this connection (30:32, 37), as do the different materials featured in the zones of the tabernacle (see below).\textsuperscript{20} Holiness means that the items are designated uniquely for God’s purposes (see 30:37); consequently, they must be made the way he wants them made. Therefore, the holiness of the objects—the tabernacle itself and the instruments for carrying out Israel’s worship—requires his revealing a plan for making them, as well as the artisans’ executing that plan.


Perhaps the clearest way the passage shows how wisdom equips the artisans to create objects of holiness appears in 28:1–4, where God introduces his instructions for creating the priestly garments (28:5–41). God explains that the artisans will produce garments that are “for glory and beauty” (ךֵּיתֶרֶת חַדְּשֶׁיָּה) (28:2b). Furthermore, these are “holy garments” (ךֵּיתֶרֶת בֵּית נַחֲלָת) and they have the purpose “to consecrate him [Aaron]” (ךַּדְּשֶׁיָּה) to serve as a priest (28:2a–3). Moreover, God explains that the artisans will make the garments by virtue of “a spirit of wisdom” (ךֵיתֶרֶת רַעָן) with which he has supplied them (28:3). Thus, the garments, by virtue of being produced with wisdom, and having a certain aesthetic quality, visually reflect the holy status assigned to Aaron and his sons as Israel’s priests.21 Furthermore, the creation of the priestly garments exemplifies how, through supplying his people with wisdom for executing his plan, God equips the people to create a setting where they have a way of responding to his presence in worship.22

Second, the presence of God within the tabernacle requires it to have a certain spatial arrangement or design. The craftspeople create three zones (the courtyard, the holy place


22Other items created through wisdom enable the people to respond to God’s presence through worship, including the altars, the laver, the lampstand, the bread of presence, the incense and the anointing oil.
and most holy place) that order the tabernacle’s space and accessories around degrees or levels of holiness (the most holy place is holier than the holy place, the latter of which is holier than the courtyard, which is holier than the space outside). The zones are distinguished in two primary ways from one another. First, cloth boundaries, including curtains, a screen at the entrance to the holy place, a veil at the entrance to the most holy place and even a screen separating the courtyard from the camp outside, separate the zones (26:31–37; 27:16). The encounter between God and his people on Mt. Sinai indicates that the holy presence of God with people requires boundaries for the latter’s protection (Exod 19:12, 24); serving as a “portable Sinai,” the tabernacle requires them as well, separating God’s presence in the most holy place from the people in the rest of the complex. Second, the materials used in making the curtains,

23 Haran, Temples, 164–5; Jenson, Graded Holiness, 89–93; Balentine, Torah’s Vision, 139.

24 See Brown, Ethos, 76; Jenson, Graded Holiness, 89, 92–93.

boundaries and accessories correlate with the holiness level of the particular zone where they are found, thus distinguishing each zone visually.\(^2^6\)

Creating the tabernacle according to this structural design requires “wisdom” for working with gold, silver and bronze, which are necessary for making the zones distinct visually (31:3–4; 35:31–32). Additionally, it requires wisdom in working with threads, as well as with wood and metal, in order to produce the cloth boundaries and structures for hanging them (35:25–26, 32–33, 35). Moreover, placing the images of cherubim into the fabric of the curtains, a feature that visually distinguishes the tabernacle as a holy domain, requires wisdom in weaving (36:8–9).

Thus, in light of the discourse of Exod 25–40, בְּצָלֶל and אוֹלוֹּיאָב serve as the means by which Israel constructs the tabernacle in order for God to reside with them in fulfillment of his covenant promise. By supplying certain Israelites with wisdom, God equips his people with the needed competence for constructing his holy sanctuary according to his plan.\(^2^7\) As a result of executing this plan, Israel produces a holy structure with boundaries, where God’s presence resides in Israel’s midst, and with holy instruments and accessories, by which Israel may respond to God’s presence through worship.

\(^2^6\) The accessories inside the holy and most holy places are either made with gold or wood overlaid with gold, while the accessories in the courtyard are either made with bronze or wood overlaid with bronze. Additionally, the quality and complexity of fabric used increases as one moves from the courtyard into the most holy and holy places. For further discussion of these matters, see Haran, Temples, 158–65; Jenson, Graded Holiness, 101–5.

