

## Creation made into חָכְמָה: The eco-theological appraisal of the intrinsic worth of nature in Proverbs 3:19–20

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### Abstract

This article explores the statement “creation made in wisdom” of Proverbs 3:19–20 as pointing to the Earth Bible’s principle of intrinsic worth/value of nature. This article argues that our contemporary societies need to adjust their development in harmony with the cosmic order as secured by God at creation through wisdom. Wisdom in creation constitutes the supreme ideal for living wisely, and for constructing a healthy society that is in harmony with creation.

### Key words

*Wisdom; creation; cosmic order; water-related phenomena; eco-theology; Earth Bible*

## 1. Introduction

Both modern and ancient people agree that water is the major element of the cosmos. In the first creation narrative (Gen 1:1–2:4a) water existed before the earth was formed by an act of separating the primeval waters into the water-above the sky (שָׁמַיִם), the water of the sea (land water) and the water under the earth. The earth, therefore, was understood as a great cosmic disc surrounded and bounded by water, with the dome of the skies fixed above it (Frymer-Kensky 1987:233). In 1 Samuel 2:8, the earth is thought to be supported by pillars resting somewhere in the underworld.

The verb “to establish” (כּוּן) in Proverbs 3:19 conveys the idea that the שָׁמַיִם (containing the water-above; see Psalm 148:4) are firmly fixed by Wisdom (חָכְמָה) to secure (יָסַד) the earth (אֶרֶץ) against a potential threat from the water-above. In fact, people of the ancient Near East considered the expanse

called שמים (sky) as a kind of roof supporting the water-above so that it would not leak and collapse (Kee 2012:184). That is why some texts depict the שמים as supported by *pillars* (Job 26:11) or *the foundations* (2 Sam. 22:8).

It is also surprising to read in Proverbs 3:20 that the primeval chaotic תהו מות are stated as bursting open (נבקעו) with דעת; a way of highlighting the positive aspect of the water from the תהומות. Normally, the verb נבקעו is paired with the תהום or תהומות<sup>1</sup> to announce a chaos on earth (Gen 7:11). The Hebrew תהום or תהומות usually refers to the underground water as well as to a huge mass of water (cf. Gen 1:2) (Tsumura 1989:59).

In Proverbs 3:20, the word תהומות is paired with דעת to highlight the fertilizing role of תהומות. The question is what is the eco-theological significance of water-related phenomena as sustained by wisdom (החכמה) and תהומות flowing by דעת in Proverbs 3:19–20? In other words, how can we understand the fact that creation was made into wisdom and תהומות burst forth by דעת? Is there any allusion to the principle of intrinsic worth of nature as stated in Earth Bible Project?

The Earth Bible principle of intrinsic worth/value reads that “the universe, Earth and all its components have value in themselves, not only because they are useful for humans” (Habel 2008:2). In the context of this article, the assumption is whether God has raised elements of creation, namely the water-related phenomena, to a state of intrinsic value by underscoring their making into חכמה, תבונה and דעת.

In fact, the usual interpretation of the Hebrew word for Wisdom (החכמה) in Proverbs 3:19 reduces her to a status of one of divine attributes (Murphy 1985:5). However, in relation to other wisdom texts (Prov 8:22; Sir 1:9 and Ps 104:24), one may guess that this Hebrew concept underscores a quality of a particular design (wisdom) within the cosmos that governs the course of its structures to act with purpose. According to Murphy (1985:9), Proverbs 3:19 must be read “God established the earth *into* wisdom, not *by* wisdom.” In the same literary part of the book of Proverbs (1–9), namely Proverbs 8:22, Wisdom is less regarded as God’s attribute, but a divine principle beyond human control “bestowed upon the world at Creation” (von Rad

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1 The Hebrew bible uses the singular תהום and תהומות (plural of majesty) alternatively to mean the same thing: the water below the earth (Perdue 1994:83).

