I. BACKGROUND.

A. Certain books in the OT stand apart from the rest due to their distinctive didactic character and literary style.

1. These include Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, and in the canonical books, and Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha.

2. These books account for most of the occurrences of the Hebrew word הֹאָכָם (hokmâh); variations of this term occur 182 times in these books.

3. Their distinctive style includes such things as sayings, proverbs, admonitions and exhortations, as well as a kind of pragmatism.

4. (Related to these are Psalter and the Song of Solomon)

5. Thus they are quite different from narrative, though they make special use of poetry.

6. Yet they have an affinity with the rest of the Old Testament.

   a. They "readily seen to stand apart, and to have belonged to a distinctive part of ancient Israelite life which necessitates special attention."  

   b. "At the same time, if their interpretation is to be meaningful" there must exist "some kind of relationship to that of other parts of the Old Testament literature."  

7. Wisdom literature provides an interesting insight in its illustration of the interpretation of the law.

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3Clements, *One Hundred Years*, 99.
BI 4215/4315 Devotional and Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament; “Wisdom in its ANE and Old Testament Context”; Randall C. Bailey, Ph.D.; Faulkner University, Spring 2012

a. It offers examples of life conduct in accordance to the law.

b. It offers illustrations of disobedience to that law.

II. BACKGROUND.

A. H. Schultz denied the origin of wisdom could be dated and “argued that it represented a distinctive type of philosophical piety which emerged on the basis of the divine revelation given in the Mosaic Law.”

1. He argued:

   a. It claimed an intrinsic religious character from the start.
   b. It did not belong to particular class of people.

2. Scholarship has focused on this special type of “philosophical piety.”

   a. This allows us to see that “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10).

   NRS Prov 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

   ḫtāḥāṯ ʾyāḏāh ʾyhwh ṭyāḥāh ʾyôhôh ṭôshôbîm ṭôshôbîm WTT Prov 9:10

   b. Yet it does not allow us to see the origins of wisdom in Israel and its relationship to daily life.

B. J. Wellhausen paid almost no attention to the wisdom material.

C. B. Duhm, in his Die Theologie der Propheten (1875) raised the question of when, where, and for what purpose wisdom arose in Israel.

1. He argued that the wise men were the heirs of the prophetic movement, in that they took the religious teachings of the prophets and applied them to everyday life.

   ⁴Clements, One Hundred Years, 100.
2. Two things were thought to illustrate this:

a. The belief in retribution for wrong doing.

b. The hostile attitude towards the cult and its claims as focused on sacrifice (Prov 15:8; 21:27).

\[ \text{NRS Prov 15:8} \text{ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.} \]

\[ \text{WTT Prov 15:8} \]

\[ \text{NRS Prov 21:27} \text{ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when brought with evil intent.} \]

\[ \text{WTT Prov 21:27} \]

c. Though used in this manner by early scholars, note the passages are so much anti-cult as they are anti-wickedness.

d. Such an approach necessitated the belief that wisdom material was dated quite late.

3. These ideas were challenged by the form critical approach of Gunkel, and the discovery of similar material in the ANE.

D. **H. Gunkel.**

1. Gunkel argued that the various forms of wisdom material indicated that it was so distinctive that it did not presuppose either Law or Prophecy.

2. This distinction could be traced to a special class of wise men in Israel who were concerned with man's education and progress and advancement in life.

3. These educators must have had connections with similar groups in other parts of the ANE.
4. The wisdom writings were demonstrably late; they must be distinguished from the oral teaching and wisdom collection which was much older and “had roots in the very beginning of Israel's existence as a distinguishable people and culture.”

   a. The older oral wisdom had its origin in the educated class.
   
   b. The later wisdom material was more religiously oriented.

