Old Testament Reading Guide

Introduction to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

Roland E. Murphy

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22

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Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.

A Lamp to My Feet

is Your Word,

A Light to My Path

— Psalm 118:105

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Rear cover photo: CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY at Bethlehem. A Greek Orthodox priest is reading his Bible in a quiet corner of the Greek Orthodox area of the building. *Photo courtesy*: Jordan Tourism Information Service, 5 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE WISDOM LITERATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is merely historical accident that only seven books of the Old Testament have been classified as the "sapiential books": Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach, Wisdom, Psalms, and the Canticle of Canticles. This designation has been classical in the Church from early times and it is still used in the liturgy to designate readings from these books. However, it is not exact. Thus, the book of Psalms has only a few poems which can properly be designated as "wisdom," although we may owe the preservation of the psalter to the sages of the OT. Similarly, the Song of Songs is properly a collection of love songs, even if we allow that there is a didactic purpose behind the collection and preservation of this great poetry. While, therefore, we shall restrict ourselves to only five of these books, we shall also take into consideration the wisdom Psalms, and other passages in various books, such as Tobit and Baruch, where there is strong wisdom influence.

The purpose of this treatment is to present the wisdom literature of the OT in a broad perspective: how it took its rise and developed within Israel itself; how it relates to the wisdom literature of Israel's neighbors; a general conspectus of distinctive ideas developed in Israel's wisdom literature.

Chapter One

HEBREW POETRY

Literary Characteristics

The sapiential books of the OT are also called the poetical books (so the title of the fine little book by T. H. Robinson, *The Poetry of the Old Testament*). This term is hardly adequate since most of the prophetical books are also written in poetic style, and there are several poems scattered throughout the historical books. Yet the Massoretes themselves set up a special musical notation for Psalms, Job and Proverbs, thus setting them apart from the other poetical works. The basic question is: what do we mean by Hebrew poetry? One who is attuned to rhyme as the ever-necessary ingredient of English poetry will perhaps be puzzled by Hebrew poetry. There is no rhyme, although often one finds a play on words or alliteration. One of the most successful examples is Samson's riddle:

> Out of the eater came something to eat,
> Out of the strong came something sweet (Jg 14:14).

But this sort of thing is hard to capture in translation. Or if one is willing to forego rhyme and look for the quantitative verse of Greco-Roman classical works (based on the type of meter or the length of syllables), he will find that this also is foreign to Hebrew poetry.

Rather, Hebrew poetry is characterized by the number of accents (or beats) in a line and by parallelism. A line is the verse unit, called a stich, which is divided by a caesura (or pause) into a distich, or if there are two caesuras, into a tristich. The length of the line depends upon the number of accented syllables and their distribution among unstressed syllables. This finds mathematical expression thus: 3 plus 3 (three accented syllables, parallel to three accented syllables):

> Is-not-man's-life on-earth a-drudgery? (3)
> Are-not-his-days those of-a-hireling? (3) (Job 7:1)

English is too verbose to catch the succinct beats of the Hebrew, but if one joins words together, as above, the Hebrew can be approximated.

The so-called "Qinah" (dirge) meter is 3 plus 2, and is found frequently in the OT (but not always in a sad poem; cf. Ps 18:8-11):

Come, all-you-who-pass by-the-way,
look and-see (Lam 1:12).
He-has-worn-away my-flesh and-my-skin,
he-has-broken my-bones (Lam 3:4).

Fortunately, the clearest and most unmistakable characteristic of Hebrew poetry is parallelism — a thought rhythm, not a vowel rhythm. It is easier to recognize parallelism than to define it. There are three classical types that were first named by an eighteenth-century Anglican Bishop, Robert Lowth: synonymous, antithetic and synthetic. He defined parallelism as a certain equality or similarity between two parts of a sentence; the words in these parts correspond to each other. The first member raises a certain expectation, and the second completes it:

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense
(Ps 50:3).

This is *synonymous* parallelism; the second member merely repeats the idea of the first with a slight variation. Antithetic parallelism presents a contrast between the two members; they say ultimately the same thing, but by way of a negation or contrast:

A wise son makes his father glad,
but a foolish son is a grief to his mother (Prv 10:1).

The third type, *synthetic*, is really a catch-all for all parallelism which cannot be classified in the first two groups. Here the parallelism is the sense of expectation which is created in the first part and completed in the second:

Yet God knows my way;
if he proved me, I should come forth as gold (Jb 23:10).

Some authors speak of "staircase" parallelism, as when each of the first two lines builds up to the third:

For behold, your enemies, O Lord,
for behold, your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered (Ps 91:10).

Parallelism is a characteristic not only of Hebrew, but of all the ancient Semitic literatures of the Fertile Crescent. The above example finds an interesting comparison in the literature of ancient

Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra in Syria). In the cyle of the famous Ugaritic epic, Baal and Anat, a messenger speaks to Baal:

> Behold, your enemies, O Baal,
> Behold, your enemies you will smite;
> Behold, you will vanquish your foes
> (Gordon's edition, 68:8).

It is important to be sensitive to the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry; it makes for variety and emphasis, and frequently is an aid to comprehension when the meaning of a line is obscure.

Some poems, while keeping the parallelism, follow an acrostic pattern. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. Thus one can render Ps 34:1-2 thus:

> At all times I will bless the Lord,
> his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
> Boasting in the Lord let my soul be;
> the lowly will hear me and be glad. . . .

The acrostic pattern can be applied to single lines, as in Pss 110 and 111, or even to an entire strophe, as in Ps 118. However, it tends to restrict the power and range of expression available to the poet.

The Proverb

Scholars usually distinguish between a saying and a proverb (*mašal*), as these are found in the OT. The saying has no particular rhythm or parallelism, in contrast to the proverb which is an art-form, the result of literary artifice. Typical sayings are: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 S 10:12; to be compared with Jer 23:28, "what has straw to do with wheat"?); "the blind and the lame shall not come into the house" (2 S 5:8). Although 1 S 10:12 is explicitly called a *mašal*, these sayings do not have the literary expression found in the popular proverbs, which are usually marked by a play on words, or contrast, or by some literary device: "Let not him who is girding on his weapon boast himself as he who is ungirding" (1 K 20:11); "As is the share of him who goes down into the battle, even so is his portion who remains with the baggage — they shall share alike" (1 S 29:24). Both of these sayings reflect wise decisions and observations derived from the realities of war. They have their roots in common human experience and are not peculiar to Israel. Many sayings

of this kind have been incorporated into the collections of the sages. So at least, one may judge Prv 10:5, which is drawn from the harvest work:

> A son who fills the granaries in summer is a credit;
> a son who slumbers during harvest, a disgrace.

Or again, Qoh 11:4,

> One who pays heed to the wind will not sow,
> and one who watches the clouds will never reap.

It is not possible to determine the extent to which the proverbs in OT wisdom literature have their origins in popular wisdom; probably many do. But they seem to owe their final literary expression, and their preservation, to the sages who used them for instruction.

Unfortunately, the exact meaning of *mašal* = proverb, is unknown. Some have explained it from a root meaning "to rule." Thus, it is something spoken by a "ruler," one filled with power (and so used to describe Balaam's oracles in Nm 23:7,18; 24:3, etc.). But it is more probable that its basic meaning is "likeness," or "comparison." One can thus understand how it came to be used of the proverbs which so often involve comparison. But it is also true that the word refers to more elaborate compositions, such as the dirge or taunt song of Is 14, or the didactic history of Ps 77.

The directness and sharpness of the proverb is best expressed by the parallelism of a couplet:

> The door turns on its hinges,
> the sluggard, on his bed! (Prv 26:14).

The book of Proverbs is mostly a collection of such two line sayings. In many instances, however, the proverb may become more prosaic, as when a reason is added to the saying:

> Injure not the poor because they are poor,
> nor crush the needy at the gate;
> For Yahweh will defend their cause,
> and will plunder the lives of those who plunder them
> (Prv 22:22-23).

This fullness of style is characteristic of Prv 1–9, where there is a relative unity and development to be found in groups of verses (cf. Prv 1:1-6), and also of Sirach and the book of Wisdom. Where disparate proverbs have been merely collected and published (Prv 10–22; 25–29), there is no continuous bond of unity. Often one can detect a catch word which will unite some

proverbs, such as "Answer the fool. . . ." in Prv 26:4-5, or the Yahwist proverbs in Prv 16:1-9.

The riddle (*ḥidah*) is a special form of folk wisdom, and it was also taken over by the sages as a literary expression. The most famous biblical example is Samson's riddle (Jg 14). Here the marriage festivities provide the background, and a prize goes to the one who solves the riddle. It is tempting to think that the questions about the bride in Ct 8:5 (perhaps also 6:10) are fragments of another marriage riddle. 1 K 10:1ff, the visit of the Queen of Sheba, indicates that the riddle played a role in royal wisdom (v. 23-24); and this is born out by the famous story about the strongest thing in the world in 3 Ezra 3–4, and the banquet discussions of the Letter of Aristeas (187-300).

But the adoption of the riddle was at the same time an adaptation. The numerical proverb seems to be one result. This type of saying specifies a number, and then adds another unit: n and n +1 (cf. Prv 6:16-19; 30:15-31; Sir 25:1-2,7-10):

> Three things are too wonderful for me,
> yes, four I cannot understand:
> The way of an eagle in the air,
> the way of a serpent upon a rock,
> The way of a ship on the high seas,
> the way of a man with a maiden (Prv 30:18-19).

The proverb itself seems to be an answer to the question, "what are the three (four) things too wonderful for man?" The riddle seems to have left little mark on the rest of the OT sapiential literature. The word has just about lost its proper connotation when it is merely associated with "proverb" in Prv 1:6 (cf. Ez 17:2; Pss 48:5; 78:2).

Chapter Two

THE ORIGINS OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Solomon, Patron of Wisdom

Solomon emerges in the OT as the wise man, *par excellence*. Basic to this judgment is the picture drawn in 1 K 4:29-34 (TM 5:9-14):

> God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand that is on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men: wiser than Ethan, the Ezrahite and Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the neighboring nations. He also spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were five thousand (TM: a thousand and five). He spoke of the trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts and birds, reptiles and fish. Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

Several points in this tradition call for comment. The "gift" of wisdom was already indicated in Solomon's prayer in 1 K 3:5-14, and the practical examples of his wisdom are seen in the episode of the two harlots (1 K 3:16-28) and the visit of the Queen of Sheba (1 K 10:1ff). What is particularly noteworthy is the standard of comparison: "the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt." In no other respect does Israel ever compare herself with her neighbors; here it is assumed that wisdom is an international affair, that Israel herself is a late-comer on the scene, compared to the Eastern Arabs and the Egyptians. We shall see later how truly justified is this association of wisdom with the East and with Egypt.

Ethan and the others who are mentioned in the text are not identifiable. Professor Albright has suggested that they were Canaanites, and members of orchestral guilds, who exerted great influence on Hebrew poetry. The mention of trees and animals (v. 33) brings to mind the fables of Jotham in Jg 9, and Joash in 2 K 14:9. One must admit, however, that there is little extant

concerning the realm of animals and trees. Israelite wisdom literature concentrated on the human scene, although the interest in animals is evidenced in Jb 38–41 and in Prv 30. It is possible that the so-called onomastica or name-lists, which shall be discussed later, may shed some light on this interest in nature and natural phenomena.

The tradition about Solomon was enough for Jewish and Christian traditions to ascribe the wisdom books to him. The very title of Prv is "The Proverbs of Solomon," even though other authors are explicitly indicated in this book, such as Lemuel, Agur, the "wise," etc. The Canticle of Canticles is entitled "The Song of Songs by Solomon," and this is probably due to the mention of his name in 3:7ff, and 8:11f. Qoheleth describes himself as "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12), and the title of his book is "the words of David's son, Qoheleth, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). In the last work of the OT, the book of Wisdom, the author likewise speaks in the person of Solomon (Wis 6:22ff). It would seem that the idea of authorship in the ancient world was not the same as ours. Roderick MacKenzie, S.J., has expressed this very well:

> In Israelite tradition, in order to express the belief that books were holy and composed under the impulse of the spirit of God, they were connected with great names of the past, prophets and wise men, who were famous as having been instruments through which the spirit worked. For the Jews, this was their instinctive way of expressing a profound truth. They were unwilling to leave a sacred writing entirely anonymous for then there was no affirmation of its origin through a divinely inspired man (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20[1958]4).

This enables us also to understand the wholesale ascription of the Pentateuch to Moses.

But the passage about Solomon's wisdom which we have discussed above is important, not for any statement about authorship, but because wisdom is associated with foreign influence and with Israelite royalty. And this suggests the problem of the *Sitz-im-Leben* or life-setting, of wisdom.

The Life-setting

1 S 8:5,20 indicates that kingship was adopted in Israel in imitation of the surrounding nations. There was no kingdom more ancient, more authentic, more involved in Israel's own traditions,

than that of Egypt. And the Bible itself reflects the prestige that Israel felt in the marriage alliance between the Davidic dynasty and the daughter of Pharaoh (1 K 3:1). It appears too that the very structure of the Israelite court was influenced by Egypt, especially the office of the *mazkir* ("herald," or "recorder"). The Bible lists the officials of David and Solomon (2 S 8:15-18; 1 K 4:1-7): priests, scribes or secretaries, the palace major-domo, etc. A royal court implies a world of lesser functionaries, courtiers of various types. These men must be trained for their several functions in a kingdom that was tightly re-organized by Solomon (1 K 4:8-19). Was there any pattern of courtly training that Israel could adopt?

While we are leaving a more complete discussion of Egyptian wisdom literature for a later section, we must indicate here in brief the general program of courtly training which existed in ancient Egypt. This has been preserved in the Egyptian writings, called *Sebayit* or "teachings," which purport to train worthy rulers and court-servants. They are instructions concerning life and conduct, transmitted from teacher to student (often in the form of father to son). Since these writings bear a remarkable similarity to OT wisdom literature, it is reasonable to assume that in Israel too, the court was the life-setting for this kind of literature. This impression is confirmed by the many proverbs which deal explicitly with king and court-life (especially Prv 16 and 25):

> The king's lips are an oracle;
> no judgment he pronounces is false . . .
> The king takes delight in honest lips,
> and the man who speaks what is right he loves . . .
> (Prv 16:10-13).