1962:441). Wisdom is a kind of quality immanent within the created order of which is attached its intrinsic worth.

This principle governs the movements of the created things, including the water-related phenomena. Creation made *into* wisdom implies intrinsic value of nature created within the framework of blessing and security (Brown 1999:283). In both creation texts of the book of Proverbs (3:19–20 and 8:22), Wisdom is considered as a “world-principle”, a mystery distinct from creation, yet somehow present in its implicit order (Vawter 1980:206).

I will thus explore the wisdom relatedness of the three Hebrew concepts *חֵכְמָה*, *תְּבוּנָה* and *דַּעַת* of Proverbs 3:19–20 before assessing the ecological implication of Wisdom as denoting the intrinsic worth of elements of creation, of which water-related domains. The point of this article is that human wisdom in every society needs to adjust its growth with the cosmic order (wisdom) as secured by God at creation. Wisdom in creation embodies the dominant character of creation. It is only a society led by “folly”, as is evident in our industrial 21<sup>st</sup> century world, which sometimes denies or ignores the requirements of the harmony with the cosmic order and its boundaries established *into* wisdom at creation. In this case, droughts or floods and other water-related disasters are now becoming more frequent.

## 2. Appraisal of the relatedness of *תְּבוּנָה*, *חֵכְמָה*, and *דַּעַת*

Scholarly dictionaries define *חֵכְמָה* as wisdom, *תְּבוּנָה* as insight and *דַּעַת* as knowledge. All the three words relate to the Hebrew conception of wisdom. The word *חֵכְמָה* points to a variety of meanings going from technical skill (Ex 28:3), to shrewdness (2 Sm 20:22) and the *savoir-vivre* (Brown, Driver & Briggs 2010: 314–315). In this sense, *חֵכְמָה* often occurs as the opposite of “folly” or fool (*אִוֵּלָת*) (cf. Prov 14:1) suggesting that all human actions and creations can be wise or foolish (Fox 2000:28).

As to the second word, *תְּבוּנָה*, its etymology suggests the idea of “distinguish between” or to separate”. Out of its 42 uses in the Hebrew Bible, the word *תְּבוּנָה* occurs 22 times in relation to *חֵכְמָה* (wisdom) (Ringgren 1975:106). *תְּבוּנָה* is therefore used as an opposite of *אִוֵּלָת* (folly) in Proverbs 14:29; *חֶסֶד לֵב* (lacking sense) in Proverbs 11:12 and *פְּסִיל* (fool) in Proverbs 18:2. In this sense, *תְּבוּנָה* often occurs, with certain nuances, as synonym of *חֵכְמָה*.

The third word, דעת refers to “insight or knowledge” and is derived from the root ידע (to know) which is an aspect of wisdom (Job 28:23). The statement “to know good and evil” is a sapiential wording (Gen 3:22). In Genesis 25:27 and Amos 5:26, the root ידע refers to the ability of being “skillful” in doing something, while in other places the word דעת is synonym of the highest wisdom (Hos 4:6; Prov 2:5).

Each of the three Hebrew words (הַכְּמָה, תְּבוּנָה and דְּעַת) mentions a certain aspect of the Hebrew wide range meanings of wisdom. They are implicitly *relative* and *comparative* in nature, allowing for “more” or “less” of the quality in play. In creation texts, all the three Hebrew words occur one next to the other to highlight certain aspect of wisdom.

### 3. Wisdom and creation

The playhouse of wisdom is creation itself and creation’s *diversity*. All of God’s creatures are “made *into/with wisdom*” (בַּחֲכָמָה, Ps 104:24; Prov 3:19). In Hebrew, for instance, the “skill” of sailors is “wisdom” (חֲכָמָה, Ps 107:27) while the ant’s ways teach wisdom to human beings (Prov 6:6–11). The funeral singers are wise just as the metalworkers, and the builders of temples, palaces, and houses (see Jer 9:16; Is 36:8). As noted above, all these act, build and make with the same wisdom that YHWH used to “build” the cosmos (דעת, תְּבוּנָה, חֲכָמָה; Prov 3:18–19; cf. 8:22–31; 2:6; Ex 35:30–36:1).