5. These differences may be described as follows:

   a. If these wise men were a special class, then they must have been concerned with the education of the sons of the wealthy landowners.

   b. The fundamental form of instruction that they used was the “proverb”

      (1) Heb. מַשָּׁל māšāl = represent, to be like, likeness, i.e., extended similes

      (2) To “become like, to be comparable to,” “to compare,” depending upon the force of the verb.

   c. Such proverbs were different from modern proverbs and were designed to distinguish some pattern of moral order in the world which could be usefully used.

   d. These short, poignant sayings evolved into longer sayings

6. “On the basis of Gunkel’s insights wisdom in the Old Testament undoubtedly took on a new look, for he had been able to show that it had a setting of its own, and was not to be regarded as an extension, or adaptation, of some other branch of instruction or literature. It belonged neither to the cult nor to prophecy, but to a class of people who were to be considered on their own.”

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5 Clements, One Hundred Years, 102.

6 Clements, One Hundred Years, 102.
III. ISRAEL'S WISDOM AND THE ANE.

A. We have similar material from the ANE.\(^7\)

1. Do these materials indicate that Israel's wisdom was imported from the surrounding cultures of the ANE?

2. Most 20\(^{th}\) century scholars thought so.\(^8\)

3. This problem created an immense discussion as the following will show

B. Though Gunkel had been able to show the international character of wisdom, which caused scholars to suspect that Israel’s wisdom was borrowed, he was unable to show how or when this took place. The race was on to establish these events.

C. The *Teaching of Amen-em-ope*, an Egyptian official, was brought back from Egypt by *Sir E. W. Budge* in 1888. The publication of the translated text showed how important it was for the study of Old Testament wisdom.

1. The document consisted of moral instruction with religious overtones.

2. So close was part of the teaching to Prov 22:17-24:22, that the conclusion that there was a direct relationship between the two documents seemed inevitable.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amen-em-ope</th>
<th>Proverbs</th>
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**Introduction:** The beginning of the instruction about life, The guide for well-being, All the principles of official procedure, The duties of the courtiers; To know how to refute the accusation of one who made it, And to send back a reply to the one who wrote, To set one straight on the paths of life, And make him prosper on earth; To let his heart settle down in its chapel, As one who steers him clear of evil; To save him from the talk of others, As one who is respected in the speech of men.

NRS Proverbs 22:21 to show you what is right and true, so that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?

**Introduction:** To let his heart settle down in its chapel, As one who steers him clear of evil; To save him from the talk of others, As one who is respected in the speech of men.

NRS Proverbs 22:19 So that your trust may be in the LORD. I have made them known to you today-- yes, to you.

**Chapter 1:** Give your years and hear what is said, Give your mind over to their interpretation: It is profitable to put them in your heart, But woe to him that neglects them! Let them rest in the shrine of your insides That they may act as a lock in your heart; Now when there comes a storm of words, They will be a mooring post on your tongue.

NRS Proverbs 22:17 The words of the wise: Incline your ear and hear my words, and apply your mind to my teaching; 18 for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips

**Chapter 2:** Beware of stealing from a miserable man And of raging against the cripple. Do not stretch out your hand to touch an old man, Nor snip at the words of an elder.

NRS Proverbs 22:22 Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate

**Chapter 6:** Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land, Nor alter the position of the measuring line;

NRS Proverbs 22:28 Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up. Do not be greedy for a plot of land, Nor overturn the boundaries of a widow.

NRS Proverbs 23:10-11 Do not remove an ancient landmark or encroach on the fields of orphans, for their redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.
Chapter 7: Do not set your heart upon seeking riches, For there is no one who can ignore Destiny and Fortune; Do not set your thoughts on external matters: For every man there is his appointed time. Do not exert yourself to seek out excess And your wealth will prosper for you; If riches come to you by theft They will not spend the night with you; As soon as day breaks they will not be in your household; Although their places can be seen, they are not there. When the earth opens up its mouth, it levels him and swallows him up, And it drowns him in the deep; They have made for themselves a great hole which suits them. And they have sunk themselves in the tomb; Or they have made themselves wings like geese, And they fly up to the sky.

