

## Intro:

In this lesson, we are going to be using notes from an article by Duane Garrett who wrote a good commentary on the book of Proverbs:

Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1993.

The article is in the introduction to the commentary, pp. 52-59, and is entitled:

### *The Theology of Wisdom*

Note: this is a theology of wisdom, not of Proverbs alone.

Garrett starts his article with this:

“The theological problems in Proverbs can be divided into five major questions.”<sup>1</sup>

**QUESTION ONE:** *Is the search for a divine order a basic element of the old wisdom of Proverbs?*<sup>2</sup>

## I. The search for the divine order

A. What scholars assume about the search for the divine order

1. Wisdom does not look for **revealed** truth.
2. Wisdom seeks for **clues** to divine order in nature, history, social order, and daily work.
3. This view makes wisdom entirely a matter of **human** observation.

Implication for the book of Proverbs: **purely a human book**

B. Specific assumption: Proverbs **imitates** the efforts of Egyptian wisdom

1. Egyptian concept called *Maat* (‘justice’)
2. *Maat* is the natural order built into the world (some unbelievers in our culture will call this “natural law”)
3. “To be in harmony with *Maat* is to live in peace and prosperity; to

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<sup>1</sup> Duane A Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1993), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Garrett, 53.

oppose it is to destroy oneself.”<sup>3</sup>

4. Task of the wise man is to unravel the mystery of *Maat* and live according to it

### C. Questions:

1. Is there a divine order to the world and its affairs? **Yes**
2. Is the wisdom of the Bible merely man’s discovery of this order or is it revealed by God? **Revealed by God**

### D. Theology of divine order

1. Doctrine of creation is “**crucial**” to Hebrew wisdom<sup>4</sup>
  - a. Foundation of Hebrew wisdom:
    - 1) Creation is **good** (Gen 1.1)
    - 2) Man **opposes** the good God created (Eccl 7.29)
  - b. Divine order in creation the **product** of God’s wisdom (Pr 8.22-31)
2. Divine order in creation difficult to discern **merely** by human knowledge and skill

Dt 29.29 ¶ “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

Pr 30.2-4 Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man.<sup>3</sup> Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.<sup>4</sup> Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!

Eccl 8.16-17 ¶ When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth e\*ven though

<sup>3</sup> Garrett, 53.

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, 53.

one should never sleep day or night),<sup>17</sup> and I saw every work of God, *I concluded* that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, “I know,” he cannot discover.

See also 1 Cor 2.7, Col 2.3, Heb 4.13, Job 28.23

3. Determinative **proposition** of biblical wisdom: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28.28; Pr 1.7)

Job 28.28 “And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.’”

Pr 1.7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

- a. Not that fear of the Lord is one aspect of wisdom
  - b. Nor that fear of the Lord is the best aspect of wisdom
  - c. But fear of the Lord is where search for wisdom must begin
4. The major **theme** of biblical wisdom: fear of the Lord (Job 1.1, Eccl 12.13)

Job 1.1 ¶ There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Eccl 12.13 ¶ The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies* to every person.

- Reverence for God determines
  - 1) Progress in wisdom
  - 2) Includes moral dimension of obedience and spiritual dimension of worship

We’ve discussed this somewhat in earlier studies, but are emphasizing here that Biblical wisdom is a spiritual exercise; it comes as the individual interacts with the Spirit of God.

**QUESTION TWO:** *Does Israelite wisdom include a concept of divine retribution, or is it simply an act-consequence philosophy?*<sup>5</sup>

## II. Judgement vs. Consequences

Similar challenge to the divine order question: where is God in this literature?

### A. Compare Deuteronomy and Proverbs

1. Deuteronomy tends to stress concept of **Divine** punishment or reward (sermonic literature)
2. Proverbs focuses on the **inherent** link between an act and its consequences (proverbial literature)

### B. Second, compare the similarity of **form** but distinction of **thought** between pagan wisdom and biblical wisdom

#### 1. Egyptian wisdom literature vs. Proverbs: similar style

Give your ears, hear the sayings,  
 It profits to put them in your heart,  
 Woe to him who neglects them!  
 Let them rest in the casket of your belly,  
 May they be bolted in your heart;  
 When there rises a whirlwind of words,  
 They'll be a mooring post for your tongue.  
 If you make your life with these in your heart,  
 You will find it a success;  
 You will find my words a storehouse for life,  
 Your being will prosper upon earth.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, Waltke describes the profane character of many ancient Sumerian and Assyrian proverbs — when the book of Proverbs describes the strange woman, for example, it does so discretely.

<sup>5</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Instruction of Amen-em-Ope quoted by Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 543 (July 1979): 225.

## 2. Proverbs: Theological focus

Pr 22.17 Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,  
And apply your mind to my knowledge;  
18 For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,  
That they may be ready on your lips.  
19 **So that your trust may be in the LORD,**  
I have taught you today, even you.  
20 Have I not written to you excellent things  
Of counsels and knowledge,  
21 To make you know the certainty of the words of truth  
That you may correctly answer him who sent you?  
22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor,  
Or crush the afflicted at the gate;  
23 **For the LORD will plead their case**  
And take the life of those who rob them.

“Like other wisdom literature, it [Proverbs] stresses the act-consequence relationship. But the theological perspective of the book is uniquely Israelite and is in agreement with the theology of the Torah. Proverbs must be interpreted in the context of the whole biblical canon.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 54–55.