However, some scholars (J.-P. Audet, G. Couturier) have suggested that the origins, and thus the original life-setting, of the wisdom literature must be extended beyond the court into the family. The wisdom literature is not simply proper to the court; many other types (hymns, annals, etc.) of literature flourished there because writing was cultivated. But the wisdom literature was hardly created in this circle, rather it was transmitted to the court by way of oral tradition. Wisdom in Israel did not begin with Solomon; it must have existed before him, and its primary and most natural milieu would have been the family. The book of Tobit exemplifies this; in Tob 4:1ff, the old man calls in his son before he dies and pronounces several wisdom sayings: "Do not turn your face

from any poor man so that the face of God be not turned away from you. . . Avoid immorality. . . My son, take care in all you do, and discipline your conduct. . . Seek advice of all wise men. . . You are blessed if you fear God and keep from sin and do what pleases him." Such advice as this, it is argued, is what we find in the counsels of the sages. Hence the "my son" phraseology is not a device natural to the court; it points to the original and proper life-setting, the home.

These points are well taken; the home certainly served as a place for the education of youth, and in many respects the advice of the wisdom literature reflects the admonition, the legacy, that a father would want to hand down to his son. Such standards as these doubtless influenced the training of courtiers. However, it is also just to ask if the sayings as we have them do not owe artistic formulation and their status to the court. Was it not here that the movement of sapiential thought took root and developed? One may conclude by recognizing both family and court as important sources in the development of the wisdom literature of the OT.

The Wise Men in Pre-exilic Israel

The references to the sages in this period are not very frequent, but they are important. Isaiah refers explicitly to the wise men, or *ḥakamim*, and his words are harsh. The wisdom of the wise men shall perish (Is 29:14); doubtless he had in mind the educated courtiers who were advisers to the king. Yahweh, too, is "wise and will bring disaster" (Is 31:2) upon those courtiers who look not to the Holy One of Israel. The prophet makes a clear reference to the Egyptian sages in 19:11ff:

> Utter fools are the princes of Soan!
> the wisest of Pharaoh's advisers give stupid counsel.
> How can you say to Pharaoh,
> "I am a disciple of wise men, of ancient kings?"

These are obviously the high officials of the Egyptian court, whose worldly wisdom shall be nullified before Yahweh's plans to subjugate Egypt.

There is a precious, if somewhat obscure, reference to the sages in Jeremiah:

How can you say, "We are wise,
we have the law of Yahweh?"
Why, that has been changed into falsehood
by the lying pen of the scribes!
The wise are confounded,
dismayed and ensnared;
Since they have rejected Yahweh's word,
of what avail is their wisdom? (8:8-9).

Here the wise men are described as opposed to the word of the Lord preached by the prophets. They think that they have God's law, but in fact the scribes (the *sopherim*, who have obstructed the reform of Josiah which was based on Deuteronomy) have deceived them. This does not necessarily indicate a *class* of wise men, although the preoccupation with the law is characteristic of the sages. The existence of this class is certainly indicated by 18:18 where the opponents of Jeremiah mention three groups from whom they may expect help: priests (for instruction), wise men (for counsel), prophets (for the divine word). A similar contrast, this time between the strong man or warrior, and the riches and the wise is to be found in 9:22.

Besides the wise man (*ḥakam*), the counsellor (*yo'eṣ*) is mentioned frequently in the OT. Counsel goes with knowledge (Prv 1: 29-30; 22:20) and wisdom (Prv 13:10). The counsellor is the wise man who guides kings to life and security — as Ahithophel, David's trusted counsellor was described: "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one consulted an oracle of God — so was all the counsel of Ahithophel regarded both by David and by Absalom" (2 S 16:23). Counsel belongs in the same sphere as the priest's instruction or the prophet's word (Jer 18:18). As we have seen, it is a common complaint of the prophets that the counsel of the wise man is contrary to the Lord's will (Is 29:15; 30:1, Ez 7:26; 11:2). Another feature of the OT counsellor or sage is his role as a *father*. So Joseph is described as becoming a father to Pharaoh by his wisdom (Gn 41:39-40; 45:8); Simeon is recommended by Mattathias as a man of counsel who should be a father to all the others of the family (1 Mac 2:65). So also the wise Ahiqar is called the "father of all Assyria" by whose counsel Sennacherib was guided (*ANET* 428). This fits in neatly with the stance of the wisdom teacher in Prv (e.g., 2:1; 3:1,11, etc.) and in Sir (2:1; 3:1, etc.).

The prophets also make the association between court and wisdom for the neighbors of Israel. Jeremiah speaks of the "wisdom in Teman" (49:7; cf. Obadiah, 8-9]) — a reference to the wisdom of the Arabs; and he condemns the "princes and wise men" of Babylon (50:35; 51:57). Ezechiel describes the king of Tyre as "wiser than Danel" who was probably the almost legendary monarch that plays a role in the Ugaritic myth of Aqhat, son of Danel (Ez 14:14, 20). Isaiah taunts Egypt because her wise men will be of no avail (Is 19:11). We have already indicated that the opposition of the prophets to the sages was grounded in the political expediency which they recognized in the court. But there must have been many sages whom they respected. Jeremiah was protected by the family of a certain royal scribe, Shaphan (2 K 22:3-12), especially by Ahikam (Jer 26: 24).

Moreover, the prophets were open to many of the ideas which circulated among the wise men. Thus the problem of retribution is stated in traditional wisdom terms in Jer 17:5-8 (cf. Ps 1), and in Is 3:10-11. The idea that God alone can probe the mind and test the mysterious heart (Jer 17:9-10) is frequent in the wisdom books (Prv 16:2; 21:2; 24:12; Jb 31:4-6; Qoh 12:14). At times the stylistic devices of the sages are adopted by the prophets, e.g., the numerical sayings (Amos 1–2). Finally, some passages in the prophetical books suggest that these were edited by sages; the most striking example is the last verse of Hosea:

> Let him who is wise understand these things;
> let him who is prudent know them.
> Straight are the paths of Yahweh,
> in them the just walk,
> but sinners stumble in them (14:10).

Chapter Three

EXTRA-BIBLICAL "WISDOM" LITERATURE

We have put the word "wisdom" deliberately in quotation marks because it must be admitted that the total concept of wisdom literature in Israel is not identifiable with the wisdom literature of any of its contemporaries. As might be expected, Israel developed its own style, even while it also owed much to its neighbors. One has only to study the comparative literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia to appreciate this fact.

Egypt

The literature of ancient Egypt which presents the greatest similarities with the OT material is the *Sebayit*, or teachings. These extend from the third millenium down almost to the time of Christ, from the instructions of Hor-dedef, Kagemni, Ptah-hotep, Merikare, Amenemhet, Kheti (also called "the instruction of Duauf"), Ani, Amenemope, the Insinger papyrus. Most of these are available in translation in James B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (= ANET). There is a set form for the *Sebayit*: "the beginning of the instruction which X made for his son (or student) Y." A teacher is handing down certain rules of conduct. Often a prose introduction gives us details concerning the writer (his work and titles), and student. The introduction to the teaching of Amenemope does this and also states well the purpose:

> The beginning of the teaching of life, the testimony for prosperity, all precepts for intercourse with elders, the rules for courtiers, to know how to return an answer to him who said it, and to direct a report to one who has sent him, in order to direct him to the ways of life, to make him prosper upon earth . . . (ANET 421).

There few lines suggest the very practical purpose of Egyptian wisdom teaching. The young man had to be equipped to deal with the manifold duties and situations of court life. Hence he had to have the requisite knowledge and character. Character meant

diligence, reliability, moral fiber, ability to adjust to situations, self-control, etc.

One of the basic concepts of Egyptian thought is *maat*, which can be rendered as truth, justice, or the divine order. In his study, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Harper Torchbook, 77; New York, 1961), Henry Frankfort comments on this term: "We lack words for conceptions which, like *maat*, have ethical as well as metaphysical implications. We must sometimes translate 'order,' sometimes 'truth,' sometimes 'justice' . . . The laws of nature, the laws of society, and the divine commands all belong to the one category of what is right. The creator put order (or truth) in the place of disorder (or falsehood)" (p. 54).

This divine order established by the divinity must be observed by man; if he integrates himself into it by his conduct, he will succeed — if he does not, he ruins his life and reduces his existence to the chaos which opposes *maat*. Frankfort has well pointed out that a proper understanding of this viewpoint is necessary if we are to appreciate the "teachings." We may not simply write off the doctrine of the sages as pragmatism; if we do, we fail to comprehend the religious aspect of man's conduct. For the Egyptian the ethical or religious and the useful were one. Justice is the one true order, established by the divinity forever, which man must know and follow. Frankfort insists that the Egyptians did not have our notion of sin; rather, wrong-doing was an aberration — the harmonious integration with *maat* is disturbed. This is, as the Egyptian phrase has it, "an abomination of God." It is disorder and chaos, but it is not the same as the biblical understanding of "abomination of God" (Prv 3:32; 11:1, etc.), which implies a failure to correspond to the holiness demanded by the covenant God and thus destroys a personal relationship to this God.

Hence, no matter how pragmatic individual admonitions appear to be — even table-manners — they all have a bearing on this divinely established harmony. The purpose of the "father" is to preserve his "son" in justice by handing down the correct rules, observations based on experience and in accord with *maat*. The ideal man, who shows forth this harmonious integration, is the "silent man." This does not mean humility or weakness; it designates the man who has self-control, who rules his tongue and passions and is thus master of every situation — in contrast to the rash, impetuous person. Control of the tongue is two-edged. The wise man knows when to keep silent, but he must also know

when to speak and what to say. Ptah-hotep says that speaking is more difficult than hard physical work (ANET 414). The Instruction for Merikare likens the tongue to a sword: "Be a craftsman in speech, (so that) thou mayest be strong, (for) the tongue is a sword to (a man), and speech is more valorous than any fighting" (ANET 415).

For the convenience of the reader we will comment briefly on the various teachings, indicating the biblical references which show similarity to the Egyptian sayings.

The *Instruction of Ptah-hotep* was written by an Egyptian vizier of about 2450 B.C. He purports to be giving "the ideas of the ancestors," and follows the advice of the Pharaoh who emphasizes that the son of Ptah-hotep should be taught first about speaking, so as to become an example to others. Then he addresses himself to his son: "Let not thy heart be puffed-up because of thy knowledge. . . Take counsel with the ignorant as well as the wise. . . Good speech is more hidden than the emerald, but it may be found with maidservants at the grindstones" (ANET 412; cf. Prv 2:4). Table manners are frequently mentioned in the OT (Prv 23:1-8; Sir 31:12-31); and Ptah-hotep advises: "If thou art one of those sitting at the table of one greater than thyself, take what he may give when it is set before thy nose" (ANET 412).

A very frequent warning of the OT sages is the avoidance of evil women (Prv 6:24-35; Sir 9:1-9). Ptah-hotep also gives this admonition, and urges fidelity, love and care of one's own wife (ANET 413; cf. Prv 5:15-20; Sir 25:12–26:18). The ideal of a faithful messenger ("like the coolness of snow in the heat of the harvest," Prv 25:13) is also emphasized in the Egyptian work: "If thou art a man of intimacy, whom one great man sends to another, be thoroughly reliable when he sends thee. Carry out the errand for him as he has spoken" (ANET 413).

The *Instruction for Merikare* was probably written by his father, Wahkare, about 2100 B.C., and it includes a great many observations about the current historical situation. But the timeless wisdom of the sages is also handed on: "More acceptable is the character of one upright of heart than the ox of the evildoer" (ANET 417; cf. 1 S 15:22; Qoh 4:17).

The *Instruction of Ani* is interesting for its inclusion of the reactions of Ani's son to the advice given by the father; the son finds the wisdom teaching too idealistic. However, Ani's teachings are not different from the traditional Egyptian wisdom: admoni-

tions against strange, evil women, correct deportment before elders and superiors, care for one's mother. His words concerning the silent just man are worth noting: "Do not talk a lot. Be silent, and thou wilt be happy. Do not be garrulous. The dwelling of god, its abomination is clamor. . . If a passing remark issuing from thy mouth is hasty and it is repeated, thou wilt make enemies. A man may fall to ruin because of his tongue" (ANET 420; cf. Prv 10:19-21; Sir 20:1-30).

The *Instruction of Amenemope* is particularly famous because it presents the greatest similarity to the book of Proverbs. Most scholars agree that the Egyptian text is a direct source for Prv 22:17–24:22, although the date of the Egyptian work has not been established. Amenemope had arranged his teaching in thirty chapters (or "houses," as he calls them), and this is reflected in Prv 22:20, "Have I not written for you the 'Thirty' " — a reference to the various sayings that make up this section of Prv. The reader should note the reading adopted by the American Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation for Prv 22:19: "I make known to you the word of Amen-em-ope."

This is a conjectural translation, which underlines the correspondence between the two works. Although the chapters of the Egyptian sage are more diffuse than the sayings of the Hebrew writer, there are some remarkable similarities. The first of the thirty chapters begins with an admonition that is almost the same as Prv 22:17-18. "Give thy ears, hear what is said, Give thy heart to understand them. To put them in thy heart is worth while." The Egyptian ideal of the man of self-control is contained in the negative advice: "Do not associate to thyself the heated man, nor visit him for conversation. . . Do not leap to hold to such a one, lest a terror carry thee off" (ANET 423); similarly one reads in Prv 22:24-25:

> Be not friendly with a hotheaded man
> nor the companion of a wrathful man,
> Lest you learn his ways,
> and get yourself into a snare.

The most satisfactory way to view the relationship between the two works is to read the entire Egyptian work in connection with Prv 22:17–24:22. Both the similarity and also the dependence of the Hebrew author will stand out. If he has modeled his work on the "Thirty" it is also clear that he has not imitated slavishly.