\(^2^7\) Cf. Hess, who connects the artisans’ being filled with God’s Spirit (which the passage associates with their receiving wisdom) with their competence to do the necessary work (see “Bezalel and Oholiab: Spirit and Creativity,” in Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2011], 165).
Cognitive Linguistics and the Semantics of Creative Wisdom

The question arises: Do דָּרַךְ וַדַּרְךְ refer to “wisdom” in Exod 25–40, or simply manual skill? A cognitive-linguistic semantic study of דָּרַךְ וַדַּרְךְ in the OT may further illumine the uses and meaning of the terms in Exod 25–40. Cognitive linguistics (also known as “cognitive grammar”) is perhaps best defined as the theory asserting that the human capacity for processing, and using, language is of a piece with the capacity for processing other knowledge with the mind. Just as all other knowledge is conceptual, linguistic knowledge has an essentially conceptual function.

Moreover, according to cognitive-linguistic semantics, the concept represented by a given word is intertwined with other concepts. Thus, cognitive linguists have developed a set of terms for referring to the various concepts that contribute to the semantic value of a word. “Profile” refers to the concept that the word itself “designates.” “Base” refers to the “conceptual content that is inherently, intrinsically, and obligatorily invoked by the

28 The latter meaning is suggested by Whybray, Intellectual Tradition, 83.


31 See especially the influential essay by Fillmore (“Frame Semantics,” 111).

expression.”"33 “Cognitive domain” refers to the “more generalized ‘background’ knowledge configuration against which conceptualization is achieved.”34

Space will not permit a full-scale cognitive linguistic semantic study of הָאִיר and הָאָר here. As Solomon’s use of wisdom demonstrates, the OT presents “wisdom” as a multifaceted concept, with a wide array of manifestations (1 Kgs 4:32 [5:12]).35 Accordingly, the terms appear in a wide variety of cognitive domains in the OT36 and it is clear that, within Exod 25–40, they are used within the cognitive domain of craftsmanship. Additionally, the discourse context of the terms in Exod 25–40 indicates that, in this passage, the terms profile

Linguistics, 15; Van Wolde, Reframing, 57. Hence, the word “quarterback” profiles the offensive player who generally calls the plays in the huddle, receives the snap from center and distributes the football to other players.


34Taylor, Cognitive Grammar, 195. Cf. Van Wolde, Reframing, 57. Whereas Langacker (“Introduction,” 6) treats “cognitive domain” and “base” as one and the same thing, Taylor draws a distinction between the two terms, differentiating between a specific concept implied by another and a broader field of “‘background’ knowledge.” The cognitive domain for “quarterback” would be the game of football (including its rules and typical procedures).


36The domains, many of which overlap in some respects, include, but are not limited to: administering justice (Deut 1:13–17; 16:18–20; 1 Kgs 3:16–28; Isa 11:2–5; Prov 20:6) ethics (Deut 4:6–9; Prov, 2:10–15; 3:33–35; 4:11–14; 8:1–7, 12–13; Ps 111:10), prophecy (Gen 41:39; Dan 1:17; 5:11–12, 15), speech (Prov 10:31; 14:3; 15:2, 7; 18:4; 31:26; Ps 37:30), economics (Ezek 28:4, 5), craftsmanship (Is 40:18–20; Jer 10:9; 1 Kgs 7:14; Prov 24:3; 1 Chr 22:15; 2 Chr 2:6 [7], 13–14 [14–15]) and sailing (Ps 107:27).
heightened understanding and have the base of the “heart” or “mind” (בְּלֵא). The profile and base of חָגְגֵרָה and חָגְגָרָה in Exod 25–40 are thus consistent with those in a wide variety of cognitive domains throughout the OT, calling into question the claim that the terms in that passage only refer to “skill” to the exclusion of “wisdom.”

