

Proverbs & Ecclesiastes

COME, FOLLOW ME

Proverbs

Khok-ma - wisdom

חֻכְמָה

Proverbs is a collection of traditional sayings supplemented by instructional literature, presented as the teaching of father to his son. This kind of literature is called “wisdom literature” because of the frequency with which words for wisdom and foolishness occur.

Proverbs

As to Solomon's authorship of proverbs, he is said in I Kings 4:33 to have spoken thousands of them, covering all facets of the relationships of nature, man and God. Whether the extant proverbs in the Bible include all of them, and whether all that are attributed to him are really his would be difficult to tell now. In any case, Proverbs, chapters 1–9 are entitled 'Proverbs of Solomon.' (Institute Manual, Proverbs. See also: Ellis T. Rasmussen, *An Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Teachings*, 1969, 2:45)

Proverbs

In the Hebrew Bible, the wisdom literature is represented by Proverbs, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), and Job, and by some Psalms, such as Psalms 1. The Apocrypha includes two major wisdom books, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon, and there is a hymn to wisdom in the book of Baruch.

(John Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, p. 248)



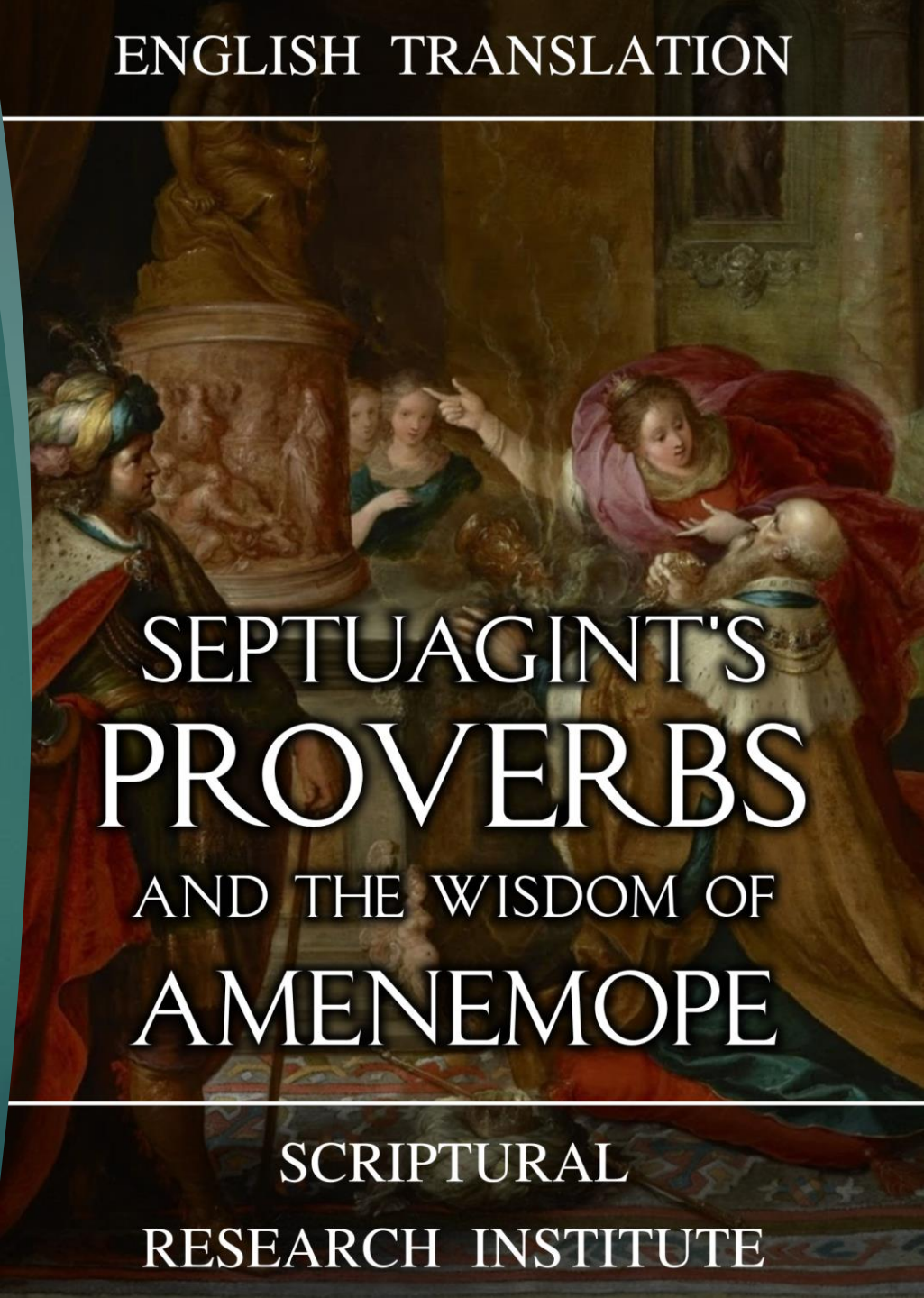
Proverbs

Proverbs was probably influenced by its setting in the ANE. There is a well-attested genre of wisdom instruction, especially in Egypt, that dates back to the third millennium BC. Examples include the teachings of Amenemhet and Ptahhotep. (M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* 1:58-80; 2:135-63) These instructions were copied in scribal schools, and new instructions were composed, down to Hellenistic times. They deal with relations between superiors and inferiors, friends and enemies. They often caution about relations with women.