In addition to the *Sebayit* of the Egyptian sages, there also exists a genre which deals with nature — the Onomastica or Name-lists. The Onomasticon of Amenemope contains the names of over 600 objects, persons, offices, cities, etc. The enumeration of all these things suggests an encyclopedia, and the work does claim to be concerned with all that Ptah has created: heaven, earth, mountains and waters. The pertinence to the Bible comes from the fact that this kind of list seems to underlie such passages as Jb 28:12-41; Sir 43:1-25; Ps 147:1-12; Dn 3:59-83.

If one compares these passages with the Onomasticon, as Gerhard von Rad has done, it seems very likely that the knowledge of the cosmic and meteorological phenomena and the animal world has been derived from such lists. The prosaic lists have been put to poetry, as it were. This may also provide the background to the sayings attributed to Solomon (1 K 4:23) concerning trees, cattle, birds and fish. There are extant even earlier lists from ancient Sumer which contain the names of things; the most famous is the Akkadian *Charra-Chubullu* lists, which are twenty-four cuneiform tablets that contain hundreds of names.

There are several Egyptian works which have been compared to Job and Qoheleth. The comparison is not meant to suggest derivation, but a common preoccupation about central problems of life. Several "Harper's Songs" have been preserved and these remind one of Qoheleth:

> Follow thy desire, as long as thou shalt live.
> Put myrrh upon thy head and clothing of fine linen upon thee . . .
> Set an increase to thy good things;
> Let not thy heart flag.
> Follow thy desire and thy good.
> Fulfill thy needs upon earth, after the command of thy heart,
> Until there come for thee that day of mourning . . .
> Behold, it is not given to man to take his property with him.
> Behold, there is not one who departs who comes back again
> (ANET 467).

See Qoh 5:17-19; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9. To judge from the art preserved on the Egyptian tombs, the Harper and his Song were a frequent accompaniment at Egyptian banquets; his message calls them to enjoy the pleasures of the moment.

Another work is the *Dispute over Suicide,* or *The Man Who was Tired of Life.* This is, however, more of a simple complaint than a struggle about the problems of life, or the suffering

of the good man. It is an argument between a man who is weary of life, and his own soul. Whereas he envisions suicide, the soul appears unwilling at first, urging him to various pleasures, but finally resigning itself to suicide or whatever fate he chooses. The following illustrates the tone of the complaint:

To whom can I speak today?
I am laden with wretchedness
For lack of an intimate (friend).
To whom can I speak today?
The sin which treads the earth,
It has no end.
Death is in my sight today
(Like) the recovery of a sick man,
Like going out into the open after a confinement . . .
Death is in my sight today
Like the longing of a man to see his house (again),
After he has spent many years held in captivity (ANET 407).

This is simple resignation to death, or suicide; the significant questions of Job or Qoheleth are never asked.

The story of the *Eloquent Peasant* is set in the background of the twenty-first century, B.C. A peasant is robbed of his goods by a man of higher social standing, who has connections at court. The peasant goes to the court and insists on his rights to the chief steward who is the superior of the robber. Nine appeals are made and finally he wins his case; the goods are returned, the robber punished, and the humble peasant is rewarded with the patronage of the chief steward. Its pertinence to the wisdom literature derives from certain sayings that approximate the OT point of view, e.g., "Now justice lasts unto eternity; it goes down into the necropolis with him who does it. When he is buried and interred, his name is not wiped out upon earth, but he is remembered for goodness" (ANET 410). As with the Israelites, the good name is an eternal memorial for a man (e.g., Sir 15:6; Wis 8:13). The "eternity" of justice reminds one of Wis 1:15 ("for justice is immortal") but it is not the same. The Egyptian "justice" is *maat*, the order established by God, which we discussed above; it has no association with the blessed immortality proclaimed by the writer of the book of Wisdom.

Finally there is the *Satirical Letter* of Hori, contained in the Papyrus Anastasi, which dates from the thirteenth century B.C. This presents some similarity to the Yahweh speeches in Job. In the

Egyptian work Hori replies to a letter from a scribe named Amenemope and satirizes him as being an incompetent scribe:

> Thou art come provided with great mysteries, and thou tellest me a saying of Hor-dedef, (although) thou knowest not whether it is good or bad. What chapter is before it, what after it? . . . (ANET 476).

> How damaged is everything which comes forth over thy tongue! How futile are thy speeches! Thou comest to me wrapped up in confusions, loaded down with mistakes . . . (ANET 478).

This exemplifies the tone of the Egyptian letter, which is filled with questions reminiscent of the manner in which the Lord squelches Job ("where were you when. . ." Jb 38:4, and *passim*). Both Job and the Letter tick off a list of points that demonstrate or illustrate the ignorance of the party concerned. Both resemble a kind of catechesis which is inflicted upon a student who has presumed to rebel against his teacher.

Mesopotamia

In recent years there has been an increasing number of Sumerian texts published by American and European scholars. Unfortunately this complex language is not yet adequately understood, and very often the translations are not trustworthy, or at least are being constantly revised. Proverb literature, in particular, presents very special difficulties. The *e-dubba* ("house of tablets") was the school or academy, especially in Nippur, where the scribes copied out the literary pieces, sapiential, myth, etc., in the early second millenium B.C. Not many of the proverbs thus far published by Professor Edmund Gordon bear close resemblance to the biblical heritage. For one thing, they are far more inclusive than the collection that has been preserved for us in the Bible, since they include animal fables.

S. N. Kramer has published a Sumerian text, "Man and His God," which he considers to be a Sumerian variation on the "Job" motif. But as he interprets it, there is no marked similarity to the biblical book. The poet presents the story of a suffering man, apparently just, who remains faithful to his god throughout; in the end, after confessing guilt, he is restored by his god (cf. *History*

Begins at Sumer [New York: Doubleday Anchor A175, 1959] 114-118).

In his monumental *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) Professor W. G. Lambert brings together the extant wisdom literature written in Akkadian. He makes the simple but important observation that "*wisdom* is strictly a misnomer as applied to Babylonian literature." It is true that there is a similarity in subject-matter: practical conduct, the problem of suffering, etc. But the origins, background and tone of the Babylonian literature differ from that of the OT. It is really the OT classification that has been pressed into service to describe the Babylonian literature, although wisdom in Mesopotamia had to do more with magic and cult. Nonetheless, some significant parallels, even if there is no question of dependence, can be pointed out.

The *Counsels of Wisdom* are in the same genre as Prv, or the Egyptian *Sebayit*; they are moral exhortations that are probably the admonitions of a ruler or courtier to his son, and the typical phrase, "my son" is actually used. The topics are familiar from Prv: the avoidance of bad companions, improper speech, kindness to the needy, avoidance of disputes, marriage and women, friends, etc. There are about 150 lines, but they are not easy to date; perhaps they are from the fourteenth or thirteenth century B.C. The following selections are related to the biblical wisdom literature:

> Let your mouth be controlled and your speech guarded: Therein is a man's wealth — let your lips be very precious . . . Beware of careless talk, guard your lips (26-27,131; BWL 101-105).

This ideal of self control, and especially control of the tongue, is familiar from Egypt and the OT (cf. Prv 13:3). Prv gives many counsels urging one not to repay evil (20:22; 24:29; Sir 28:1-2, etc.). The *Counsels* also upholds this ideal, although the context is one of legal disputes (which are to be avoided):

> Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you;
> Requite with kindness your evil-doer,
> Maintain justice to your enemy,
> Smile on your adversary (lines 41-44; BWL 101).

There are two stories of the ancient Semitic world that should be treated here because of their contacts with wisdom literature:

the *Story of Ahiqar* and the *Story of the Three Youths* at the court of Darius. The Ahiqar tale is the more famous, for it has entered into various languages and literatures: Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Greek; the Koran, Arabian Nights, and the Church Fathers. The most ancient recension is the Aramaic, found among the fifth century B.C. papyri which were discovered at the start of the twentieth century on the island of Elephantine in the Nile. The story concerns the betrayal of Ahiqar by a nephew whom he has raised; when Ahiqar's life is spared by the executioner, the way is prepared for him to be restored to his post as chancellor of Assyria when King Esarhaddon needs his help. This forms the framework for two speeches that contain the characteristic sapiential maxims: guarding one's tongue, conduct before the king, respecting secrets, etc.

Ahiqar has been incorporated into the book of Tobit (1:22; 2:10; 11:17; 14:10, according to the Greek numbering); like the Tobit story, the tale of Ahiqar provides opportunity to impart wisdom teaching. The following examples may be noted: "If I strike you, my son, you will not die, but if I leave you to your own desires (you will not live)." "Two things (which) are meet, and the third pleasing to Shamash: one who drinks wine and gives it to drink, one who guards wisdom, and one who hears a word and does not tell" (ANET 428). The association of wisdom with divinity and kingship is also worthy of note: "Wisdom (comes from?) the gods; to the gods also she is precious. For (ever?) kingship is here; in heaven she is established for the lord of holiness (or holy ones?) has exalted her."

The *Tale of the Three Youths* has been incorporated into the Greek Ezra (= 1 Esdras of the LXX; 3 Esdras of the Vulgate) 3:1–5:6. This book is a very free Greek translation of the canonical Ezra of the Hebrew Bible. The story is set in the court of Darius I, where his three palace guards conduct a contest concerning the strongest of all things. They write down their views, and place the sealed answers under the pillow of the king who will, presumably, give a reward for the wisest answer. The first two answers are: wine, and the king. The third reply, given by a certain Zerubbabel (and so identified with the governor of Judah who carried out the rebuilding of the Temple in 520-515; cf. Ezra 5:2), is twofold; women, and truth — "women are strongest, but truth prevails over everything" (3:12). All of these answers are

developed and exemplified at some length. Thus, Zerubbabel illustrates the power of women over men, and even kings. His description of Truth is reminiscent of the qualities of OT wisdom:

> Truth is great, and mightier than all other things. The whole earth calls upon truth and heaven blesses her; all his works quake and tremble, there is no wrongdoing with him. Wine is not upright, the king is not upright, women are not upright, all the sons of men are not upright; there is no truth in them, and through their unrighteousness they will perish. But truth endures and is strong forever, and lives and reigns forever and ever. There is no partiality or preference with her, but she does what is right, rather than all that is wrong and wicked. All men approve her doings, and there is no injustice in her judgment. To her belongs power and the royal dignity and authority and majesty in all the ages; blessed be the God of truth.

Zerubbabel the Jew is recognized as the victor, and any request of his will be fulfilled. He then asks Darius to fulfill his own vow that Jerusalem and the Temple should be rebuilt, and Darius accedes. The adaptation of the story (probably written originally in Aramaic and perhaps even of Persian origin) is clear: the third youth is identified with Zerubbabel and his victory explains how he came to lead the exiles back to Jerusalem. The role of wisdom in the whole affair is clearly indicated by the description of Zerubbabel's reaction in 4:58-60:

> When the young man went out, he lifted his face to heaven toward Jerusalem, and praised the King of Heaven, saying, "From you comes victory, from you comes wisdom; to you belongs glory, and I am your servant. Blessed are you, who have given me wisdom; I praise you, Lord of my forefathers."

Several literary works have been preserved in Akkadian which bear some similarity to the "problem literature" of the OT, namely, Job and Qoheleth. The problem of the "righteous sufferer" is illustrated by the famous poem, *Ludlul bel nemeqi* (this title is the first line of the poem: "I will praise the lord of wisdom"), which has been called "the Babylonian Job," or better, with W. G. Lambert, "the Babylonian Pilgrim's Progress." A nobleman, named Shubshi-meshre-shakkan, describes the various sufferings that have befallen him, and relates three different dreams which have promised him deliverance. The climax comes with his description of how Marduk intervened to save him; Marduk is the "lord of wisdom" whom he is addressing in the poem, and it is quite

clear that the literary form of this work is thanksgiving or praise of divinity. From this point of view, it is quite different from Job, in which the poetry has been situated into the framework of a folk tale. There is broad similarity in so far as in both there is question of one who suffers apparently mysteriously and is eventually restored. The sufferer complains that his prayers are not answered; although he has always been faithful to his god, he is not treated well:

> Like one who has not made libations to his god,
> nor invoked his goddess at table,
> Does not engage in prostration, nor takes cognizance of
> bowing down . . .
> For myself, I gave attention to supplication and prayer:
> to me prayer was discretion, sacrifice my rule
> (BWL 39; II,12-14, 21-22).

In his despair he must conclude that man's concept of justice is not that of the gods:

> What is proper to oneself is an offence to one's god,
> What in one's own heart seems despicable is proper to one's god.
> Who knows the will of the gods in heaven?
> Who understands the plans of the underworld gods?
> Where have mortals learnt the way of a god? (BWL 41; II, 34-38)

However, this desperate conclusion is wiped out by the convenient intervention of Marduk to save him. It is not that this is the answer to the problem: that the suffering of the just is merely temporary, to be followed by restoration. The writer had no answer; he simply ascribed to Marduk the divine intervention that saves the righteous sufferer. Job's challenge to his God, his confrontation with him, and final acceptance of his will — there is none of this in the poem.

The *Dialogue about Human Misery*, also called the *Babylonian Theodicy*, dates from about 1000 B.C., and it has also been compared to Job and Qoheleth. This is an acrostic poem of twenty-seven stanzas, each of eleven lines. The thought progresses by means of a dialogue between the sufferer and his friend; unlike Job, there is only one friend, and he is completely sympathetic to the one who is suffering. The main thrust of the argument is the evils of society, which are ultimately of course in conflict with the justice of the gods. The first complaint is that he was born when his parents were already old, and was left an orphan by them,

with none to defend him. The gentle reply is that all must die, even one's parents, and that protection comes from piety towards one's god. The dialogue rehearses several themes: why should the first-born be favored above other children; the uselessness of piety, the advantages of crime, etc. The friend never adopts an accusing tone, but neither does he fail to uphold the wisdom of the gods as inscrutable, and the belief that piety will be rewarded. But in the twenty-sixth stanza he makes a startling admission:

> Narru, king of the gods, who created mankind,
> And majestic Zulummar, who dug out their clay . . .
> Gave perverse speech to the human race.
> With lies, and not truth, they endowed them forever.
> (26:276-280; BWL 89)

In the twenty-seventh and final stanza, the sufferer nevertheless asks the gods for protection. But, as W. G. Lambert has pointed out, the above admission has undercut the debate; if the gods are responsible for man's evil ways, the argument is over, and discussion is useless.