Within the domain of craftsmanship, חָגְגֵרָה and חָגְגָרָה refer to wisdom, or heightened competence, which equips someone to carry out a creative act. Moreover, the creative process results in an object that exhibits full functionality, that is to say, it is well-made and fulfills its intended purpose. This functionality involves two facets. First, this functionality

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37 For evidence that the profile of the terms is heightened understanding, see the discussion above on how the terms refer to the cognitive capacity God gives the artisans for carrying out their work. For evidence that the base of the terms is the “mind” or “heart” note the uses of בְּלֵא in Exod 28:3; 31:6; 39:24, 34–35; 36:1–2, 8. Just as one cannot explain the term “quarterback” without reference to a football team, one cannot adequately explain wisdom without making reference to the mind. Therefore, the concept of the mind is necessarily implied by the notion of “wisdom.” On the role of the בְּלֵא in the OT as the seat of the intellect and wisdom, see Hans Walter Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: S.C.M., 1974), 40–58; Thomas Krüger, “Das ‘Herz’ in der alttestamentlichen Anthropologie,” in Anthropologische Aufbrüche: alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie, ed. Andreas Wagner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009), 103–4. Cf. Alex Luc, “בְּלֵא,” NIDOTTE, 2:749-53; “בְּלֵא,” HALOT, 513–5; Carolyn S. Lee, “Translating the Hebrew Body into English Metaphor,” in Social Sciences and Biblical Translation, ed. Dietmar Neufeld, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium 41 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 110–16, 121–2.

38 For example, see the apparent connection of חָגְגֵרָה or חָגְגָרָה to knowledge (עֲרֵב/ חָגְגָרָה) or understanding (וְחָגְגָרָה) in the following cognitive domains: ethics (Prov 1:7; 2:2–3, 6, 10; 3:13; 10:23), prophecy (Gen 41:39), craftsmanship (2 Chron 2:6 [7], 13 [14]) and administering justice (1 Kgs 3:7, 9, 12; Is 11:2). Additionally, see, for example, the connection of the terms to the “mind” or “heart” (בְּלֵא) in the cognitive domains of ethics (Prov 3:1, 3; 4:4; 6:21; 7:3; Ps 90:12) and administering justice (1 Kgs 3:12; 5:9 [4:29]). Also, note that Qohelet ascribes the difference between the wise and fools to a difference between their minds/hearts (Eccl 10:2–3).

39 This is in opposition to Whybray (Intellectual Tradition, 83). This further substantiates Van Leeuwen’s criticism of Whybray’s conclusions (“Cosmos, Temple, House,” 418–9).
is related to order and stability. For instance, in his polemic against idols, Isaiah mentions that idols require human wisdom in order to be stable and not collapse (40:20). Using architectural imagery, Psalm 104 describes God’s creating the earth “in wisdom” (םָבֶל כָּלֵב) (104:24); because such a “skilled engineer” has laid its foundation, the earth is stable and “does not wobble” (םָבֶל כָּלֵב) (104:5). Moreover, the earth exhibits order, both in its temporal structures (104:19–23) and in the habitats it provides for the life within it (104:16–18, 26–30).

When necessary, order involves the setting of boundaries to neutralize threats, which might hinder the created work’s ability to function. Psalm 104 recounts how God has established a “boundary” (סְתֵּר) for the waters that once submerged the earth, lest they move beyond their newly assigned “place” and overtake the land as they had before (104:9; cf. Prov 8:29). Similarly, Job, in depicting God as “the divine architect” behind the world, notes that God has given order to the world through establishing limits on its potentially chaotic forces.


41 See Van Leeuwen, “Cosmos, Temple, House,” 402. Cf. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9,” Semeia, Liminality 50 (1990): 123–6. Additionally, Clifford comments that the “threefold repetition of bal” in vv. 5, 9 ties together the establishment of the earth on the one hand and the boundaries for the water on the other (“A Note on Ps 104:5–9,” JBL 100 [1981]: 88). Cf. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2011), 49; Walter Brueggemann and W. H. Bellinger Jr., Psalms, New Cambridge Bible commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 446. Barker argues that the waters described in these verses are the waters of the Noahic flood and not the collection of waters in Gen 1:9 (“The Waters of the Earth: An Exegetical Study of Psalm 104:1-9,” GTJ 7 [1986]: 57–80). This is possible, but the use of גָּבִיל (“place”) in 104:8 appears to be a reference to Gen 1:9, where the same term appears. Also, as Clifford argues, the psalmist’s use of סְתֵּר ties 104:6–9 to the creation context of 104:5, which describes God’s setting the earth on its foundation. Moreover, while Barker (78–79) argues that the flooding of the earth in Gen 7 precludes the interpretation of Ps 104:9 as an allusion to Gen 1:9, this is not necessarily so. The
This order in the world arises from God’s use of wisdom: he explored wisdom (תֵּבֶן) and applied it, setting it up (חַכִּית) as the very substructure of the world (28:27). Second, such functionality is related to the artisan’s ability to execute rightly a plan for creating the new thing. King Hiram of Tyre replies to Solomon’s request for help in building the temple by agreeing to send Huram-abi, a “wise person” (חַכִּית), who is able to use the requisite materials “and to consider any plan given to him” (2 Chr 2:13 [14]). The gist of Hiram’s elaboration is that Huram-abi has the ability to use raw materials in conformity to a design or plan, so that Huram-abi can produce the sort of structure that Solomon envisions, which will function as God’s temple.