Römer (2009:579) summarizes the relationship between wisdom and creation when he said:

Le principe de la חֲכָמָה est que Dieu a organisé le monde selon un ordre qu’il faut découvrir et selon lequel il faut ensuite conformer sa vie<sup>2</sup>.

By creation, the Bible understands the whole range of existing creatures, from humans to ants, not excluding the *tehomoth* and Leviathan. According to both Job 28 and Proverbs 8, “wisdom” is neither God’s creation nor his inner attribute but rather something that he acquired before creation (Vawter 1980:207). Wisdom pre-existed elements of

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2 English translation: “The principle of חֲכָמָה is that God organized the world according to an fixed order that the sage should discover and conform his/her life accordingly”.

creation, but subsequently became prominent in the making of the created order (see Prov 8:29). In other words, wisdom turns out to be a mysterious order present in the cosmos (Murphy 1985:9).

For Proverbs 3, wisdom is instilled in the structures of creation from their foundations. Wisdom is an essential element of the cosmos itself and the obtaining her will enable the sage to grasp the nature of creation (Perdue 2007:51). Creation is established *into* wisdom and understanding. Through this perspective, we may rightly imagine water and soil all mixed up before creation in a set of a “folly chaos-order”. By creation made into Wisdom, we understand the intrinsic value of creation made to act according to an order established within it. In Job 38–41, the intrinsic order of creation speaks wisdom words to Job on behalf of God differently than the chorus of Job’s friends.

In Proverbs 8:22, Wisdom existed from the *beginning* (רֵאשִׁית), and is the masterpiece or the principle of the created order and teacher of laws and norms that govern creatures and their functions (Prov 8:29). Wisdom is a self-existent being, but closely related to God (Scott 1963:213). The word רֵאשִׁית here in Proverbs 8:23 does not thus mean the timeline of events, but the *principle* or the model by which creation was made from the beginning (De Saignac 1954:429).

The cosmic aspect of wisdom means that only YHWH is ultimately wise and established creation *into* wisdom (Prov 3:19–20). In rare places, God grants special wisdom to people such as Joseph (Gen 41:33), Solomon (1 Kgs 3) or Daniel (Dan 2:20–23). Yet, even the wisest individual experiences big limits, because no one can master and know the *totality* of creation and the mysteries within it (Job 28). Wisdom is the principle of the created order; it is its language. Wisdom is more than a set of rules, but the order that is present within the structures of the cosmos. By wisdom, the water-related phenomena act and function for the good of the created order.

## 4. General literary considerations

### 4.1 The Masoretic Text of Proverbs 3:19–20

19 יְהוָה בְּחָכְמָה יִסַּד-אָרֶץ

כּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּיָהּ:

20 בְּדַעְתּוֹ תִּהְיוּמוֹת נִבְקָעוּ

וְשָׁמַיִם יִרְעַפוּ-טֹל:

### 4.2 Translation of Proverbs 3:19–20

Proverbs 3:19–20 does not contain major textual variants. The researcher has therefore opted for the translation of the NRSV. However, unlike the NRSV, the Hebrew word שָׁמַיִם (v.19) is not read “heaven” but “sky” in accordance with the cosmogonic aspect of Proverbs 3:19–20. The word heaven tends to have spiritualist connotation while the text of Proverb 3:19–20 pledges to be about the physical aspect of creation. The translation of the text will appear then as follows:

<sup>19</sup>Into<sup>3</sup> Wisdom, the LORD founded the earth; by understanding he established the sky; <sup>20</sup>by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

### 4.3. Position of Proverbs 3:19–20 in Proverbs 1–9

Proverbs 3:19–20 fits in the first section of the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 1–9, covering a number of father-son teachings. Its immediate context concerns the creation theology in the book of Proverbs, namely Proverbs 3:13–20. This wisdom poem has three strophes: the first strophe (Prov 3:13–17) depicts the happiness (אֲשֶׁרִי) of the finder of Wisdom. The second (Prov 3:18) personifies Wisdom as a tree of life, a major symbol of fertility in the Ancient Near East (Murphy 2007:205). The third concerns Wisdom’s role in creation (Prov 3:19–20).