The *Dialogue of Pessimism* has been compared with Qoheleth, and with some justice. It is a conversation between a master and his slave concerning a variety of topics: piety, charity, marriage, etc. The master leads off with a declaration of his intention to carry out a particular course of action; the slave agrees, adding one reason or another why the master should do so. But then the master decides to do the opposite; nothing daunted, the slave agrees, and indicates the advantages that will accrue:

> Slave, listen to me. "Here I am, sir, here I am."
> I am going to love a woman. "So love, sir, love.
> The man who loves a woman forgets sorrow and fear."
> No, slave, I will by no means love a woman.
> ("Do not) love, sir, do not love.
> Woman is a pitfall — a pitfall, a hole, a ditch,
> Woman is a sharp iron dagger that cuts a man's throat"
> (46-52; BWL 147).
> Slave, listen to me. "Here I am, sir, here I am."
> I will perform a public benefit for my country.
> "So perform, sir, perform.
> The man who performs a public benefit for his country,
> His deeds are placed in the ring of Marduk."
> No, slave, I will by no means perform a public benefit for my country.
> "Do not perform, sir, do not perform.

Go up on to the ancient ruin heaps and walk about;
See the skulls of high and low.
Which is the malefactor, and which is the benefactor?"
(70-78; BWL 149)

As in Qoheleth, extreme positions are taken; Qoheleth was ready to search out contradictions, to show two sides to a question, and he never failed to reject a given value, if one disadvantage could be found. He continually comes back to the presence of evil in the world, and especially to the fact of death, which wiped out the distinction between man and beast, between wise man and fool ("which is the malefactor. . . ?"). But Qoheleth never entertains the idea of suicide — the note on which the *Dialogue* ends:

Slave, listen to me. "Here I am, sir, here I am."
What, then, is good?
"To have my neck and your neck broken
And to be thrown into the river is good.
'Who is so tall as to ascend to the heavens?
Who is so broad as to compass the underworld?' "
No, slave, I will kill you and send you first.
"And my master would certainly not outlive me
by even three days" (79-86; BWL 149).

Assyriologists debate whether this is a farce, or a serious piece. E. Speiser thinks it is farce, that the servant is like the Sam Weller of Dickens. It may be granted that the deliberate and unabashed contradictory positions taken by the slave are not without their humor; so also in real life, subjects have to adapt to the (contradictory) views of superiors. But the climactic build-up leading to the decision of suicide is meant to be taken seriously. As we have seen, the same grim considerations led to suicide in the Egyptian piece, *The Man Who was Tired of Life*.

Far from countenancing suicide, Qoheleth recognized that there are certain joys in life: "Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, because it is now that God favors your works. At all times let your garments be white, and spare not the perfume for your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of the fleeting life that is granted you under the sun. This is your lot in life, for the toil of your labors under the sun. Anything you can turn your hand to, do with what power you have; for there will be no work, nor reason, nor knowledge in the nether world where you are going" (9:7-10). Even in the

face of the nether world, he was able to affirm certain joys. The closest parallel to this in the ancient world is the advice given by the bar-maid Siduri to Gilgamesh:

> Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
> The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.
> When the gods created mankind,
> Death for mankind they set aside,
> Life in their own hands retaining.
> Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly.
> Make thou merry by day and by night.
> Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,
> Day and night dance thou and play!
> Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
> Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
> Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
> Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!
> For this is the task of mankind! (ANET 90).

One feels that there is a desperate tone to this advice given to Gilgamesh, and that the view of Qoheleth is less phrenetic; the difference is to be explained by the Jewish understanding of God. Indeed, when the Israelite struggles with the problem of divine justice, etc., the poignancy is all the more increased because of the theological point of view (a personal intimacy with the Lord) from which he argues; this is lacking in the dry and grim Mesopotamian counterparts.

Conclusion

This brief survey of the wisdom literatures of Egypt and Mesopotamia indicates the undeniable contacts between Israel and her neighbors. Perhaps in no other area of OT literature is this relationship so extensive and striking. Where else is there a passage that draws on a foreign model for structure and content in such a manner as Prv 22:17–24:22 imitates the *Instruction of Amenemope?* This is not to minimize Israel's adaptation of other literatures (e.g., Ps 28 and its Canaanite background), but the very nature of the wisdom movement — its origins and the development of its particular interests — is truly international. It was, as it were, a relatively neutral block which Israel could adopt and adapt with more freedom than in other areas.

But Israel never borrowed, nor underwent outside influence,

without digesting and expressing the matter anew in its own style. This has been recognized in the various Israelite institutions such as kingship and liturgy, and it is true of the wisdom literature as well. One of the most striking differences here is the orientation given to the sapiential writings. They came to be designed for *all* Israelites. It is no longer a question of training courtiers as it remained for so long in Egypt, while in Mesopotamia the proverb literature is a hodge-podge of popular wisdom, fables and tales, and lacking the intensity and direction of the Israelite work. The training of the official has given way to the training of every Israelite. The "son" or student of Prv and Sir is each Jew who is expected to "give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, 'This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people' " (Dt 4:6).

One sees this change in the wider range of human interests and moral activities described in Prv and Sir: the evaluation of the wife, appreciation of the poor and afflicted, friendship, Providence, etc. Moreover, the problem of the righteous sufferer receives an expression in Job and Qoheleth — and an answer in the book of Wisdom — that was never attained elsewhere. It is not necessary to belabor the reason for these differences: Israel's understanding of Yahweh shaped its proclamation of *ḥokmah*.

Chapter Four

WISDOM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Wisdom, Experiential and Didactic

The proverb literature has been well characterized by Gerhard von Rad as "experiential wisdom," that is, a wisdom gained by observation and experience in man's attempt to master life's activities. The sayings, then, are the distillation of observations concerning the human scene. Some proverbs are pure observations. It is a fact, for instance, that money is used to influence people ("gains access," Prv 18:16; "allays anger," 21:14), and that there are clear social differences between the rich and the poor (Prv 19:6-7, "all are friends of the man who has something to give. . . all the poor man's brothers hate him. . ."; cf. Sir 13:20-22). Things are not what they *seem* to be:

> Sometimes a way seems right to a man,
> but the end of it leads to death (Prv 16:25).
> One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing;
> another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth (13:7).

There is no moral judgment expressed in the sayings (as one does find, on these topics, in Prv 15:27, 19:1, etc.). They are simply the facts of experience.

This suggests that one can interpret proverbs as attempts to impose control upon a highly diversified reality. Prv 27:19 recognizes the great variety of men:

> As one face differs from another,
> so does one heart differ from another.

Hence one must try to bring order into the chaos of the activity of man especially, and of nature. Man's position before the uncertain and the unknown is solidified when he can point to the usual or to the universal. Sometimes nature will suggest an analogy: the nether world is ever greedy to swallow up humans — is that not like the darting, greedy eyes of man himself (Prv 27:20)? If you take away the wood, there will be no fire — similarly, there will be no strife, if there is no talebearing (26:20). Or the proverb may be the best answer to a puzzle: why does one repeat foolish actions? — doesn't the dog return to his vomit (26:11)?

Often one can merely affirm a paradox:

> One man is lavish, yet grows richer,
> another is too sparing, yet is the poorer (11:24).

Even the one action can be variously interpreted: silence is the sign of a wise man who is "chary of speech," but the fool can do this, too (17:27-28). However, there are certain signs that are tell-tale: "He who winks his eye is plotting trickery" (16:30; cf. 6:12-13).

These proverbs remain on the level of observation and experience. They have a real function to perform in initiating the young man to reality. But most of the sayings go beyond mere observation and contain a directive of some sort. Here their true didactic nature appears: they are designed to influence the conduct of the young man. The moralizing may be very explicit:

> The kindly man will be blessed,
> for he gives of his sustenance to the poor (22:9).

Or there may be a command:

> Love not sleep,
> lest you be reduced to poverty (20:13).

At other times the moral is only implicit:

> The avaricious man is perturbed about his wealth,
> and he knows not when want will come upon him (28:22).

Because the proverbs taught the young the facts of life and directed their moral training, they were preserved by the sages. The author of Prv 1–9 has made clear this purpose in his opening lines:

> The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David,
> king of Israel:
> That men may appreciate wisdom and discipline;
> may understand words of intelligence;
> May receive training in wise conduct,
> in what is right, just and honest;
> That resourcefulness may be imparted to the simple,
> to the young man knowledge and discretion.
> A wise man by hearing them will advance in learning,
> an intelligent man will gain sound guidance.
> That he may comprehend proverb and parable,
> the words of the wise and their riddles.
> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
> wisdom and instruction fools despise (1:1-7).

This kind of framework is a clear indication of the religious and moral thrust of these proverbs. Many have sought to distinguish between "profane" and "sacred" within the body of the sayings. Such a procedure can hardly escape an anachronistic judgment; our criteria for distinguishing the two differ from those of ancient Israel. That is why we have preferred to distinguish merely between experiential wisdom (e.g., Prv 10ff) and the more explicitly didactic or formative wisdom (e.g., Prv 1–9). But for the sages all of this had a sacred or religious bearing — even conduct at the table (23:1-2,6-8; Sir 31:12-31). As we shall see, many proverbs acquired overtones, and of a more deeply religious character, by being incorporated with the others, e.g., the "life" of Prv 10:16, or the "justice" of 12:28:

> The just man's recompense leads to life,
> the gains of the wicked, to sin (10:16).
> In the path of justice there is life,
> but the abominable way leads to death (12:28).

The Change in the Life-setting from Court to School

We have just made a suggestion concerning the overtones that the wisdom sayings acquired, as pointed up in the introduction to Prv (1–9). This opens up a new perspective that must constantly be kept in mind. The wisdom literature is, by and large, postexilic; only then was it written down in its present form. The only serious exception is the collections in Prv 10–22, 25–29, most of which is undoubtedly pre-exilic (e.g., especially the king proverbs in 16:10-15; 25:2-7), and finds its proper life-setting in the Jerusalem court, as described above. Yet in the postexilic period there was no king and no court!

It is a paradox that a literature, whose *origins* are in the court, should have developed in the apparently free manner of the OT wisdom books. This means that the courtly life-setting and the international, universal, stamp of this literature contribute relatively little to our *understanding* of these books. Rather, they are very important for understanding the growth and direction of this literature, but not for the religious message.

This is true even for the book of Proverbs. The question now is, have these pre-exilic sayings preserved completely their original

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character? Are we to think that the editor has retained them as antiquarian notices, or are they now acquiring a deeper resonance? A significant change has taken place: the atmosphere of the court career has been replaced by religious schooling. The context of these early sayings is more than ever now the principles of Yahwist faith: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prv 1:7; cf. 9:10; 15:33). Scholarship has come to accept the fact of re-reading, i.e., that early passages of the OT were re-interpreted and re-read in the light of Israel's ongoing life.

An outstanding example is the royal psalms which originally referred to the reigning king but which were nevertheless preserved and re-read in the postexilic period when kingship had disappeared — now re-interpreted in the light of messianic hope. Similarly, the old standards of conduct have been assimilated into a more religious framework. As the reader will recall, this assimilation is not any the less remarkable than the other more widely recognized instances of Israel's power of assimilation, as in cult and mythology. There is no way of ascertaining the whole range of the original corpus of Israelite wisdom literature. Presumably it could have dwelt on many varied topics (e.g., the trees and animals of 1 K 5:10ff), but only the material capable of a more directly religious application was preserved.

For this reorientation one need merely recall Prv 1–9, in which the urgent, didactic tone, so reminiscent of Dt, comes alive in the warm appeal of the wisdom teacher to his student. Wisdom is held out as divine and utterly desirable. If the youth observes the wisdom counsels, he will have life (Prv 8:35; Sir 4:12), just as the Deuteronomic preachers set before their audience the choice of life and prosperity, or death and doom (Dt 30:15-20), assuring them that if they followed exactly the way prescribed in "the commandments, the statutes and the decrees" they would "live and prosper" and have long life in the land (Dt 5:33). In one important respect the wisdom viewpoint differs from that of Dt. The latter had a definite legal corpus (Dt 12–26) to propagate, and it worked within the framework of covenant renewal. The sage, however, propagates a way of life, not the Torah (except for Sirach who is very much concerned with the Torah – 15:1; 19:17; 24:22; 28:7; 32:4–33:3; 35:1; 39:1; 42:2). This way of life combines loyalty to the covenant god (or rather, assumes this loyalty) with a backlog of practical observa-

tions about life and man which are in harmony with devotion to the Lord.

The editor and collector of the book of Prv wished his readers to interpret his work in the light of his introductory chapters. The word of the prophets and the instruction of the priests had aimed at the more obvious areas of Yahwist belief, morality and ritual. But what about the large grey area — the concrete details of daily life — the area which was not always amenable to clear-cut moral decisions? Here was the place for a practical morality or propaedeutic to morality, designed to develop and equip man for the smaller experiences that at the same time mold his moral character: How should a person react to bad companions (Prv 13:20)? What are the effects of jealousy (14:30)? What are the consequences of pride (29:33)?

One may conclude that what had been deduced by experience and observation was seen to be a confirmation of what had been believed in: a kindly man benefits himself; but a merciless man harms himself (11:17); the start of strife is like the opening of a dam; therefore, check a quarrel before it begins (17:12); the soul of the sluggard craves in vain, but the diligent soul is amply satisfied (13:4). There is no denying the similarity between the Egyptian ideal of the man who has perfect self-control, and the model held up in Prv 17:27 ("chary of speech"), 14:29-30 ("patient," "tranquil"), etc. But these ideals have a new quality and direction as they now stand.

We have been illustrating the reorientation from the book of Proverbs because this presents the interesting contrast between early (Prv 10ff) and late wisdom. But the same can be done with Sirach, who is able to embrace the hard-headed advice of the ancients on loans, (29:1-7), types of people (18:1-19), especially evil women and their wiles (9:1-9), and on table etiquette (31:12–32:13), in his concept of wisdom (cf. 1:1–2:18) as fear of the Lord.

