

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—Wisdom, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes

Wisdom Literature—Wisdom literature is a genre with certain characteristics and themes. Proverbs tends to represent these characteristics, while Ecclesiastes and Job appear to be reactions against many of these characteristics.

I. What is Wisdom Literature?

- 1. The attempt to cope with reality as it presents itself in real life (Crenshaw, 7). The authors, or teachers (?), of wisdom literature studied the complexities of life & sought out ways to cope with it, i.e. deal with the adversity, inequities, and contradictions of life. This explains contradictions found within the corpus of wisdom literature.
- 2. The transmission of this knowledge to future generations so that they, too, will embody “wisdom” & enjoy prosperity & health. Much of wisdom literature throughout the ANE is directed toward youth.
- 3. Relational. Although many of the values & actions taught in wisdom literature are individual in nature, most of them have a relational base. They deal with husband-wife relationships, parent-child relationships, business relationships, & societal relationships.
- 4. A Worldview.
 - God created the world with a basic order. In this order, God has the ultimate authority. With “wisdom,” the world functions properly.
 - This worldview assumes a basic propriety in life. Everything has its place & its time. Everything must be done properly & orderly so that life will exist as God designed it.
 - Thus this worldview is basically optimistic. It recognizes the basic goodness of creation & seeks to maintain the positive nature of creation through attaining wisdom & making wise decisions & actions.
 - This worldview is also basically humanistic. God is seldom called upon to act; rather all outcomes—good or bad—depend upon the correct human decision & action. In other words, God is “transcendent” rather than “immanent.”

II. Themes of OT Wisdom Literature

--Moderation & Restraint

--Excess is to be avoided. Thus the Wisdom Literature consistently warns against the evils of riches, which produce greed and lack of justice; strong drink, which produces drunkenness & loss of self-control; the adulterous or loose woman, who produces loss of family & societal solidarity; & power, which leads to injustice and abuse of inferiors.

--Family Life

--The family is the foundation of the society. Thus anything that tears down family solidarity is to be avoided. This explains the many warnings about adultery and prostitution. The important roles of father and mother are stressed in the Wisdom

Literature. The father as teacher is seen throughout the corpus, and passages like Proverbs 31 point out the value & importance of a good wife & mother.

--Wisdom and Folly—"Wisdom" and "Folly" are presented as opposite characters in the Wisdom Literature.

--"Wisdom"=Integrity,	"Folly"=Dishonesty
--"Wisdom"=Righteous,	"Folly"=Unrighteous
--"Wisdom"=Good,	"Folly"=Evil
--"Wisdom" is to be sought,	"Folly" is to be avoided
--"Wisdom" brings life,	"Folly" brings death

--Fear of the Lord—

--"Fear of the Lord" is variously defined as reverence, worship, & obedience. All of these are true in the wisdom literature.

III. Wisdom Literature is an international phenomenon.

--Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian examples of wisdom literature are found, which represent proverbial literature and skeptic literature (parallel to Job and Ecclesiastes). These examples represent the seemingly universal phenomenon of Wisdom Literature. Almost every culture wrestles with right and wrong, ethical choices and dilemmas, and the unfairness of life. All of these are themes of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament and elsewhere.

Proverbs—

I. Structure

I. Introduction	1:1-7
II. Instructions on Wisdom	1:8-9:18
III. First Collection of Solomonic Sayings	10:1-22:16
IV. "Sayings of the Wise"	22:17-24:22
V. Further "Sayings of the Wise"	24:23-34
VI. Second Solomonic Collection	25:1-29:27
VII. Sayings of Agur (& others)	30:1-33
VIII. Sayings of Lemuel	31:1-9
IX. The Excellent Wife	31:10-31

II. Examples of Texts

--1:1-7—Introduction to Proverbs

--"Proverbs of Solomon"

--Solomon, as well as those in his court, was probably the author of some proverbs. They most likely also collected proverbs from various sources, including local, Egyptian, and possibly Mesopotamian sources.

--The Proverbs of Solomon are parallel to Laws of Moses & Psalms of David. This is as much a statement of authority as origin or authorship.

--Teaching wisdom

--“Discipline” (=disciple), “understanding,” “learning,” and “guidance” suggest the process of learning. This purpose cannot be overemphasized. Wisdom literature is, at its basic foundation, educational.

--Understanding “proverbs,” “parables,” “saying,” and “riddles” was also a goal of the sages (v. 6). These are the basic forms/genres of wisdom literature, and obviously the sages wanted to help people understand the meaning contained in these forms.

