

# WISDOM

**PROVERBS & ECCLESIASTES**

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# Wisdom of the Ancient Near East

- Egyptian
- Edomites
- Arabians



# The Ancient's View of the World



# Compare with Egyptian Wisdom



- “Guard yourself from robbing the poor, from being violent to the weak. Do not associate with the rash man nor approach him in conversation.”
  - The Teaching of Amenomepe
- “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate...  
Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,” Prov. 22:22, 24

# Hebraic Uniqueness



- The Fear of the Lord
  - For Israel, wisdom and the knowledge of God were inseparable because God was the source and dispenser of insight and understanding (cf. Job 12:13; Prov. 2:5-6; Isa. 31:1-2)
- Implications of “Yahweh Orientation”
  - Israel’s emotional and spiritual life (OT Poetry)
  - Israel’s physical and experiential life (OT Wisdom)

# Compare with Egyptian Wisdom



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  - The Teaching of Amenomepe
- “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, *for the LORD will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.* Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, Prov. 22:22, 24

# “W – I – S – D – O – M”



- hok ma: Originally denoted technical skill, aptitude, or ability
  - (eg. Crafting wood/metal, artistic design/architecture, sea navigation, politics)
- Bezalel and Oholiab were given special wisdom (hok ma) for their work in the construction of articles and utensils for the tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-11)

# Wisdom's Other Meaning



- Philosophical and intellectual connotations
  - Superior mental ability and intelligence
- In this context, wisdom means the “judicious or skilled application of the powers of human reason to the issues of life.” (Hill & Walton, 2009)

# Two Genres



- **Didactic**
  - Wise sayings, popular proverbs that advocate prudential habits, skills, and virtues. (cf. Prov. 21:23; 22:3; 23:22)
- **Philosophical (Qoheleth)**
  - Speculative or even pessimistic
  - Questioning, critical, and reflective
  - “The skepticism characteristic of this speculative and philosophical literature portrays most vividly the emptiness and folly of the search for insight and understanding apart from God (Eccl. 1:1-18; 12:12-14).” (2009)

# Practice of Wisdom



- The Bible knows two paths to life
  - The way of the righteous or the way of the wicked (Ps. 1)
- Jesus Affirmed this worldview
  - “Narrow way” and “Broad way” (Matt. 7:13; 12:30)
- Three “characters” in Proverbs
  - The wise, the fool, the simple minded
- “The way of wisdom is not so much knowledge and intellect as it is behavior and character. True wisdom is a lifestyle...a code of ethics rooted in the Word of God.” (Ibid.)

# Personification of Wisdom



- Emphasis is placed on the experience of a relationship with the “person of wisdom”
- Illustrates the personal aspects of the fear of the Lord.
  - Itinerate female pedagogue seeking students at the city gates (Prov. 8:1-12)
  - Preexistent master architect participating in God’s creative works (Prov. 8:22-31)
  - NT identifies Jesus Christ as the “master architect” of creation (Col. 1:15-17)

# Themes in Proverbs



- Being Careful of Evil People
- Friendship
- Dangers of Adultery
- Marriage
- The Fool's Downfall
- The Fear of the Lord
- Many, many more

# The Fear of the Lord



- The very beginning of wisdom (9:10) and knowledge (1:7)
- Through the fear of the Lord we will hate evil (8:13)
- In the fear of the Lord we can have a satisfying life, and will be spared from much evil (19:23)
- Finally, in the fear of the Lord we have strong confidence (14:26) and our children have refuge
  - Another way to think of what Proverbs is teaching is to say that without the fear of the Lord, we dance closely with evil and will be corrupted by it, we will never walk in wisdom or knowledge, our families are exposed and unprotected, and we lack confidence in anything of integrity.

# The Fool's Downfall



One of the great ways to learn about wisdom is by contrast to its opposite, foolishness.

- A fool trusts in his own mind (28:26) and finds very little fault in himself.
- Unteachable, despising wisdom and instruction
  - Contrasted to the wise man leaning not on his own understanding (3:5-6)
- Fools vent their full thoughts and feelings when a wise person should hold back frustration (29:11)
  - We are often misguided in our frustration and do more harm than good when other people hear our negative thoughts vented, rather than our reasoned thoughts explained in grace.

# The Fool's Downfall



- Proverbs 10:21 goes so far as to say that the fool will die due to lack of sense.
- foolishness will soon be known by all (12:23)
- Fools are destined for hardship and punishment, “...and beating for the backs of fools” (Proverbs 19:29)

# Dangers of Adultery



- Adultery begins with the lure of a subtle deception, it sounds and feels good at first (5:3) and that there will be much flattery (2:16).
- The true cost of adultery is great. It will cost you financially, physically and emotionally. (5:7-11)
- (6:26-31) teaches that people do not take adultery lightly and a reputation varnished by it will be varnished for a long time.
- “He who commits adultery lacks sense: he who does it destroys himself” Proverbs 6:32

# For Next Week



- Read Proverbs 1 and 2
- Questions, based on this text:
  - What is the value of wisdom?
  - What is the Fear of the Lord?
  - How are we to respond to the requests of sinners?
  - How does wisdom respond to those who ignore her call?