3 For von Rad, the preposition בְּ prefixed to חָכְמָה must be read as *into* implying something imparted to creation on creation (1962:441). The syntax of בְּ here refers to a physical or ontological state/condition in which the action takes places (Brown, Driver & Briggs 2010: 88). This is the same syntax as בְּשָׁלוֹם (into/in peace) in Genesis 15:5 or even בְּצָרָה (into/in distress) in Psalm 91:15. In Proverbs 3:19, creation takes places into wisdom.

Therefore, the praise of Wisdom ends in Proverbs 3:19–20 where YHWH uses Wisdom to create and sustain the world. This strophe, which is rhetorically different from verses 13–18, underlines the idea that YHWH used his Wisdom in both securing the earth from the water-above and in supplying the earth with life-giving water (dew) (Perdue 2007:51). It is as if YHWH pledges to establish creation into an intrinsic order on which will depend its survival. The rhetorical structure of Proverbs 3:19–20 is seen in the following section.

#### 4.4 Structure of Proverbs 3:19–20

Biblical scholars agree that Proverbs 3:19–20 evolved as an independent unit in origin, but came to be inserted in its current position in order to underline the means and merit of Wisdom's value (von Rad 1972:151; Whybray 1994:37; Brown 1999:284). In this sense, the unit displays the following outstanding structure<sup>4</sup>:

- A. YHWH by Wisdom (הַכִּמְהָ) founded (יָסַד) the earth (אֶרֶץ), v.19a
- B. Establishing (כִּוְּנָה) the sky (שָׁמַיִם) by understanding (תְּבוּנָה), v.19b
- A'. By his (YHWH) knowledge (דַּעַת) the deeps (תְּהוֹמוֹת) burst open (בָּקַע), v.20a
- B'. And the clouds (שָׁחַקִים) drop (יִרְעַפּוּ) dew (טֶל), v.20b

The creation poem in Proverbs 3:19–20 is depicted by four verbs, all embedding the idea of “intrinsic measures of security of creation”. While the first two verbs (v.19) (יָסַד and כִּוְּנָה) point to the security or pillars of the creation framework, the last two others (v.20) (בָּקַע and יִרְעַפּוּ) points forward to the nurturing of the earth and its flora kingdom by the secured water-related phenomena.

Therefore, Proverbs 3:19–20 presents an alternating parallelism whose structure is made in the way that lines 1 and 3 relate, as do 2 and 4 (see Willis 1987:50). In Proverbs 3:19–20, A links with A' in the way that the secured earth and the deeps belong to the lower sphere of the created order. B (sky) and B' (clouds) relate as the upper water-related domains of the cosmos. Hence, the skies (שָׁמַיִם) can now send forth its water into dew (טֶל)

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4 This structure is a construction of the author of this article.

towards earth via the clouds (שְׁהַקִּים) to fertilize the earth. Likewise, the תְּהוֹמוֹת may now burst forth its water without turning the earth into chaos because they act according to God's דַעַת embedded in the design of the world. There is an implanted principle of intrinsic value within the secured created order to act according to a certain purpose.