How was the gap between courtly training and religious wisdom bridged? What factor enabled the postexilic sage to incorporate the less obviously religious proverbs into his message? For one thing, we have seen that these sayings could be considered an introduction to morality, because of their pertinence to everyday life. Secondly, the reward promised by these sayings (success, prosperity) was seen as identifiable with the life promised by

the Deuteronomic preacher. The rewards held out by Dt for observance of the Law are in every way comparable to the success envisioned by the early sages. The blessings of the "produce of your soil, and the offspring of your livestock" (Dt 28:4) were seen to have some relation to the diligence and independence and other traits fostered by the sages. The good life, then, is the common denominator between observance of the Law as conceived by Dt and the pursuit of wisdom preached by the wisdom writers. Ultimately, this common denominator is a basis for the identification between Law and Wisdom (Sir 24:22).

Enough has been said to indicate that wisdom is one of the most complex concepts in the OT. One reason for this has been made clear: the origins of the wisdom movement. If the wisdom teaching is an attempt to master reality, there will be as many aspects to wisdom as there is to the reality that is contemplated. But somehow the wisdom teaching should be synthesized, and we shall attempt to do that. We shall begin negatively by indicating what is omitted by the wisdom teaching, and then positively, by summarizing the main content of this teaching under the following heads: human conduct, wisdom Psalms, the theologizing of wisdom (including the personification of wisdom), the problem of retribution.

The Omissions in the Wisdom Literature

The OT wisdom literature lacks the specific beliefs of Yahwism. This does not mean that it does not operate in the light of OT monotheism, or that it fails to express values that are in harmony with the Yahwistic point of view. It is just that there is little or no positive reference to the great events of Israel's salvation history — to Yahweh as Ruler of history and Savior of Israel. Moreover, the cult is practically ignored, despite the fact that recent research has underscored the role of the liturgy in the composition of large parts of the OT. The sealing off of the wisdom books from the rest of the OT is almost water-tight.

The exception to the above statements is the so-called "Praise of the Fathers" in Sir 44:1—50:24, and the historical summary in Wis 10:1–19:5, where the role of wisdom in the history of Israel is illustrated. The didactic use of Israel's history is also to

be found in the Canticle of Moses (Dt 32) and in Ps 77, which begins in the wisdom style, "Hearken, my people, to my teaching. . . I will open my mouth in a parable" (*mašal*). It may be that these early poems created a precedent to which the later sages felt they should return. Yet in both Sir and Wis these references remain isolated and extraneous; they go beyond wisdom proper, even if they are made to serve a didactic purpose.

On the whole, one may perhaps explain Sirach's use of Israel's sacred history from his identification of wisdom with the Torah (24:22), the Pentateuch which contained the record of the classical age of salvation history. Wisdom is the Law, from which the salvation history is unseparable. It is Sirach, too, who refers to the cultic practices of Israel: the enthusiastic description of Simon the high priest (50:1-21) agrees with his command that the priests be revered (7:29-31). Qoheleth is the only other sage who makes a point of commenting on sacrifice and vows (4:17–5:5). It still remains true that, relatively speaking, the sages ignore what is peculiarly Israelite.

This orientation can be understood from what has been said about the origins and direction of wisdom in Israel — the preoccupation with the human conduct of everyday life. There is a deeper reason that also deserves to be emphasized: the proper sphere of wisdom is man as man, as the creature made by a supreme Being. As Walther Zimmerli has pointed out, "Wisdom theology is Creation Theology." It is in this perspective of God, the Creator, that the sages operated. The subject is man as man, not as an Israelite under the covenant.

Not enough attention has been given to this aspect of wisdom — its place within the theology of creation. Indeed, many have posed wisdom as a problem for OT theology; how is it to be fitted in when it lacks what is distinctively Israelite (election, covenant, etc.)? This approach is too narrow and fails to evaluate Gn 1–2, where Yahweh *blesses* man with dominion over the beasts of the field, and equivalently makes him the crown of creation: "fill the earth and subdue it. . ." (Gn 1:28); "the man named all the cattle. . ." (2:20). This work of subduing reality was carried on in its own way by the wisdom movement. The sage's effort to grasp reality is therefore not pure utilitarianism — he was reaching out to control what God had commanded him for a blessing.

Human Conduct

There is a high premium put on justice towards one's fellow man:

> He who condones the wicked, he who condemns the just,
> are both an abomination to the Lord (Prv 17:15).
> It is not good to be partial to the guilty,
> and so to reject a rightful claim (18:5).

It would appear that bribery was particularly common, and we have already seen that it was recognized as a fact (Prv 17:8; 18:16; Sir 20:27-28), but it is also condemned (Prv 15:27; Qoh 7:7; Sir 7:6), for it was ruled out in the Law (Ex 23:8; Dt 16:19). Dishonesty in business, specifically a false use of weights, is another item of condemnation (Prv 11:1, "an abomination to the Lord," 20:10,23), which echoes the Law (Dt 25:13-16). Sirach goes so far as to say:

> A merchant can hardly remain upright,
> nor a shopkeeper free from sin;
> For the sake of profit many sin,
> and the struggle for wealth blinds the eyes (Sir 26:20–27:1).

Control of the tongue is a commonplace in the sapiential literature; it derives from the description of the ideal sage, as cultivated among the Egyptians. The Israelite sages, too, recognized this value and warned against the dangerous power of the tongue (Prv 12:6; 13:3; 14:3; Qoh 10:12; Sir 20:4-7; 28:12-26), and they lined it up with their condemnation of lying and false witness (Prv 6:19; 14:25; 19:5; Sir 5:15–6:1; 26:5), which was forbidden by the Law (Dt 19:16-20).

The teaching of Amenemope characterizes certain actions as an "abomination" to God. The term "abomination" (to the Lord) is used in Prv to condemn the perverse man (3:32), seven crimes (6:16-19), the sacrifice offered by a wicked man (15:8), the proud man (16:5), the prayer of the lawless (28:9), and other wrongdoing. The Egyptian literature is also marked by "better" sayings, and we find these in our sapiential books. Some of these sayings refer to morally neutral things (Prv 21:9,18; Sir 10:27; 30:14; Qoh 7:1-5), but most often in Prv the reference is to the ethical sphere:

> Better a little with virtue,
> than a large income with injustice (16:8).

It is better to be humble with the meek
than to share plunder with the proud (16:19).
Wealth and vigor build up confidence,
but better than either, fear of God (Sir 40:26).

As regards riches and poverty, there are again several "neutral" observations (Prv 10:15; 19:4; Sir 13:3,20). But most of the time poverty is considered as an evil (sometimes at least, due to laziness, Prv 6:6-11; Sir 22:1; 40:28) and riches are considered a blessing, associated with wisdom:

With me (wisdom) are riches and honor,
enduring wealth and prosperity (Prv 3:18).

But wealth carries its own pitfalls (Prv 11:28; 30:7-9; Qoh 5:9-11), and the sage is constantly urging the superiority of wisdom to the richest of possessions (Prv 3:15; Wis 7:8-11). Sirach is careful to warn about the danger of riches: "the lover of gold will not be free from sin" (31:5); and he finds that wealth is a real test of a man:

Happy the rich man found without fault,
who turns not aside after gain!
Who is he, that we may praise him?
he, of all his kindred, has done wonders,
For he has been tested by gold and come off safe,
and this remains his glory (31:8-10).

The true wise man refuses to be seduced by wealth (Sir 11:10) and Sirach takes the attitude: "poverty and riches are from Yahweh" (11:14).

Although riches are recognized as a blessing and a mark of divine approval, poverty is not the converse of this. It may be the result of laziness (Prv 12:27), but the sages show great sympathy for the poor:

He sins who despises the hungry;
but the friends of the rich are many (Prv 14:20).

Several proverbs recognize the bond of union between all men, rich and poor, which obliges to true charity:

He who oppresses the poor blasphemes his Maker,
but he who is kind to the needy glorifies him
(Prv 14:31; cf. 17:5; 19:17).

The poor are a frequent topic in Ecclesiasticus (4:1-5; 11:1-6,14-21; 14:3-10; 29:8-11). Sirach indicates that "poverty is evil by the standards of the proud" (13:23). He can see where the wis-

dom of the poor man will bring him honor (10:29) and "set him among princes" (11:1). Hence he urges his students:

> To a poor man, however, be generous;
> keep him not waiting for your alms;
> Because of the precept, help the needy,
> and in their want, do not send them away empty-handed.
> Spend your money for your brother and friend,
> and hide it not under a stone to perish;
> Dispose of your treasure as the Most High commands,
> for that will profit you more than the gold
> (29:8-11; cf. Jb 31:16-20).

Closely allied to the theme of poverty is humility. After all, it is the Lord himself who "shows kindness" to the humble (the so-called *'anawim*, Prv 3:34). "With the humble is wisdom" (Prv 11:2); hence this attitude of humility is in parallelism with "fear of Yahweh" (Prv 15:33; 22:4). This religious humility is not weakness; it is the opposite of pride, arrogance, oppression, and self-reliance — against which Sirach warns in 10:6-18. It is Sirach also who tempers any exaggerated notion of humility:

> My son, with humility have self-esteem;
> prize yourself as you deserve (Sir 10:27).

Humility will be present if there is trust in God, and there are many such exhortations in Prv (3:5; 18:10; 22:19):

> Entrust your works to the Lord,
> and your plans will succeed (16:3; cf. also 28:25; 29:25).

It is easy to get the impression that the lessons of the sages are cold appraisals of men and their actions — that there is no perspective of charity. One must realize that the calculating aspect of these sayings derives from the observation of reality:

> As iron sharpens iron,
> so man sharpens his fellow man (Prv 27:17).

The youth must learn what human nature is like, and the portrait of society is not flattering. Hence there is the constant warning about the wicked man, who must be avoided. But one is obliged to show consideration for others:

> Refuse no one the good on which he has a claim
> when it is in your power to do it for him.
> Say not to your neighbor, "Go, and come again,
> tomorrow I will give," when you can give at once.
> Plot no evil against your neighbor,
> against him who lives at peace with you.

Quarrel not with a man without cause,
with one who has done you no harm (Prv 3:27-30).

True friendship is held up as a value that serves one well in distress (Prv 7:17; 18:24). Sirach urges caution: a friend is to be tested (6:7-10); the new friend is like new wine that needs aging (9:10). It is within the circle of the wise that one must move (Prv 13:20; Sir 9:14-16), since fools are to be avoided at all costs:

Face a bear robbed of her cubs,
but never a fool in his folly (Prv 17:12).

There is a certain inevitability to the sages' distinction between the wise and the foolish, between the righteous and the sinner. As they saw it, mankind can be divided up into these two classes. And this is an all-important fact for the youth — with which class will he align himself? As Sirach puts it,

Some he (God) blesses and makes great,
some he sanctifies and draws to himself.
Others he curses and brings low,
and expels them from their place.
Like clay in the hands of a potter,
to be molded according to his pleasure,
So are men in the hands of their Creator,
to be assigned by him their function.
As evil contrasts with good, and death with life,
so are sinners in contrast with the just;
See now all the works of the Most High;
they come in pairs, the one the opposite of the other
(33:12-15).

Lest the dogmatism of the sage seem too extreme, it is well to remember that he had a profound sense of human uncertainty:

Man may make plans in his heart,
but what the tongue utters is from the Lord
(Prv 16:1, cf. 16:2,9; 20:24).

There is no wisdom, no understanding,
no counsel against the Lord (Prv 21:30).

The wisdom tradition was one thing, but the Lord was not to be contained by it. Mankind can be catalogued, some kind of order can be imposed on chaotic reality, but there is one great Incalculable, Yahweh himself. Under the pressure of the practical, the sages do not develop this point (witness Sirach's claim in 39:16-

35, "the works of God are all of them good"). It will remain for Qoheleth and the author of Job to wrestle with the hidden and incalculable God.

Wisdom Psalms

The reader will doubtless recall from the treatment of the Psalms the all-important literary classification of the psalms into hymns of praise, individual and collective laments, thanksgiving prayers, royal psalms, etc. This classification is based on certain literary characteristics (structure, motifs, etc.) which occur regularly in the poems that belong to a given type. The life-setting of the psalm-group is also important in determining the literary type (e.g., thanksgiving psalms on the occasion of a thanksgiving sacrifice). Can one likewise distinguish "wisdom psalms"? Nearly all scholars speak of such a class, although they do not agree on precisely which psalms belong to the group. Without wishing to close this question, we would suggest that the following psalms are best understood if they are viewed in the light of the wisdom movement: 1, 32, 34, 48, 112, 128. These poems are written precisely as *wisdom*; this is their whole purpose. We shall also see that there are wisdom elements which have been appropriated and incorporated into other psalms.

What are the tell-tale signs of the wisdom psalms? The characteristics which one finds in the rest of the sapiential literature: "Blessed" or "Happy the man" formulas, numerical sayings, "Better" sayings, the address of a teacher to a "son," alphabetic structure, simple comparisons, and the admonition. Then too, the content is similar to the content proffered by the sages: the contrast between the just man and the wicked, the two ways (life and death), practical advice as regards conduct (diligence, responsibility, etc.), preoccupation with the problem of retribution, fear of the Lord (i.e., observance of the Torah). It is not possible to reconstruct the life-setting of these psalms. The rest of the Psalter has its life-setting in the liturgy as a normal thing; we do not know how these wisdom psalms fit into the liturgy, although the thanksgiving psalms with their didactic address to fellow-believers suggest a place for them in Israel's cult.

Ps 1 begins with a "Happy the man" formula, and it is an admonition to avoid the way of the wicked, as opposed to the way

of the just. We have the typical contrast between the just and the wicked, and the appropriate retribution. This psalm seems to have been added to the Psalter as an introduction — to present these prayers as a study-book, as a work to be learned from, in much the same way as the book of Hosea is held up by the sapiential tag that concludes it (Hos 14:10).