--Living moral lives

--“Right,” “just,” and “fair” are terms that denote the type of lifestyle promoted throughout Israel’s history. This is the prophetic life. Failure to live lives of righteousness & justice eventually led to the downfall of the kingdoms of Israel & Judah.

8:1-36—Speech of “Lady Wisdom”

--8:10-12—Wisdom calls for people to choose her over all other things, even the greatest riches. Nothing that a man can desire is as important as her. This is because she claims to possess what men truly need to live: prudence, knowledge, and discretion. As we have seen, these are the foundations of wisdom literature & are basic to humanity’s life in the world.

--8:20—Wisdom states that her way is the way of righteousness & justice. Once again these are two of the basic virtues which the Book of Proverbs seeks to bestow on its readers.

--8:22-31—Wisdom claims to have been the 1st creation. Compare this with Col. 1:15, where the great hymn says much the same about Jesus. This is likely a statement of wisdom’s basic role in the created order, not about divinity or creation.

--Poverty & Wealth—Much of the Book of Proverbs is a collection of unrelated sayings. I want to look at instructions on this one topic.

--10:4--The obvious teaching here is that diligence & hard work produces wealth. Is that true? `Not always, cf. below.

--19:1, 19:22, 21:6, 22:1, 28:6

--The presupposition of these verses seemingly contradicts those above. If wisdom & righteousness brings wealth, then one cannot be a righteous man of integrity and still be poor. However, these verses explicitly state that you can. How?

--Perhaps the problem is simply reality, that life is not always as it seems. Wicked men sometimes do win, and righteous people are sometimes overthrown & suffer. This problem at the basic philosophical & theological level helps to explain the skepticism of Job & Qoheleth.

Job

Outline of the Book of Job

I. Prologue	(1:1-2:13)
II. Job's "Birthday Curse"	(3:1-26)
III. Dialogue with "Friends"	(4:1-31:40)
IV. Elihu's Discourse	(32:1-37:24)
V. Yahweh's 1 st Speech	(38:1-39:30)
VI. Job's 1 st Response	(40:1-5)
VII. Yahweh's 2 nd Speech	(40:6-41:34)
VIII. Job's 2 nd Response	(42:1-6)
IX. Epilogue	(42:7-17)

Purposes of Job

1. Theodicy

--The Problem of suffering in the world. Why does a righteous person like Job suffer? Does he not deserve better than he received? This has been an age-old philosophical & theological problem.

--The problem boils down to our understanding of God. Is He a God of love or a harsh, vindictive God?

2. A Protest against the prevailing Deuteronomistic & Wisdom Theology.

--According to this theology, if you do good, you can expect long life, children/posterity, wealth, & a good reputation/name. This was the position of the other speakers in the book. Job's friends "knew" that he had sinned because his life proved it! Job obviously questions this theological position.

3. Job is an example of a man of faith, even in the face of suffering & mistreatment. He questioned God, but he never abandoned his faith. Later Judaism & Christianity saw Job this way, as an example of patience or perseverance under trial (i.e. James 5:11).

Theology of Job

1. The development of Job's Faith

1. Job desires death (Job 3). He is in utter despair & desires only to die & be at rest.

2. Job affirms the current theology, that death & Sheol are final (7:9-10, 21). His afflictions will soon take him to death. Sheol is the place of death, & once a person goes to Sheol he does not return. This is the theology of death in the great majority of the OT.

3. Job sees the need for an "umpire" or "arbiter" (9:32-35). Job suggests that if he only had someone to stand between him and God, then he might be able to present his case & be heard by God. This eventually became a need for messiah & redeemer. Certainly we cannot say that Job was looking for Christ, but we can say that he saw the need for a "messiah" type figure to mediate for him before God.

4. Job questions whether a man can live after he dies (14:11-17). Job's tradition tells him that death is final, but Job questions whether God's justice would allow this. If his case cannot be heard in this life, then perhaps God will hear him on the other side of the grave.

5. Job discovers a heavenly witness (16:19-21). Job asserts that he has a witness and intercessor in heaven, one who will plead his case for him. This is, again, a call for a “messiah” type figure.

6. Job, for his part, knows that his redeemer lives (19:23-27). Job longed for someone to present his case before God. Though some have argued that the “redeemer” is God, or Jesus, I would argue that the “redeemer” is the same “umpire” and “witness” that Job earlier sought.