NRS Proverbs 23:4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist. ℹ️ When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Chapter 9: Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man, Nor approach him to converse. . . . . . . . And take care not to speak against him. Do not allow him to cast words only to entrap you, And be not too free in your reply; . . . . . . . . The creator of the ill-tempered man Whom he molds and fires.....; He is like a wolf cub in the farmyard, And he turns one eye to the other (squinting), For he sets families to argue. He goes before all the wind like clouds, He darkens his color in the sun; He crocks his tail like a baby crocodile, He curls himself up to inflict harm, His lips are sweet, but his tongue is bitter, And fire burns inside him. Do not fly up to join that man Not fearing you will be brought to account

NRS Proverbs 22:24-25 Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; And with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

Chapter 11: Do not covet the property of the dependent Nor hunger for his bread; The property of a dependent blocks the throat, It is vomit for the gullet

NRS Proverbs 23:6 Do not eat the bread of the stingy; do not desire their delicacies; ℹ️ "for like a hair in the throat, so are they. "Eat and drink!" they say to you; but they do not mean it.

NRS Proverbs 23:8 You will vomit up the little you have eaten, and you will waste your pleasant words.
Chapter 21: Do not say, I have found a strong protector And now I can challenge a man in my town.
Do not say, I have found an active intercessor, And now I can challenge him whom I hate. Indeed, you cannot know the plans of God; You cannot perceive tomorrow. Sit yourself at the hands of God: Your tranquility will cause them to open. As for the crocodile deprived of his tongue, the fear of him is negligible. Empty not your soul to everybody And do not diminish thereby your importance; Do not circulate your words to others, Nor fraternize with one who is too candid.

Chapter 23: Do not eat a meal in the presence of a magistrate, Nor set to speaking first. If you are satisfied with false words, Enjoy yourself with your spittle. Look at the cup in front of you, And let it suffice your need. Even as a noble is important in his office, He is like the abundance of a well when it is drawn.

Chapter 30: Mark for your self these thirty chapters: They please, they instruct, They are the foremost of all books,
They teach the ignorant. If they are read to an ignorant man, He will be purified through them. Seize them; put them in your mind And have men interpret them, explaining as a teacher. As to a scribe who is experienced in his position, He will find himself worthy of being a courtier.

[Colophon]
It is finished. By the writing of Senu, son of the god's father Pamiu

4. "It is possible that both Proverbs and Amenemope are drawing on a common source, but the majority of scholars conclude that the compiler(s) of Proverbs 22:17-24:22 were dependent on Amenemope."

D. Gressman argued that the scribes in David’s court would be the kind of persons where wisdom teaching in Israel may have originated, and such has been the general conclusion of scholarship.

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\[^9\] Lucas, A Guide, 82.
E. Scholars recognized that wisdom is much earlier than had been thought before, that it had an international character, and should be studied as a literature with its own special characteristics.

F. They no longer thought in terms of imported or borrowed wisdom and they were divided on whether wisdom schools such as those of Mesopotamia and Egypt ever evolved in Israel, but the evidence indicates they did not.


1. Wellhausen and Duhm had traced the historical development of Israel’s religion and argued that religion and morality could be seen in the “Ethical Monotheism” of the prophets and their teaching.

2. Consequently, wisdom was thought to have originated with the prophetic teaching, i.e., “The moral insights presupposed in the laws of the Old Testament, and the ethical basis of the instruction urged upon the young in the wisdom writings, were both regarded as derivative from this prophetic revelation of the primacy of moral understanding for religion.”

3. But discoveries such as the Code of Hammurabi, and the similarities it presented to the Old Testament laws were beginning to show that morality was not something suddenly discovered by the 8th century prophets.

4. Instead man had dealt with the “problem of morality” from a much earlier period.

5. The discovery of similar wisdom material in the ANE simply corroborated this.

H. What proved difficult was to explain how and why the ethical element in Israel was different from the ANE, even though Israel seemed to share fully in the life of the ANE.

\[ \text{References:} \]

\[ ^{10} \text{Lucas, A Guide, 82-3.} \]

\[ ^{11} \text{Clements, One Hundred Years, 105.} \]

\[ ^{12} \text{Clements, One Hundred Years, 107} \]
1. This was all the more difficult when it was realized that the covenant relationship between Israel and God, so prevalent in the Law and Prophets, is noticeably absent in the Wisdom materials.

   a. The wisdom teachers appealed to their followers as men and not Israelites in special covenant, much as was done in the ANE.

   b. Further, their insights did not seem to be dependent either on the Law or the Prophets.

   c. Rather, it seemed to have an international context, i.e., it seemed to share more directly, than either the Law or the Prophets, the international characteristics found in ANE wisdom materials.