## 5. Ecological wisdom of Proverbs 3:19–20

### 5.1 אָרֶץ and שָׁמַיִם secured and established

In Proverbs 3:19, אָרֶץ (earth) and שָׁמַיִם (skies) are securely fixed *into* Wisdom (בְּהִקְרָמָה). The effect of this act is that two watery masses, one above and one below the firmament, are kept at a distance from each other (van Wolde 2009:9). In this sense, the Hebrew verbs יסד (to found) and כוון (to secure) should be understood as driving the waters off the earth (אָרֶץ) and keeping them in impermeable limits which are the שָׁמַיִם. These Hebrew verbs present God as the ultimate architect who lays down a solid foundation and secures fences and pillars, and supports the sky with a roof constructed over the cosmic sea to hold the waters back (Perdue 2007:51).

The text denotes the common idea of the time in which the earth was conceived as a mass resting on an ocean (Ps 24:2; 136:6), and as having foundations and supported by pillars beneath the ocean (in Sheol) (Is 51:33; Job 9:6; Am 9:2–3).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, above the earth, the sky (שָׁמַיִם) was thought of as a solid barrier (רָקִיעַ) fixed in its place by God (Gen 1:6; Is 20:22) and held by pillars (Job 26:11) so that the water-above should not descend towards the water-below and turn creation into chaos.<sup>6</sup> This renders the Hebrew concept בְּהִקְרָמָה as “*into* Wisdom” implying a quality of “order” immanent in creation (v. 19) or even a quality of intrinsic value embedded into the created order.

According to James Barr (1974:2), etymology must be valued for the understanding of biblical language as it can furnish valuable insights into the history and the background of words. In fact, the Hebrew Bible has many rare words, which can often be clarified only in comparison with

5 For more details, see Frymer-Kensky (1987:233).

6 The function of the רָקִיעַ (or שָׁמַיִם) is to separate the waters from waters (literally: מַבְדִּיל מֵיִם לְמֵיִם, Gn 1:6b).

words in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Arabic and other related languages. The word שָׁמַיִם (sky), for instance, etymologically means “what relates to water” according to the fact that in Semitic languages the letter ש occurring before a three-letter root extends the underlying idea to the utmost<sup>7</sup>. In this sense, שָׁמַיִם is therefore the superlative of מַיִם suggesting that there is water above the sky (Sachs 2006:130).

The word שָׁמַיִם in Hebrew or Aramaic and *shamu* in Akkadian was thought as uniting “of/one of which” (ש) and “waters” (מַיִם) assuming that the sky (שָׁמַיִם) is “one of the waters/of the waters” (Kee 2012:187). In this sense, the hardness of the expanse (רָקִיעַ) and the sky blue colour were assumed as strongly holding the upper-waters back<sup>8</sup>, and thus preventing them to break up and engulf Creation (van Wolde 2009:9). These protection measures are part of the intrinsic value of creation since creation and they must not be broken or bypassed in order to keep creation secured.

Just as Genesis 1, Proverbs 3:20a is aware of the unruly waters in designed limits within the created order. Ancient people might have thought that the barriers were pushing hard against the water above and the water below, which once formed a single substance but were now divided into a pair (Sachs 2006:130). By the verbs to “secure” the earth and “establish” the sky, the sage implies that in wisdom God protects his creation from being engulfed by the life-threatening chaos waters. In wisdom, God does not destroy the chaos water but keep them in designed limits.

## 5.2 The תְּהוֹמוֹת burst open by נָעַת (v.20a)

The Hebrew Bible uses the singular תְּהוֹם and its plural תְּהוֹמוֹת in a synonymic way. Both words refer to the water mass below the earth. This ocean was referred to as the primal flood, the deep, or the chaos water, which was regarded as a dangerous place, typified by the chaos monster living in its

7 Generally, the words denoting sky in the Semitic languages are all spelled by prefixing *sh* to the words meaning water (van Wolde 1998:24). Therefore, *sha* is a grammatical form of *shafel* indicating “gives water” – that is, the source of rainfall (Sachs 2006:130).

