

Wisdom Literature: Wisdom in Many Settings

Teachers of Wisdom

- In ancient Israel, some individuals devoted themselves not only to gaining wisdom, but also to teaching others to gain it
 - They were referred to as 'wise men' (1 Chron. 27:32; Ecc. 2:16) or 'wise women' (2 Sam. 20:16; Pro. 14:1)
 - They eventually held a position in Israelite society somewhat akin to that of priest or prophet (Jer. 18:18)
- The civic position arose beginning around the time of David (c. 1000 BC; cf. 1 Sam. 14:2)
- They functioned as teacher-counselors to people who sought their wisdom
- And some were inspired by God to write sections of the OT
- They would serve as a substitute parent of sorts to the person seeking wisdom
 - Joseph as 'father' to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8)
 - Deborah as 'mother' to Israel (Jdg. 5:7)
 - Thus, often in Proverbs we often see the wise teacher addressing their pupil as 'my child'

Wisdom in the Home

- The home was normally the place that wisdom was taught in the ancient world
- A good parent helps shape the thinking and behavior of their child
 - And a godly parent tries to do so by instilling godliness in their child
 - This is especially seen in Proverbs

Wisdom among Colleagues

- One way people refine their ability to make the right choice in life is through discussion and debate
- This sort of wisdom is arrived at sometimes by lengthy discourse
 - Either in a monologue intended for others to read and reflect on (e.g. Ecclesiastes)
 - Or in a dialogue among various people seeking to inform each other's opinions (e.g. Job)
- The type of wisdom that predominates Proverbs is called proverbial wisdom (also known as 'lower' wisdom)
- Whereas the kind found in Ecclesiastes and Job is called speculative wisdom (also known as 'higher' wisdom)
 - Which is still highly practical and based on experience
- The kind found in Song of Songs is called lyric wisdom

Wisdom through Poetry

- Just like other areas of Scripture, Wisdom Literature utilizes poetry as a mnemonic device
 - Mnemonic: "of or related to memory"
- Just like other poetry, Wisdom Lit. often has careful wording, cadences, and stylistic qualities that make it easier to remember than prose
- Some techniques used include:
 - Parallelism: Synonymous (Pro. 7:4); Antithetical (Pro. 10:1); Synthetic (Pro. 20:1)
 - Acrostics (Pro. 31:10-31)

- Alliteration (Ecc. 3:1-8)
- Numerical sequences (Pr. 30:15-31)
- Countless comparison like similes and metaphors (Job 32:19; Song 4:1a)
- Formal parables, allegories, riddles, and other poetic techniques are also found

The Limits of Wisdom

- It is important to remember that not all wisdom in the ancient world was godly or orthodox
 - Orthodox: “based in right beliefs”
 - There are many collections of ‘wisdom’ from the ancient world
 - But they lack a firm emphasis on the Lord as the source of wisdom (Pro. 2:5-6)
 - And the purpose of wisdom as to please Him (Pro. 3:7)
- Wisdom does not cover all of life
 - Because of its practical nature, it tends to not touch on the theological or historical issues so important elsewhere in Scripture
- Skill in wisdom does not guarantee that it will be properly used
 - Solomon’s great wisdom (1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29-34) helped him gain wealth and power, but did not keep him from turning away from faithfulness in the Lord years later (1 Kgs. 11:4)
 - Only when wisdom is subordinate to obedience to God does it achieve its proper ends in the OT sense