2. **J. Fichtner**\(^{13}\) and **J. C. Rylaarsdam**\(^{14}\) attacked this problem.

   I. Fichtner argued that Israel’s wisdom, like that of the ANE, was eudaemonistic (i.e., producing happiness) and that it was aimed at obtaining the mastery of life through reflection and the passing on of this through admonition and instruction.

   1. This was to be distinguished from the later wisdom which reflected on *Torah*.

   2. Fichtner desired to establish two things.

      a. To demonstrate how wisdom had developed from its early pragmatic form into something far different.

      b. To demonstrate how in its earlier form it was distinctively Israelite in character.

   3. Fichtner, argued that Israel’s particular monotheistic view of God and cult had special influence on the unique nature of its wisdom.

\(^{13}\)J. Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung. Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel* (BZAW 62), 1933.

\(^{14}\)J. C. Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Chicago, 1944).
a. Its monotheism was a catalyst for the religious elements of wisdom, i.e., “the close connection of the idea of moral retribution with the belief in a divine power working immanently in the world to uphold justice”\textsuperscript{15} produced a religious emphasis

b. In spite of this religious element the cult played almost no part in the wisdom material.

c. Thus Fichtner argued Israelite wisdom grew up as a distinctive wisdom, while at the same time it was part of a larger wisdom complex found in the ANE.

J. \textit{Rylaarsdam} added another view to the uniqueness of Israelite wisdom in the context of international origins. His major views are as follows:

1. He argued the earliest wisdom was pragmatic in that it assumed that man could master life if he used his intellectual gifts to search out truth.

2. Its basic assumption was the truth about the natural universe could be discovered by the use of the gifts God had given him.

3. In contrast, as exemplified in \textit{Ecclesiasticus}, was to be identified with the Law.

K. If scholars could not point to direct elements of cross-over from Egyptian wisdom to Israelite wisdom they could point to parallels between the two cultures, and even a place in history when one probably influenced the other.

1. Thus scholarship proposed that wisdom material in the OT probably developed as it did in Egypt, in the royal court.

2. The most likely place was in the court of Solomon, who had contacts with Egypt.\textsuperscript{16}

L. The nature of this “connection.”

\textsuperscript{15}Clements, \textit{One Hundred Years}, 108.

1. The Egyptian didactic literature did not contain one word which could provide an exact counterpart in Israelite wisdom.

2. Yet the similarity was so close that they were part of the same heritage.

3. The Egyptian official, Amen-em-ope desired to pass on moral and ethical truths he had learned to those who had similar responsibilities.

4. Gressman argued that Solomon's court, like the Egyptian court, was interested in passing along such wisdom to the government officials. Variations of this hypothesis have been proposed.

5. There can be little doubt that the Solomonic period was a time of opening up Israel’s cultural heritage.
   a. Solomon’s marriage and the functions of his officials point in that direction.
   b. The reorganization of the Israelite state point in that direction.
   c. It would only seem to be natural that wisdom would also grow during this time.

6. But the details of this speculation cannot be proven with any assurance.

7. W. McKane has argued that the aims and function of wisdom indicate a natural connection with politicians, while at the same time recognizing a wider application to life.

8. Even if it could be established that there was a direct corollary between Egyptian wisdom and that in Israel, it must be admitted that there are differences between the two.
   a. In Egypt the king and court are often spoken of very flatteringly, as if the teacher were attempting to educate one of the members of the royal family; in Israel the student group seems to be young men in general.

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b. In OT wisdom there is not the emphasis on translators, writers, secretaries, accountants, lawyers and archivists, that would be necessary for the effective working of government.

c. Furthermore, the two basic assumptions upon which such a connection is based have yet to be proved.

   (1) There is no evidence that Solomon founded schools like those in Egypt.\(^\text{18}\)

   (2) It cannot be established that the aim was to teach suitable court officials.