Accordingly, Exod 25–40 presents the tabernacle as a functional structure that exhibits order and stability, resulting from the way the artisans execute the building plan. The point of Ps 104:9 is that the earth’s bodies of water are restrained from naturally overtaking the earth’s surface; as a supernatural act of God’s judgment, the flood in Gen 7 was a unique exception to the waters’ restraint (see Gen 7:4, 11–12).

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44 On the tabernacle as an ordered sanctuary, see Jon D. Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row,
craftspeople in Exod 25–40 are equipped to build the tabernacle according to the “plan” (יוֹנֵבָדָה) God reveals to Moses (25:9, 40; cf. 31:6, 11; 35:10, 36:1, 5, 9). Also, as a result of God’s filling them with wisdom, Exod 25–40 states that Bezalel and Oholiab are able “to consider a plan” (דַעַתְוא דַעַתְוא בָּאַל) (31:4; 35:32, cf. 35:33, 35), a statement that resonates with king Hiram’s description of Huram-abi (2 Chr 2:13 [14]).

The tabernacle especially exhibits order and stability in the following ways: First, through their creating the cloth boundaries and their use of metals, the artisans supply order to the tabernacle, demarcating zones of holiness within it (see discussion above). Furthermore, the boundaries provide stability to the tabernacle, a place where Israel approaches its holy God. Since even unauthorized viewing of the furniture inside the tabernacle tent would result in death (see Num 18:3), let alone unauthorized entry into the tent itself (see Num 3:10, 38; 18:7), the construction and implementation of these boundaries add stability as Israel gathers near to God in worship.

Second, the craftspeople create the priestly garments and the laver, which provide order and stability to the ritual worship performed in the tabernacle. The priestly garments

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45 Jenson notes that “order” serves a fundamental role in the so-called “Priestly theology of the cult,” which includes the description of the tabernacle in Exod 25–40 (see *Graded Holiness*, 215).

46 See ibid., 89.

47 Ibid., 108.
supply order by designating which people will serve as priests.\textsuperscript{48} God’s holiness requires that those approaching God’s presence in the tabernacle have a special holy status. Thus the craftspeople use their wisdom to create elaborate priestly garments for consecrating the priests, visibly marking these priests as holy and able to approach God on Israel’s behalf (28:3, 35–38).\textsuperscript{49}

Because they designate the priests as holy, the garments keep the priests from dying when they approach God’s presence to perform their service (28:35, 43). Similarly, the laver provides purification for the priests before they draw near to God’s presence; by washing with the water from the laver before approaching the altar or God himself, the priests avoid death (30:20). Thus, the priestly garments and the laver supply stability to the tabernacle and the worship that takes place within it.

Therefore, it is through the artisans’ wisdom—their competent ability to work with wood, stone, metal and threads—that the tabernacle is functional and able to fulfill its purpose as a sanctuary where God resides with his people, and where the people approach him. Of course, the tabernacle’s functionality, order and stability are attributable to God’s plan for

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., 124.

\textsuperscript{49}On the connection between the wisdom of the craftspeople, the elaborate nature of the priestly garments and the garments’ function of consecrating the priests, see the discussion of Exod 28:1–4 above.
building it. Yet, the realization of these features requires the architectural and “aesthetic know-how” of the artisans, who received from God the wisdom necessary for executing his plan.  

Contributions of Exod 25–40 to an OT Theology of Wisdom

In evaluating the place of wisdom in OT theology, several scholars have focused their attention on the wisdom literature and the perceived theological differences between it and the rest of the OT. In assessing these differences, it is important to note, on the one hand, that the different emphases may be a feature of the distinct genres in question, rather than evidence of altogether different theological traditions. On the other hand, exploring the OT’s theology of wisdom does not only involve the study of the wisdom literature, but the study of wisdom and its themes wherever and however they may occur in the OT. Such an exploration entails examining how non-wisdom OT books incorporate wisdom elements into their presentations of redemptive history. Consequently, the study of the place of wisdom in OT theology must include, among other things, the study of the Pentateuch and its use of wisdom.