--When will the redeemer appear? H. H. Rowley: “Though there is no full grasping of a belief in a worthwhile afterlife, this passage is a notable landmark in a progress toward such a belief” (*Book of Job*, New Century Bible, 140).

7. Job had previously heard, but now he has seen God (42:5). This changed Job’s perspective. He now has met God face to face. God bombarded Job with endless questions, which Job could not possibly answer. His only reaction to the meeting is fear—submission, worship, & obedience. But how has his worldview changed?

2. A New Worldview?

--Job’s traditional worldview led him to stand in contempt before God. He challenged every presupposition of that faith: that wisdom leads to prosperity, that suffering is the result of sin, that God is just, that God is beyond our accusation, etc.

--In the end, a new worldview emerges which allows for undeserved suffering. The center of this new worldview is not a theological system, but God Himself. This allows for a certain amount of flexibility because God cannot be placed in any box.

3. “The Necessity of a Christ”—What can Job show us about the Christ?

--We do need a mediator before God. Job struggled with bridging the transcendence of God. We must also struggle with that problem, and we will find that we cannot bridge that gap any better than Job. Ultimately, Jesus was sent to be our mediator & redeemer (see Hebrews 9-10).

--Job’s example of suffering serves as a model for Jesus, & possibly other righteous sufferers as well. Some suffering is unjust, & some suffering has greater purposes (cf. Isaiah 53).

--Ecclesiastes

--Title

--Ecclesiastes is called “The Words of *Qoheleth* (קהלת).” This is the Hebrew title of the book. *Qoheleth* comes for the root meaning “to assemble.” In Ecclesiastes, the term is a title for the one writing the book. It is used in 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; & 12:8, 9, 10.

“Ecclesiastes”—The Greek word was used in LXX as the one calling an assembly. *Ekklesia* is the basic Greek word for “assembly,” referring to any public assembly. In the early church, the term became the word for “church.” This accounts for the connection of *Qoheleth* with “preacher,” i.e. one leading an assembly=church.

--Structure

I. **Epilogue & Prologue—1:1, 12:9-14.** These verses have the appearance of editorial additions.

II. **1:2-11—Introduction**

--1:2—Statement of Thesis--“Everything is meaningless.” The author had tried various paths of life & found them all to be “meaningless” or “worthless.” This is the ultimate pessimistic view of life, despite the attempt of some to put a more positive spin on Ecclesiastes.

III. **1:12-2:26—The King’s Testimony**

IV. **3:1-15—A Time for Everything**

V. **3:16-6:12—Everything Under the Sun.** Everything under the Sun has been examined & found to be meaningless.

VI. **7:1-12:7—Various Wisdom Sayings**

VII. **12:8—Conclusion--“Everything is meaningless!”**

VIII. **12:9-14—Epilogue**

--12:9-12—Conclusions on Ecclesiastes & Wisdom

--*Qoheleth* is pictured not as a king, but as a sage who searched out, collected, & recorded wisdom sayings. Could he be a king & a sage? Maybe he could, but societally these are two distinct groups of people.

--12:13-14—Righting the Ship--This conclusion moves the reader back to the world of traditional wisdom. The only way to live life is in fear of the Lord & obedience to His commands. This seems to be a corrective of *Qoheleth*’s challenge of the traditional wisdom.

--Theological Conclusions

--*Qoheleth* the Cynic

--*Qoheleth* was confounded by the contradictions of life. If God blesses His faithful children, then why do they often suffer & why do the wicked so often prosper. And in the case when the accepted logic prevails, how long does it last? After death everyone is equal. Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-haul?

--But unlike many cynics, *Qoheleth* did not reject his life & the life of wisdom. Rather he concluded that no better offer presented itself, so the best life was to continue in wisdom & in worship of God.

--*Carpe Diem*—

--The only real happiness that man can hope for is in taking the best life has to offer & doing the most with it. Live with gusto! Live with passion! Live with joy! Seize the day!

--Ecclesiastes & Job

--Both books attack the prevailing views of wisdom theology. The authors view the traditional theology as inadequate.

--Both books rebuild a new, synthetic theology & worldview. The Book of Job affirms the rule of God & his right to govern as He sees fit, thus man should fear & serve Him whether in blessing or suffering. For Ecclesiastes the new worldview questions the basic view that a life of wisdom produces a meaningful life. Both books deal with perseverance, i.e. living with a system that is patently wrong or absurd, depending upon the book.