M. **G. von Rad** in his *Theology and Wisdom* volumes\(^\text{19}\) has argued that the ANE collection was not as significant as its relationship to theology. According to him:

1. Wisdom was experiential as it sought to understand the order behind the universe.

2. In Israel the order of the universe was perceived in religious terms due to the nation’s belief in its relationship to Yhwh.

3. Thus it is wrong to think in terms of “secular,” or “profane” wisdom.\(^\text{20}\)

4. Von Rad particularly attempted to define wisdom as setting the limits of man's ability to master his life and thus marking off those areas of life which belonged to Yhwh alone.

5. These arguments allowed von Rad to argue for a theological dimension even in Israel’s earliest wisdom.

6. The Solomonic era was a challenging one for wisdom in that it led it out of its earlier pragmatism, while at the same time creating a new questioning

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climate which challenged the older assumptions and led to a more genuinely theological interpretation of religion.

7. One unique feature of von Rad's theory was that it led him to challenge the commonly accepted theory that apocalyptic grew out of prophecy; rather it grew, according to von Rad, out of wisdom.

N. **Folk Wisdom:** stood alongside the international wisdom; it represented a more common variety of wisdom shared by ordinary people.\(^{21}\)

1. Examples of such could be seen in such genres as the parable, the fable, the allegory, etc.

2. Such wisdom must have had a long history before the more polished "court wisdom" attributed to the Solomonic era.
   a. Such "folk wisdom" represented the early clan teaching its men.

3. While the existence of such wisdom has never been denied, its presence had often been overlooked until the studies of E. Gerstenberger\(^{22}\) and H. W. Wolff.\(^{23}\)
   a. Gerstenberger argued that the apodictic (injunction) form of the Decalogue originated in the clan as voiced through the clan leader (patriarch), and only later took on a wider religious authority.
   b. Wolff’s interest grew out of his studies in prophecy, particularly Amos. Wolff came to argue that the forms of speech in Amos should not be traced to the cult, but to the old clan, or folk wisdom.

O. **Family Wisdom:**

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1. Proverbs 1-9 speaks of "my son," perhaps indicating a "father/son" relationship

2. Further Proverbs 1:8, 6:20, 30:17, and 31:1-9 indicate that the mother could also be the teacher.

3. Yet, "son" often could mean other than biological descendants, as in "sons of the prophets." 24

IV. NEW APPROACHES RE: ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP TO ANE WISDOM. 25

A. E. I. Gordon, a student of S. N. Kramer, has published new Sumerian material.

B. J. A. van Dijk and W. G. Lambert have also published Sumerian and Akkadian texts. 26

C. Though Akkadian wisdom text have been discovered at Ras Shamra, 27 none have been discovered in the Ugaritic language.

D. The wisdom literature of Egypt still has proven the most useful.

1. "... the publication of the Instruction of `Onchsheshonqy has led B. Gemser (1960) and W. McKane (1970) to investigate its bearing on the Bible; and the priority of the Wisdom of Amenomope to Prov. 22:17-24:22 has been rendered even more probable than before by evidence about the Egyptian work's date ... and by the refutation ... of the theory that it is based on a Semitic original." 28


27Published in Ugaritica V, 1968.

2. Furthermore, scholarship no longer view Egyptian wisdom literature in merely utilitarianism and eudaemonistic terms, and seeing rather a religious emphasis.

   a. This has been largely due to the studies of H. Frankfort and H. Brunner.\(^{29}\)

   b. The Egyptian term *ma’at* has attracted much attention.

      (1) Can be translated “truth,” “justice,” or “order.”

      (2) Often used of a divine order, established at creation and which is manifested in society as justice, and the individual's life as truth.

      (3) Sometimes *ma’at* is thought of as a goddess

      (4) Egyptian wisdom teachers taught that all should act according to *ma’at*.

      (5) Finally, *ma’at* was thought to be present in the universe through the divine will.

V. **H. H. Schmid\(^{30}\)** argues that ANE wisdom was used by Israel, but that it was modified according to the needs of particular historical situations.

   A. As such, wisdom was at first a flexible system.

   B. Later, when it became an inflexible system, a crisis arose.

   C. Israelite wisdom tended to become more explicitly theological and more anthropological.

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VI. WISDOM'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD AND ITS INFLUENCE ON OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY.