50 Brown, Ethos, 78. Also see Van Leeuwen, who argues that, within the thought of the ancient Near East, temple building reflected “human wisdom rooted in divine wisdom manifest in the provisioning and ordering of the cosmos,” though he does not discuss how the tabernacle in particular reflects such order (“Cosmos, Temple, House,” 421).


52 See Gerhard F. Hasel, Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1991), 204. Hasel writes, “On principle, a theology of the OT must tend toward themes, motifs, and concepts and must be presented with all the variety and all the limitations imposed on them by the OT itself” (italics are added).

53 Cf. Schultz, “Unity,” 302–3, who notes that scholars have investigated wisdom’s influence on the rest of the OT, and calls for more attention in investigating the rest of the OT’s influence on the wisdom literature. Schultz is correct in calling for the latter; however, assessments of the wisdom
Significantly, the Pentateuch depicts wisdom as something God uses to accomplish his covenantal purposes through Israel. The covenantal nature of wisdom appears in Deut 4:6, which closely ties “wisdom” (חכמה) to the keeping of the Law, the stipulations of Israel’s covenant with God.\(^{54}\) Among God’s purposes for his covenant with Israel is the blessing of the nations (Gen 12:3); thus, by keeping the Law, which the nations recognize as wise and as attesting to God’s righteousness (see 4:7–8), Israel participates in God’s covenant mission.\(^{55}\)

The Pentateuch, however, attests to wisdom’s role in accomplishing God’s covenantal purposes in other ways besides identifying the Law as a source of wisdom. Upon hearing Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams,\(^{56}\) Pharaoh deduces that Joseph must be one with whom “the Spirit of God” (רוח ה scrimmage) is present (41:38). He then declares to Joseph, “Because God has made all this known to you, there is no one who is understanding and wise (חכם) like you” (Gen 41:39). Pharaoh’s assessment of Joseph resonates with Joseph’s own tradition’s influence on the rest of the OT have, in the past, generally focused on proposing a certain Sitz im Leben of a given OT text, rather than investigating the theological importance of wisdom within that text. Thus, more studies are needed which give attention to the significance of wisdom to the exegesis and theology of these texts.


\(^{55}\)See O’Dowd, Wisdom of Torah, 72, 173.

claim, that only God could supply the interpretation of them (41:16); thus, Pharaoh’s remarks are included by the narrator here as a way of developing the latter’s own portrayal of Joseph, depicting him as wise.\(^{57}\) Joseph’s wisdom leads Pharaoh to install him as a senior administrator (41:41–44), positioning Joseph to obtain a place for his family to live during the famine in Canaan (47:1–6). Thus, Joseph’s wisdom, recognized by Pharaoh, is pivotal to the narrative: ultimately, Joseph’s rise to power, resulting from his divinely given wisdom, leads to Israel’s survival in Egypt (50:20).\(^{58}\)

Additionally, wisdom’s covenantal role appears at the conclusion of Deuteronomy, which tells of Joshua’s appointment as Moses’ successor as the people are on the verge of entering Canaan (34:9–12). The passage recalls Num 27:15–23, where God appoints Joshua as Israel’s next leader, and where Moses lays his hands upon Joshua, ritually symbolizing the transfer of authority.\(^{59}\) During the ritual, Joshua receives a portion of Moses’ “authority” (יִתְנַחֲמָה), equipping him to lead the people (Num 27:20). Similarly, Deuteronomy narrates that, upon having Moses’ hands laid upon him, Joshua “was filled with a spirit of wisdom


\(^{58}\)This is contrary to the interpretation of Redford, who rightly observes that Joseph’s wise plan is predicated upon his interpretation of the dreams, but who downplays the importance of the wise plan, and wisdom in general, to the rest of the chapter (A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50), Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 20 [Leiden: Brill, 1970], 103).