Proverbs – An Egyptian Connection

There are **close parallels** between the writings of Proverbs 22:17-23:11 and “**The Instruction of Amenemope,**” which suggest that **the Hebrew composition was modeled on the Egyptian.** The Egyptian instructions were copied for scribes in schools sponsored by the pharaohs. It is not clear whether such schools existed in Jerusalem before the exile. Nonetheless, the analogy with the Egyptian instructions suggest that this literature was developed under the monarchy to serve the needs of the court.

(John Collins, A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, p. 249)



SEPTUAGINT'S PROVERBS AND THE WISDOM OF AMENEMOPE

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Proverbs – The Composition

There are 7 distinct collections, introduced by distinct headings or superscriptions:

1. 1:1-9:18 The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David
2. 10:1-22:16 The Proverbs of Solomon
3. 22:17-24:22 The words of the wise
4. 24:23-34 These also belong to the wise
5. 25:1-29:17 Other proverbs of Solomon that Hezekiah's men collected
6. 30:1-14 The words of Agur, son of Jakeh
7. 31:1-9 The words of King Lemuel

Proverbs – The Tree & The Woman

Proverbs 3.13

μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὃς εὗρεν σοφίαν καὶ θνητὸς ὃς εἶδεν φρόνησιν

My trans: **In the state of the Gods** (makarios) **is who the man who has found wisdom** (Sophia) **and the mortal being who has seen wisdom/the holy love of God** (phronesis). [another word for happy not used here is ὄλβος= good fortune, material wealth; εὐτυχία= good luck/fortune; εὐδαιμονία= happiness/well being]

אַשְׁרַי אָדָם מָצָא חֲכָמָה וְאָדָם יָפִיךְ תְּבוּנָה

Ashray (happy- think “Asherah”) **is the man** (Adam) **who has found** (matzah) **Wisdom** (hakmah) **and the man who has** (obtained/drawn out/secured) **understanding** (tabunah).