Ps. 31, "Happy is he whose fault is taken away. . . ," can be classified as a thanksgiving psalm or as a wisdom psalm. The question is, what is the preponderant element, the determining spirit? The introduction (1-2) and the ending (8-11) are typical of the sapiential writings; the introduction is comparable to Prv 28:13, and the ending affords instruction and counsel (8-9) and ends with a proverb-like statement in 10:

> Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
> but kindness surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.

The psalmist's description of what happened to him ("your hand was heavy upon me") seems to be orientated toward the confession of his sin and trust in God.

Ps 33, "I will bless the Lord at all times. . . ," is an acrostic poem; each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. The sapiential style appears clearly in 12-23, the address of a sage to "children." Here we find typical maxims in favor of the just man as against the wicked:

> Many are the troubles of the just man,
> but out of them all the Lord delivers him;
> He watches over all his bones;
> not one of them shall be broken.
> Vice slays the wicked,
> and the enemies of the just pay for their guilt (20-22).

The sapiential intent becomes evident at the beginning when the psalmist urges the "lowly" (*'anawim*) to join with him in extolling the name of the Lord (3-4). He is offering thanksgiving, and wishes to unite the bystanders in his testimony or witness; he glosses over the deliverance which Yahweh worked on his behalf (5-7) and addresses the bystanders who share with him in the thanksgiving sacrifice:

> Taste and see how good Yahweh is;
> happy the man who takes refuge in him.
> Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones,
> for nought is lacking to those who fear him.

The great grow poor and hungry;
but those who seek Yahweh want for no good thing (9-11).

These lines could fit into Prv or Sir without any adjustment.

Ps 36 is alphabetic in structure, and it suggests the air of an old, experienced, teacher (v. 25) who is intent upon admonishing his pupil. The content is the familiar problem of retribution and there is frequent allusion to the contrast between the just and the wicked. Wisdom and the Law are associated (vv. 30-31) in a manner reminiscent of Sirach (24:22). The entire poem is a pastiche of sapiential sayings that one would expect to run across in the wisdom books:

Give up your anger, and forsake wrath;
be not vexed, it will only harm you.
For evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who wait for Yahweh shall possess the land (8-9).

Ps 48 has the vivid beginning in the style of Dame Wisdom preaching in the streets (Prv 9:13-18):

Hear this, all you peoples;
hearken, all who dwell in the world. . . .
My mouth shall speak wisdom (*hokmah*);
prudence shall be the utterance of my heart.
My ear is intent upon a proverb (*mašal*);
I will set forth my riddle to the music of the harp. (2-5).

The particular *riddle* is that of retribution, and the psalmist sees God as the one who redeems him from death.

Ps 111 is characterized by the "Happy the man" formula, and the contrast between the just and the wicked. Again, the verses could occur in any OT wisdom book:

Happy the man who fears Yahweh,
who greatly delights in his commands.
His posterity shall be mighty upon the earth;
the upright generation shall be blessed (vv. 1-2).

Ps 127 also begins with a familiar wisdom formula, and it describes the prosperity of the man who fears God:

Happy are you who fear Yahweh,
who walk in his ways!
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork,
happy shall you be, and favored . . . (1-2).

Many classify Ps 72 as a wisdom psalm, since it deals with the problem of retribution. But it is properly a thanksgiving psalm, for

the psalmist has been delivered from his torment. The content itself is not sufficient to establish the classification of "wisdom." Pss 77, 104, 106 should be classified as historical psalms, even if an introduction in the wisdom style has been prefixed to 77; these had a didactic purpose, but this does not constitute them wisdom psalms. Ps 110 is another border-line case. It is written in acrostic form, but it is really a hymn of praise, incorporating wisdom motifs — as the final verse reminds us, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom." It matches Ps 111 in that it is the type of hymn that a sage would utter.

Even if there be only a handful of wisdom psalms in the strict sense, the influence of the sages on the Psalter was quite strong. There are many other poems (thanksgivings, laments) that incorporate wisdom elements.

Ps 24:8-15 has a typical wisdom insert. The direct address to the Lord is interrupted by the wisdom sayings which elaborate on the "way" which is the theme of the poem:

> Good and upright is Yahweh;
> thus he shows sinners the way.
> He guides the humble to justice,
> he teaches the humble his way.
> All the paths of Yahweh are kindness and constancy
> toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees . . . (8-10).
>
> When a man fears Yahweh
> he shows him the way he should choose.
> He abides in prosperity,
> and his descendants inherit the land.
> The friendship of Yahweh is with those who fear him,
> and his covenant, for their instruction (12-14).

Similar influence can be detected in Ps 38:5-7 (cf. Jb 7:6ff; 14:1ff; Qoh 2:16ff; 4:8), and also in Ps 91:13-15 (cf. Ps 37:25; Jer 17:8). In Ps 93 an admonition is directed to fools (8-11), and the Lord is introduced as a teacher (12-15).

The Theologizing of Wisdom

We use the term "theologizing" to underline the radical change which wisdom underwent in the postexilic period when it departed from the court for the school. Prv 1–9 is a concrete example of

what is meant by this process. If there were any opposition in times past between the humanism and internationalism of the sages and the prophets' preaching or the priests' teaching, this was all over — there is no opposition between wisdom and fear of the Lord; they are one and the same. Fear of the Lord means obedience to his will (and this does not exclude awe before him; cf. Jb 37:23-24), and in Prv wisdom is well on its way to its identification with the Law (cf. Sir 24:22; Bar 4:1).

In contrast to the Law, which expresses the will of Yahweh, the counsels of the sage are under the authority of experience and the advice of older men. The youth who is addressed is expected to submit to the discipline (*musar*) which the sages judge necessary, to the advice which in many instances they derive from, or offer in support of, the Law. However, wisdom is presented in Prv 1–9 in such a way as to replace the sage himself. Claims are made for her that go far beyond anything that was predicated of wisdom in the days of the courtly wise men:

> Mine are counsel and advice;
> mine is strength; I am understanding . . .
> Those who love me I also love,
> and those who seek me find me.
> With me are riches and honor,
> enduring wealth and prosperity (Prv 8:14-18).
> For he who finds me finds life,
> and wins favor from Yahweh;
> But he who misses me harms himself;
> all who hate me love death (Prv 8:35-36).

The late Père A. Robert, in his fundamental study of Prv 1–9, succeeded in establishing the literary method of the author of these chapters. It is "anthological composition," that is, the use of terms and phrases of earlier biblical books in order to express one's message (comparable to Milton's allusive use of Scriptural phrases from the King James version in his *Paradise*). The recognition of anthological composition is important also for the understanding of the books of Sirach and Wisdom, which teem with biblical allusions.

In the passages from Prv 8, which we have just quoted, anthological composition is at work, and it is the means by which the author is able to present the all-embracing claims of wisdom. He appropriates Is 11:2 (the gifts of the spirit to the messianic king: wisdom, understanding, counsel and strength) to describe

wisdom, and the same attributes are used of God himself in Jb 12:13, "With him are wisdom and might; his are counsel and understanding." In 8:15-16, it appears that wisdom still keeps its original association with royalty ("by me kings reign. . ."). But this is hardly a reminder of wisdom's humble origins in the court; it is employed to exalt her above human rulers. Again, she claims the love of man, as the Lord does in Dt 6:5. And her love will mean all kinds of earthly blessings (8:18,21) just as God's love in Dt 7:13 is shown in the prosperity of Israel. We will discuss the personification of wisdom later; here we merely wish to underscore the religious transformation.

In Sirach wisdom is totally a gift of God (1:1), eternal and pre-existent to creation (1:4; 24:3-9), associated with God as king (1:6) who exercises domain in Jerusalem (24:11). Fear of the Lord — the beginning of wisdom (1:12) — is described in 1:9-29 as answering all human needs: glory and splendor, a happy end, peace and perfect health, inebriating men with her fruits (stored in her "granaries": wisdom and culture) — until finally wisdom and Law are identified outright (24:22). While Sirach is, therefore, preoccupied with the traditions of Israel, he is also oriented to the practical, according to the law of the wisdom genre. He gives the typical advice concerning table etiquette (31:12–32:13), the visit of a physician (38:1-15), the use of wealth (29:1-20), women (25:12–26:18), etc. But there is a clear moralizing note, sounded much more frequently than in Prv 10:1ff, to almost every subject he treats. Regulations concerning the master and servant (33:25-30; compare Prv 29:19) come to an end with the admonitions, "never lord it over any human being, and do nothing unjust." Unlike earlier sages, he has left a prayer in 23:1-6, and composed hymns (39:12-35; 42:15–43:35), and thanksgiving psalms (51:1-2).

The theologizing of wisdom is completed in the book of Wisdom, written in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew. Even here it is true that some of the earlier orientation remains — wisdom retains its association with king and court. Pseudo-Solomon appeals to other leaders to acquire wisdom (6:9,21-22,24; cf. 1:1; 6:1), and "the desire for wisdom leads up to a kingdom" (6:20). Perhaps the most striking example of development (in line with the interests of earlier wisdom) is the description of the encylopedic knowledge which it brings:

For he gave me sound knowledge of existing things,
that I might know the organization of the universe
and the force of its elements,
The beginning and the end and the midpoint of times,
the changes in the sun's course and the variations
of the seasons.
Cycles of years, positions of the stars,
natures of animals, tempers of beasts,
Powers of the winds and thoughts of men,
uses of plants and virtues of roots —
Such as are secret I learned, and such as are plain;
for Wisdom, the artificer of all, taught me
(Wis 7:17-22; cf. 8:8).

Cosmology, physics, chronology, astronomy, zoology, psychology, botany and medicine — all these sciences, however infant, were the sciences of the cultivated Greek, and the author recognized them as belonging to wisdom.

Nevertheless, wisdom is primarily justice, or virtue, and the reward of justice is taken up in a novel way in cc. 1–5, as we shall see later. Those who do not "keep the Law" (6:4; cf. 6:17-18) will be punished by the Almighty. Wisdom comes to the one who prays for her (6:7; cf. also Sir 51:18-19). She passes "into holy souls from age to age" and "produces friends of God and prophets" (7:27). The four cardinal virtues recognized by the Greek world are the lessons which she teaches (8:7). Solomon (i.e., pseudo-Solomon) prays for her that he may know what is pleasing to God (9:10).

The theological transformation of wisdom can also be exemplified in another important respect: wisdom becomes a savior. In one sense, this is a logical development: the older wisdom shielded the young man from the snares of evil women (Prv 22:14; 23:26-28), from death in its various forms (Prv 10:2; 18:7; 19:23, etc.). It comes as no surprise, then, to read Prv 4:6:

Forsake her (wisdom) not, and she will preserve you;
love her, and she will safeguard you.

The salvation wrought by wisdom is particularly underlined by pseudo-Solomon. Man's history is truly a salvation history; from Adam to the Exodus, wisdom was at work saving men:

Thus were the paths of those on earth made straight,
and men learned what was your pleasure,
and were saved by Wisdom.

She preserved the first-formed father of the world . . .
When on his (Cain's) account the earth was flooded,
Wisdom again saved it . . .
She saved the just man (Lot) from among the wicked
who were being destroyed . . .
She preserved him (Jacob) from foes,
and secured him against ambush . . .
The whole people and blameless race — it was she
who delivered them from the nation that oppressed them . . .
She took them across the Red Sea
and brought them through the deep waters . . .
(Wis 9:18–10:18).

One of the outstanding characteristics of wisdom in the later sapiential literature is her *personal* aspect, and this is another illustration of the far-reaching theological development experienced by wisdom. The personification occurs in Prv 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6; Sir 24:1-22 (cf. 1:1-18); Wis 6:12–9:18 (especially 7:22-30); Bar 3:9–4:4. It is also to be found in related Jewish literature: 1 Henoch 42:1f; 91:10; 2 Henoch 30:8; 33:4 and in the writings of Philo Judaeus.

Personification of abstractions or of the attributes of God is not a strange phenomenon in the OT. The vindication or righteousness of the Lord will protect the Babylonian exiles by going before them (Is 58:8). In a description of moral corruption "truth stumbles in the public square" and uprightness cannot enter (Is 59:14). In Ps 84:11 kindness and truth meet; justice and peace kiss. Justice and judgment are the "foundation" of Yahweh's throne while kindness and truth go before him as heralds (Ps 88:15; cf. 96:2). Similarly, the spirit of God (Wis 1:7) and the word of God (Wis 8:15) are also personified. Hence one need not be surprised in seeing wisdom as a preacher (Prv 1:20; 8:1) or as a guide (Prv 6:22) or a sister (Prv 7:4) or as a hostess at a banquet (9:2-6) nor finally, as a firstborn of God, his "craftsman," and "playing before him," as wisdom describes herself in the famous passage of Prv 8:22-31,

The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways,
the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago;
From of old I was poured forth,
at the first, before the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no fountains or springs of water;
Before the mountains were settled into place,
before the hills, I was brought forth;

While as yet the earth and the fields were not made,
nor the first clods of the world.
When he established the heavens I was there,
when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep;
When he made firm the skies above,
when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;
When he set for the sea its limit,
so that the waters should not transgress his command;
Then was I beside him as his craftsman,
and I was his delight day by day,
Playing before him all the while,
playing on the surface of his earth
[and I found delight in the sons of men].

Wisdom's divine origin is clearly affirmed here, and her existence before creation is emphasized. If one follows the Confraternity translation (v. 30: "craftsman," although others read "child"), she also concurred with God in creation (as in Wis 7:22, "the artificer of all"). The idea of wisdom's role in creation is also hinted at in Prv 3:19,

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth,
established the heavens by understanding.

The passage proclaims her noble (divine) birth and supreme authority — older than creation (described here in terms of Gn 1:6-10). This same pre-existence to creation is attributed to her in Sir 1:4; 24:9, and in Wis 9:9.

Sir 24 also underlines the origin of wisdom from God ("from the mouth of the Most High I came forth," v. 3), and it is by his command that she made her dwelling in Jacob. Hence she rules from Jerusalem (v. 11), as the Law of Torah (v. 22). Similarly the book of Baruch describes wisdom as dwelling first with God, but also:

Since then she has appeared on earth,
and moved among men.
She is the book of the precepts of God,
the Law that endures forever (3:38–4:1).