A. If the older Israelite wisdom was utilitarian and eudaemonistic, rather than religious, "How was such a prudential, anthropocentric view of life, borrowed from foreign peoples, to be related to belief about Yahweh's election of Israel, his deliverance of the nation from slavery in Egypt, his revelation on Mount Sinai and the making of the covenant, and his saving acts in history?"\(^{31}\)

B. The doctrine of divine retribution has proven to be of little help

C. Koch\(^{32}\) has shown that the suffering of the wicked was not regarded as punishment meted out by Yhwh (cf. Job), but the Israelites believed that there was an inner connection between and act and its consequences.

   1. E.g., \textit{Prov 26:27} "Whoso digs a pit shall fall therein: And he that rolls a stone, it shall return upon him."

   \textit{kārēs šēmah be ets él la'él âmōn ḥelah tō'eb} Proverbs 26:27

   2. That is, Yhwh makes the punishment fit the crime.

   3. According to Koch, this view had affinities with the ANE, but whereas ANE material was influenced by magic, Israel's concept was developed by monotheism.

D. \textit{H. Gese} begins with Egyptian wisdom literature, opposes the eudaemonistic understanding of it, and argues that its basic premise is living according to \textit{ma'at}.

   1. Turning to the OT he similarly denies a utilitarian interpretation of its wisdom materials.

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2. Rather, he argues, that Yhwh has ordered the world and the wise man seeks to live according to a divinely established order even when he cannot completely understand it.

3. There is a divinely established order between act and consequence.

4. Thus the Israelite view of life as rule does not differ radically from Egypt or Mesopotamia although a few passages do differ radically (Prov 10:22; 16:1,9, 33; 20:24; 21:1, 30, 31; 25:2).

   a. **NRS Prov 10:22** The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

   בָּרָךְ יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים וַעֲצַמִּיָּהוּ לָא יִרְאוּ יָסָרָה יְהוָה: WTT Prov 10:22

   b. **NRS Prov 16:1** The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

   לְאֵלֶּה הַחֲלֵקָה לִפְנֵי שָׁמַיִם וְהַקִּלְקֵלָה לְאֵלֶּה לִפְנֵי שָׁמַיִם: WTT Prov 16:1

   c. **NRS Prov 16:9** The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.

   לֵלֶכְכֶם יִתְּמוּ הָעָרֶפֶל וּניָכַר יְהוָה עַל כִּי תַשְׁעֵה: WTT Prov 16:9

   d. **NRS Prov 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the LORD’s alone.

   בָּחַק יֵשֵׁל אַלְמָנוֹת וַעֲצַמִּיָּהוּ לָא יְהוָה: WTT Prov 16:33

   e. **NRS Prov 20:24** All our steps are ordered by the LORD; how then can we understand our own ways?

   מְהַלֵּה מַעֲשֵׂרְךָ אַלְמָנוֹת וַעֲצַמִּיָּהוּ: WTT Prov 20:24

   f. **NRS Prov 21:30-31** 30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the LORD. 31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

   מְהַלֵּה מַעֲשֵׂרְךָ אַלְמָנוֹת וַעֲצַמִּיָּהוּ: WTT Prov 21:30-31
BI 4215/4315 Devotional and Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament; “Wisdom in its ANE and Old Testament Context”; Randall C. Bailey, Ph.D.; Faulkner University, Spring 2012


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1. Proverbs 10-15 and 28-9 deal not so much with act and consequence as a man's way of living and his destiny (cf. 14:14a; 15:32a).

2. Criticizes Gese’s theory that there are certain passages which teach a doctrine of intervention by Yhwh that contradict the older doctrine.

3. Thus 21:30-31 and 25:2 are not contradictory, rather they illustrate divine intervention, not between and act and its consequence, but between the making of a human plan and its translation into action.

a. NRS Prov 21:30-31 30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the LORD. 31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

h. In these God is portrayed as acting independently of the universe.

5. Thus Gese believes that though the older Israelite wisdom materials were essentially similar to other ANE nations, this similarity is sometimes shattered by free grace of God.