Proverbs – The Tree & The Woman

Proverbs 3.18 The Tree

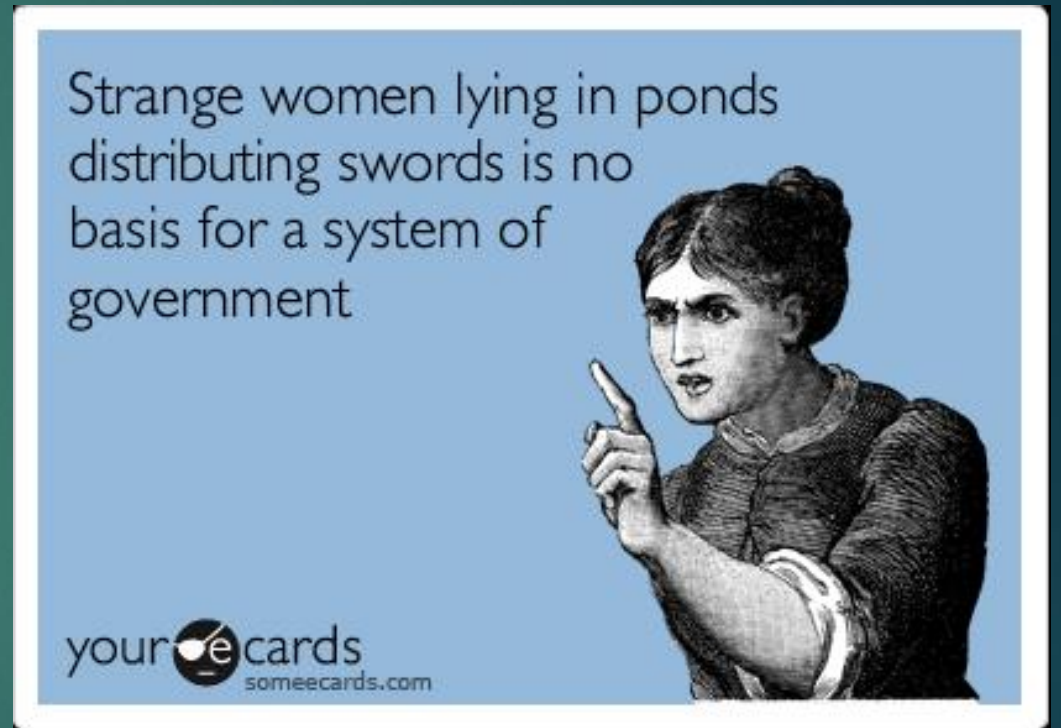
ξύλον ζωῆς ἐστὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀντεχομένοις αὐτῆς καὶ τοῖς ἐπερειδομένοις ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς ἐπὶ κύριον ἀσφαλῆς

A tree (xulon) of life (zoes) she is to all the ones holding (antechomenois) her, and to the ones leaning (epereidomenois) upon her as upon the Lord (kurion) are safe/secure (asphales).



Proverbs – The “Strange Woman”

The primary image of temptation is the “strange woman”- *issah zarah*. This figure is first introduced in 2:16-19, where she is associated with the adulteress (5:3-4), but the most elaborate description of her is in Proverbs 7.