8 This seems to corroborate the worldview of the sky in one of DRC ethnic groups, the Nande. For this people, the name for sky is *OLUBHULA*, meaning the water-basin above that descends earthward as rain (*MBULA*). The word *OLUBHULA* (water-above) has evolved into *ELUBULA* (heaven) due to the missionary Christian eschatological teaching. See Kambale Luvalia, student in the first year of Theology at CBETM/KATWA, interviewed in Mai 2018, Butembo, DRC.

depths (Klopper 2002:676). Like the raging sea, the underground ocean was continually threatening to break out and turn the universe into chaos (Simkins 1994:108–109). This occurred once during the Flood (Gn 7:11; 8:2) when it overwhelmingly broke out and submerged the earth. It therefore had to be kept in check by confining it within secure limits.

However, in Proverbs 3:20, תְּהוֹמוֹת burst open (בָּקַע) by YHWH's דַּעַת (knowledge). They are kept into limits since creation and only overflow by YHWH's דַּעַת. Proverbs might assume the springs and wells typifying the positive aspect of תְּהוֹמוֹת because they provide water on the earth's surface in a controlled way. Although of the same תְּהוֹמוֹת substance, the springs' water is life-giving as it flows in an orderly way.

The idea links to Psalm 78 in which תְּהוֹמוֹת represents not chaos but “the miraculous provision of water in the desert” (Waschke 2006:580). In the prophetic message of hope of Isaiah 35:6, also, the verb נִבְקַעַי is used for the springs and streams of water gushing in the desert. In דַּעַת, controlled water rises from underground תְּהוֹמוֹת into springs/wells on the surface of the earth (Emerton 1966:127). The contrast would be a disaster on earth as it happened in the times of Noah: the תְּהוֹמוֹת did not flow by דַּעַת but broke up and consumed the earth (Gen 7:11–12). This means that survival and stability of the created order are dependent on wisdom through which creation was made.

The idea of *controlled* water is clearly illustrated in the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*. God Marduk wisely shapes the cosmos from the slain body of Tiamat, goddess of the sea water, which is linguistically the equivalent of תְּהוֹמוֹת or תְּהוֹם. The verb בָּקַע in Proverbs 3:20a may therefore infer Marduk “splitting open” the chaos monster to protect the created order from being engulfed by chaos (Perdue 2007:51).

Marduk loaded mountains on Tiamat's head and breasts to prevent her uncontrolled flood of waters to flow from her body. He then bores through the mountains in order to release her waters, but in a *controlled* way by means of springs from her eyes and breasts to nurture the earth (Pritchard 1955:67). This is probably what is implied in Proverbs 3:20a where the author juxtaposes the verb בָּקַע (burst open) with God's דַּעַת (knowledge) in the release of water from the depths (תְּהוֹמוֹת). Thus, תְּהוֹמוֹת has to act according to God's דַּעַת by letting some water flow within designed channels

to the land. Otherwise, תְּהוֹמוֹת would uncontrollably send forth its life-threatening water against the created order.

Contrary to Genesis 7:11 employing the verb בָּקַע to depict the beginning of a dreadful flood, Proverbs 3:20a softens the verb בָּקַע with דַּעַת to highlight God's willing to provide the earth's surface with orderly water. The *niphal* form נִבְקַעוּ occurs in both Genesis 7:11 and Proverbs 3:20 to highlight that the תְּהוֹמוֹת act by themselves denoting the principle of intrinsic value of nature. However, contrary to Gen 7:11, in Proverbs 3:20 they not only act by themselves but flow according to God's דַּעַת. דַּעַת here stands for the principle of intrinsic worth that governs the flow of the waters. The sage probably infers Genesis 2:6 where the mist from the deeps burst open to fertilize the land (Brown 1999:284).

In this sense, the words נִבְקַעוּ תְּהוֹמוֹת (the deeps burst open) in Proverbs 3:20a probably refer to the creation of conduits for this water since verse 19 assumes the act of creation in Genesis 1:1–2 (Emerton 1966:125). God's act of wisdom does not suppress the waters of תְּהוֹמוֹת, but keep them into limits so that its water can follow in designed channels to flow earthward according to דַּעַת, the principle God bestowed on creation. In other words, by wisdom God builds the cosmos, securing it with order so that even the underground waters (תְּהוֹמוֹת) may work for the good of the created order (Brown 1999:285).