E. U. Skladny agrees with much that both Koch and Gese have said, but claims that divergences are to be found in the different collections.

1. Proverbs 10-15 and 28-9 deal not so much with act and consequence as a man's way of living and his destiny (cf. 14:14a; 15:32a).

2. Criticizes Gese’s theory that there are certain passages which teach a doctrine of intervention by Yhwh that contradict the older doctrine.

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a. NRS Prov 21:30-31 30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the LORD. 31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

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b. NRS Prov 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.


F. W. Zimmerli argues:

1. "In the wisdom literature, God is viewed as one who acts according to the order discerned by the wise men, rather than as one who acts freely."34

2. The writer of Ecclesiastes challenges this view and "for the writer reasserts the freedom of God to act as he wills.35

3. The problem of the exact relationship between ANE genres of wisdom and that found in the OT has been a problem which scholars have found very difficult to expound.

VII. WISDOM LITERATURE AND OTHER PARTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

A. Some scholars have sought to trace wisdom materials in other parts of the OT which are not normally reckoned as wisdom materials.

B. Von Rad finds affinities between parts of the wisdom materials and both the Pentateuch and the historical writings

1. He held that a change from a sacral to a secular outlook took place in the reign of Solomon, and a belief arose that Yhwh acts in a hidden way.

2. Both the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 6-20; 1 Kgs 1-2), where Yhwh's working is concealed in ordinary events (2 Sam 11:27; 12:24; 17:14), and
the Joseph story reveal, which, von Rad argues is actually wisdom material, reveal this tendency.

C. **M. Weinfeld** attributes the "Deuteronomistic Writings" to scribal circles sometime between Hezekiah's reign and the fall of Judah.

1. Thus these were the work of people who were not only clerical, political, and didactic, but also religious.

2. Therefore, Torah being identified with wisdom (Deut 4:6), the prominent place given to wise men in Deuteronomy, similarity in language (laws against moving the landmark [Deut 19:14], and statements against false weights [Deut 25:13-16; Prov 11:1; 20:10,23]), all point to a connection between the two.

D. **E. Gersterberger** argued that apodictic law goes back to the clan or great family, and that this is to be preferred as the origin of wisdom rather than a scribal group.

E. **J. Fichtner** argues that any connection between prophets and wisdom material must be traced to a common tradition in Israel or the ANE in general.

F. **W. McKane** goes further in that he sees a contrast between prophets and wise men, the former looking to Yhwh for guidance, the latter to their own judgment.

1. Isaiah and others took a more positive attitude toward wisdom, arguing that true wisdom proceeded from God alone.

2. Wise men also moderated and came to see God's law as wisdom.

G. **J. Lindblom** modified this argument, postulating that prophets knew of and valued wisdom, but were hostile to it when it was opposed to the divine word through them.

H. **S. Terrien** sees evidence in Amos of wisdom influence:

1. In the numerical sayings, 1:1-2:6

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2. In the belief that the underworld under Yhwh's control (9:2; Prov 15:11)
   a. **NRS Amos 9:2** *Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.*
   
   נָטַת נַחַל בְּשָׁאֵל לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עֲשֵׂה יָדִ֥י מִן הַשָּׁאֵל לֹ֖א יִלְּךָֽו לְהַשָּׁאֵל לֹ֖א יַעֲשֶׂה עֲשֵׂה יָדִ֥י מִן הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָאֱלֹהִים
   
   **WTT Amos 9:2**
   
   b. **NRS Proverbs 15:11** *Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more human hearts!*
   
   נַחַל וַאֲבַדְנָא נַעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לֹ֖א נַעֲשֶׂה הַלֹּא נַעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם נַעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם
   
   **WTT Proverbs 15:11**
   
   c. **NRS Job 26:6** *Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering.*
   
   נַעֲשֶׂה נַעֲשֶׂה לְעַד הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲבַדְנָא לֹא נַעֲשֶׂה לְעַד הָאֱלֹהִים
   
   **WTT Job 26:6**

3. In the appeal to common sense
4. In the rhetorical question
5. All suggest a connection with Edomite wisdom.

I. **H. W. Wolff** also sees clan wisdom as affecting Amos.

J. **J. L. Crenshaw** rejects most of the arguments of Terrien and Wolff, accepts some of them, and advances new observations:

1. The need to define precisely “wisdom,” while exercising caution that no definition is selected that is too complicated to be useful.
2. Wisdom influence can only be found, if characteristics peculiar to wisdom can be identified in the material.
3. Resemblances to wisdom material in other parts of the OT must be carefully examined to see if there has been any change in meaning.
4. Ideas alien to wisdom must not be overlooked.
5. The history of wisdom must be taken into consideration.