Some of my favorites in Proverbs

Counsel and safety – 11:14 & 24:6

Virtuous Woman – 12:4

Spare rod/spoil child – 13:24, 23:13-14

A soft answer – 15:1

God hears the “good guys” – 15:29

Be quiet – 17:28

Merry heart = medicine – 17:22

Power of the tongue – 18:21

Find a wife! – 18:22

Be humble! – 18:12



Some of my favorites in Proverbs

Don't be lazy! – 20:4; 24:30-34

Be careful of drink! – 20:1; 23:20

God will make things right – 20:22

Help the poor – 21:13

Avoid angry women – 21:19; 25:24; 27:15

Teach children young – 22:6

Avoid debt – 22:7; 6:1-6

Advice on table manners – 23:1-8

Control yourself – 25:28

Don't brag – 27:2

When wicked rule, people mourn – 29:2

Lemuel's advice on finding a wife - 31

Proverbs – Tension in the text

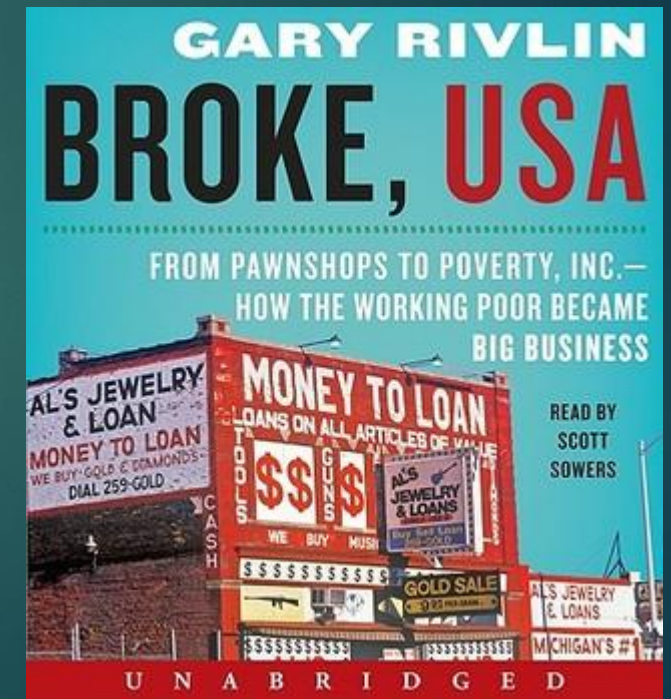
On poverty

Blaming the poor – 10:4-6; 13:18-22; 14:20

Give to the poor – 19:17

Do not oppress them – 14:31

Rob not the poor – 22:22-23



Proverbs – Tension in the text

On taking bribes

Nope – 17:23

Well, okay if it helps people – 21:14

On answering fools

Yes or no? – 26:4-5

Ecclesiastes – קהלת - Ἐκκλησιαστοῦ

קהלת

Why is this book called “Ecclesiastes?”

The name *Qoheleth* has never been satisfactorily explained. The Greek form, “Ecclesiastes,” “member of an assembly,” assumes that the word derived from *qahal*, קהל, “to assemble.” A modern suggestion takes it to mean “gatherer” or “assembler.” (Collins, *A short introduction*, p. 262)

Ecclesiastes

הֶבֶל

All is vapor “hebel” – translated as vanity – this is used 33 times in Ecclesiastes. Let’s read Ecc. 1.2:

הֶבֶל הֶבֶל? אֵמַר קִהְלֹת הֶבֶל הֶבֶל? הַכֹּל הֶבֶל

Vapor – see 1:1-3, 14; 2:11, 17-23; 6:11-12

Ecclesiastes

The purpose of life

Have fun, eat, drink, and be merry.

See Ecclesiastes 2:24

Ecclesiastes 8:15

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

Why? Because we all die, so you might as well live life.

See: Ecclesiastes 3:19-21

Ecclesiastes

Note the end of the whole book:

Here is the whole matter, fear God, and keep his commandments! (Ecc. 12.13)

Ecclesiastes 12.12-14 – An addition, making the book more pious?

At the end of this undermining text we are left with the command to fear God and keep his laws, which pushes us to believe that perhaps the author was not as subversive as he seems. Perhaps he was simply encouraging us away from materialism and trusting ourselves.

But if you go back to the beginning and do a slow and careful reading of the text, there seems to exist an insurrectionist picture of God doesn't seem to line up with much of the Bible. **Seeking out wisdom is an evil business that God has given man** (1.13). **Being wise is really no benefit** for time and chance happen to all (2.14). **Eat, drink, and be merry!** (3.13, 5.18, 8.15, 9.7-9,) Where there is justice there is also wickedness, and God's judgment of righteousness and wickedness is only to show us that we are no better than beasts (3.16-22). Even 5.1-7 seems to counsel us to have healthy fear... **don't make any waves!**

Perhaps D&C 91 is the best tool to use when reading Ecclesiastes.

Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; And whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; And whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited. Therefore it is not needful that it should be translated. Amen. (D&C 91.4-6)