The description of Wis 7:25-26 surpasses both Prv 8 and Sir 24 in emphasizing the divinity of wisdom:

For she is an aura of the might of God
and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nought that is sullied enters into her.
For she is the refulgence of eternal light,
the spotless mirror of the power of God,
the image of his goodness.

"Refulgence," "mirror," "image," — these ideas seem to have influenced Heb 1:3; Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4, as well as the prologue to the Gospel of St. John. The Fathers preferred to see here a reference to the pre-existent Word, begotten by the Father. In doing so they prolong the thought that is behind the above passages from the Pauline epistles. And one may readily grant that these OT descriptions of the divine Wisdom are a preparation for the Christian message of Christ, whom St. Paul terms "the Wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). But they are *merely* a preparation. Personification is a literary process, and it is not to be confused with a (divine) person. The contrast between Dame Folly and Dame Wisdom in Prv 9:1-18 is a clear indication that this is only a literary personification.

However, the orientation of wisdom towards the NT message is important. The key fact is that God communicates himself to man. This communication had begun long before, in the creation when he made man in his image, in the theophanies to the patriarchs and Moses, in the giving of the Law to Israel. The NT was able to see in Christ the supreme communication of God.

What lay behind this development of the personification and divinization of wisdom? There is no certain answer, but we can at least point to a general background in partial explanation; some factor in this background probably acted as a catalyst in the development. It is tempting to think that the personification is a typically Israelite reaction to the figure of Astarte — a replacing of the goddess of the fertility rites with wisdom. This cannot be proved. But there is no question about wisdom being represented as a spouse and consort who seeks to attract those who will love her:

> Wisdom has built her house,
> she has set up her seven columns;
> She has dressed her meat, mixed her wine,
> yes, she has spread her table . . .
> 'Come, eat of my food,
> and drink of the wine I have mixed!
> Forsake foolishness that you may live;
> advance in the way of understanding' (Prv 9:1-6).

Wisdom is to be the "sister" (Prv 7:4, and one may recall the use of the term "sister" in the love poetry of Ct) to one who aspires after her. The lover of Wisdom is described by Sirach as one "who listens at her door . . . who pitches his tent beside

her . . . and dwells in her home" (14:20-27). The pseudo-Solomon describes his courtship of Lady Wisdom:

> Her I loved and sought after from my youth;
> I sought to take her for my bride
> and was enamored of her beauty . . .
> So I determined to draw her into fellowship,
> knowing that she would be my counselor while all was well,
> and my comfort in care and grief . . .
> Within my dwelling I should take my repose beside her . . .
> (Wis 8:2-16).

A more likely explanation of the personification of wisdom is afforded by the sayings of Ahiqar, which were discussed above. Here wisdom is personified and described as "precious to the gods" and "established in heaven, for the Lord of holiness has exalted her." Wisdom clearly belongs to the sphere of the divine. This point of view is expressed in the Aramaic papyri which derive from a Jewish community of the fifth century in Egypt, and it remains a possibility that this personification was influenced by the personification of *maat*, or justice, in Egyptian wisdom literature (see the discussion of *maat* in chapter III). For example, Ptahhotep describes *maat* as "great, and its appropriateness is lasting; it has not been disturbed since the time of him who made it" (line 88; ANET, 412).

In the story of the "Eloquent Peasant," the peasant declaims to the chief steward that *maat* "last unto eternity; it goes down into the necropolis with him who does it" (lines B 307-309; ANET, 410); his point of view is that the good name of a person is immortal. But the personification of *maat*, and its divine associations, are important precedents for the Hebrew treatment of *ḥokmah*, because of the undoubted influence of Egypt on OT wisdom literature.

The divine origin of wisdom, oddly enough, does not seem to have been familiar to early Israelites. The German scholar, Martin Noth, has pointed out that wisdom is not associated with Yahweh until relatively late in the OT. It is true that God is said to "make wise" or "give wisdom" (e.g., to Solomon). This is much in the manner in which he is said to "make rich," or "give riches." But only rarely is he said to be wise or possess wisdom. It is hard to determine the reason for this. Noth himself suggests that the notion of human cleverness which is connected with wisdom may be the reason for the resistance to the term — wisdom is the

sphere of man, not of God. But wisdom is in the sphere of the gods in Ugarit. In the Baal epic the god El is hailed, "Thy command, O El, is wise; thy command is for eternity; a happy life is thy command" (Anat V, 38ff; 51:IV, 41ff). It would have been strange if Israel could have long regarded wisdom as not belonging to the realm of the divine.

All would agree that in the postexilic period the Lord is recognized as wise; he alone knows the way to wisdom. This applies to Yahweh himself (especially as regards creation, Jb 38:37; Prv 3:19; Ps 103:24; Jer 10:12; 51:15). In Dn the wisdom and power of God are celebrated together (Dn 2:20), while the wisdom of the members of the heavenly court is recognized in Jb 15:8 and Prv 30:3.

Once God and wisdom are clearly associated, wisdom becomes transcendent, and a certain ambivalence develops. As transcendent, it cannot be discovered by man — God alone knows it. Yet, as a component of human experience, as the product of the sages, it is somehow within man's grasp. So wisdom must show herself and invite man to take her. The poem of Jb 28 proclaims that there is a place for everything — except wisdom. One can find silver and gold in the bowels of the earth, but the most precious possession remains beyond the range of man and beast, beyond the range of the world:

> Abaddon and Death say,
> "Only by rumor have we heard of it" (28:20).

The Lord alone "knows the way to it" (28:33). An attempt to bridge this gulf between wisdom and man is made in the final verse:

> And to man he (God) said:
> Behold, the fear of Yahweh is wisdom,
> and avoiding evil is understanding (28:28).

One may well question whether this is the same as the inaccessible wisdom described in the rest of the poem where wisdom is associated with God's creative power (vv. 25-27). But in the context of the book v. 28 serves to tie the poem in with Jb 1:8 and 2:3. The same inaccessibility characterizes Bar 3:15, 23-36. God alone knows wisdom, but now it is clearly identified with religious understanding, the Law:

> He has traced out all the way of understanding,
> and has given her to Jacob, his servant,
> to Israel, his beloved son.

Since then she has appeared on earth,
and moved among men.
She is the book of the precepts of God,
the Law that endures forever;
All who cling to her will live,
but those will die who forsake her (Bar 3:37–4:1).

Here the inaccessibility has vanished in the realization of the precious possession of the Law (cf. Sir 24).

One can only agree with the viewpoint of Gerhard von Rad that the problem of a theological definition of wisdom, despite her highly personal character, is not easy to solve. "Nevertheless one can say that she is the form in which Yahweh's will and his association with man (in other words, salvation) comes to him. She is the essence of what man needs for a good life, and of what God gives him. But most importantly, wisdom does not present herself to man as a thing, or teaching, or guidance or salvation, etc., but as a person, an "I" who calls. Hence wisdom is really the form in which Yahweh makes himself present and in which he wants to be sought after by man. 'He who finds me finds life' (Prv 8:35). Only Yahweh can speak this way."

The foregoing remarks suggest some of the implications of the theologizing of wisdom. It is fitting to close this with an indication of how significant is the contribution of the wisdom movement to the theology of the first pages of the book of Genesis. Several Catholic scholars have looked on Gn 1–3 as the product of wisdom writers. Recently L. Alonso-Schökel has added concrete reasons to the earlier arguments offered by A. M. Dubarle Karl Rahner and H. Renckens. This viewpoint is not as startling as it might seem at first sight. We have already seen that the sage looked upon the human condition in the light of God as creator, rather than as savior of Israel. Gn 1–3 is the approach to God, the creator; it reflects a universal outlook, the perspective of creation, of man as man — the viewpoint of the wisdom writers. It is interesting to note that it is only in the wisdom books that any reference is made back to the fall of man:

In woman was sin's beginning,
and because of her we all die (Sir 25:23).
For God formed man to be imperishable;
the image of his own nature he made him.
But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,
and they who are in his possession experience it
(Wis 2:23-24).

Hence we are invited to understand the first chapters of Genesis as the composition of a sage, not of an historian or a prophet.

The evidence to support such a view derives from the presence of wisdom elements in the story of the creation and fall. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:9) fits in with the task of the sage as Sirach conceived of it, "to learn what is good and evil among men" (Sir 39:5). So also, the providence of God is described by him:

> With wisdom and knowledge he (God) fills them (men);
> good and evil he shows them (Sir 17:6).

The emphasis in Gn 1 that the works of God were good is echoed in Sirach's hymn to creation, "The works of God are all of them good" (39:16):

> The works of God are all of them good,
> every need when it comes he fills.
> No cause then to say: "This is not as good as that";
> for each shows its worth at the proper time (Sir 39:33-34).

The serpent is described as "cunning," (*'arum*, a sapiential term). Although the man is not said to be wise, wisdom figures in Ez 28:22, a passage which is certainly related to the creation accounts, and in which the king of Tyre is described as being "stamped with the seal of perfection, of complete wisdom . . . in Eden, the garden of God." And the man of Gn is in the tradition of Solomon (1 K 4–5, where Solomon "spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles and of fish") in so far as he exercises dominion over the animals by giving them names. He even names his wife in phrases worthy of a sage (Gn 2:23; 3:20).

When we turn to the description of the ideal wife in Prv 31, we find a remarkable number of suggestive contacts with Gn 2–3: we are moving in a world of "good and evil" (31:12), planting (16), where her dealings are "good" (18), where the woman puts forth her hand (19-20) and clothes are made (21-22); she "opens her mouth in wisdom" (26) and is given the "fruit of her labors" (31). After pointing out these associations — even if they are merely material resemblances — Alonso-Schökel wisely remarks that, at the very least, Gn 2–3 seems to have a sapiential "tonality." These are not the only echoes of later Israelitic thought in Gn 1–3. There is also a covenant and salvation-history background: the sequence in Gn (God blesses man with various goods and imposes a precept; man rebels, is punished, and later recon-

ciled with God) is comparable to the Deuteronomic sequence of salvation-history (sin, punishment, penitence, deliverance; cf. Jgs 2).

The Problem of Retribution

The sages shared the Deuteronomic point of view: God rewards the good and punishes the evil. This philosophy permeates Proverbs and Sirach. By means of it Yahweh was recognized as a just God, governing the world with telling sanctions. These sanctions had to operate during man's life, since there was no balancing the scales of justice in Sheol or in any meaningful existence after death. The passion with which the sages adhered to their law of retribution is truly remarkable. From the tenth-century (and perhaps earlier) proverbs down through the exile to the author of Prv 1–9 and to Ben Sira in the second century, the emphasis is on the good life promised to the wise or virtuous man.

The values of the good life are this-worldly: long life, a large family, riches, prestige – all this is subsumed under the *life* which is promised by wisdom (Prv 3:1-10, 16-18; 10:16-17; 14:27, etc.). The reader should not be misled by the emphasis on material goods (e.g., Prv 3:9-10). The material benefits are viewed as blessings from God, as signs of his Providence (Sir 33:12-15), "sacramentals," which bespeak his presence and activity. The natural accompaniment of such blessings is renewed fidelity and trust on man's part (e.g., Sir 34:13-17). Hence it is quite erroneous to characterize this as materialistic. An essential part of the happiness, as envisioned by the sage, is a sense of personal union with God (perhaps best expressed in Ps 72:23-28).

Life, in itself, is a very complex concept. It can mean mere existence (Prv 10:27) but it nearly always stands for more — security, etc. As J. Guillet has recognized, there is a profound moral conviction involved in the OT view: sin undermines man; it is a symbol of death and corruption. Virtue brings the vitality which alone is associated with the living God. Hence the promise of Yahweh, in Deuteronomic phraseology, is taken up with life on the land — planting, building, marrying (Dt 30:19-20; 28:30). It was only in Sheol, where one was no longer in contact with Yahweh, that there was no true life. Simple survival in Sheol is of no significance to the Israelite. As Guillet remarks, "religious hope

does not mean hope in survival, but the hope of finding God." As we shall see, this final discovery of God, even beyond death, was attained only gradually by Israel.

With few exceptions the sages refused to allow the hard facts of experience to shake their belief in the good life as a reward for wisdom and virtue. When they were confronted by contrary facts, they advanced various answers. The boldest and most courageous stance is given in Prv 3:12 — adversity is a sign of God's love, "he chastises the son he favors." This is at least an acknowledgment of the problem, which is viewed in faith as a mystery of divine love. Then, too, it was thought that suffering was due to one's hidden sins; perhaps one was not virtuous enough to be exempt from suffering.

The sages often give definite answers, many of which deny the problem. The author of Ps 36 admits that the prosperity of the evil man can be a scandal — but such a person is not to be envied: his prosperity is merely temporary and his day of loss is certainly coming (a frequent answer to the problem in the OT). Or the punishment will affect his descendants (a point of view which fails to console Job; cf. Jb 21:19). The sages were convinced that sin must be and would be punished, despite appearances. The friends of Job exemplify a fierce rationalism which is put at the service of the law of retribution; they go so far as to accuse Job of specific sins which would explain his suffering (Jb 22:6-11). The failure of the traditional optimism to provide a viable answer was hastened by the works of two men who were themselves sages, the unknown author of the book of Job, and Qoheleth.

It is generally admitted that the writer of Jb has inserted the great debate between Job and the "Three Friends," and also the encounter with God, into a framework (cc. 1–2; 42) which was doubtless taken over from earlier folklore. It is ironic that while there is agreement on the general purpose of the book — to "bury" the traditional optimism of the sages — there is no agreement on the specific answer provided by the author. It would appear indeed that there is no *one* answer, and the author has introduced side issues more or less pertinent to the total problem. Some have drawn from cc. 1–2 the ideal of disinterested service of Yahweh. There is no denying that such an ideal is depicted, but it is surely not the main thrust of the book.

Others suggest that the poem in c. 28 on wisdom and its inaccessibility indicates that the author has no solution to offer in

default of the traditional theory; still others interpret the restoration of Job in the final chapter as a capitulation to the traditional theory. But these viewpoints over-emphasize minor aspects of the book. Chapter 28 seems to be an insert that is in harmony with cc. 1–2 (cf. 28:28 with 1:8; 2:3), and the final restoration belongs to the narrative framework used by the author, who could not very well allow Job to remain in the clutches of the Satan.