### 5.3 The שָׁחֲקִים pour down טל

The whole verse 20 of Proverbs 3 clearly juxtaposes the beneficent water flowing from the sky in the form of dew (טל) and the controlled water from the deeps (תְּהוֹמוֹת), each working for life on earth (Waltke 2004:262). YHWH refreshes and revitalizes the earth by the life-giving water from both the deeps (v.20a) and dew drops (v.20b).

The Hebrew word שָׁחֲקִים (v.20b) means clouds that send water towards earth in form of dew/rain. It was believed that a cosmic sea existed above the earth, and the waters were held back by a solid dome (Gen 1:6), sometimes obscured by clouds (שָׁחֲקִים), but at times the doors were opened to allow water to flow earthward (Crenshaw 2011:145). If these doors were opened and the water allowed to descend directly on the earth without passing through the clouds, the effect was devastating and destructive (Sutcliffe 1953:102).

This is what is assumed in Job 36:27–28 in which God gathers water from the sea (water below), distils it into the rainclouds (water above), before falling on earth as rain or dew, resulting in the fertility of the land (Kavusa 2016:70). Therefore, water in the clouds was a sign of life-giving rain for the agrarian life if it rained at expected times (see Deut 11:14). That is why Proverbs 16:15 compares the king’s mercy with the clouds that bring the spring rain.

In Proverbs 3:20, water (dew) falls on earth via the clouds according to God’s *דָּעַת*. The Hebrew word used here for the falling of dew on earth is *יִרְעַפּוּ*. In Elihu’s speech in Job 36:28, *יִרְעַפּוּ* means “to pour down,” while in Psalm 65:12 it means to flow. In this sense, the verb does not merely refer to the dripping of dew (*לָטַף*), but that YHWH continually waters the earth. In rainless summer season of Palestine, the land was almost dependent on dew. That is why “rain and dew” usually occurs together as a pair in many parts of the Bible.

Palestine was a land whose fertility depended on the fall of the yearly rain (Deut 10:11–17) and dew. Apart from human efforts at storing water and irrigation, crops that grew during the dry months relied on dew mainly in the central coastal plain where dew is involved in up to 55mm of water per year (Gilead and Rosenan 1954:120). In Genesis 27:28, dew features among the blessings that Isaac asked for his son Jacob, while Gideon could wake up early in the morning and squeeze dew from the fleece to fill a bowl of water (Jdg 6:38). That is why the absence of dew and rain is seen as a curse in 2 Samuel 1:21.

## 6. Eco-theological synthesis

It is fascinating to see how creation is depicted as existing and functioning into wisdom. By wisdom structures of creation, including the water-related phenomena, were secured and assigned function. Into wisdom, God assigns intrinsic value to creation by securing strong and secure foundations to support the cosmos. The water-above and water-below are maintained in designed limits in protection of the created order. The value of creation is now dependent on the *חֻקֵי הַמַּיִם*, *תְּבוּנָה* and *דָּעַת* God used to create.

Wisdom stands as the skill, the design and knowledge that God uses to secure and order the universe (Perdue 1994:84). Subsequently, the stability

of creation is maintained by wisdom. In this sense, the waters continue to flow upwards and downwards and are held back by “barriers” to prevent them from turning the cosmos into chaos. Thus, the waters above can go earthwards via the clouds as rain/dew and the water-below burst open on the surface of the earth in an orderly way. Wisdom is the life-sustaining and ordering principle of creation.

Therefore, fashioned by God and inhabited by Wisdom’s followers, the created world would be an ethos where virtue will flourish. God’s creation gives evidence of wise craft and design where structures are made in a discernible order.

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