in order that the people will listen to him (34:9).\(^{60}\) The people’s conquest of Canaan required a leader with understanding, not only of conducting battles, but of the very will of God himself as revealed in the Torah.\(^{61}\) Therefore, wisdom functions to accomplish God’s covenantal purposes, equipping Joshua to lead the people, in Moses’ absence, ultimately to possess the land promised to Abraham (Gen 17:8; Deut 3:28; 31:23).\(^{62}\)

Exod 25–40 has much in common with both of these passages and their portrayals of wisdom. In a manner similar to the way in which Joseph is described (Gen 41:38–39), the tabernacle artisans are described as having “the Spirit of God” (יהוה השם), whose presence is closely associated with wisdom (Exod 31:3; 35:31). Additionally, just as Deuteronomy attests that Joshua has “a spirit of wisdom” (יהוה השם) (Deut 34:9), Exodus indicates that the tabernacle artisans have the same spirit (Exod 28:3).

Not coincidentally, all three texts describe people that God supplies with wisdom in order to execute his covenantal purposes. God supplies Joseph with the needed wisdom to interpret Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41:16, 39), he fills Joshua with wisdom for leading the conquest of the Promised Land (Deut 34:9; cf. Num 27:16–17) and he gives Bezalel, Oholiab and the rest of the artisans the wisdom needed for building the tabernacle (28:3; 31:3, 6; 35:31, 34–35).

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Moreover, just as Joseph and Joshua fill special roles in in the working out of God’s covenant purposes for Israel, the tabernacle artisans do the same. As the discourse of Exod 25–40 shows, the tabernacle’s existence is the very product of Israel’s covenant bond with God (see above).

By giving wisdom to Bezalel, Oholiab and the rest of the artisans, God establishes an environment where he will be present with his people, and where they will respond to him in worship, realities grounded in the covenant he made with them. Thus, in accordance with other texts in the Pentateuch, Exod 25–40 contributes to the OT theology of wisdom, showing that wisdom serves as one of the principal means God employs to accomplish his covenantal work.

**Conclusion**

In their studies of Exod 25–40, a number of scholars have noted comparisons between the creation of the tabernacle and the creation of the world in Gen 1:1–2:2. For instance, Gen 1:1–2:2 depicts God’s creation of the world in six days, culminating with God’s rest on the seventh day. Similarly, seven distinct speeches of God provide the instructions for building the tabernacle, the seventh of which reminds the people to rest from their work and observe the Sabbath.63 “Thus, what is at stake in Israel’s tabernacle is a model of a new world, with God at the center, living with his people.”64 Exod 25–40 makes clear that the tabernacle’s

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existence—and the new world to which it points—is deeply rooted in God’s special, covenant relationship with Israel. Moreover, its existence is rooted in the very wisdom of God.

Only a structure assembled with wisdom can model such a world. The tabernacle is not simply an “abode,” but a “sanctuary,” a space that reflects God’s holiness. Reflecting holiness requires that the tabernacle and all its accessories possess a certain formal and aesthetic quality; hence, they must be well assembled, according to God’s plan, and this requires that the artisans employ wisdom in making them. Additionally, as the Sinai theophany indicates, the very presence of God is potentially perilous for his people (Exod 19:12, 24). Thus, the world of the tabernacle must have a certain structure and order not only for it to reflect God’s holiness, but to serve as a place where Israel—with all its sinfulness—may approach its holy God in worship (see Lev 1–6). This structure and order, likewise, requires competent, wise, assembly, according to God’s plan. By infusing various Israelites with his wisdom, through which they execute his plan, God brings his holy, stable tabernacle-world into existence, where he draws near to his covenant people.

65 Childs notes, "For the Old Testament writer, the concrete form of the tabernacle is inseparable from its spiritual meaning…there is no tension whatsoever between form and content, or symbol and reality throughout the tabernacle chapters" (Exodus, 540).

66 In some respect, the wise building of the tabernacle parallels the wise approach to life inculcated in Prov. Just as right living in Prov calls for a wholistic understanding of life and the world, grounded in the fear of the LORD (1:7; 9:10), rightly constructing a holy sanctuary requires a wholistic understanding of how to use the tools and materials to build it according to the LORD’s design. Cf. Ryan O’Dowd, “Wisdom as Canonical Imagination: Pleasant Words for Tremper Longman,” in Canon and Biblical Interpretation, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 375–84. I credit my dissertation mentor, Richard E. Averbeck, for drawing my attention to this connection.