The development of thought within the debate does not follow logical rules. There is a growing intensity and sharpness to the exchange between Job and the Three Friends, but the issues are not treated in any sequence. It should be noted that Job's argument proceeds within the logic of the traditional theory of retribution. He is at a loss precisely because there is no explanation of his situation. There is no balance between his present incredible suffering, and his past life. He clings to his integrity and portrays the problem of the suffering just man. He refuses to accept the convenient answer supplied by the sages (represented by the Three Friends) because it is a lie — and God has no need of lies (Jb 13:7-9).

The solution offered by the author is a practical one, not theoretical: one must see God (42:5), encounter God as Job did, in order to live with suffering. Moreover, this vision of God is accompanied by a shattering sense of one's own nothingness before God — such as the author conveys in the Yahweh speeches of cc. 38–41. These are not logical arguments which answer the problem of evil; rather they make it possible for Job to encounter God in the right spirit. Job does not "understand" his suffering, but he is able to bear it — in a deeper and personal union with God.

The attitude of another sage, Qoheleth, is clearer than that of the author of Job because it is more drastic. He experiments in various areas of life in order to find certain values, but it is all "vanity of vanities." He faults God and the world in two particular respects. First, there is no moral sanction evident in the divine government of the world — a just man perishes in his justice and a wicked one survives in his wickedness (7:15); "the sinner does evil a hundred times and survives" (8:12). Qoheleth proclaims that the traditional theory is contradicted by the facts. Just as grievous is the law of death to which all men must submit. It affects all, both wise and foolish (2:15), and it renders the lot of man no different from that of the beast, which must also die (3:19-21). The best that Qoheleth can offer his students is the resigned con-

clusion of accepting whatever pleasures come to them from the hand of God (5:17-18; 9:7-10, etc.).

Far from being a skeptic or hedonist, Qoheleth was a deeply religious man; his problem and the approach to it make sense only *within* the framework of Israelite orthodoxy which he shared. As W. Zimmerli has perceptively remarked, Qoheleth is a salutary warning in the stream of wisdom literature. When the trend was to "control" God by a law of retribution, Job and Qoheleth pointed up the folly and inadequacy of such wisdom. Instead, Qoheleth returned to emphasize a basic OT belief: God gives, but out of his freedom. Qoheleth is the watchman of the divine independence.

The very defeat of Job and Qoheleth in struggling with the problem of retribution is an important milestone in the progress of OT revelation. The supremacy and freedom of God is being maintained, and the mystery of this God who has mercy on whom he pleases (Ex 33:19) remains intact. But of his mercy there can be no question, and this provides an opening into the mystery that will be exploited. Can this merciful God, the ruler of history and of nature, who has established Israel as his people, remain indifferent to the response and desires of his people? Will Sheol be ever the final breaking-point, the eternal silence, between Yahweh and his faithful one? In the period of the martyrs — the Maccabean revolt of 165 — the people were led to affirm a belief in the resurrection of the body (Dan 12:2; 2 Mc 7). In certain psalms there are expressions which seem to envision an unending union with the Lord, Ps 48:15-16; 72:23-28. But the most significant and emphatic break-through comes in the sapiential literature: the book of Wisdom, written in the first century B.C., by an Alexandrian Jew.

The doctrine of immortality which characterizes this work is particularly significant because it is expressed in an authentically Jewish manner. Many scholars speak of the author's debt to Greek thought. This is quite true of certain ideas in the books, such as the four cardinal virtues in 8:7 or the "encyclopedic" wisdom in 7:17-21.

But there is no evidence that the author came to affirm a belief in immortality because of the (immortal) nature of the soul. In fact, the expression of immortality is authentically Jewish: "justice is immortal" (1:15). One need not deny that he may have been aided by Greek philosophy — this may have been the catal-

yst. However, he does not reason from the nature of man, but from man's relationship to the living God; this relationship of justice or integrity is such that it simply perdures after death. The Lord does not abandon his faithful one. Rather, he judges him worthy of his own company, and counts him among the sons of God (Wis 5:5):

> Those who trust in him shall understand truth,
> and the faithful shall abide with him in love:
> because grace and mercy are with his chosen ones (3:9).

As with other late wisdom pieces (Prv 1–9; Sir), this book is marked by "anthological composition," a dependence upon earlier biblical writings. In this case the writer depended upon the Greek form of the Bible (the Septuagint) with which he was familiar. In particular, the books of Psalms and Isaiah influenced him in his expression of a blessed immortality with God. It is against this backdrop of justice and immortality that Jesus and Saint John speak of eternal life. The power of God has overcome the hostile power of death:

> To know you well is complete justice,
> and to know your might is the root of immortality
> (Wis 15:3).

As it is put in Saint John:

> For this is eternal life:
> that they know you,
> The one true God,
> and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn 17:3).

Suggested Readings concerning OT Wisdom Literature

Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., *Seven Books of Wisdom* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960)

Theodore H. Robinson, *The Poetry of the Old Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1947)

John Paterson, *The Wisdom of Israel* (New York: Abingdon, 1961)

Among the books dealing with OT theology, there are pertinent chapters in:

John L. McKenzie, S.J., *The Two-edged Sword* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956)

Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1962)

Collections of wisdom literature of the ancient Near East are to be found in:

J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton University Press, 1950), which is abbreviated ANET in this booklet.

W. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), which is abbreviated BWL.

Among the pertinent periodical literature may be noted:

W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964) 146-158.

R. E. Murphy, O. Carm., "The Concept of Wisdom Literature," in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought* (New York: Herder, 1962) 46-54.

ABBREVIATIONS

Gn—Genesis
Ex—Exodus
Lv—Leviticus
Nm—Numbers
Dt—Deuteronomy
Jos—Joshua
Jg—Judges
Ruth—Ruth
1 S—1 Samuel
2 S—2 Samuel
1 K—1 Kings
2 K—2 Kings
1 Chr—1 Chronicles
2 Chr—2 Chronicles
Ezr—Ezra
Neh—Nehemiah
Tob—Tobit
Jud—Judith
Est—Esther
Jb—Job
Ps—Psalms
Prv—Proverbs
Qoh—Qoheleth
Ct—Canticles
Wis—Wisdom
Sir—Sirach
Is—Isaiah
Jer—Jeremiah
Lam—Lamentations
Bar—Baruch
Ez—Ezekiel
Dn—Daniel
Hos—Hosea
Jl—Joel
Amos—Amos
Ob—Obadiah
Jon—Jonah
Mi—Micah
Na—Nahum
Hb—Habakkuk
Zeph—Zephaniah
Hg—Haggai
Zech—Zechariah
Mal—Malachi
1 Mac—1 Maccabees
2 Mac—2 Maccabees
Mt—Matthew
Mk—Mark
Lk—Luke
Jn—John
Acts—Acts
Rom—Romans
1 Cor—1 Corinthians
2 Cor—2 Corinthians
Gal—Galatians
Eph—Ephesians
Phil—Philippians
Col—Colossians
1 Th—1 Thessalonians
2 Th—2 Thessalonians
1 Tim—1 Timothy
2 Tim—2 Timothy
Tit—Titus
Phm—Philemon
Heb—Hebrews
Jas—James
1 Pt—1 Peter
2 Pt—2 Peter
1 Jn—1 John
2 Jn—2 John
3 Jn—3 John
Jude—Jude
Ap—Apocalypse

REVIEW AIDS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

I.

Hebrew Poetry and the Origins of Wisdom Literature *pages* 4-14

1. Describe the three common kinds of parallelism and apply them to several poetic passages in the Bible.
2. What does *mašal* (proverb) mean? What does *hidah* (riddle) mean? How is the riddle related to the numerical proverb?
3. What do we learn about wisdom from 1 K 4:29-34? What OT books are attributed to Solomon? Why? What is the notion of authorship in the OT?
4. Is the life-setting of the wisdom literature the court, the home, or both?
5. What is the attitude of the prophets to the wise men? Is there evidence of wisdom influence on the prophets?

II.

Extra-biblical "Wisdom" Literature *pages* 15-29

1. What are the general characteristics of Egyptian *Sebayit*, or wisdom literature? What does *maat* mean?
2. Look up the biblical texts which are mentioned as presenting similarities to the *Instruction of Ptah-hote*, and the *Instruction of Amenemope*.
3. Compare the "Harper's Songs" of Egypt with Qoheleth; what similarities and dissimilarities do you find? Do the same for the *Dispute over Suicide*.
4. Is "wisdom literature" applicable to both the literature of Israel and Mesopotamia? If so, in what sense?
5. Read the *Story of Ahiqar* and check the similarity between his counsels and those of the biblical sages. Do the same for the *Tale of the Three Youths* in the book of the Greek Ezra; how does this book compare with the canonical books of Ezra-Nehemiah?

III.

Extra-biblical "Wisdom" Literature (continued) *pages* 15-29

1. Read the Babylonian poem, "I will praise the Lord of Wisdom," and compare it with the book of Job.
2. In what way does the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy* fail to come to grips with the problem of evil?
3. Illustrate from the book of Qoheleth his "contradictions" which resemble those in the *Dialogue of Pessimism* (e.g., Qoh 6:3 and 9:4).

4. Is Qoheleth's continual advice (Qoh 5:17-19); 9:7-10; 11:7-10, etc.) the same as that given to Gilgamesh?
5. Discuss the similarities and differences between the wisdom literature of Israel and that of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

IV.

Experiential Wisdom, a change in life-setting, omissions in the wisdom literature *pages* 30-35

1. What is meant by experiential wisdom? Look up the says in Prv 10–22 and 25–29 that are mere observations, or paradoxes, or moral admonitions. What is the purpose of the proverbs according to Prv 1:1-9?
2. How much of the OT wisdom literature is pre-exilic? What does the post-exilic date of most of this literature mean for the life-setting? Discuss the new perspective given to a) the royal Psalms (e.g., Ps. 2), and b) the Solomonic proverbs (Prv 10–22, 25–29) in the postexilic period.
3. Compare the preaching of the book of Deuteronomy with the tone and message of Prv 1–9 as regards life, and retribution. What is the role of Prv 1–9 in relation to the rest of that book?
4. In what way are Sir 44:1–50:24 and Wis 10:1–19:5 exceptional in the wisdom literature?
5. Discuss the place of wisdom literature within OT theology.

V.

Human Conduct and Wisdom Psalms *pages* 36-43

1. Look up references in the wisdom literature pertinent to justice to one's fellow man, control of the tongue, riches and poverty, humility, friendship.
2. In what way does the Lord remain outside the wisdom tradition (see Prv 21:30).
3. Study any five psalms which you choose and see if they can be classified according to their dominant note: praise, or thanksgiving, or lament (supplication).
4. On what basis can certain psalms be classified as wisdom psalms?
5. Read Pss 1, 32, 34, 48, 112, 128 and point out how they reflect OT wisdom teaching.

VI.

The Theologizing of Wisdom and Retribution *pages* 44-59

1. What is meant by the "theologizing" of wisdom? What are the characteristics of wisdom in Prv 1–9? What is meant by "anthological composition" and give an example from Prv 8. How is wisdom viewed in Sirach? In the book of Wisdom?

2. Discuss the personification of wisdom in Prv 8, Sir 24 and Wis 7. How does this personification lead into the NT? What is to be said about the Lord and wisdom? Discuss the antinomies of wisdom: inaccessible, yet accessible.
3. What wisdom motifs have been pointed out in Genesis 1–3?
4. What is the typical OT view on retribution? What is the truth in the equation, wisdom = life, folly = death? What role did the authors of Job and Qoheleth play in the development of the theory of retribution?
5. What is the meaning of immortality in the Book of Wisdom?

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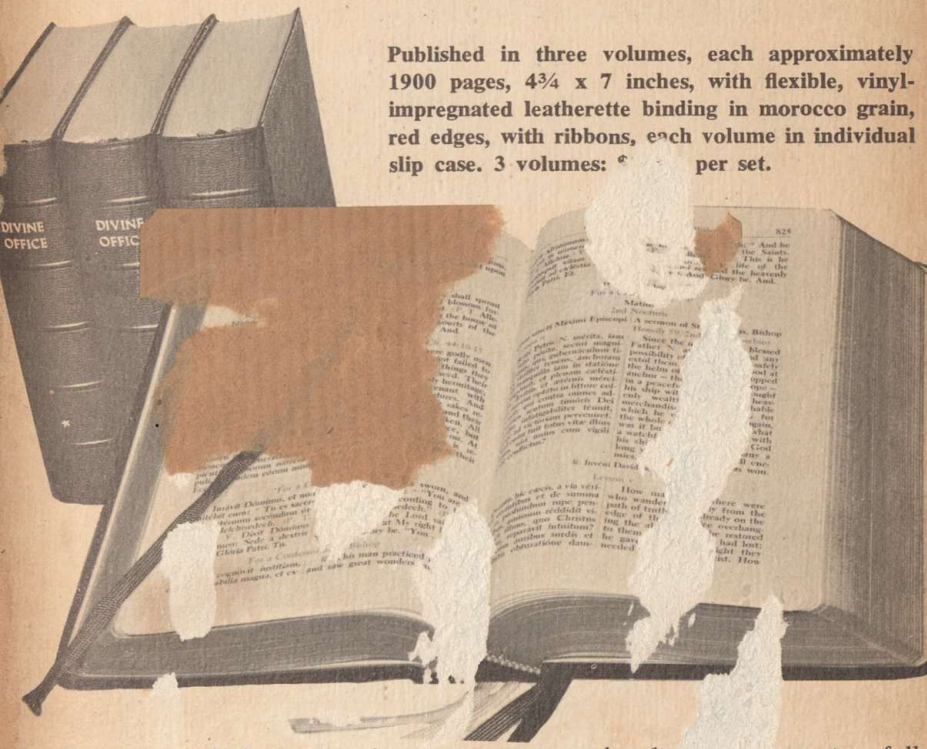

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Old Testament Reading Guide

Introduction to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

Roland E. Murphy