6. Such an approach is a welcome preventive against wild and unsubstantiated theories.

VIII. LITERARY FORMS OF WISDOM.

A. *Proverb*: either as a statement or as instruction.

B. *Fables*: of which there are no examples extant, despite the fact that Solomon is said to have written about animals, trees, fish, etc (1 Kgs 4:32-33).

C. *Allegories*: two examples, Prov 5:15-23 (characterizes a wife as a cistern), and Eccl 12:1-6 (description of old age).

D. *Hymnic*: passages are found in *Sirach* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*; but these lie outside the canon.

E. *Disputation*: Job.

IX. CHARACTERISTICS.

A. Wisdom is a way of thinking, a way of offering explanation of the world in which man lives, an attempt at understanding life.

B. It has various tensions embedded in it.

1. There is a sense of questioning, desiring to know about the world.

2. At the same time there is a sense of humility at just how inept man is at understanding and controlling his world, and how powerful and knowledgeable God is in running the universe.

X. THE POETRY - WISDOM LITERATURE - OF THE OT CONSISTS OF JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SOLOMON.

A. *Job* deals with “theodicy,” or “Why does God allow suffering?”

1. Considered the oldest book of the Bible by some, later by others.

2. Various authors have been proposed: Job, Moses, other.
B. **The Psalter** was Israel’s ancient song book.

1. Is a collection of songs, poetry, etc.
2. Not divided into chapters, but separate songs.
3. Each Psalm is a unit in and of itself with its own message
4. The Psalter is divided into 5 books with various authors

   a. **Book I–1-41**
      
      (1) 1, 2, 10, 33–no author given
      (2) 3-9, 11-32, 34-41–David

   b. **Book II–42-72**
      
      (1) 43, 52-55, 60, 66, 67, 71–no author given
      (2) 51, 56-69, 61-65, 68-70–David
      (3) 42, 44-49–Sons of Korah
      (4) 50–Asaph
      (5) 72–Solomon

   c. **Book III–73-89**
      
      (1) 73-85–Asaph
      (2) 84-85, 87-88–Sons of Korah
      (3) 86–David
      (4) 89–Ethan

   d. **Book IV–90-106**
      
      (1) 90–Moses
      (2) 91-100, 102, 104-106–No author stated
      (3) 101, 103–David

   e. **Book V–107-150**
      
      (1) 107, 111-121, 123, 125, 126, 128-130, 132, 134-157, 146-150–no author
5. The above indicates the following:
   a. Though we do not know who made the divisions they do indicate a long period of growth
   b. The psalm titles (the first verse in the Hebrew text) are a special problem
   c. The psalms, by their very nature of poetic songs and prayers, deal with emotions.

C. **Proverbs:** short, pithy statements about life and conduct; written by various authors.

D. **Ecclesiastes:** perhaps written by Solomon, though many argue against this.
   1. If it is written by Solomon, it is a penitential sermon.
   2. If not, the message is the same–The meaninglessness of a life without God
   3. The sermon is the result of a life-long experiment

E. **Song of Solomon:** may have been written by Solomon, or may not
   1. Traditional interpretation is that it is an allegory of the relationship of Christ and the church.
   2. Others that it is a description of love between a husband and wife
   3. Still others, it is a secular discussion of sexual love

F. Some general topics found in the wisdom literature include:
   1. Wisdom
   2. Fools
   3. Simple minded
   4. Peace
   5. Loafer
   6. Evil vs. virtuous women
   7. Evil men
8. Youth
9. “Eat, drink, and be Merry”
10. Old Age
11. Value of riches
12. Learning
13. Why there is suffering in the world.